

Echoes of memory and narrative reimagining: jungian clinical practice facing racial trauma

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Abstract

This article examines racism as a manifestation of the cultural complex and the impacts of racism on individual and collective psyches. By analyzing a clinical case study through the lens of Jungian Analytical Psychology, we explore how silenced narratives emerge from the unconscious, and affect the identities of racialized individuals. Clinically attuned listening — sensitive to the images and affects mobilized in analytic sessions — reveals unconscious material available for integration into consciousness. The analytic setting becomes a space for symbolically working through archetypal pain by acknowledging phantom memories, thereby fostering new subjective experiences. The holding environment enables movement between regression and progression of psychic energy, supporting the individuation process. The study underscores the significance of clinical practices that acknowledge the intricacies of racial trauma, leading to the re-signification of psychic distress in racialized contexts. ■

Keywords: Racial trauma, Memory, Narrative, Cultural complex, Individuation.

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Ecos da memória e reimaginação narrativa: a clínica junguiana diante do trauma racial

Resumo

Este artigo investiga o racismo como expressão do complexo cultural e os impactos do racismo na psique individual e coletiva. A partir da análise, sob a ótica da Psicologia Analítica Junguiana, de um caso clínico, explora-se como narrativas silenciadas emergem do inconsciente, afetando a identidade de pessoas racializadas. A escuta clínica, sensível às imagens e aos afetos mobilizados no encontro analítico, revela conteúdos inconscientes passíveis de integração à consciência. A clínica analítica constitui um espaço para a elaboração simbólica da dor arquetípica, por meio do reconhecimento de memórias fantasmas, favorecendo a construção de novas experiências subjetivas. O campo de continência possibilita o trânsito entre regressão e progressão da energia psíquica, favorecendo o processo de individuação. O estudo destaca a relevância de práticas clínicas que reconheçam a complexidade do trauma racial, contribuindo para a ressignificação do sofrimento psíquico em experiências racializadas. ■

Palavras-chave: trauma racial, memória, narrativa, complexo cultural, individuação.

Ecos de la memoria y reimaginación narrativa: la clínica junguiana frente al trauma racial

Resumen

Este artículo investiga el racismo como expresión del complejo cultural y el impacto del racismo en la psique individual y colectiva. A partir del análisis de un caso clínico desde la perspectiva de la Psicología Analítica Junguiana, explora cómo emergen narrativas silenciadas del inconsciente, afectando la identidad de las personas racializadas. La escucha clínica, sensible a las imágenes y afectos movilizados en el encuentro analítico, revela contenidos inconscientes que pueden ser integrados en la conciencia. La clínica analítica proporciona un espacio para la elaboración simbólica del dolor arquetípico, a través del reconocimiento de memorias fantasmas, favoreciendo la construcción de nuevas experiencias subjetivas. El campo de contención posibilita el tránsito entre regresión y progresión de la energía psíquica, favoreciendo el proceso de individuación. El estudio destaca la importancia de prácticas clínicas que reconozcan la complejidad del trauma racial, contribuyendo a resignificar el sufrimiento psíquico en experiencias racializadas. ■

Palabras claves: trauma racial, memoria, narrativa, complejo cultural, individuación.

Introduction



Figure 1 — Black Anastácia Jacques Étienne Arago — Punishment of the Enslaved (1839)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacques_Etienne_Arago_-_Castigo_de_Escravos,_1839.jpg.

“Leaving behind nights of terror and fear.
I rise”

(Maya Angelou)

Despite the significant mobilizations driven by the issue, racism continues to contribute to emotional suffering among Brazil’s Black population. To understand the full impact of this phenomenon, it is essential to recognize it as a systemic issue, driven by a logic that organizes power structures, both structural and symbolic, which are deeply embedded in social, inter and intrapersonal relationships, impacting both the individual and collective spheres.

It is evident that the perpetuation of forms of inequality and violence that define contemporary social life are intricately linked to the issue of race. Racism, in its many forms, can lead to discriminatory practices in a direct manner, such as overt rejection of individuals and groups, or in an indirect manner, characterized by unconscious discrimination without explicit intent, leaving deep marks on both the individual and collective psyche. Many of these marks manifest themselves as traumatic experiences, which are often perpetuated in an invisible way, through unacknowledged and silenced memories and narratives.

The trauma caused by racism is a phenomenon that transcends time and space, perpetuating itself through transgenerationally shared memories. By recognizing the various symbolic layers of the psyche, Analytical Psychology offers invaluable tools to explore how these experiences are narrated, internalized, and often silenced. This is where the concept of “phantom narratives,” introduced by Samuel Kimbles, becomes particularly relevant. These unacknowledged stories that haunt the present act as an invisible field of forces that shape identities and social dynamics.

By addressing racism as both a cultural and psychic trauma, this article proposes to investigate how silenced narratives emerge from the individual and collective unconscious, influencing the ways racialized individuals navigate their histories and identity constructions. The aim is to understand how erased memories can be acknowledged and integrated through clinical intervention.

Clinical listening, from a symbolic perspective, can facilitate the reconstruction of a narrative memory when it bears the marks of racial trauma. Although C. G. Jung acknowledged the existence of archetypal images and the relevance of the collective unconscious in shaping individual psyches, Analytical Psychology for a long time did not focus on discussions of racial issues. However, in recent years, several scholars have expanded this field of investigation, proposing symbolic interpretations

of racism and its repercussions on the psyche at both individual and collective levels.

In this paper, we seek to understand how the experience of racism impacts the construction, the transmission and the reconstruction of narrative memory. We base our analysis on a clinical case. Therefore, we sought to analyze how the analytical process, guided by the Jungian approach, can contribute to the treatment of emotional suffering resulting from racism. We believe that this process enables paths for the elaboration and the reconstruction of a personal narrative.

Thus, we propose analysis as a space that fosters, with tenacity and flexibility, the working-through of psychic wounds arising from the racial-cultural complex. The creation of a holding environment is essential to sustain the movement of regression and progression of psychic energy, which is essential for the symbolic elaboration of pain and for the process of subjective transformation. Within this context, memories evoked through narrative emerge as pathways for self-elaboration and reconstruction. The process of evoking memories, weaving stories, and retrieving ancestry symbolically allows for access to unconscious content. When integrated, this content expands consciousness and promotes the process of individuation, which serves as the guiding thread of the analysis.

In this sense, we employed Samuel Kimbles' concept of "ghost narratives" and James Hall's "psychological ghosts" as representations that inhabit both the collective and individual unconscious. We also draw on the work of Walter Benjamin and James Hillman to understand the relationship between trauma, memory, and narrative experience.

We also engage in dialogue with thinkers like Neusa Souza Santos, Chimamanda Adichie, Fanny Brewster, Grada Kilomba, and bell hooks — whose contributions are paramount to the discourse on memory, trauma, and Black subjectivity.

"Wild memory takes the helm: let us remember"
(Conceição Evaristo, 2017)

In addressing the theme of memory and narrative — or more specifically, the silencing of storytelling in the face of trauma — I take as my starting point the contributions of Walter Benjamin (1987). In his critique of modernity, Benjamin distinguishes between information and narrative, particularly in the context of the acceleration of time and the ephemerality of information characteristic of Modernity. Information, by its very nature, possesses value only insofar as it is novel. In contrast, narrative maintains its generative force over time, as it constitutes an artisanal form of communication.

For Benjamin, experience is cultivated through the sharing and transmission of knowledge. The event is transformed into an experience through the art of storytelling, as it is through dialogue that meanings can be amplified. The author asserts that storytellers craft their narratives by weaving together their own personal memories and those of their community, effectively incorporating the past into the present.

Conversely, Benjamin offers a noteworthy perspective on the challenges associated with recounting certain traumatic experiences. He revealed how extreme events fracture memory, drawing from the experiences of World War I soldiers who returned from the front profoundly silenced. These survivors came back "with no stories to tell", as the unbearable reality of war could not be shared in words. For Benjamin, traumatic experience forecloses — or at least severely limits — the possibility of collective sharing through verbal narrative, resulting in what he described as "poverty of experience". This impoverishment stems from an evacuation of narrative, arising from the impossibility of describing and assimilating traumatic lived experience.

Transposed into Jungian language, the concept of cultural complexes proves apt for understanding the impacts of collective trauma in the face of this collapse of shared experience. Just as personal complexes, cultural complexes remain unconscious yet generate intense emotional activation around memories, ideas, and images “[...] which tend to cluster around an archetypal core and are shared by the individual within a collective defined in insidious and shadowy ways” (Singer & Kaplinsky, 2019, p. 58). Collective experiences repeated throughout a culture’s history form the foundation of these complexes.

Brewster (2020) observes that even today, we are constantly confronted with the reenactment of the trauma of African peoples’ enslavement through suffering relived in each new generation. This suffering has become potentially archetypal, transmitted transgenerationally, yet silenced in a myriad of ways.

Not talking about racism in a society that lives under its impacts denounces the denial of this experience and increases the illusory feeling of avoiding emotional suffering, or the notion that accountability lies with a dehumanized ‘them’. Yet when racism is recognized as a cultural complex, it becomes clear that denial only amplifies its energetic charge, enabling its destructive force in emotional and social realms — normalizing racial violence and exclusion.

One of the most nefarious shadows in the formation of the Brazilian nation is the legacy of slavery. Brazil bears the historical burden of being the last Western country to abolish slavery, and “the descendants of slaveholders and the descendants of the enslaved grapple with accumulated inheritances of profound pain and violence, that reverberate through both the concrete and symbolic lives of contemporary generations” (Bento, 2022, p. 15).

The “myth of racial democracy” is a fundamental element of Brazil’s cultural complex, defined by Gonzalez (2019) as a mask that conceals hegemonic racism while shaping the collective imagination. Souza Santos (2021) and Gonzalez (2019) have

indicated that this narrative serves to perpetuate colonialist ideology — widely disseminated in the 20th century — by fostering a specious harmony between White, Black, and Indigenous populations. Through eugenic theories, a political project of national whitening became entrenched, reinforcing White superiority and erasing African cultural references.

In that light, Black people were compelled to assimilate White cultural norms at the expense of their own identity. Therefore, in order to affirm or annul themselves, Black people were compelled to emulate White people, while their existence was subjugated under the discourse of equality.

The concept of the “ghost narrative” was developed by the American analyst Samuel Kimbles (2014) and refers to unconscious psychic patterns that influence individuals and groups without being consciously recognized or named. These narratives are rooted in the collective unconscious, manifesting as untold stories, historical traumas, or cultural wounds that continue to operate silently across generations.

Kimbles (2017) describes them as a kind of “absent presence” — unmetabolized, often traumatic experiences that remain unsymbolized and unprocessed. Because they remain without language or conscious expression, they continue to haunt both individual and collective psyches. Phantom-like, they unconsciously shape behaviors, beliefs, emotions, and relationships.

These phantom narratives typically originate in transgenerational social and familial wounds, and in collective traumatic experiences such as racism, colonization, war, or slavery.

They are composed of archetypal contents and may emerge through dreams, symptoms, repetitive behavioral patterns, or group phenomena — forming both individual and cultural complexes. Complexes are structured by images and affects that function as narratives of unrecognized unconscious expressions.

Hollis (2017) emphasizes that unacknowledged transgenerational traumas tend to return as “psychic hauntings” in subsequent generations, affecting

individuals and groups alike. Thus, culturally rejected presence often reaches the clinical space through psychic symptoms. The silenced history demands to be heard.

Hollis further notes that the present becomes “haunted” by an archetypal dynamic of untold archaic stories — and these stories will manifest unconsciously in our behaviors, choices, aversions, and projective fields. According to him: “to trace our ancestral origins is to witness how the unspoken history haunts us — like ink spilled in clear water, its dark tendrils slowly unfurling until the entire vessel of consciousness is stained” (Hollis, 2017, p. 39).

Meanwhile, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2021) warns against reducing the diversity of narratives to a single dominant story — a colonial and racist one — as this reduction profoundly compromises the identity frameworks and sense of belonging of those whose histories have been rendered invisible.

Thus, in psychological intervention, it becomes imperative to cultivate attuned listening to the various narratives that patients may present, which have frequently been suppressed over time. The analytic task, then, is to enable contact with the invisible — helping patients (or groups) recognize these “unspoken and mis-spoken narratives” by offering them symbolic language and psychic space. Kimbles, reflecting on Jung’s psychic trajectory, observes that one must “open the mouths of the dead” and descend into the underworld to forge symbolic ways of relating to cultural complex manifestations. This movement aligns with the individuation process, creating room to integrate shadow contents through psychic transformation.

Hillman (2010) argues that successful therapy requires active collaboration between analysand and analyst to co-create a new narrative through reimagining one’s history. This involves discovering a “*mythos*” — an integrative thread that reveals fresh meanings for life. Each person carries his or her own story, rewriting it retrospectively

and into the future in the process of individuation. By recognizing that memory is perpetually reconfigured by imagination, fixed recollections can be transformed into more creative images. It is within this symbolic dimension that both individual and collective complexes may dissolve and transmute.

The case presented below explores the emotional impact of racism and the possibilities for psychological restoration through a clinical intervention sensitive to the intertwining of memory and narrative.

“I need to be seen by a Black woman psychologist”

(Zuri)

Zuri (pseudonym), a 37-year-old Black woman, had been a civil servant at an educational institution for ten years. The therapeutic process described here occurred between 2022 and 2025 in private practice. Our first contact took place via WhatsApp, when she expressed an urgent need for therapy with a Black woman psychologist. At the time, she was suffering from severe psychological distress, exhibiting symptoms of depression and acute anxiety.

Along with the start of the analysis, she underwent a psychiatric evaluation and was diagnosed with recurrent depressive disorder, for which she began medication. In the aftermath of the pandemic, she had recently returned to the workplace, but was finding it very difficult to maintain herself there. She reported persistent sadness, insecurity, and distinct feelings of being targeted within the institutional environment — particularly as a Black woman who had voluntarily assumed multiple leadership roles in racial equity initiatives. In preceding months, she had withdrawn socially, maintaining contact solely with her husband and parents. She felt exhausted and undervalued in a context of institutional racism.

Two years prior, Zuri had been invited to join a heteroidentification review committee¹. At the time, the institution had no formal racial equity policies. The invitation ignited her transformative commitment to this work. Previously, she had held only technical positions. However, this new role — implemented without institutional support — became a source of physical and emotional exhaustion. As coordinator, she faced constant clashes with supervisors and colleagues, alongside systemic resistance to implementing equity projects. She reported feeling drained and undermined.

In early sessions, her speech was frequently interrupted by intense crying. She described workplace struggles — pervasive insecurity, fear, and a sense of being targeted. When asked about the roots of her distress, she revealed that since 2019, when she fully embraced her identity as a Black woman and racial justice advocate, she had experienced an existential rupture: “Sometimes I wish I could return to before 2019. Back then, I lived with fewer questions. Becoming conscious of racism’s impact on my work and life has made me ill.”

After the first month of care, her symptoms of fear, persecution, and anxiety worsened, making it intolerable for her to remain at work. At this point, she was placed on medical leave — following both physician recommendations and my clinical guidance — returning four months later under a hybrid work arrangement. During this period, she repeatedly relived the experience of the systemic barriers preventing her from having her initiatives recognized. Though invited to lead racial equity projects, she understood this as mere legal compliance rather than genuine institutional commitment to change. As one of the few Black employees, she faced routine silencing in meetings and profound isolation. The pain deepened when handling student reports of racism — a role that positioned her, at severe emotional cost, as an unofficial protector.

In sessions, she shared the difficulty her family and colleagues had in understanding her pain. The daily microaggressions, previously taken for granted, became more visible. In addition, she blamed herself for the apparent “emotional imbalance” she was experiencing. One striking episode was a trip with her husband to a resort where she noticed that they were the only Black guests, while most of the staff serving them were Black. What was once subtle discomfort now felt visceral. When I asked about this shift’s meaning, she replied: “I feel I can no longer see the world without racialized lenses.”

The visibility of her body also became troubling. Though she had always taken pride in her appearance, she now felt unsettled by stares and comments about her braided hair — once a source of empowerment. In some places, she was admired; in others, she was an intruder. At the peak of her depression, even showering felt exhausting. She grappled with guilt over her socioeconomic privilege in relation to her family of origin. Self-doubt permeated her thoughts: “I feel as if I am a stranger in the world. I don’t know when I can trust people or even myself.”

Months into the analytical process, Zuri disclosed a prior therapy attempt years earlier. When she tried addressing racism as the root of her distress, the therapist deflected, labeling her “difficult” and suggesting she had “a distorted perception of reality.” After a few months, she stopped the process without knowing exactly why. Years later, she was able to name the experience: she had been silenced by a professional who could not legitimize her suffering. This episode reinforced her distrust of herself.

Research shows that the delegitimization of experiences of racism, especially by unprepared White professionals, is recurrent and can cause retraumatization. By minimizing these narratives, the psychotherapist can become an iatrogenic agent (Sampaio, Silva & Rauter, 2023).

¹ A process that confirms an individual’s self-declared ethnic-racial identity. It is a complementary process to self-declaration and is conducted by a validation panel (commonly used in Brazilian affirmative action policies).

In the current process, I prioritized a welcoming listening and the validation of Zuri's pain. My interventions were punctual and respectful of pauses and silences. The goal was to provide a protected space and the time necessary to support the emergence of a narrative marked by self-alienation. Anger, insecurity, and indignation have been known to arise in the face of experiences of oppression. According to Souza Santos (1983), these feelings are directly linked to the subjectivization of Black people in a society structured by whiteness.

It is understood that through shared recognition of colonialism's living legacy the therapeutic alliance between Black clinicians and clients often strengthens (Chaveiro, 2023). Thus, the affects stirred within me could be held and metabolized — with conscious recognition of counter transferential content — to foster an analytic field of shared identification and radical solidarity.

As a technique for psychic integration, we sometimes explored the somatic echoes of catharsis: muscle rigidity, tremors, breathlessness, and chills that voiced the embodied suffering of repressed racial trauma. In a later phase of analysis, Zuri named her initial therapeutic phase as feeling “broken” inside. At that time, the setting was used as a space for transition — from alienation to the reappropriation of one's voice and existence, as proposed by bell hooks:

moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject — the liberated voice (hooks, 2019, p. 39).

At various times, I invited her to listen to the voice of her body using active imagination. It was proposed that she attempted to establish a

rapprochement and a dialogue with emerging pain, using imaginative exploration to discover possible paths toward healing. Rather than seeking intellectual explanations for the psychic images that arose, we focused on understanding them as spontaneous phenomena, whether individual or cultural, and that they truly needed to be experienced, tended, and considered through imaginative responses (Hillman, 2019).

Zuri's experience was marked by persistent tensions, a product of self-alienation. I interpret this as one of the “tentacles” of the racial cultural complex — enforced by whiteness's narcissistic pact and its ideology of whitening. Within this system, Black individuals, perpetually targeted by hostility, develop survival strategies that trap them in psychic states of hypervigilance, tension, and withdrawal. When spontaneity emerges in these bodies, it is “automatically” stifled and rejected by the group. This is because the group feels disturbed by evoking a “transgenerational memory” of Black people's way of being in the world. This is a socially rejected way of existing that needs to be sacrificed in the name of the “narcissistic pact of whiteness” — that demands Black people to whiten themselves by renouncing their identity (Gonzalez, 1984; Bento, 2009). The potency of the collective shadow, as proposed by Jung (2015b), fueled by centuries of exclusion and violence, directly impacts Black bodily expression in social spaces.

This lived experience can also be linked to manifestations of *banzo* — an expression of the profound psychic suffering endured by enslaved people, manifesting as melancholy, existential displacement, and, in extreme cases, death wishes (Schwarcz, 1993). Zuri's body became the living archive of transgenerational *banzo* — an archaic form of psychic collapse experienced through severed belonging and the impossibility of existing whole in the world. This phenomenon reveals how cultural trauma resurfaces, transmuted, through the mental health crises of Black populations today. Anxiety, depression, and exhaustion thus emerge as expressions of collective racial trauma, reenacted through

individual experiences of inadequacy, silencing, and displacement.

“One does not need to tell the dreamer everything... only hints”.

(Jung, *OC.16/2* 318)

After three months of analysis, Zuri shared a pivotal dream:

I'm in my mother's house, in the backyard. It's a big space; there's a mango tree. I look up at the sky and a giant black snake appears from above. It has scales. It lands on the roof of the house and looks me in the eye. I feel as if it's talking to me, but I don't understand. I'm not afraid, I'm just surprised. I feel as if it's bringing me a revelation.

Exploring the emotions mobilized by the dream, Zuri described that the snake's gaze was so powerful that she couldn't turn away. She interpreted it as a message to move on. This dream arose spontaneously at various moments during the analysis, promoting a psychic movement that articulated personal memories with archetypal contents. The snake was understood as a symbol of transformation, ancestral feminine wisdom and rebirth, touching the dreamer's consciousness when she reached the roof of her mother's house — a symbolic space of welcome and belonging, which was associated with her need for support. The presence of the large tree in the yard suggested the need to return to her roots.

The snake's scales were recognized as her own psychic protective (and defensive) resources in the face of external threats. The dream also pointed to the need to integrate unrecognized aspects of the psyche, such as anger and grief, while awakening a predominant feeling of protection and inner strength.

After a year of analysis, Zuri recounted her own death in a dream:

I was at my mother's house, on the couch, and I died. I realized that I had gone to heaven. It was a place of nature, a beautiful countryside. An angel was shining down on me. I knew I had died and he was talking about my life. I was very calm, at peace.

We then worked on the symbolism of death and rebirth. Again, in her dream, she returned to her mother's house, but death transported her to a place of nature.

When she got in touch with the dream, she reflected that it would be necessary to let the person she had been before 2019 die in order to be reborn whole, connected to her inner nature. This dream mobilized a deep silence in the session.

In this way, its numinous force was able to reach the deepest levels of Zuri's psyche. In the dream experience, it was necessary for her to become a “ghost” in order to re-narrate her own existence. Later, we also understood that it heralded a new era.

“If you don't know where you're going, remember where you came from”

(African proverb)

Narrating memories is an act of constructing and reconstructing continuity, fortifying one's sense of identity through connection with personal and collective history. When we access our recollections, we activate a symbolic and imaginative language that serves as a mechanism for memory editing. Memorial narratives are known to flow between the unconscious and the conscious, thereby facilitating a reconstructive rapprochement with the past and promoting the process of individuation. This process is understood as the movement of consciousness towards self-realization, transcending the limitations imposed by genetics and society (Jung, 2015).

Thus, analytical work thrives in the space between listening and storytelling. In this interplay, lived time and its discontinuities emerge through

fragmented memories that reorganize around the awareness of lived experiences.

The suffering Zuri endured at work reawakened childhood school memories, which gradually surfaced in analysis. One of the first memories to emerge was of her childhood at an elite private school where her mother had struggled to get her enrolled. Zuri was the only Black student in her class and probably the poorest. She lived in isolation and felt ashamed when her mother came to pick her up. In one session, she revealed: “Today, I still feel ashamed for having felt that way — I was just a terrified child.”

In another session, Zuri appeared with a new hairstyle, having removed the braids she’d worn for months. She shared her years-long struggle with hair straightening: “I was enslaved by my own hair — the constant straightening was exhausting.” In that session, she also told us that she started straightening her hair when she was a teenager. Then she had to deal with people’s strangeness when she started wearing her hair naturally, especially in professional environments. After a few minutes of silence, a childhood memory emerged:

It was Black Awareness Day, and the teacher suggested an activity for the class. She handed out a sheet of paper with a drawing of a Black person and asked the children to glue their hair on the drawing. The teacher brought some “Bombril” [steel wool brand historically used to mock Afro-textured hair] for the children to glue on the hair of the drawing. My classmates stared and pointed at me; some boys wanted to cut my hair to stick it on the drawing; it paralyzed me, I didn’t know how to defend myself, I was broken. When I got home, I cut my own hair, then desperately tried to glue it back with “Super Bonder” [a Brazilian superglue brand, underscoring her extreme distress]. I was desperate, but I didn’t know how to verbalize it, I had no words. My mother saw it and took care of me without asking any

questions. Racism affects us from birth to death, it’s devastating!

Zuri’s hair became a symbol of resistance and an essential part of her identity, no longer a sign of inferiority but an expression of strength and affirmation. However, this transformation was still accompanied by painful memories.

During the analysis, memories of racial violence emerged that she had experienced throughout her school career. Constant aggression from classmates and teachers hindered her literacy process and reinforced feelings of inadequacy. As Brewster (2025) notes, Black children are often forced to suppress cultural identity to conform to whitened educational standards, resulting in low self-esteem and self-denial.

Zuri also recalled the social exclusion she suffered in childhood and adolescence, such as never being invited to birthday parties. She reported that she didn’t even allow herself to desire boys because she was always rejected: “boys wanted my body, but they rejected my color”. She later realized that sometimes objectification was the only way to be noticed, even if it cost her humanity. This realization led her to a painful inner place where she began to worry excessively about her appearance and felt trapped by the logic of dehumanization.

Even in the school where she worked professionally, recognition as an authority required a great deal of emotional effort. Revisiting the places of her childhood allowed her to better understand the suffering and insecurities she still experienced about her competence. The analytical process allowed her to elaborate the initially fragmented, threatening memories and to make room for new stories that emerged from the therapeutic alliance.

The experience of racism, marked by deep traumas such as Zuri’s, results in an alienation from the self that can lead to a long period of emotional anesthesia. Yet this suppressed affect inevitably resurfaces as anguish, depersonalization, and inadequacy — symptoms of the racial cultural complex.

These experiences generate narratives that are sometimes impossible to name, known as “phantom narratives” (Kimbles, 2014).

Afrodiasporic experiences, shaped by colonial violence, continue to mark Black bodies and identities, transmuting ancestral grief through individual histories. Black trauma transcends familial events; the racist strategies of coloniality are daily reenacted in societies dominated by whitened narratives (Kilomba, 2019).

The traumatic experience has a profound effect on the psyche, and in the face of unbearable suffering, forgetting emerges as a survival strategy. Paradoxically, however, the process of individuation mobilizes psychic energy so that these memories can return in an attempt to restore psychic integrity.

However, when it is narrated in a contingent space, it finds room for re-signification as memory is integrated into the field of experience (Benjamin, 1987). When it is possible to name the pain, language becomes a catalyzing force for the transcendent function, facilitating access to the emotions associated with the racial complex, thus allowing the experience to be elaborated. Then begins a process of healing and reintegration of the self.

As Adichie (2019) points out, dominant narratives distort our view of ourselves and others. It is therefore essential to explore invisible narratives that expand our perceptions of ourselves and allow for new ways of being.

In the second year of the analysis process, Zuri was able to access other memories, such as the memory of playing sports as a teenager, which gave her access to an internal reference of strength and competence. As a handball player, she won awards in several school championships. In one session, she recalled a party she was allowed to attend only because, as captain of the winning team, she carried the trophy: “The trophy got me into the party,” she said with irony and a laugh.

Once this episode was shared, I was able to broaden her perception of the event. She realized that, like that day, she had been navigating

exclusionary spaces throughout her life. Despite the difficulties, she resisted racism by using the gaps or opening paths with the power of her presence.

During the analysis, Zuri also faced grief for significant family members, such as the death of her maternal grandfather, the last of her living grandparents. As she said goodbye, it brought back happy memories of her childhood when he was a farmhand. “We kids thought he owned everything, and he didn’t deny it,” she said with a laugh.

These memories evoked a childhood of freedom and belonging. While the parents were busy, the women of the family took care of the children collectively. “We all lived together, every day at a different aunt’s house. They took care of all of us as if we were their children. We played in the streets; it was one big community.” By accessing these memories, Zuri recognized the collective power present in her history and the strength inherited from the women in her family. Recognizing the role of the positive maternal complex revealed in her dreams and present in her life was fundamental to strengthening her sense of belonging.

This feeling is reminiscent of the idea of “*aq-uilombamento*” proposed by Nascimento (2022), which does not limit the reference to the *quilombo* (a maroon community) to the physical territory, but extends it to the existential field — where Black people come together to produce counter-hegemonic forces. I argue this experience carries an archetypal dimension of belonging, rooted in the African Ubuntu principle — “I am because we are.” Here, individual psyche flourishes only through communal recognition.

At the time, Zuri also recounted various episodes she and her students had faced in terms of the validation and approval of projects related to the racial agenda, but at that point, the confrontation no longer immobilized her.

Gradually, she cultivated a support network — Black and White allies committed to anti-racist labor — within and beyond the institution. Now fortified, she reclaimed her activist leadership, organizing

academic and cultural events on racial justice, becoming a beacon for younger generations.

From discouragement to hope—I am because we are

Three years into the analysis process, Zuri arrived at a session visibly dispirited. She described her frustration over the imminent cancellation of a cultural trip to Salvador that she had worked diligently to plan for her students. Despite her best efforts, the pre-approved transportation funds were blocked due to bureaucratic and budgetary obstacles. With less than a week to go before the scheduled date, Zuri expressed feelings of helplessness and devaluation and considered giving up on school initiatives for good. The recurring thought that her labor was both invisible and futile resurfaced.

When met with attuned listening, she confessed she hadn't yet informed the students about the potential cancellation. We reflected on the consequences of withdrawal: while her frustration with institutional barriers was valid, the real cost would fall on the students — not the administration. This marked a pivotal shift in our work — from isolated helplessness to collective agency.

I then asked her if there were other ways to ensure the project's viability without relying exclusively on institutional funding. This intervention mobilized space for creativity and action. Inspired by the conversation, Zuri wrote a letter requesting financial support from partners in the school community and elsewhere. To her surprise, the campaign surpassed its goal — unlocking funds for the trip.

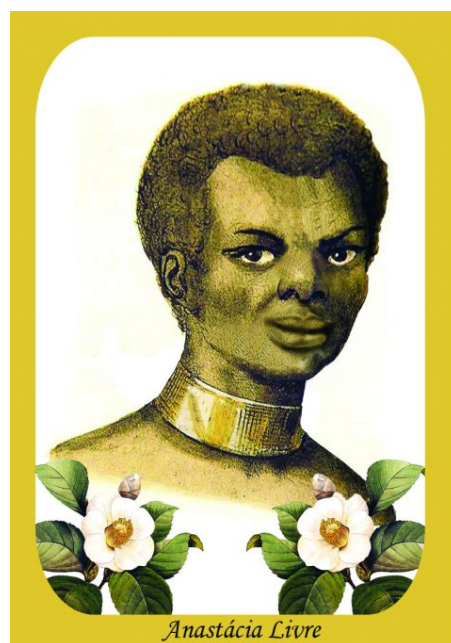
This experience proved transformative: Zuri rediscovered her social mobilization power and the collective purpose of her activism and teaching. The trip became a milestone not only for her students but also for her symbolic "claiming of place in the world" as an agent of social transformation. The episode revealed the spiraling dynamism of individuation (Jung, 2015). By confronting frustration without paralysis, she catalyzed energy from both personal

and cultural complexes, accessing a new tier of consciousness and belonging. She understood that the movement for social transformation is possible when it is shared and that its strength is amplified when it is put into relationship with others.

Final Reverberations

At the outset of this article, we outlined the multifaceted impacts of racism on individuals and communities. Our focus has been on the emergence of ghost narratives from both collective and individual experiences, and their influence on the way racialized individuals approach their histories and the construction of their identities. Zuri's clinical case demonstrated how memories erased due to racial trauma can be transformed through a clinical intervention based on the Jungian perspective. However, further research is needed to understand the racial issue and its impact on the emotional health of Brazilians.

In closing, I recall visual artist Yhuri Cruz, who offered a nuanced reinterpretation of the mythical figure of the Black woman Anastácia. In the latter half of the 20th century, she emerged as a symbol of the brutality of enslavement, a recurring theme in the context of modern racism. As depicted in the original figure, she is portrayed with an iron mask on her face (Figure 1). This mask has come to represent the silencing imposed on enslaved people by colonialism (Kilomba, 2019). In the artist's reinterpretation, entitled "Monument to Anastácia's Voice" (Figure 2), the gag has been removed, and Anastácia is presented with a slight smile. Adjacent to the image is a prayer to the free Anastácia, a figure that has been sanctified. This is a sensitive and powerful piece of work that reimagines and reconstructs narratives around a double collective memory of curse and sanctification. The new image eliminates the weight of the mask, presenting Anastácia with a lighter appearance and greater freedom to express herself. Therefore, the work presents a fresh perspective on the past, transforming the narrative of an enslaved woman's suffering and resistance



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ORAÇÃO

Vemos que algum algoz fez da tua vida um martírio, violentou tiranicamente a tua mocidade, vemos também no teu semblante macio, no teu rosto suave, tranquilo, a paz que os sofrimentos não conseguiram perturbar.

Isso quer dizer que **sua luta** te tornou superior, **conquistaste tua voz**, tanto que Deus levou-te para as planuras do Céu e deu-te o poder de fazeres curas, graças e milagres mil **a quem luta por dignidade**.

Anastácia, **és livre**, pedimos-te ... roga por nós, proteja-nos, envolve-nos no teu manto de graças e com teu olhar bondoso, firme e penetrante, afasta de nós os males e os maldizentes do mundo.

Monumento à voz de Anastácia
Yhuri Cruz, 2019

Figure 2 — Prayer to Free Anastácia

Available at: <https://projetoafro.com/artista/yhuri-cruz/>.

into a memorial that symbolizes transcendence and liberation.


By considering the symbolic dimension as a constitutive element of the human condition, Analytical Psychology enables us to amplify narratives through a reimagining of underground memories.

Therefore, it is essential that the clinic be attentive to narratives marked by colonial traumas, creating space for future stories to be based on a dynamic of otherness and on the reconstruction of painful past memories. Only then will silenced voices in the unconscious find resonance. ■

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