

# PSYCHIATRIC DISCOURSE AND HYGIENISM-NORMALIZATION AND LIBERALISM IN LATIN AMERICA FROM MICHEL FOUCAULT<sup>1</sup>

João Barros<sup>2</sup>


**Abstract:** The purpose of this text is to reflect on the production of abnormalities from a historical-hermeneutical point of view. Starting from the theoretical framework proposed by Michel Foucault, how the normality-abnormality binomial has been seen, whether in a disciplinary or biopolitical way, it serves to produce individuals through knowledge-power relations. In these terms, it has been demonstrated how the production of abnormalities occurs in Foucault's work. In the second topic, it has been shown how the discussion about biopower can be used in order to problematize situations and cases that have occurred in our continent. It is about connecting the production of abnormalities to the hygienism development in Latin America, giving notice to some strategies used in normalization and production of hygienic bodies.

**Keywords:** Psychiatric discourse. Hygienism. Liberalism. Normalization. Michel Foucault.

## INTRODUCTION

In face of the uncertain and difficult national framework involving education in Brazil, we aim to reflect upon the learning activity from Michel Foucault's proposal. If we think about the conservative wave that promotes

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<sup>2</sup> Ph. D. Professor of Political Philosophy. Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (UNILA), Foz do Iguaçu, PR – Brasil.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0324-7079>. E-mail: joao.barros@unila.edu.br.

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initiatives similar to the *Escola sem partido*<sup>3</sup> movement, we may realize how the act of educating motivated by the struggle between world views has bothered some sectors of society. Conservative groups have put an obstacle to initiatives that aim to develop the ability to read reality critically, opposing to the acceptance of differences and to the confrontation of authoritarianism characteristic of our society.

Though seeing offensives in the horizon, made by conservative movements in actuality, we shall not analyze these particular experiences. Our goal is to propose a reflection employing the biopower theoretical framework, but also contextualize our arguments using facts from Latin America that occurred in the nineteenth century. With this genealogical perspective, we intend to enrich our reflection on our current moment of extreme intolerance.

In the first section, we see, in light of Michel Foucault's work, how we may infer that we live in a society in which our bodies are constant targets to power dispositives. When being hit by the normality-abnormality binomial, for example, be it disciplinary or biopolitical, we end up being converted into products of the power relations that surround us. In these terms, we shall see how production of abnormalities come to be in Foucault's work. Our goal is pointing out how this binomial served as an indefinite management of human behaviors, contributing to a better conduct of population.

In the second section, Latin-American authors' works will be studied. In these sources, we see how the discussion on biopower may be utilized for the purpose of problematizing situations and cases occurred in our continent. It is about linking the abnormalities productions to the development of hygienism in Latin America in the context of the birth of our liberal republics. From that point on, it will be possible to perceive how important the normalizing discourse has been to the production of hygienic bodies.

## 1 FOUCAULT AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE ABNORMAL

According to Miguel Morey, Foucault's big enterprise was "[...] breaking with the habit of taking the normal as criteria of the real." (MOREY, 1999, p. 118). His assertions may be better detailed in the following quotation,

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<sup>3</sup> School without party, loosely translated. For a broader discussion on the movement, we refer to the book organized by Gaudêncio Frigotto, *Escola "sem" Partido: esfinge que ameaça a educação e a sociedade* (2017).

for in it Morey sketches a tripartite framework to express what criticizing the normal consists in for Foucault.

[...] criticizing the normal currently consists in: 1) distinguish the normal figure in actuality; 2) making the normal the effect of complex practices of normalization (discursive or non-discursive); 3) interrogate about its possibilities' conditions. (MOREY, 1999, p. 119).

About this third point, we understand that the questioning about the disseminations of the psychiatric discourse in the social tissue has been fundamental. For Foucault, in the course *Abnormal*, the moralization discourse so dear to liberalism was associated with boasting about the degeneration of society. For him, perversion and danger were concepts linked to each other in a very strong manner in the medical-psychiatric discourse of the nineteenth century. Both alerted to the danger of the degeneration of society, harassed by biological deformities of hereditary character.

We have [...] two notions [...]: on one hand, the one of perversion, that allows sewing into each other the series of medical concepts and the series of legal concepts; on the other hand, the notion of danger, of the dangerous individual, that allows justifying and found in theory the existence of an uninterrupted chain of medic legal institutions. [...] it is the theoretical nucleus of medic legal expertise. (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 32; 2008, p. 42).<sup>4</sup>

Considered in a broader context, the production of the abnormal is described by Foucault in the disciplinary society framework. During the course *Psychiatric Power* (1973-1974), Foucault argues that disciplinary power promotes “[...] a coverage of the singular body by a power that involves it and constitutes it as an individual, that is, as subjugated body.” (FOUCAULT, 2003, p. 73; 2007, p. 94). This statement might be understood more profoundly if we remind ourselves that disciplinary power is a capilar form of power that touches bodies, habits, gestures and words with the intention of working, modifying and directing them. These characteristics of disciplinary power are possible due to the relation between knowledge and power so emphasized by Foucault. The link between discourse production and exercise of power was extensively analyzed in his works, bringing very influential conceptual innovations in the most diverse branches of scientific knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Foucault's work will be composed by the original followed by the Portuguese or Spanish translation.

According to him, this was ongoing in the nineteenth century, when psychiatric discourse began to supersede others, intruding itself onto the social body. Serving nationalist and even racial purposes, this discourse coated bodies, covering them in infamy and dangerousness. During this period, “[...] preserving the national physical strength [through race preservation], its workforce, its production capacity, as well as its military might” were the primary goals of the States, for whom Medicine was a very important tool (FOUCAULT, 2001, p. 41; 2010, p. 638). We see then how the production of healthy bodies may be associated, considering some contexts, to racial aspects. It is about an imbrication that will bring singular consequences if we think of the Latin-American reality. We shall return to this aspect in the next section.

Returning to the focus of this section, in another passage, the knowledge-power relation is evidenced by the protagonism of the scripture in the normalization of bodies. The scripture allows a global and continuous action of disciplinary power. This may be perceived as of the “[...] seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the army as much as the schools, the learning centers and also the police and legal systems, etc., people’s bodies, behaviors and discourses” are entangled in a discursive plot with the intent of registering, codifying and transmitting them in a hierarchic chain (FOUCAULT, 2003, p. 50-51; 2007, p. 69). With these words, Foucault signals to the writing usage as a tool of disciplinary power. Through it, bodies would be ever more coated by description power, the registers and the codifying of details, movements and gestures aiming to the normalization of individuals.

[...] disciplinary power is individualizing because it adjusts the subjects’ function to the somatic singularity through a vigilance and scripture system or a system of *panagraphic panoptism* that projects behind the somatic singularity [...] a virtuality core, a psyche, and establishes, furthermore, a norm as partition principle and the normalization as universal prescription to all these individuals thus constituted. (FOUCAULT, 2003, p. 57; 2007, p. 77, our emphasis).

Before that passage, it is interesting to analyze some important terms for a correct comprehension of the knowledge-power relation and of the normalization as a broader strategy in regard to the individuals. Disciplinary society and the production of individuals have in the panoptic its main model and tool. Foucault states, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), that the “[...] panoptic dispositive organizes spacious units that allow seeing non-stop and immediately recognize [...]. Each one [...] is seen, but does not see; object

of an information, never subject in a communication.” (FOUCAULT, 1975, p. 234; 2009, p. 190). The panoptic breaks the pair to see-to be seen and allows the observer to generate knowledge about its object and involve this body ever more intensely without ever being identified. The individual comes to be in a condition of only an object. Described object, measured, studied in its details. Produced object, in the end, by the discourse that surrounds it. With this potential, the panoptic comes to be a model of disciplinary society (FOUCAULT, 2003, 2007).

On what concerns the normalization of individuals, we must discuss the concept of norm. The norm serves to establish an “[...] infrapenalty on the emptiness left by the law.” (FOUCAULT, 1975, p. 209; 2009, p. 171). Before objectifying the condemnation, the norm aims to homogenize those by it affected. Through the norm, discipline qualifies and represses a set of behavior that escapes the broader framework of the law. Besides its capacity to infiltrate the social body more capillary, the norm also allows disciplinary power categorize the abnormal widely. Making specific remarks on the production of the abnormal in disciplinary society, we may recollect from the same essay the following quotation:

[...] generally, all instances of individual control function in a dual mode: that of binary division and the other of marking (insane-not insane; dangerous-harmless; normal-abnormal) [...]. The constant division of the normal and abnormal [...] takes us to [...] the binary marking [...] (FOUCAULT, 1975, p. 232; 2009, p. 189).

In this enterprise that takes the writing as allied, the individual control through binary separation in categories is a result not at all surprising. Being marked as abnormal, the individuals would be products of an incessant normalizing strategy. Along these lines, Foucault argues that there was a psychiatric power dissemination as of the nineteenth century. Therefore, Psychiatry, as an example of medical knowledge-power, may take for itself all anomalies that it judged necessary in the attempt to heal the social body (FOUCAULT, 2003, 2007).

By generalization of the psychiatric power, we may understand this endless ramification of this knowledge-power that specialized in defining and identifying the abnormal. Nothing more useful to the power apparatus of liberalism, given that with the “[...] mental hygiene [it is searched for] the offender treatment instead of that of the crime.” (STEPAN, 2005, p. 59).

Therefore, the focus comes to be the supposed deficiencies or anomalies of the individual, obscuring the circumstances of the infraction or of the conduct considered deviant. This aspect gets clearer in the next section, when we reflect on the hygienic school in Paraguay.

For now, regarding the production of abnormalities, in *Abnormal*, we are able to read the consideration that positive technologies of power developed as of the eighteenth century bring a unique innovation for the West.

What the eighteenth century introduced through the discipline system with effect of normalization, the discipline-normalization system, seems to be a power that, indeed, is not repressive but productive; repression does not figure in it more than a concept of lateral and secondary effect regarding the [...] mechanisms that fabricate, mechanisms that create, mechanisms that produce. (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 48; 2008, p. 59).

What Foucault tries to tell us is that the invention of positive technologies of power is associated with a dual process: normalization and development of a new governing art. Regarding the first, be it through knowledge production, be it through the use of techniques, it is possible to perceive a standardization of bodies and conducts in a productive mode. With respect to the second, productive power generally, and production of the abnormal particularly, allow a new manner of governing the population. Through the split between normality and abnormality based on scientific arguments, the exercise of power was able to utilize the figure of the insane, the deviant, to better govern the population under its tutelage.

When identifying the insane, the abnormal, the perverted, the degenerate utilizing the psychiatric knowledge-power dispositive, the social body is subjected to constant observation. All individuals are liable of being scrutinized and analyzed at any moment, under any aspect that is not adequate to the established norm. The figure of the abnormal will be produced and disseminated in the social environment with the intent to maximize the exercise of power, allowing a better conduction of the population through normalization.

One of the most influential theories for classifying the abnormal was the degeneration theory. Employing it, Psychiatry was able to exercise an “[...] indefinite interference on human behaviors.” (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 289; 2008, p. 293). That is, the possibility of reaching every behavior and conduct came to be a reality to a dispositive previously nonexistent in the history of the

West. Through the use of the norm that used to define the frontier between normality and its opposite, between reason and unreason, power came to have the capacity of acting on the social body ever more precisely and detailed.

This more assiduous intervention will be justified by the argument of protection. The tasks of “protection and order” will be the great justifications boasted to society in the attempt that the society itself accepts the intervention of this knowledge-power that produces and classifies individuals as deviant and degenerate (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 299; 2008, p. 294). Protection against an invisible or hard to comprehend danger. Order through the threat of generalized chaos within the social body. Few dispositives were so efficient in the exercise of a persistent power in its effects and unverifiable in its performance.

We shall see in the next section how the relation between production of abnormalities<sup>5</sup> and governing of the population took place in a special way in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the school, as the environment in which hygienism performed, had an important role.

## 2 SCHOOL AND HYGIENISM IN PARAGUAY—A LATIN-AMERICAN CASE

According to Bacarlett-Pérez (2016), in his valuable study *Una historia de la anormalidad*, the whole society is founded in an exclusion operation that separates the individuals in those who have or do not have such characteristics. Nonetheless, even considering that this operation may be glimpsed in distinct times and locales, something that distinguishes Modernity is the usage of the normal-pathological binomial. In his words:

[...] every society is founded in the exclusion of what seems to be the opposite of his property. Every form of exclusion expresses the particular form that a community has of separating the desirable from the undesirable, the lawful from the illicit, the allowed from the prohibited. It is worth

<sup>5</sup> On the production of abnormalities, cf. Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (1991). Additionally, we recommend the reading of Canguilhem, *Michel Foucault: morte do homem ou esgotamento do Cogito?* (2012); Roudinesco et al., *Foucault: leituras da história da loucura* (1994) and Macherey, *Subjetividad y normativa en Canguilhem y Foucault* (2016). On the governmentality and population, cf. Curtis, *Foucault on Governmentality and Population: The Impossible Discovery* (2002) and Bacarlett Pérez, *Una historia de la anormalidad* (2016).

<sup>6</sup> If we consider the Latin-American context, violence may also be considered an important strategy for the governing of populations. On this aspect, the State racism concept present in “*Il faut défendre la société*” is very useful. For a deeper insight, we refer to Barros, *O racismo de Estado em Michel Foucault* (2018).

saying that the rites of exclusion [...] are constitutive of social life and also political: there is only community there where it was determined the inside and outside of it. Nonetheless, if something will have to distinguish the old systems of exclusion from ours it is clear the reduction of criteria used to separate and expel the different; if once there was an entire array of dualities from which it is determined the inside and the outside – good-bad, allowed-prohibited, desirable-undesirable, familiar-strange, pure-impure, friend-stranger, etc. – nowadays everything is reduced to the normal-pathological binomial (BACARLETT PÉREZ, 2016, p. 79-80).

This comprehension is extremely important, for it is not only about a difference between normal and abnormal. We have here a pathologization of abnormality through medical discourse and its by-products.

In this argumentative line, we find the assertions by Silvero Arévalos (2014, p. 225), author of *Cuerpo, suciedad y civilización*, for whom hygienism was a very influential stream in the political and educational contexts in Paraguay during the nineteenth century. By the end of his book, Arévalos presents a historical consideration, followed by the following questions:

Throughout the history of Paraguayan education, issues like poverty, exploitation, the unjust distribution of land problematic, migration, [...] underfeeding, and others imponderable that deeply make the history of bodies, in any way were considered fundamental aspects when sketching lasting educational policies, meaningful and liberating. Where justice is administered in a negligent and unequal manner, the bodies must pay the consequences in some way. How is it explained that in the full-blown twenty-first century still remains schools with nineteenth century structures? Is this detail not abnormal? In what way educational reforms [...] contribute to overcoming poverty and inequality allowing the emergence of the hygienist ideal of the clean childhood, prolux and healthy?

From Foucault's proposed theoretical framework, Arévalos dedicated himself to answering these inquiries. Before sticking to the specific Paraguayan case, he considers that there was the performance of diverse dispositives on bodies in the emerging liberal societies in our Latin-American continent, as we have seen regarding the schools, legal and police systems. This statement by Foucault appears in *The birth of social medicine*, a lecture delivered precisely in Brazil. Approximating the arguments from the French philosopher to the Paraguayan reality, Arévalos' considerations seem quite rich and pertinent to



comprehend not only the reality of his country, but also to establish similarities to our actuality.

Within liberalism flourishing in Latin America because of the Nation-State formation, Arévalos argues that hygienism acted on social pressure groups with the intent of establishing law and order, leading to the stigmatization “[...] of the dirty body, ugly, black where aboriginal, peasants and disowned” were submitted by this dispositive<sup>7</sup> (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 19). In the process of formation of emerging societies, it would be a mistake to think that the indigenous liberalism considered every person as equal and worthy of citizenship. Quite the opposite. As conservative in some aspects as their predecessors, the ruling elite of the independentist project in Latin America employed hygienism to normalize the education<sup>8</sup> and support a society project. “The Liberal strategy to build a modern State [gave place] to multiple health policies and specially to the normalization of education, achievement in Latin America of the grand cleaning operation.” (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 136-137).

Taking another example in our continent, in Puerto Rico, there was a constant stigmatization of the black body through medical discourse. We do not speak specifically of the Medicine practice or the medical theory exposed in the most common forums. We refer to the adoption of this discourse in other areas and types of expression that are not the purely scientific one. The artistic field in this case is of extreme relevance. When analyzing the work *El velorio* (1893), by Francisco Oller, Benigno Trigo offers us a quite interesting point of view on the issue.

[...] the painting takes the sickness and a metaphor for the “black” body. In it, the sickness appears in the form of racial degeneration, degenerations represented as a black child, in the fetal position on the border of the painting and that results from a line of bodies in degeneration. (TRIGO, 2004, p. 138-139).

<sup>7</sup> Combined with this strategy, it was in course at the end of the nineteenth century an attempt to purify the Brazilian population through European migration. “To justify the need for immigration, it was common the claim of shortage of arms, besides a supposed better qualification of the white immigrant for the wage labor” (STREVA, 2018, p. 97). As a last resort, it was a strategy of the farmers to not become dependent on the free workforce. Therefore, black women and men prior enslaved were submitted to a labor market in a situation of evident disadvantage.

<sup>8</sup> For a complementary debate on normalization of education it is the medicalization of learning difficulties, identifying these as pathologies, cf. MANFRÉ, A. H. *Crítica à medicalização na educação escolar* (2020).

According to him, this would be the image of a strategy that consisted in coating the black body with the sickness stigma, at the same time that moved it away from the white and the mixed-race bodies. This way, both, white and mixed-race, would be seen as healthy bodies, fit for building a nation that would come to flourish. Signal of a control dispositive, therefore, upon the considered dangerous bodies.

Returning to the Paraguayan case and quoting a speech by the former president Solano López, Arévalos allows us to realize how this power dispositive was active in his country: “[...] every civilized country knows that hygiene is the base of a nations progress, the race prosperity, health and joy of the people and the founding of comfort and wealth.” (SOLANO, 1918 *apud* ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 207). With these words, calls to attention the importance that the bodies’ hygiene had for the civilizing project in course during those times. Being a child of the motherland was not enough. It would not have been enough to wield a weapon to defend its people. It would be necessary, furthermore, to count on sanitized bodies to achieve prosperity and wealth.

Allied to this hygienist ideal, the racial discourse remains significantly present. Lilian Schwarcz (1993, p. 63) helps us to comprehend this relation in the following manner:

The racial discourse emerged [...] as a variant of the citizenship debate, since within these new models it was more discussed the determinations of the biological group than the free-will of the individual [...]. This debate [...] shapes itself more defined as of the nineteenth century.

Regarding these groups that would exercise “pressure” on society, they would be composed of the poor, drunk or delinquents. People who did not know civility and therefore should wash their bodies more frequently, as a way to be in condition to take part in the new social body. To that end, the school has an important role. In it, children would have their bodies watched and corrected aiming at normalization. “The school should civilize and, simultaneously, domesticate ‘the flesh’ and the senses. [...] the grand goal of normalism.” (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 212).

Thus, Arévalos defends that there was the creation of a corporal stereotype that would serve to separate the normal from the abnormal within Paraguayan society. Its bases were settled in medical knowledge developed at

the time. Branches like Experimental Psychology and Physical Anthropology were important in this enterprise of body stigmatization. We also noted how the school was an environment in which this medical hygienist dispositive also operated. Through Anthropometry, it was possible to classify the students in distinct ways (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 210). The separation between normal and abnormal occurred through the pathologization of supposed abnormalities. It was not only about differentiations, but also of an incidence of the hygienist discourse on the bodies. In these terms, the school assumes an additional role to its mission of graduating and educating human beings for life in society. The school also comes to be an environment of political formation. Not a formation aiming to emancipation or the exercise of citizenship in an ever-full manner. On the contrary, the teachers are seen as crucial political actors for the formation of the new society.

With “normalism” it begins to be configured as a type of teacher that assumes a political role. Not only he must teach, but also must instruct and above all civilize, homogenize and discipline big masses of immigrants and criollos [...] The Normal School offered itself as a model to be followed by all institutions [...] (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 209).

In what other manner would it be possible to comprehend the normal school institutions, if not through this critical view? If we support ourselves on solid and critical bases for the construction of a school that handles the challenges of our times, this theoretical proposal would be adequate for our days. Through this critical view, maybe it is possible to think of alternatives to this naturalization of inequality based on the production of normalities/abnormalities. If we do not do that, we risk endorsing the creation of new abnormals in our times. We would repeat, therefore, experiences of former times (?), when the body was managed by normalism, submitting social and cultural differences to a biological imaginary.<sup>9</sup> This was a strategy of naturalization of inequalities, as a manner of justifying them. Through the multiplicity of paths “[...] it was sought undeniable proof of belonging to a ‘race’, the manifest signs, inscribed on the flesh, of ‘degeneration’, of feminization, of mess or of criminality.” (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 212).

<sup>9</sup> Regarding this aspect, it is relevant to mention the concept of ontology of the present, with which Foucault attempts to investigate what would be the limits that condition our experiences. For a deepening we humbly suggest the reading of the articles “Genealogía y crítica - El debate Foucault/Habermas” (2017) and “Crítica e ontologia do presente em Michel Foucault: uma chave de leitura para entender o giro subjetivo” (2012).

As a way to reinforce this tone, Nancy Stepan also discusses the social context, scientific and ideological, that allowed the expansion of eugenie in Latin America. According to her, the “mental hygiene” was considered a means of prevention of Psychiatry, broadening the doctors performance beyond asylums, “[...] invading everyday life in homes, on the streets, at schools.” (STEPAN, 2005, p. 60). That is, the normal-pathological bipartition was present not only within the teaching institutions. It was something much more disseminated. In this sense, we are able to notice the acting of the press itself (FLORES; BARROS, 2019). In diverse pamphlets, people’s unsanitary bodies were denounced, occupying the place in which should figure the injustices and terrible life conditions that the population was subjected to. The fear of degeneration was so wide that the offensive on bodies also counted on the participation of the press. Through its diverse means, newspapers, magazines, radio and even pamphlets, there was an initiative to normalize matrimony. The goal was to avoid the union between couples that would generate inadequate children. It was built, thus, “[...] a broad propaganda and hygienic advice program”, putting the weight of the future of the nation over the “[...] poorer social classes, seen as immoral, degrading and pernicious to the racial future of the nation.” (SOUZA, 2008, p. 157-158).

Widely disseminated among authorities and elite of the time, this paradigm of mental hygiene allowed public and private agents to perform very incisively for the so sought nationality regeneration. In the search for population improvement, inclusive under the genetic aspect, eugenie was another partner in this government enterprise and society normalization. It is what we can observe with regard to the Brazilian case according to Souza (2008, p. 149):

[Eugenie guaranteed a space of authority, mostly to intellectuals connected to social medicine, where it could continue implementing policies of public health. In the Brazilian medical discourse of this period, social medicine was assimilated as an important eugenic practice within the nationality regeneration process.

The union between hygienism and eugenie Eugenie was prevalent in this period. To it, we may assign the importance that the first had in a racial improvement in our emerging countries. The preoccupation with avoiding and treating the abnormal in its distinct forms was way beyond correction through teaching. Employing surgical techniques, there was a quite known

case in Spanish America of a boy submitted to an aesthetic surgery to heal a criminal conduct. Arévalos narrates briefly this case, but not less enlightening.

The preoccupation with abnormality and all that concerns the race was a theme in vogue as of the first years of the twentieth century. [...] It is interesting to remember that one of the first cases of mass murders [...] in Argentinian society involved precisely [...] the “*Petizo Orejudo*” [Big-eared midget]. His acts had mediatic repercussion, firstly because his victims were babies and young children and secondly because Cesare Lombroso, the famous Italian criminologist, stated that certain physical characteristics such as ugliness was one of the reasons for a delinquent to be motivated to kill or steal. [Taken to a Psychiatric institution], in 1927 was submitted to an ear reduction surgery, since they believed that because of their big size an idiotism was produced. (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 223).

Cases like this one perhaps may be narrated in a bigger number. This surgery was not something discriminated against by then. Quite the opposite. It represented a modern alternative to the treatment of individuals with deformed conduct. This and other strategies were considered valid to the facing of degeneration. As we read in Souza, we also find in José Reis sources that endorse the assertion that the eugenic movement had great preponderance over the Brazilian intellectual and institutional environment. According to Reis, the Brazilian ideal of eugenic improvement of men founded on race purification was shared by the “LBHM [Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene]”, that defended procedures like “[...] compulsory sterilization of ‘great degenerates’ and criminals; premarital exam; [...] mental hygiene and infantile Eugenie [...]” (REIS, 1994, p. 67). That was necessary because it was considered that the poor had no dominance over its body, or at least did not dedicate the adequate care to it. As consequence, those who counted on few conditions to generate a healthy and robust child were the ones that made the mistake of letting go to the desires of the flesh. Recriminatory words of moralist tone may be observed in a psychiatrist’s manifestations by then. According to doctor Júlio Porto-Carrero,

Pleasure, feeling with which nature lures us to procreate the following generations, is used as purpose and not means. It is pleasure for pleasure that man seeks. Little does it matter that the progeny is none or inferior. (PORTO-CARRERO *apud* REIS, 1994, p. 67).

From this point of view, it is possible to realize that the search for a hygienic body was way beyond the poor and/or black population's improvements of the real-life conditions. Quite the opposite. Through the hygienist path, people's bodies, with special attention to the children's case at school, were targets of the normalizing process. The progress of the nation earlier went through the body disciplining and not through the improvement of life conditions for the population. Resorting to the morphology of the term, Arévalos helps us comprehend how a substantial change occurs in the comprehension and role of hygiene in society. Getting ever more similar to acting power dispositives over bodies, and not an adjective that qualifies health "[...] (in Greek, *hygeinos* means: what is sane)", it is possible to perceive how its performance was important during this period (ARÉVALOS, 2014, p. 121).

If previously we could deal with hygiene having as standard the acceptance of the term as described before, as of the nineteenth century the tone radically changes. So much that the retrospective view helps us make a distinct evaluation, to the point of allying the hygienism development to the construction of a modern and civilized society. Nonetheless, for that, it would be necessary to add a pathological element to the insertion of the hygienist discourse at schools. According to Arévalos (2014, p. 213), returning to the importance of school in this context,

The existing connection between normalism and Hygienism shows us the irruption of a grand individualist utopia where, from certain ideals, it was consigned to standardize bodies submitting them in mass to a pulchritude regime, order, cleanliness and civility, aiming to make a global social regulation.

In these terms, considering the moment of the Nation-State formation in Latin-America, we see how an enormous effort was dedicated in the attempt to sanitize/normalize bodies and conducts of the poor. Once more liberalism present in this quote is conspicuous. The standardization of the body would be useful in an emerging society whose guiding principles would be work and progress. Progress based on vigilance and submission of bodies coated in suspicion and fears.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion to our arguments, we understand that the psychiatric discourse dissemination in the social tissue was fundamental for sustaining the defense of moralization so dear to liberalism. Associated to the furor on the degeneration of the society, perversion and danger were concepts strongly attached to the commotion over a supposed risk of the degeneration of the society, harassed by biological deformities of hereditary kind. This was particularly present in the nineteenth century, when psychiatric discourse gradually took precedence over others, interfering into the social tissue. Linked to national and even racial purposes, this discourse coated bodies, covering them in infamy and periculosity. In the said period, the national force increase through race preservation was State goals, which used Medicine as an essential tool. Thus, the production of healthy bodies and racial stigmatization were connected for the service of the nation.

Protection and order were slogans elevated to indisputable levels. Justifiers of a power-knowledge capable of classifying individuals as deviants or degenerate, symbolized the fight against an invisible danger, uncertain, subject to be found in anyone who presented suspicious conduct. Few dispositives were as efficient in the exercise of power, persistent in its effects and verifiable in its action.

In the center of the blooming liberalism in Latin America, we saw how hygienism acted over social pressure groups aiming to establish law and order, making use of aborigines and black people's body stigmatization and dispossessed racialized bodies. Thinking of citizenship as something accessible to every man and woman would be a gross mistake. The conservatism of our ruling elites used hygienism, for example, to normalize education and support a society project. A great cleaning operation, as Arévalos tells us. This posture was very well exemplified by the former Paraguayan president Solano López, associating civilization, hygiene, race and prosperity. In front of the civilizing project, it was not enough to be a child of the Nation or risking one's life for its defense. Here we can see the association of racial discourse and the debate on citizenship, as Schwarcz points out.

In Brazilian soil, we saw how the eugenic ideal of perfection founded in race purification was shared by "LBHM [Brazilian League of Mental Hygiene]", acting in defense of proceedings as compulsory sterilization of big degenerates and criminals. If they did that, it was because they considered

the poor to not have domain over his body, not only delivering itself to the pleasures of the flesh, as well as generating children with no condition to maintain them. Aiming to contribute with theoretical frameworks in order to reflect on this context, we saw in the first section Foucault's arguments present in two courses: *The abnormal* and *Psychiatric power*.

In the second section, we rescue the “petizo orejudo” case, a historical example very elucidating to our goals. From it, the reflection that is brought to us points to a bigger tendency to stigmatization and control of bodies than the annulment of injustice and recognition of dignity of the less favored. Therefore, we can identify a strategy to tarnish making use of language, disbelieving the different. Normality, therefore, comes from normalization through a productive power that defines what is and what is not. In this aspect, our normality is already a product that tends not to undo its monsters, targets of its hostility.

Could it be that, instead of walking to a pluralist and more equitable society construction, we continue to opt for the stigmatization and normalization of the other?

BARROS, J. Discurso psiquiátrico e Higienismo - Normalização e Liberalismo na América Latina a partir de Foucault. *Trans/formação*, Marília, v. 45, n. 4, p. 141-158, Out./Dez., 2022.

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste texto é refletir sobre a produção de anormalidades. de um ponto de vista histórico-hermenêutico. Partindo do marco teórico proposto por Michel Foucault, será possível ver como o binômio normalidade-anormalidade, seja de modo disciplinar, seja biopolítico, serve à produção de indivíduos mediante relações de saber-poder. Nesses termos, observa-se como se dá a produção de anormalidades na obra de Foucault. Na segunda seção, verifica-se como a discussão sobre o biopoder pode ser utilizada no intuito de problematizar situações e casos ocorridos neste continente. Trata-se de relacionar a produção de anormalidades com o desenvolvimento do Higienismo na América Latina, dando a perceber algumas estratégias adotadas na normalização e produção de corpos higiênicos.

**Palavras-chave:** Discurso psiquiátrico. Higienismo. Liberalismo. Normalização. Michel Foucault.



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