

# A RELIGIOSIDADE COMO ELEMENTO FUNDANTE NAS REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS IMAGÉTICAS ACERCA DA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 POR ESTUDANTES BRASILEIROS

## RELIGIOSITY AS A FOUNDING ELEMENT IN IMAGERY SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE COVID-19 BY BRAZILIAN STUDENTS

## LA RELIGIOSIDAD COMO ELEMENTO FUNDANTE EN EL IMAGINARIO REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES SOBRE EL COVID-19 POR ESTUDIANTES BRASILEÑOS

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### Resumo

A pesquisa visa compreender os efeitos da pandemia entre estudantes da Educação de jovens e Adultos, por meio das representações sociais imagéticas. O trabalho tem como aporte teórico a Teoria das Representações Sociais de Moscovici. Nos desenhos pode-se observar um forte apelo à religiosidade como amparo emocional às adversidades causadas pela pandemia. A falta da imagem da vacina, como objeto de representação, sugere estar fortemente associada ao conjunto de credos religiosos, superstições, mitos, notícias falsas ou à falta de informação. A pesquisa sugere que as aulas de Biologia possam ir além da normatização biomédica e promovam um diálogo mais amplo com atividades diversificadas, visando desconstruir percepções equivocadas sobre a imunização vacinal.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenho comentado; Pandemia; Representações Sociais.

### Abstract

The work aims to understand the effects of the pandemic among students of Youth and Adult Education. The work is part of a qualitative study and its theoretical support is the Theory of Social Representations by Moscovici. In the drawings, it is possible to observe a strong appeal to religiosity as emotional support to the adversities caused by the pandemic. The lack of representation of vaccine immunization suggests that it is strongly associated with a set of religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, false news or lack of information. As a future proposal, the research suggests Biology classes that go beyond biomedical standardization and promoting a dialogue more welcoming and promoting diversified activities, aiming to deconstruct misperceptions about vaccine immunization.

**Keywords:** Commented drawing; Pandemic; Social Representations.

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## Resumen

La investigación tiene como objetivo comprender los efectos de la pandemia entre estudiantes de Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos, a través de representaciones sociales imagéticas. El trabajo tiene como aporte teórico la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales de Moscovici. En los dibujos se puede observar un fuerte llamado a la religiosidad como apoyo emocional ante las adversidades provocadas por la pandemia. La ausencia de la imagen de la vacuna como objeto de representación sugiere que está fuertemente asociada a un conjunto de creencias religiosas, supersticiones, mitos, fake news a falta de información. La investigación sugiere que las clases de biología pueden ir más allá de la regulación biomédica y promover un diálogo más amplio con diversas actividades (fuera o dentro de la escuela), con el objetivo de deconstruir las percepciones erróneas sobre la inmunización vacunal.

**Palabras clave:** Dibujo comentado; Pandemia; Representaciones Sociales.

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## 1 Introduction

Assuming that the act of "representing the seen and the imagined through images seems to be part of the social way of being of the human species" (DALCIN; BRITO, 2015, p. 233) is that the present work intends to identify the Imagery Social Representations about the period of the pandemic among students of the modality of Youth and Adults (EJA), of the public school system of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The justification of this research is to understand the effects of the pandemic among students from a school in a conflicted area, living in the periphery of the capital Rio de Janeiro, usually considered "marginalized from society, with precarious economic conditions, excluded from cultural spaces and goods" (LIMA; PIRES; SOUZA, 2020, p.1). Since to the date, there are few researches that seeks to identify social and emotional representations of COVID-19 in a public in a situation of social vulnerability.

Aware that the implementation of remote education evidenced the socioeconomic and cultural disparities in Brazil, uncover and intensifying the social inequalities of a weakened society (MINAYO; FREIRE, 2020; COSTA, 2020), I am interested in knowing about the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the students and, from this data, what procedures may be performed with regard to emotional support and the development of future school activities.

### *1.1 Social representations and the use of images*

The essential function of social representation for those they represent is to make something unfamiliar into something familiar, close and practical (MOSCOVICI, 2003). In this purpose, the iconic aspect represented seems to bring a meaning that facilitates the process of symbolizing a given reality. This process occurs through two cognitive processes: anchoring and objectification.



Anchoring seeks to anchor unfamiliar ideas into categories, common images placing them in a family context, while objectification attributes an imagery dimension to the object presented, that is, “objectifying is reabsorb an excess of meanings materializing them [...] it is also transplanting to the level of observation what was only inference or symbol “ (MOSCOVICI, 1978, p.111). It means anchoring is “the interpretation of the subject of a given reality” (BERNARDINI; MAIA, 2009, p.177) and the objectification is the transition from subjectification to concrete images (ALVES-MAZZOTTI, 2008).

According to Silva (2006), the symbolic production of images represents an important aspect in the understanding of a given reality and “relates to the capacity of subjects have to play with meanings and images, among other motivational aspects” (MIRANDA; FUREGATO; SIMPSON; AZEVEDO, 2007, p. 528). In this purpose, the image makes it possible to relate to the experience, serving as a means of expressions and communication between internal and external reality of the subjects (CIDADE; ZORNIG, 2019).

Denise Jodelet explains that Social Representations “guide us in the way of naming and defining together the different aspects of daily reality, in the way of interpreting these aspects, taking decisions and, eventually, positioning in front of them in a defensive way” (JODELET, 2001, p. 17).

Before this, this article seeks to value the use of images as a source of data in the research of Social Representations, particularly in the teaching of Biology. This is because, when well used, images favor to understand of facts and the socialization of meanings, since reality is not defined only by words (TERRA; NASCIMENTO, 2016; GOMES; QUEIROZ; FERREIRA; APOSTOLIDIS; SILVA, 2021).

Moreover, according to Klein and Laburú (2009, p.2), images “perform a facilitator role in the explanation of concepts and are important resources for the communication of scientific ideas”. This idea is corroborated by Marandino (2014) by clarifying that the use of images helps in understanding the concepts, ideas and scientific processes, having a pedagogical potential that should be explored, particularly in perceiving how determined image transmits certain information.

Tomio et al (2013) add that the interpretations of images allow students read the reality in different ways and, therefore, is relevant that the teacher value the expression of different readings in order to this professional can intervene in the production of meanings closer to the values of scientific production.

## 2 Development

This manuscript is part of a qualitative study which has as finality to analyze the perception of young people and adults about the period experienced in the pandemic by SARS-CoV-2.

After the return to presencial classes and the signature of Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE), students received a sheet of white A-4 sulfite paper and a black pencil n. ° 2 to the first sketches of the drawing that, later, could be painted by paints, crayons or colored pencils. Then, the students were asked to make a draw from the following inducing expression **draw an image that has marked your pandemic routine**.

The work was carried out in two stages: in the first stage the construction of the drawing occurred and, in the second stage, the analysis. In this last stage, through a group conversation, each student can socialize their information about their drawing, this because when there is a descriptive verbal explanation associated to the images, they develop a higher level of cognitive processing (COMPIANI, 2013).

For the analysis of the drawings, categories were defined based on characteristics of the drawings and explanations that the students gave to them. Thus, the analysis took place in four groups: suffering, death, hospitalization and social distancing. There were cases in which the drawings were included in more than one category.

## 3 Results and discussion

Twenty-five students of the second year of the high school participated in this research, being 14 women (56%) and 11 men (44%). The mean of the age was 29 years old and the standard deviation 16,13, which indicates it is a heterogeneous class in relation to age. From those twenty-five students, 51% identified themselves as evangelicals, 33% as Catholics, 11% as spiritist, and 5% did not know or did not want to answer.

### *Suffering*

According to Daniel Callahan (1988, p.177), suffering may be defined as “state of severe distress, associated with the events that threaten a person’s integrity”. For the American philosopher, suffering demands self-awareness, affects personal relationships and makes people question their existence, their roles and places in the world, the meaning of life and death and all other inherent issues of the human being.

In figure 1, suffering, according to the statement of the author of the image, is portrayed in a contrast between two colors, generating an anguish in the brain – something similar to what he had felt when watching daily data about the number of deaths and hospitalization, broadcasted by the consortium of press media. Therefore, suffering is something that goes beyond physical pain and seems to correspond to a psychosocial disorder

in facing reality (PESSINI, 2002; SOUSA; MACIEL; MEDEIROS, 2018; TRAJANO, BERNARDES; ZURBA, 2018).

**Figure 1:** Suffering.



Source: Allan, 19 years-old

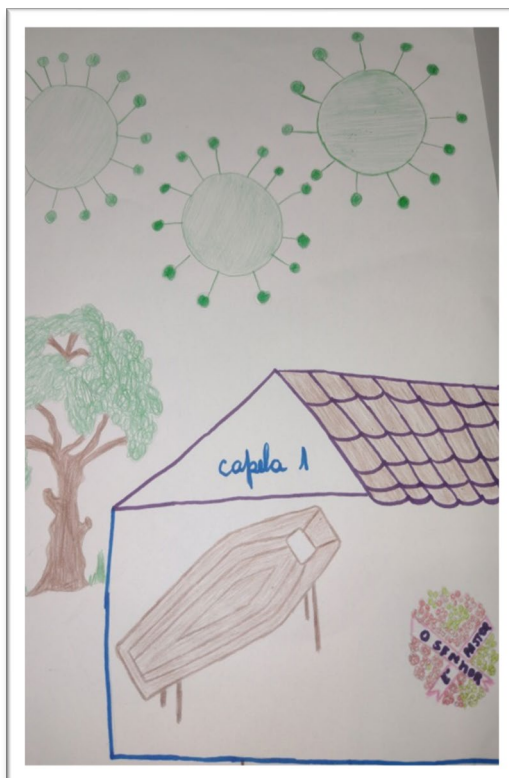
On the image above, it is possible to identify haemolacria, it means, the act of crying blood as psychic suffering related to anguish. In this way, it seems that the author of the drawing emerges such symbolism referred to the image of Jesus Christ, moments before his crucifixion, described in the gospel of Luke: “ And in his anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Holy Bible, 2000).

According to Alves and collaborators (2021, p.1) from the Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso do Sul (Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul), “pandemics tend to be marked by masses losses: not only human lives, but also of routines, customs and rules, forcing people to deal with a scenario of atypical unpredictability”. Unpredictability which, among other factors, trigger anxiety and intensifies emotional distress.

### ***Death***

The authors whose drawings were grouped in the death category, they sought to portray the impossibility of burying and/or waking their loved ones (Fig:2). The phrase “not being able to bury my loved” was the most prevalent in the discourses of the participants.

Figure 02: Funeral.



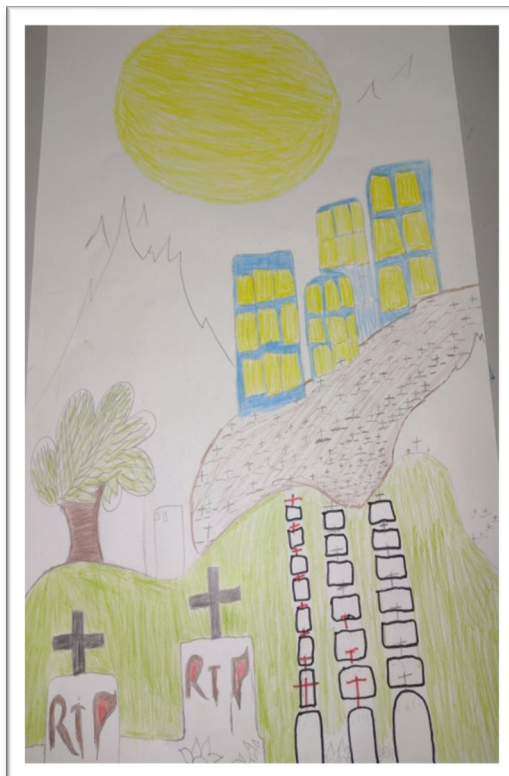
Source: Suellen, 40 years-old.

In this purpose, Crepaldi et al. (2020) inform us of the importance of farewell ritual which includes, among other religious particularities, requests of forgiveness, thanks, sharing of good moments that, because of the sanitary restrictions, could not be performed, creating a guilty sensation among friends da family for considering that deceased loved people deserved to have a farewell worthy of affection.

In this context of loss of beloved people, it is important to pay attention to the figure 3 and its symbolism of the cross that, according to Nielsen (1989, p.629), “*es un símbolo que ha podido provocar emociones fuertes en todas las épocas [...] La cruz es el símbolo principal de la fe cristiana*”.



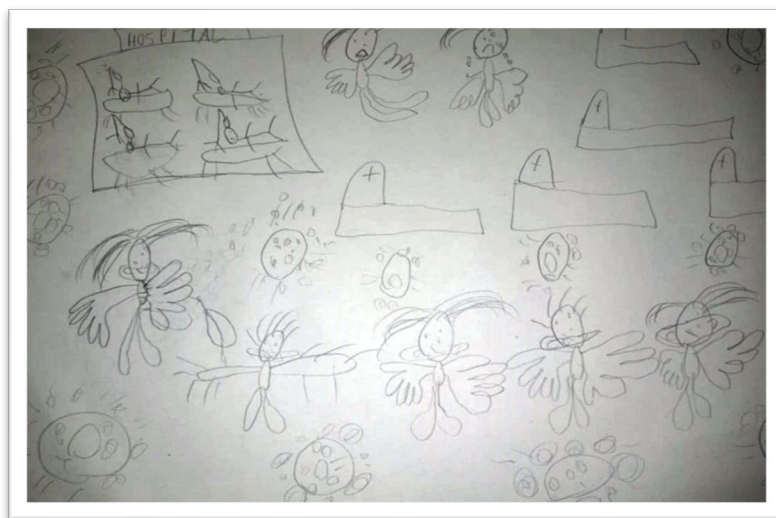
Figure 3: Burial



Source: Richardson, 28 years-old

Andreato (2019, p.33-34) adds that, beyond being a Christian symbol, it is also a symbol of individuation, it means something which “each one must take, assume and take upon himself/herself” and “while process, is the way of *entelécheia* of the subject in his/her historical time and in the world of life, as a totality of the realization of this in the existential experience until the full realization of its end (*télos*)”.

In particular, figure 4, drawn by a young man with intellectual disability portrays the feeling of loss and, at the same time, emotional comfort. For the young man, the souls of dead people receive wings and therefore go to meet God.

**Figure 4:** Winged souls

Source: Lucas, 18 years-old.

The symbolism of the winged souls may refer us to the representation of independence of the physical body, “whose destruction by death restores their freedom” (KARDEC, 1857) or by the “symbolic meaning presents in the collective imaginary of the divine celestial figure” (VEDOVE, 2017, p.59).

### *Hospitalization*

Another representative figure recorded by the students corresponds to the hospitalization of people infected by the virus of Covid-19, demonstrated in figure 5.



**Figure 5:** hospitalization of people infected by the virus of Covid-19.



Source: Luís, 63 years-old

When asked about the drawing, the author of the image 5 sought to represent part of his routine in the work, performed inside the hospital, the sad look of his little granddaughter in the window of the house without being able to go to school and hundreds of daily deaths.

Besides the aspect of hospitalization, it is also possible to cover others in the figure, such as: the tireless work of the health team, closed schools and parks, social distancing, the wearing of masks, worry, sadness and death.

Symbols of tension, sadness, death, and worry were also identified in kid's drawing during the pandemic (Penha & Simões, 2020), as well in the research conducted by Alvaro and his collaborators (2021), indicating that such symbols may derive from the main ideas in the social imaginary of people, at different stages of life in the pandemic period.

### ***Social Distancing***

Social distancing as a control measure for viral transmission was something that the students commented and recorded in their drawings (Fig. 6).

**Figure 6:** Social Distancing

Source: Carla Celeste, 34 years-old.

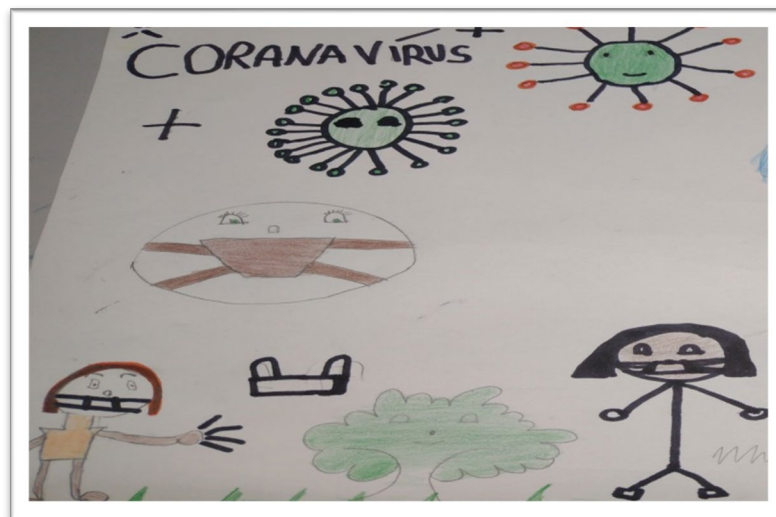
In the Figure 6, the author represents a virus as a torturer with threatening characteristics as opposed to nature (the sun and the tree) with also humanized characteristics of deep sadness. Moreover, it is important to observe that the house does not touch the ground and people inside do not have any access to external environment.

In that regard, it is worth referring to the classic research entitled “Clinical aspects of home representation in schizophrenic patients” by Romaro and Loureiro (1990) in which they state that “symbolically, home represents a protective stronghold that keeps intimate relation with the maternal lap, also representing the individual’s body structure and the level of psychosexual maturity” (p.123).

Based on the above-mentioned research, it is possible to infer an allusion, demonstrated by the author of the drawing, to the maternal intrauterine phase – a phase that protected her from any external risks. In this purpose, being inside a home, totally inviolable, seems to bring the sensation of safety and well-being, the absence of door seems to symbolize the difficulty in receiving people, such as relatives and friends (BÉDART, 1998) and finally, “the fact the house does not touch the ground seems to denote separation and disconnection from the real (ROMARO; LOUREIRO, 1990, p.127).

The wearing of masks in external environments as a measure to prevent the virus during social distancing was also represented in the images and speeches of the participants, as is illustrated in the figure 7.

**Figure 7:** Wearing masks



Source: Rayane, 19 years-old

Besides social distancing represented by the distance greeting of the two characters in the figure above, the author of the drawing emphasized the importance of wearing masks in extra-home environments (stores, parks, workplaces, public transport, among others) as a protective measure. In the drawing it is still possible to identify different strains of viruses and the need to wear masks for the entire planet.

Although the masks appear as an object of Social Representation due to the adoption of an international policy, the same cannot be said for the vaccines. In none of the analyzed drawings, vaccination was present, which may be associated with religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, fake news disseminated by influential digital medias, and/or lack of information (APS et al., 2018; PASSOS; MORAES FILHO, 2020).

Summarizing, the participants of this research seem to have demonstrated to have acquired new habits as a result of the worry with the pandemic. However, vaccination/immunization does not appear in the social imaginary of students approached in this research.

For the researcher Gonzaga (2022, p. 118), when identifying about the social representations about vaccination among young people and adults, it was verified that “students have full conviction of the importance of vaccination immunization, but the fear of needle acts as a bulkhead for non-compliance with vaccination”, which may explain the

resistance of the vaccine to enter as a representational object in the sociocultural repertoire of the participants in this research, even it has an aversive representation.

#### 4 Final Considerations

Although this research is a study case and because of that does not have the intention of being generalizable, the activity performed with young people and adults seems to demonstrate that new habits were produced due to the pandemic time.

When analyzing imagery representations of young people and adults about the Covid-19 pandemic utilizing the technique of commented drawing, it can be observed that, to some extent, participants inserted in their daily lives the worry with the virus, indicating the importance of social distancing and the wearing of masks, as well as supported themselves in religious creeds to deal with the suffering and the emotional comfort for the losses of their beloved people.

On the Other hand, even with more than 70% of the Brazilian people vaccinated, the vaccine does not show in the imagery representations of the participants, what emphasizes the role of science and the discussion on the theme of “vaccine immunization” in the firsts school years.

In relation to emotional support, it is important that the school board can establish a partnership with a mental health team (of family clinics, for example) with the school's pedagogical, developing activities that promote planning skills, reflection and action, helping the teachers and students to better deal with adversities and challenges. In this purpose, interventions can be fundamental so that problems arising from the socioemotional vulnerability situation cannot be installed.

It is important to highlight the combination of data collection in two distinct moments: i) the construction of drawings allowed identifying the representations of the pandemic and a bigger insertion of the students with or without disabilities; ii) the joint analyzes enabled a deeper understanding of different views, diverse narratives and complex feelings.

In short, the social representation of the group is therefore religious, although elements of the universe were present, such as the masks. It is interesting to note that even though vaccines were not part of the "pandemic routine", as respondents were asked, since visits to the vaccination center were one-off events, they should, or at least could, appear as an object of representation. This is because a lot has been said about them in the media, but, probably, such a discussion about the vaccine has not entered the school in question.

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