

Telmo Mota Ronzani *Editor*

Drugs and Social Context

Social Perspectives on the Use of Alcohol
and Other Drugs



Springer

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*I dedicate this book to my loved ones,
Fabiana, Vítor, and Cecilia.*

To my children:

*Ser sombra (do) presente,
Norte do futuro,
Um quadro velho na parede.
A-presento-me, discretamente,
Olhos no futuro das montanhas de sua vida.*

*O que ensinar e o que aprender?.
Que não estamos e somos sozinhos?.
De indignar-se com a injustiça?.
E celebrar a vida como eternas crianças?.
Aprendendo, sempre?.
Talvez a resposta seja:
Sou apenas um velho e marcado espelho,
Uma imagem manchada daquilo que estar
por vir;
De forma mais bela, em eterna imperfeição.*

Foreword

An opinion on the book *Drugs and Social Context – Social Perspectives on the Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs*,” organized by Telmo Mota Ronzani, is not an easy task.

It is not easy to talk about a book with this title, where “drug” is not even defined. Within, there is no classification of drugs, their receptors are not addressed (pre- and postsynaptic, inhibitors, etc.), and no attention has been given to the biochemical complexities of synthesis or the release of agonist receptors. Also unmentioned are details of these agonists, the wide clinical use of both natural and synthetic agonists, and the drug antagonists of these agonists.

Thus, the book by Ronzani and colleagues is a striking contrast to an “official truth.” It emphasizes knowledge of the environment, with its myriad types of knowledge, and factors that constitute the social environment; in fact, it is the path that psychiatry should follow in its studies and conclusions. However, this is not the place to address the great importance of economic sectors that have led psychiatric ideology to other paths.

This book stresses the imperative need to emphasize the impact of the environment on modeling the neurons of the brain, making them a consequence of this fundamental aspect. We almost always ignore the social environment, which should be the main factor that deserves our attention.

I begin discussing this book by saying that its reading reminded me of my time in elementary school, in São José do Rio Preto city, São Paulo state. At that distant time, poetry in Portuguese was a mandatory subject at school, including important discussions in different areas. I remember, in elementary school at 12–14 years old, a poem that the teacher demanded we knew by heart:

Oh! Bendito o que semeia
Livros... livros à mão cheia...
E manda o povo pensar!
O livro caindo n’alma
É germe – que faz a palma
É chuva – que faz o mar.

This book was prepared and written by 19 researchers, associated with departments or services in 14 universities or institutes (in Brazil, USA, Uruguay, and Spain) that study human behavior based on psychiatric characteristics. There are many themes addressed by the authors, some of which are listed below:

Capitalism	Stigmatization
Treatment access	Social withdrawal
Prohibition	Morals
Social stigma	Hygienist ideas
Stereotypes	Harm reduction
Prejudice	Poverty
Discrimination	War on Drugs
Stigma	Oppression
Self-esteem	Alcohol
Moralization	Criminalization
Race	Gender
Vulnerability	Racism

This set of factors, among others, is one of the most fundamental in influencing human behavior, causing it to react in different ways and bringing great psychic suffering that is manifested by a change in thought and behavior.

Therefore, knowing the social environment (often disrespectful and aggressive) better may cause changes that can lead to behavioral modification. It is up to psychiatrists to be aware of this fact, and this book is a good resource for achieving this desideratum.

October, 23rd, 2017
Professor Emeritus
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Elisaldo Araújo Carlini

Preface

Science as Political Action: It Is Just another Book about Drugs

At first glance, the reader may ask, “Why one more book about drugs?” At least that was the question I asked myself when I considered editing this book. The topic “drugs” is already widely discussed in several contexts. We all have more or less well-defined beliefs about the use of psychoactive substances. Regardless of whether we are users, legal or illegal drug sellers, politicians, public managers, or scientists, we use such beliefs to base our actions and positions regarding the topic, whether religious, ideological, or even scientific.

As we look back over the last few centuries, when we defined drugs as a problem and were clearly more focused on their use, it seems that despite some advances and findings, we are still far from having a clear understanding about drugs or a solution to the problem. The complexity of the topic leads to different points of view about the supposed “problem” and its possible solutions, leading to different causal attributions and even adding characteristics to drugs that go beyond their properties. Although we know so many different things about this particular subject, we may not know as much as we think.

Even with recent advances in pharmacology and neurosciences, there is still a *black box* regarding how we develop prevention, treatment, and public policy actions on drugs. The various technical manuals, clinical protocols, and public policies (supposedly supported by scientific data) still seem far from responding to the needs of the drug field. Maybe it is because we still have very limited answers. In general, our focus has been limited to individual aspects, with biological or psychological explanations about substance use. I do not consider these aspects to be the problem. However, it is important to draw attention to the fact no organism or psychological aspect is isolated from the social environment. Therefore, moving away from the antagonism between biological/psychological/sociological viewpoints, it is important to consider the integration between such dimensions. However, this is not the ethereal position of biopsychosocial discourse, which is often general to

immobilism, a conceptual inconsistency that gives a false lack of tension in this discussion.

We know from the beliefs and many interests related to drugs that this is an extremely controversial area, with several tensions that have served (and still serve) to legitimize many actions against people and peoples. In this sense, this book assumes the view that individuals are the actors and the result of their own history, which influences and is directly influenced by their social relations. To understand the process of establishing relationships with an individuals' body and subjectivity, it is fundamental to understand their social and cultural relations.

Drugs have different meanings. Through the discourse that drugs are the cause of social problems, the legitimization of criminalization, punishment, and exclusion of a groups' rights are used as a pretext for social cleansing actions and xenophobia in different parts of the world. At this historic moment of a new wave of conservatism in the world, it is important to draw attention to certain discourses that seek to justify penalization and social injustice as if they were neutral discourses, often used with false scientific support. As Karl Marx said, "history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." That is why it is important to resist and draw attention to the discourses used in this field. It is therefore important to be aware that "science" can and should be a political act for the defense of life and equality among people. Otherwise, we merely repeat socially empty rituals or serve as supporters of the process of oppression and social injustice.

In other words, that is why we are writing another book about drugs. This time, we aim to discuss and deepen knowledge of macro-social relations related to drug use and understand how this area has served as a mechanism of control, exploitation, and maintenance of exclusion. With this goal, we invited authors from different knowledge areas, some not necessarily specialists in the drug field, with the challenge to relate large social issues to drug use. In this perspective, the book was organized in two axes and seven chapters. The first part, "Drugs and Society," presents chapters discussing general aspects of the social basis of substance use. The second part, "Drugs and Social Issues," more specifically looks at social markers such as gender, social class, and race and includes a chapter on territory.

For the opening section, I have written the chapter "The Context of Drug Use in the Consumer Society," which introduces the following topics. I demonstrate how, historically, actions of restriction or incentive regarding the production and consumption of certain drugs are related to commercial gain and the control of certain groups, often justified by the public health discourse. In addition, I criticize the danger of assuming an automatic liberal discourse on drug use and the idea of the citizen-consumer, with a critique of the consumer society model. In the chapter "The Stigmatization of Drug Use as Mechanism of Legitimation of Exclusion," de Silveira, Tostes, Wan, Ronzani, and Corrigan discuss the fact that drug use is one of the most stigmatized behaviors in the world and how this results in a barrier to seeking care and legitimizes exclusion, as well as the punishment of people linked to certain drugs. In "Social Effects of Prohibitionism in the Americas and New Drug Policies," Rossal presents some consequences of actions against drugs based on

prohibitionism. The chapter gives examples such as the processes used in Uruguay and some US states for regulating the sale of marijuana.

The section “Drugs and Social Issues” starts with the chapter “Drugs and Poverty: Interfaces of Oppression in the Capitalist World,” in which Ximenes, Paiva, Moura Jr., and Costa discuss how the capitalist system generates situations of poverty and how drug consumption is related to processes of oppression, mainly through the criminalization of poverty through the discourse of control of drug use. In “Drugs and Gender,” Nuria Romo-Avilés discusses the specificities related to drug use from the gender perspective and draws attention to the idea of appropriate public policies for considering such an aspect. In the chapter “Drugs and Race,” Matsumoto, Farias, and Almeida present the concept of racism and how it relates to the strategy of the “war on drugs” and the use of repressive policies in the maintenance of oppression and criminalization of certain populations according to racial markers. Finally, in the chapter “(Des)Occupation of Urban and Rural Spaces, Gentrification, and Drug Use,” Dimenstein, Dalla Vecchia, Macedo, and Bastos call attention to the scenes and territories of use as an important element in understanding the consumption of drugs and how this aspect is related to the formulation of public policies.

We do not intend to propose a “solution” to the issue of drugs, because we would have to define better what, in fact, the problem of drug use among people is. As we hope to show in this work, it seems that there are many problems, with various intentions to find solutions or at least to justify actions that seem to have other targets. In summary, we seek to bring out aspects that are not new, but perhaps forgotten or neglected. Thus, perhaps we should talk more about the same topics, so that we do not repeat the farce of history. This is our proposal for another book about drugs, or beyond them...

Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, Brazil

Telmo Mota Ronzani

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