

- Frausino, C. C. M. (2018). Virgínia Leone Bicudo: um capítulo da história da psicanálise brasileira. *Caliban*, 16(2), 178-188.
- Frausino, C. C. M. (2020a). Um olhar sobre Virgínia Leone Bicudo. *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise*, 54(3), 226-236.
- Frausino, C. C. M. (2020b). Somos filhos de Dona Virgínia. *Associação Livre: Jornal da Sociedade de Psicanálise de Brasília*, 9(10), 14-19. <https://tinyurl.com/38w6th74>.
- Frausino, C. C. M. (2022). Falácias psicanalíticas: o bacharelado em psicanálise. *Cult*, 283, 29-31.
- Gomes, J. D. (2013). *Os segredos de Virgínia: estudos de atitudes raciais em São Paulo (1945-1955)* [PhD thesis]. Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Maio, M. C. (2010). Educação sanitária, estudos de atitudes raciais e psicanálise na trajetória de Virgínia Leone Bicudo. *Cadernos Pagu*, 35, 309-355. <https://doi.org/c9cgmz>
- Pieczanski, N. L. & Pieczanski, A. (2017). *The pioneers of South American psychoanalysis: an essential guide*. Karnac. (Original work published in 2014).

Calibán -
RLP, 22(2),
193-199
2024

Ney Marinho*

Nise da Silveira and the madness enigma

Madness has always followed mankind and been its enigma as well. It has been given different names and sometimes even honored as something divine. It is often repelled to the city and culture suburbs. Our Western civilization is an example of this. Madness conveys us psychoanalysts to Freud's wonderful text: *The Uncanny* (1909) in which he describes something that is familiar and unusual at the same time! Except for the famous *The Case of Schreber* (1911), Freud did not explain this phenomenon that has followed us as a spectre. Let's recall Jacques Derrida – *Marx's Spectres* – that in order to debate about the Marxist persistence, he reminds us of the beginning of the communist manifest (“... a spectre prowls around Europe, the communist spectre”) approaching it to the beginning of Hamlet in which the murdered father's spectre indicates that *Something is rotten in the State of Denmark*.

I understand the immortal presence of Nise da Silveira (1905 – 1999) that still calls our attention: madness cannot be ignored. It is part of the human condition. Therefore, it is a great pleasure to have Nise side by side with another heroin, Virginia Bicudo, to be honored by FEPAL.

Nise was brave and sensitive to listen to what madness had to say. She listened, respected and lived with the most excluded of all people.

Let's recall the story of our character, muse and spectre. Despite having known Nise very superficially, I know of her fight for dignity and respect for those suffering with madness and I have tried to fight her fight the same way in order to reach a country far different from the one we live in and the one she dreamed of.

The origin

Nise was born in the small northeastern state of Alagoas which is known for its natural beauty, popular culture and plenty of contrasts. Alagoas is the land of military

* Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise do Rio de Janeiro.

Generals since it provided many of them to our first republic from 1889 to 1930. It is also the Lost Nation of Fugitive Slaves, better known as “The Quilombo¹ dos Palmares” (the biggest resistance movement against slavery) as well as the land of great writers and artists such as Graciliano Ramos, Jorge de Lima, Alberto Passos Guimarães, Otávio Brandão, Luiz Cerqueira, Cacá Diegues and many others together with land property and oligarchy which are very common in the northeast of Brazil. Nise experienced the permanent contrast between the creativity of a people, its nature and the declining conservatism that offers violent resistance to any change that withholds its privileges.

Nise was born in Maceió in 1905. She was the only child of a pianist mother and a journalist and mathematics professor. They were both intellectuals very committed with social changes. Her name recalls us to the muse – Nise – to the rebellious poet Claudio Manuel da Costa². When she was only 16 she decided to study medicine in Salvador, Bahia. Despite her family’s choice for her to be a pianist, her parents succumb to her decision and support her to take a class with 157 students in which she was the only woman. Her determination will be a milestone of her character. Fortunately, some classmates of hers such as Arthur Ramos who was later recognized as a great anthropologist, and her cousin Mario Magalhães da Silveira who she gets married to and becomes a notable sanitarian.

When her father dies, Nise is determined to move to the State of Rio de Janeiro in the neighborhood of Santa Tereza where young intellectuals have endless projects but very little resources. She then meets Otávio and Laura Brandão, Manoel Bandeira, Di Cavalcanti, Castro Rebelo, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and is introduced to the communist movement and the literature behind it. However, there is no reference to her being engaged to the Brazilian Communist Party (back then it was called The Communist Party of Brazil). Her enemies on the other hand, were right in considering her a communist but in the most profound meaning of the word: sweet, peaceful and always determined no matter what to defend the rights of the excluded and fight for an equal and fraternal world. It was in fact a concern for the recently free slavery regime society whose dominant classes were native of families of landowners with their addictions of arrogance and impunity. However, I believe her origins of communism were many: from the Northeast (no doubt about this), from her new friends, readings, but most of all from her contact with the human suffering that the real practice of medicine offers and teaches for those who are willing to learn. In this regard, I would include the work with the mentally sick, the mad, those who were excluded from a regular life with those considered *normal*. Nise made her internship at the old Mental Hospital at *Praia Vermelha* where she showed the same brilliance that her final Medicine thesis revealed: *An essay on the woman’s criminality in Brazil* – in which she is arrested and denounced by a nurse for her personal books on Marxism. A unique event follows her arrest: a patient who seemed indifferent to the environment but was treated by Nise with great respect, beats up the nurse after knowing of her imprisonment. At that time, Nise was able to feel and observe under descriptions from textbooks that there was much more to life, even if unconsciously, but that could surface at any moment in a less dramatic way.

1. “Quilombos” were communities far from cities where fugitive slaves lived with dignity. Some of them lasted for more than one hundred years. The state of Alagoas had the most important “quilombo” governed by Zumbi.

2. The poet Claudio Manoel da Costa participated of a movement to free Brasil from Portugal. He was denounced and arrested in 1789. He died in prison murdered probably.

The infamy of prison

Nise was arrested at her workplace in the presence of her patients on March 26 of 1936. Not being properly judged, she remained in prison until June of 1937. This arbitrary imprisonment was due to the *Communist Upheaval* of September 1935 with some military regiments which were defeated in a few weeks and had their leaders arrested. It is important to point out that Hitler was in power in Germany (1933) and Mussolini in Italy; soon after the defeat of the republic, Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, composed the Nazi-fascist group which preceded World War II. Soon after the Communist Upheaval in Brazil and despite not having any connection with the aforementioned uprising, the persecution for left wing intellectuals, physicians and politicians was initiated.

While in prison, Nise went through tough experiences with friendships, companionship and outrage. According to one of her biographers (Agilberto Calaça) this had a profound impact in her life. This can be found in a Brazilian classical literature book – *Prison Memories* – in which Graciliano Ramos, a fellow countryman arrested under the same circumstances, describes the life that promising intellectuals, physicians and even members of the armed forces would have among convicts who ranged from misdemeanors to homicides, but who all had been excluded from a Fascist and hypocrite society. Their characters witnessed one of the biggest crimes of our history: the handing over of Elisa Berger and Olga Benário Prestes (pregnant with the daughter of Luiz Carlos Prestes³, Anita who is currently a historian and was saved due to an international campaign unleashed by the catholic attorney Sobral Pinto whose integrity fed the hope of many people), to extradition in a German concentration camp to be killed. But her life after freedom is surrounded by a constant threat of being arrested at any moment since her reintegration to the public service only happened with the amnesty in 1944. Moreover, her husband and one of our greatest sanitarian physicians of all times, Mario Magalhães, was under surveillance due to suspicions of being member of the Communist Party. Therefore, he and Nise had to work in discretion in the Amazon. According to their biographers Agilberto Calaça and Moacir Medeiros de Sant’ana, this is how they spent years of semi-clandestinely and wandering in Brazil.

Spinosa and Jung

The restless Nise enjoyed this forced idle period to deepen her research on the Dutch philosopher’s work with whom she identified herself with since her youth. This was due to the Dutchman’s courage of pursuing what he believed in. His philosophy and ethics were embodied in his own biography such as our young psychiatrist at that time. She learns about Jung when returning to the Psychiatric Center Pedro II in *Engenho de Dentro* (name of the neighborhood that popularized the hospice), where most of our brilliant psychiatrists worked and who years later were able to accomplish the psychiatric reform that extinguished the big madhouses. Nise, who was averse to the traditional therapeutic practices such as electroshocks, insulin shocks or cardiozolic shocks, took refuge at the forsaken occupational therapy sector created by the geniality of Juliano Moreira and a few other pioneers who foresaw the artistic production, work and activity as a therapeutic element which was ignored by tradition. This tradition was reduced in order to eliminate symptoms while looking for psycho-

3. Luiz Carlos Prestes was the more important communist leader and was arrested with his wife Olga, a German communist Jewess.



Angelica Dass
Humanae. 16 February-15 May 2022. Paris.
 France Photo: David Paquin.

pharmacological discoveries that *could cure the disease but not the patient* as our old teacher Portella Nunes would often say. Therefore, from this extreme different point of view, Nise formulated her remarkable speculations. The first one can be considered very simple: *Although unconscious, there is a rich and constant inner life in patients*. Despite not being enough for Nise's uneasiness, this simple ascertainment was a leap to Freud's study. Nise recognized Freud's geniality but deemed him stuck to achieving rationality to unconscious manifestations. Nise observes that her patients produce regular, irregular, sophisticated, complex and harmonious forms. Therefore, Nise questioned Jung whether these forms could be *Mandalas* – circular designs found in many cultures ranging from American Indians to Buddhist and Hindu temples – which are always linked to curative procedures. Being a wise Swiss, Jung agrees with Nise and she initiates long researches on mythology, history of religion and other themes that will bring her close to Jung's analytic psychology. Therefore, Nise starts therapy with Dr. Marie Louise von Franz in Zurich. This consistent theoretical-clinical basis will allow Nise to launch many projects such as: "Casa das Palmeiras", "Museu do Inconsciente" and others. She also publishes the result of her work as well as her conjectures: *Occupational Therapy – Practice and Theory*; *Unconscious Images*; *Casa das Palmeiras*; *Letters to Spinoza* and *Cats – the emotion in caring*.

Isolation and recognition

As time goes by, the incipient service of occupational therapy grows and reaches 17 different sectors. But it was only in 1954 that the sector was regulated by determination of the Psychiatric Director Doctor Paulo Elejalde who was an enthusiast of Nise's work for a long time. Barriers start to be broken. A reputed art critic, Mario Pedrosa, was probably one of the first to recognize the aesthetic value of the art performed by Nise's patients. They are unknown artists who get recognition through national and international expositions and overcome the polemic of the "Psychotic Art" or "Art of the Psychotics". However, the recognition came more from scholars than from the psychiatric environment that, unable to challenge Nise's success regarding the therapeutic proposal (patients who had been admitted in mental hospitals for years started to participate in regular activities) kept a significant silence and distance and refused to at least discuss her complex and sophisticated proposal.⁴ On top of that we can add the fear that therapy through artistic and social activities could stimulate the movement here in Brazil of transforming the old hospices in therapeutic environments with short stays and the development of a broad psychiatric reform. However, this only happened at the end of last century with the anti-asylum movement. Another element that delayed the process was the dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 since every group activity was seen as a threat to the regime. The recently founded therapeutic communities and psychoanalytic group sessions in public organs were closed.

Nise's presence

Social inclusion of any nature is always seen by the "Establishment" as a threat. This is an issue of great interest to us since the political, economic and historic explanations are all very disappointing. As we all know, any exclusion is impoverishing.

Psychoanalysis scholars from Freud, Bion, Klein, Winnicott and Lacan to the more recent ones such as Green and Rousillon have always called the attention to the epistemological value of art and to the need of developing a *negative capacity*: "cope with uncertainties and mysteries without the search of irritable reasons" as according to Keats and cited by Bion, Shakespeare represented so well as a man of achievement.

This is how I see *Nise's immortal presence* as the one who had "...the courage to listen to madness and death" (Kierkegaard). We believe that enigmas are not to be solved, explained or even abandoned, but to stimulate our investigation and respect.

Presence and current topics when the primordial states of the mind are subject of attention and research by countless psychoanalysts both individually as well as in groups. Let's reflect on our limitations while approaching madness or *the mad* the same way on the irrational group manifestations that can be best explained with the current wars in the 21st century.

Let's listen to Luiz Carlos (citado por Calaça, 2001) one of Nise's patients when she introduced the work with wool by cats and dogs:

4. An unique exception is the Doctorate Thesis: *Artistic expression and Schizophrenia – Adelina Gomes's case through images*, by psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Maria Cristina Reis Amendoeira who uses the history and artistic production of a Nise's patient.

Wild Angora cat
Blue eyes gray nose
Brown cat
Nut brown male ear
And now just speed
So caring to love (p. 201)

Bibliography

- Amendoeira, M. C – *The Artistic Expression and Schizophrenia: Adelina Gomes's case through images*. Doctorate Thesis. UFRJ Institute of Psychiatry, 2008.
- Calaça, A. – Nise da Silveira: biographical sketch, In *Quaternion, C. G. Jung Study Group, nr. 8, 2001*.
- Cerqueira, L. – *For the rehabilitation in psychiatry (From Pretherapy to the Therapeutic community)*. Rio de Janeiro: Universidade do Brasil, 1965.
- Derrida, J. *The Spectres of Marx*. Ed. Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro: 1994.
- Freud, S. 1919 *The Uncanny*. Standard Edition XVII. The Hogarth Press, London: 1974.
- Medeiros de Sant'ana, M. Nise da Silveira, the psychiatry reinvention, In *Quaternion, C. G. Jung Study Group, nr. 8, 2001*.
- Ramos, G. *Prison Memories*. Ed. José Olímpio, Rio de Janeiro:1953.
- Silveira, N. – Nise da Silveira's bibliography, In *Quaternion, C. G. Jung Study Group, nr. 8, 2001*.

Documentary Films

- Unconscious Images* (1985). Director: Leon Hirzman.
- Olhar de Nise* (2015). Director: Jorge Oliveira.
- Nise – The heart of madness* (2015). Director: Roberto Berliner.