

PSYCHOTHERAPY IN ECUADOR: ORIGIN AND TRENDS

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The beginnings and evolution of psychological sciences in Ecuador are not exceptional among Latin American countries. Due to the strong scholastic spirit reigning during the last decades of the past century, man was dichotomized into body and soul, which were studied and considered as two different and separate entities. The "psyche" was for a long time the *leitmotiv* of all psychological investigations, which tried to discover the essence of the being, metaphysically considered.

These philosophical studies slowly yielded to the first empirical psychometric advances when in the early twenties of the present century the methods and ideas of Binet and Claparede were introduced in the Magisterial Educational Plan.

Psychological diagnosis, as part of Clinical Psychology, started with the works of Julio Endara Moreano, M.D., Jorge Escudero, M.D., and Agustín Cueva Tamariz, M.D., during the thirties. In 1937, the former founded *Archivos de Criminología, Neuropsiquiatría y Disciplinas Conexas*, the first journal that dealt with psychological sciences, which up to today has published articles and information which reflect the development and progress of psychology in Ecuador. Julio Endara is also well known in this country and abroad for his research in psychodynamics, particularly in the field of projective techniques, with valuable results with the Rorschach in psychiatry and criminology.

For many years, psychology has been taught as part of subjects dictated in the Departments of Education of the different national universities. Only two years ago, the first Psychology Department was founded in the Central University in Quito. It is felt that in the near future, psychology will be considered as an independent science, and that consequently it will be taught apart from Philosophy or Education in all the universities of the country.

As of today, most of the psychologists of our country work in schools or do some work that is in one way or another related with schools. The work of these psychologists deals mainly with the fields of academic planning and professional guidance for pupils, and they do some therapy, especially with children and adolescents who have behavior problems or low academic achievement.

Due to the youth of psychological sciences in Ecuador, and to the lack of specific training courses in different trends of psychotherapy, there are very few psychologists who dedicate themselves to the field of psychotherapy as such. In the State Mental Hospitals, for example, there are usually therapists who work with the mentally disturbed, in association with or under the direction of psychiatrists. Privately, there are few cases, if any, where a psychiatrist works in direct cooperation with a psychologist. When they do work for a psychiatrist, it consists mainly of personality evaluation through means of different batteries of tests. The psychotherapists' work in the rehabilitation of schizophrenics is quite scarce and empirical.

Presently, the work of a psychotherapist in our country is still looked upon as some sort of oddity. This happens especially because there is not enough information about the specific work that psychologists and psychotherapists do. But there are signs of a growing tendency to understand and to esteem their work, especially with children.

Although it is hard to determine which "schools" are influential in our psychotherapy, we may mention Pavlov and Freud as the most popular ones, but others such as Jung and the existentialists are also known.

Among the factors that cause this state of things of psychotherapy in Ecuador, we may mention the fact that this profession has been known for very few years here. It is necessary to stress that there is not yet enough information about the help that a psychotherapist may offer, and due to the poverty of a large percent of the population, it stays away from elementary medical attention, let alone from specialists, such as psychotherapists, in this case. Besides, in spite of the fact that today there are many students interested in Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, there are not enough teachers prepared for their training, or adequate centers where the practical side of such a training program could be carried on. It may be helpful to mention, too, among the cultural characteristics of our country, that there is not a definite knowledge of the personality of the Ecuadorian man, done in a scientific way, which would enable the therapists to accurately select the most valuable form of therapy according to the needs and psychology of our citizens.

In order to be able to work in psychotherapy, psychologists need only the required academic certification of studies in Clinical Psychology, awarded by one of the local universities (or a duly certified and legalized one, if it comes from a foreign university). Their legal status is the same as that of professions related to them,

such as counselors, psychiatrists, etc. They describe themselves as Clinical Psychologists, and hold only this degree.

There are no special training centers for the preparation of psychotherapists, so it takes place in traditional academic programs in a university setting. These Departments are: Facultad de Ciencias Psicológicas, Universidad Central del Ecuador (Quito); Escuela de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (Quito); Escuela de Psicología, Universidad Estatal de Santiago de Guayaquil; and Escuela de Psicología, Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil.

The practice that the students get is mainly through sporadic contacts with patients, usually on behalf of some research work for monographic investigation. There are some few exceptional cases, when students, on their own initiative, practice before getting their degrees.

The future for psychotherapy in Ecuador is a promising one. There has been a surprising growth in the interest in psychology and psychotherapy. This is shown in the great number of students that each year enroll in the universities to study these sciences. At the same time, the need for psychotherapists is starting to be felt and valued in institutions such as asylums, hospitals, schools, nursery schools, jails, etc. Unfortunately, since at the present time there are not enough means for the preparation of psychotherapists in our country, they must get their degrees in foreign universities, and they have to overcome the difficulties of applying their knowledge to the peculiar characteristics of Ecuadorian people. Possibly, with the growing number of psychotherapists, there will be in the future a legislation setting minimum salaries in public and private institutions. We hope that the popularity of their services will increase in direct proportion to the information about their work and success.

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