



Studying the Zar ritual in Hormozgan and Its Correlation with Jacob L. Moreno's Theories in Psychodrama

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ABSTRACT

Jacob Levi Moreno (1889–1974), an Austrian psychologist and psychiatrist, made significant contributions to his field through innovative therapeutic approaches. By integrating sociological research with clinical practice, Moreno developed psychodrama, a method inspired by the dramatic potential and immersive environment of theater. This technique fosters spontaneity and facilitates the patient's confrontation with their inner truth. Key principles of psychodrama, such as communication, emotional expression, and externalization, are crucial in therapeutic interventions. This study aims to explore Moreno's theories and their application to personality evolution during the Zar ritual practiced by the Ahl-e Hava community in Hormozgan. This study seeks to determine how personality development observed in patients and participants of the Ahl-e Hava aligns with Moreno's perspectives.

Keywords: Psychodrama, Zar ritual, Jacob Levi Moreno, Spontaneity, Creativity

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Introduction

The “Zar” ritual has been practiced for many years as a therapeutic tradition in the southern, southeastern, and eastern regions of Iran. The origins of many physical ailments in these areas were often unknown to the general population, leading them to attribute these conditions to supernatural forces referred to as “wind.” In Hormozgan, it is believed that these winds manifest in various forms, including animals and objects, and they can possess individuals. Those who are physically weak are said to succumb to these forces, allowing their bodies to become vessels for the wind.¹ The methods used in the Zar ritual bear significant similarities to those used in psychodrama, particularly in their shared focus on personality evolution. Psychodrama, developed by Jacob Levi Moreno, is a therapeutic approach designed to address emotional dysfunctions by compensating for the limitations of verbal expression. Through techniques like “role switching,” psychodrama enables patients to look into their internal issues, establish connections between past and present experiences, and anticipate their influence on future events. The approach emphasizes creativity, spontaneity, dynamism, and sociometric principles, aiming to elicit intuitive, emotional, and behavioral responses during therapy. Although psychodrama shares commonalities with therapeutic theater, it is distinct in its exclusive application within psychotherapy. While therapeutic theater may be used in various contexts, psychodrama specifically addresses a patient’s life story and a defined situation. Furthermore, therapeutic theater typically involves the patient’s full awareness of the dramatic scenario and active participation, whereas psychodrama focuses on the psyche. In psychodrama, the patient may not be fully aware of their dramatic context and is introduced as a central character by the therapist. This study aims to analyze Jacob Levi Moreno’s perspective to underscore the importance of dramatic elements in therapy and their effect on the unconscious. Recreating specific scenarios or environments through dramatic elements facilitates memory recall and internal confrontation in patients. A similar unconscious process is observed in the Zar ritual, making it an important area of study for indigenous therapies. The study’s significance lies in its potential to enhance psychotherapy practices in indigenous regions like Hormozgan. Traditional treatments in such areas rely heavily on the patient’s psyche, and a lack of specialized knowledge in this field could lead to severe consequences. Incorporating psychodramatic principles into the local belief systems of Hormozgan may yield meaningful therapeutic outcomes. By transcending social traditions and conventional limitations, Moreno explored the various nature of human behavior and emphasized the importance of action in its various dimensions. This research underscores the importance of human action within ritual practices, analyzing it through the lens of psychodramatic philosophy. Emphasizing psychoanalysis as a therapeutic approach and exploring the evolution of personality among Ahl-e Hava participants provide valuable insights into indigenous therapeutic methods. This study aims to answer the following questions: What is the philosophy of personality evolution in psychodramatic therapy and among Ahl-e Hava participants in the Zar ritual? What are the fundamental differences between the patient-therapist relationship in psychodrama and rituals? How do local beliefs shape the collective wisdom of society, and in what direction do they guide it? In what ways do the study and application of psychodramatic techniques influence the ritual experience in the Hormozgan region?

Theoretical Considerations

The study of therapeutic rituals, particularly the Zar ritual, emphasizes the individual and their relationship with the surrounding community. This study examines human interactions within the Ahl-e Hava society through the theoretical framework of Jacob Levi Moreno, specifically his philosophy of confrontation and mental purification. Moreno introduced psychodrama as a psychological treatment modality in the late 1920s, following World War I. The approach aimed to replace verbal expression with action as a means of therapy. Dissatisfied with traditional psychotherapy methods, which he deemed ineffective, Moreno focused on reconstructing truth by realizing the mind’s reality. This process, he believed, enabled patients to progress to new, beneficial stages of treatment by altering behavioral patterns through psychodrama techniques. His extensive work culminated in a three-volume series titled *Psychodrama*. Psychodrama, a branch of psychotherapy, externalizes the patient’s internal trauma through enactment, often in group settings. Giacomochi highlights the roots of group therapy,² crediting Dr. Joseph Pratt, who in 1905 organized sessions with 15 tuberculosis patients in Boston. These sessions, initially educational, revealed significant therapeutic benefits as patients shared experiences and successes. Pratt observed that this collective exchange was more impactful than individual therapy, particularly because healed patients inspired courage in those still undergoing treatment.

¹ Zahra Apaand; Zhila Moshiri, “Gone Shenasi-e Darmangaran-e Sonati Dar Navahi-e Jonubi-e Iran (Motalee Moredi Ostan-e Hormozgan).” *Journal of Medical History* 6 (2011), 142-143.

² Scott Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers* (Springer Nature: 2021), 31.

As a pioneer in group therapy, Moreno initiated his sessions in 1913 with a small community of prostitutes. Following this experience, he recognized society's profound influence on individual emotions. His emphasis on group therapy was grounded in the belief that isolated individuals adopt fixed, one-dimensional roles. Moreno asserted,³ "Group research is a necessary prerequisite for group therapy. In any therapeutic situation, there are at least two individuals involved, such as the therapist and the client. Therefore, the interaction taking place is the first point of consideration. Moreno regards community as the fundamental aspect of understanding the individual. This perspective is based on a specific viewpoint regarding humanity. According to Moreno, "the therapeutic potential of one group member helping another and of one group helping another" is central to human development. He considers society to be the most fundamental point of the individual's cognition. However, in his attitude toward humanity and society, Moreno expresses theories distinct from Freud's and, in some respects, offers substantial criticism of Freud's ideas. In his 1947 book, "The Spontaneous Theater," Moreno articulated his main concern: the enslavement of humanity to technology. He posited that activating individual creativity was the only means of confronting this issue. Unlike Freud, who asserted that sexual desire is the ultimate driving force in human affairs, Moreno introduced spontaneity and individual creativity as the primary human stimulus. He argued that humanity must establish a principled structure for societal progress to achieve a better quality of life. Rejecting Freud's notion that humans are savage animals beneath a thin veneer of civilization, Moreno described humans as social and altruistic beings who consistently strive for the welfare of others.⁴ Based on these principles, it can be interpreted that Moreno prioritizes spiritual considerations in personality development over physical and instinctual aspects, interpreting human personality as deriving from the spirit. A review of Moreno's theories suggests that creativity represents the initial stage of human flourishing and self-awareness. Through creativity, individuals gain the opportunity to break free from mental frameworks and social conventions, advancing in line with their subconscious. The dominance of the subconscious in decision-making leads to a stage Moreno identified as spontaneity. Moreno's psychodrama therapy aimed to rekindle spontaneity and revitalize lost creativity while examining human social connection. In actions involving group interactions, the dynamics of action and reaction serve as critical points for research and investigation in psychodrama. The present study explores Moreno's ideas, interprets his theories about the human psyche, and examines similar elements in the philosophy of psychodrama and ritual.

Literature Review

Despite the apparent similarities between psychodrama and rituals, there has been limited research specifically dedicated to this topic. Most studies have focused on the philosophy of rituals and their formation, often examining key elements, such as music, within the context of Ahl-e Hava's therapeutic practices. The earliest written documentation on ritual in Iran can be found in Gholamhossein Sa'edi's book *Ahl-e Hava* (1966), which explores the traditions and legends narrated by the inhabitants of southern Iran. This work specifically discusses the types of winds and the philosophy of the "Majles" in the Hormozgan region. Nasser Taghvaei's documentary "Bad-e Jen" (1969), filmed in Bandar Lengeh, serves as another critical reference, visually capturing the proceedings of the "Majles." Another notable contribution is Ali Riahi's book "Zar, Wind and Baluch" (1977), which delves into the historical background of the Baluchis in the Sistan and Baluchestan region. By classifying the winds associated with the "Majles," Riahi offers a detailed introduction to the ritual and its components. These two books are foundational due to their reliability and role in documenting the nature and practice of rituals in Iran for the first time. Additionally, Bahram Beyzaie's film "Bashu the Little Stranger" (1985) visually portrays elements of these ceremonies. In the field of psychotherapy, Jacob Levy Moreno's three-volume book "Psychodrama" (1972) comprehensively explains the philosophy and methods of psychodrama. Zand Moghaddam (1999) highlights the collective efforts of southern Iranian communities in treating individuals and emphasizes gender equality during the "Majles." Further contributions include Khabari et al.'s (2006) series of four plays: "Flowers and Jars," "Mirror in the Ceiling," "Turquoise Singing," "Moonlit Women," and "Sunny Men," which reflect ritualistic themes within their narratives. Appand et al. (2011) introduce the traditional therapeutic practices of southern Iranian healers, particularly the roles of Mam Zar and Baba Zar and their treatment approaches.

Zavieh et al. (2013) analyzed the cultural roots of the Ahl-e Hava, highlighting the perceived inefficacy of conventional science and the influence of religious beliefs on local healing practices. Raei (2014) examines the profound impact of supernatural beings on the customs of southern Iranian communities. Karelian et al. (2016) draw the first comparisons between the executive elements of rituals and psychodrama, presenting a preliminary algorithm for understanding their

³ Jacob Levy Moreno, *Reflections on My Method of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. Experimentation and Innovation in Psychotherapy*, 1963, 149.

⁴ Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers*, 31.

shared dramatic properties. Gharehsou (2019) investigated the therapeutic role of music within rituals, while Zavieh et al. (2020) expanded on the therapeutic aspect of rituals, linking them to a religious perspective.

This study aims to build on this foundation by introducing a new discussion that integrates Moreno's views into an understanding of the Zar ritual. While prior research has focused on the historical, cultural, and narrative dimensions of Zar rituals, there has been little emphasis on the scientific and philosophical aspects of personality transformation in possessed individuals. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the therapeutic elements of Zar rituals through the lens of psychodrama, offering a fresh perspective on this underexplored topic.

Zar Ritual

As civilizations evolved, the philosophy of disease has often intertwined with local and religious beliefs. This connection imbued rituals with a sense of sacredness, granting mythical authority to local therapists over centuries. These rituals were conducted following a predetermined hierarchy, aiming to achieve common objectives, primarily healing and wellness.⁵ Designed to unearth repressed desires, the rituals unconsciously drained emotional tensions, thus proving effective in alleviating mental illness. Among these, the Zar ritual emerged explicitly as a healing practice. As Gharasoo notes:

Many scholars who have studied Zar in different parts of Africa believe that he is of Ethiopian origin. These scholars argue that during the 17th and 18th centuries, it was introduced by slaves, especially women, who were taken to other countries. As a migratory ritual, Zar spread to the Persian Gulf region in the east and the wealthy Egyptian courts in the north.⁶

In Hormozgan, Zar rituals are rooted in the belief systems of the local inhabitants, particularly concerning the presence of supernatural forces, including jinn and ghosts. These entities, referred to as "wind" in southern Iran, manifest in different forms, with "Zar" being one of them. Traditional therapists, widely respected in Hormozgan and other southern Iranian regions, address illnesses by drawing upon cultural beliefs and employing medicinal plants native to the region. The enduring influence of shamanistic practices is evident in the typology of diseases and their treatments. Key figures in Zar healing practices are Baba Zar and Mama Zar, the indigenous healers who mediate between the Zar and the afflicted individual. These healers organize a ritual known as "Majles-e Bazi," presiding over it to ensure the afflicted individual's liberation from malevolent forces. This ceremony exemplifies the unique intersection of cultural, spiritual, and therapeutic practices.

Music's Role in Majles-e Bazi

The "winds" in Zar rituals are categorized into two primary groups: Kafar (pagan or infidel) and Muslim. They can be further divided into three subgroups: African and non-Muslim, Noban (Egyptian and Muslim), and Shaykhs (Arab and Muslim). As these winds traveled from Africa to the Iranian coast, they carried their cultural narratives and rituals, which integrated with Islamic practices to create new traditions. For instance, the "Mutaharat" ceremonies of the Ahl-e Hava share noticeable similarities with the Islamic Muharram rituals. The influence of African culture is particularly evident in Hormozgan's collective wisdom and musical traditions. Many Mama Zars, Baba Zars, and elders of the Ahl-e Hava in this region are of African descent.⁷ Their cultural heritage has significantly shaped the music, instruments, and native poetry associated with Zar rituals. The therapeutic power of music has been recognized for centuries; in ancient Greece, for instance, the god Apollo was believed to harmonize human health through music. Similarly, music holds a central role in the Zar ritual, harmonizing and balancing the spiritual state of the participants.

Daf and Dohol are the two main instruments of Majles-e Bazi. In Hormozgan, each "wind" has its music and only responds to that specific music. It is expressed in the form of the person whose body it has taken over. Mama/Baba Zar, through music, identifies the type of "wind" and chooses a specific method of coping or confronting, depending on whether it is good or evil. If the "wind" belongs to a Muslim group, Mama/Baba Zar mediates to achieve harmony with the "wind" and allows it to remain in the host's body. However, if the "wind" is associated with infidelity or malevolence, it must be expelled from the person's body permanently.

In the Zar ritual, music serves a crucial purpose. One essential condition for its proper effect is performing it within a ritualistic environment. The primary role of music in this ceremony is to affirm the ritual significance of the instruments and behaviors, signaling the commencement of the Majles. The second role is to summon the "winds." The Ahl-e Huva

⁵ Saeed Zavieh, Mehdi Asl Marz, Iraj Dadashi, "Jaygah-e Ayinha Dar Darman-e Bimariha Ba Moghayese Araye Malinowski va Eliade Darbare Mahiat va Karkarde Ayin (Motalee Moredi; Hormozgan Va Khuzestan)," *Iranian Journal of Anthropological Research* 10 no.20 (2020): 81.

⁶ Maryam Gharasoo, "Shenod-e Musighi Dar Ayin-e Zar," *Fine Arts* 24 no. 2 (2019): 68.

⁷ Saedi Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava* (Tehran: Institute of Social Studies and Research Publications, 1966), 23-24.

believe that “winds” awake upon hearing music and enter the ceremonial space through the vibrations of the instruments. Consequently, during the ceremony, attendees are advised never to sit with their backs to the instruments. As part of the ritual, participants touched the instruments upon entering the chamber to receive blessings and then touched their faces. The most important and objective function of music in these sessions is its therapeutic role. By creating a distinct atmosphere, it induces a unique state in both the patient and the audience, which many anthropological studies refer to as an altered level of consciousness. This altered state closely resembles the trance state, further underscoring the transformative power of the Zar ritual’s music.⁸

The Zar Ritual as Performance

The “Zar” is one of the types of wind with no material essence, which becomes tangible only when it possesses a body. Winds are believed to choose the souls and bodies of vulnerable individuals, inhabiting them. When someone exhibits diverse and persistent symptoms of physical or mental disorder and fails to find healing through conventional treatments, charms, or prayers, they are often said by many in southern Iran, especially in Hormozgan, to have become the “carriage” of one of these winds. These winds are categorized into various groups, which are generally divided into two main categories: Muslim and non-Muslim (infidel). Each category carries distinct characteristics and traits, which also reflect religious affiliation. The treatment of these winds is handled by a Mama/Baba Zar, who specializes in a particular type of wind, with each healer having specific expertise in driving out a particular wind and delegating a specific area of the body and causing harm at predetermined points. As a result, the selection of the Mama/Baba Zar and the way the ritual is conducted are influenced by the symptoms displayed by the afflicted individual.

Upon diagnosing Zar possession, the first step involves washing the afflicted person’s body and keeping them secluded for seven days. This seclusion serves to shield the person from external influence, particularly interactions with non-mahram individuals, as defined by Islamic principles. During this period, a special potion, prepared by the Mama/Baba Zar, is administered. After seven days of seclusion, a girl known as “Khizrani” from the community visits the homes of those suffering from Zar to invite participants to the ritual gathering. On the appointed day, large platters are arranged with a variety of foods, aromatic herbs, and the blood of the Zar sacrifice. This sacrifice is typically a goat, whose head is severed before the ceremony, and its blood is brought to the table. The afflicted individual is required to consume a small amount of this blood, which is believed to enable the Zar to speak through them during the ritual.⁹

Once the type of wind has been identified by the Mama/Baba Zar, music and songs related to the wind are played and sung throughout the ceremony. The afflicted person, wearing a white cloth, sits next to the Mama/Baba Zar as the music begins. Ahl-e Hava, the community members, sit in a circle around them. Gradually, the afflicted person’s movements become more intense, eventually reaching a point of trance. At this stage, they begin to speak in the voice of the wind that has possessed them, voicing their demands. Once these requests are met, the Mama/Baba Zar requests that the wind release the afflicted person and cease its harm. The wind then exits the body, and the person returns to their natural state.¹⁰ The ceremony continues until the wind has spoken, which may require several consecutive days.

The Zar Ritual from a Psychological Perspective

The Zar is regarded, in the popular opinion of the people of Hormozgan, as a force that primarily targets the weak and underserved members of society. According to local beliefs, economically and physically disadvantaged groups are more susceptible than others, making their bodies suitable habitats for the inhabitation of “winds.”¹¹ This perspective reflects an underlying acknowledgment of class differences. The subordinate stratum of Hormozgan society, often composed of the working class and labor crews, unconsciously views itself as lacking credibility and value compared to the wealthier strata. This self-perception can manifest as depression, isolation, or other forms of mental illness. One defense mechanism for coping with this isolation is to seek attention in spaces in order to gain social recognition. For the lower class of Hormozgan, who have often experienced rejection and a lack of spatial belonging, the ritual becomes a means of reclaiming status and value within the community. Central to this process is “role switching,” a crucial element in the formation of the Majles-e Bazi (ritual performance). A person afflicted with Zar adopts the role of the “wind,” possessing their body, allowing them to temporarily experience power and authority in a public setting. In the first stage of the ritual, the afflicted person imagines themselves as a powerful force to which human will must

⁸ Gharasoo, “Shenod-e Musighi Dar Ayin-e Zar,” 71.

⁹ Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 44-45.

¹⁰ Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 47.

¹¹ Gholamhossein, *Ahl-e-Hava*, 9.

surrender. In the subsequent stages, they engage in a symbolic battle, either defeating and expelling the force from their body or reaching a peaceful coexistence with it. This coexistence transforms the “wind” into an inner strength that offers constant companionship and assistance. Both scenarios result in the individual gaining a renewed sense of identity and credibility.¹² The ritual ultimately serves as a psychological framework for personal transformation. By confronting and overcoming the Zar, participants experience a shift in their sense of self, evolving into individuals who feel empowered and capable. This evolution fosters the experience of living from a position of power, offering psychological relief and social validation.

Founder of Psychodrama

The Austrian psychiatrist Jacob Levi Moreno was born into a Jewish family and raised in a traditional and religious environment. Religion played an important role in shaping Moreno's thoughts, influencing his inclination toward divine ideas. As a child, Moreno portrayed the role of God in a group game, an experience he later regarded as his first close encounter with psychotherapy. The profound impact of World War I marked a turning point in his spiritual and religious experiences. Moreno's interest in the primacy of personal experience and the role of action in understanding led him to embark on research in psychotherapy.¹³

In traditional psychotherapy sessions, dialogue between the patient and therapist typically forms the main focus of treatment, with therapeutic concepts conveyed primarily through speech. Over time, Moreno recognized the importance of the concealed dimensions of a patient's psyche. He observed that humans are instinctively capable of movement from birth, even before acquiring language, using actions to interact and express their needs. Thus, he posited that analyzing personality development through the study of actions and behavior provided a closer approximation to psychological reality than verbal analysis alone. He viewed this as a critical shortfall of conventional psychotherapy methods and advocated for “showing” as a superior alternative to verbal expression. By reducing the reliance on language, a unique space is created for processing actions and their interactions with others. The exploration and analysis of these interactions in psychodrama underscores the importance of collective presence in shaping personality.

As Ronaghi Khamenei noted, “Moreno believed that the social dimension is a fundamental component of personality; personality is not merely an internal and isolated construct but also a set of social roles.”¹⁴ Therefore, defining an individual and their personality is inseparable from human interactions and societal context. Understanding personality requires analyzing societal structures and the relationships within them. Moreno emphasized the human psyche, identifying action as the primary means of understanding it, and coined this innovative approach as psychodrama. In traditional psychotherapy, the emphasis lies on explaining *why* an event occurred. In contrast, Moreno's method emphasizes *how* events unfold. By reconstructing past events, the approach examines influencing factors and their formation, enabling a more precise reevaluation of characters and events. This process fosters new dimensions of understanding and perception for the patient.

Psychodrama

As a medical student in Vienna, Jacob Levi Moreno began developing the idea that would later lead to the establishment of psychodrama therapy. He saw children as a source of inspiration for his vision of mental truth and social connections. In 1941, Moreno introduced psychotherapy at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and three years later, he founded the American Psychotherapy and Group Therapy Association.

Time plays an important role in psychodrama therapy sessions. One key task of therapists is to help clarify the concept of time in the patient's mind. Most psychodrama sessions are conducted in groups, where the elements aim to bridge the past, present, and future of the patient.¹⁵ The relationship between these timeframes and their effect on the client's behaviors and decisions is a central theme. Emphasizing the past and present serves the purpose of safeguarding a future that, although yet to unfold, is shaped by these dimensions. Treating psychological trauma in psychodrama significantly impacts future actions. The community and the relationships formed among individuals are critical points of focus in psychodrama therapy. Moreno sought to raise awareness of the dangers of adopting a singular perspective. In psychodrama, the patient's performance within a communal setting is examined. This practice encourages clients to explore multidirectional relationships and rehearse interactions within a community. To deepen

¹² Mitra Khajeian, Mohammad Reza Khaki, Parviz Azad Fallah, “Psychodrama Dar Zare Motalee Tatbighi Do Shive Darmani Ayin-e Zar (Sonati) Va Psychodrama (Modern)”, *Theatre Journal* 67 (2016), 53.

¹³ Moreno, “Reflections on My Method of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. Experimentation and Innovation in Psychotherapy”, 13-14.

¹⁴ Jafar Ronaghi Khamenei, “Karbord-e Goruh Sanji Dar Moshavere Va Rahnamayi-e Tahsil”, *Teaching Literature* 79 (1993), 26.

¹⁵ Richard Daigneault, “Psychodrama: Review and Analysis,” Website: stars.library.ucf.edu, 16.01.1977.

their understanding of these dynamics, patients are often challenged by being asked to assume another person's role. This exercise enables them to experience the situation from a different perspective, facilitating new insights into their emotions and sub-personalities.

Creating a theatrical atmosphere with elements that reconstruct specific places or events allows patients to recall meaningful situations from their lives, transforming internal realities into tangible experiences within the therapeutic setting. The main difference between role-playing in psychodrama and acting in traditional theater lies in the intent: while acting involves identifying with an imaginary character, psychodrama focuses on psychological transformation. Patients play roles in uncovering unknown dimensions and motivations within themselves, aiding in the healing and purification process. Moreno suggested using circular or semicircular stages, inspired by classical Greek theater, to enhance communication and interaction between patients and therapists. Stage props are employed only when they contribute to recreating a particular setting or situation.

Moreno first viewed himself as a social worker and believed that humans mirror the divine essence within themselves. His philosophy diverged from certain psychoanalytic theories. Moreno argued that creativity and spontaneity are essential for effecting change, emphasizing that human actions drive insight and innovation. He often criticized Freud's methods, deeming them insufficient, and claimed to have started his work where Freud left off. According to Moreno, Freud's greatest limitation was treating patients in the artificial environment of his office, as Moreno believed therapy should occur in the natural settings of patients' lives. Moreno encouraged people to dream and described humans as "cosmic beings." Through his concept of human nature, he distanced himself from traditional pathological approaches and advocated for therapeutic groups to empower individuals. It can be argued that Moreno aimed to use theater as a vehicle for social transformation.¹⁶

A Study of Personality Development in the Zar Ritual Based on Jacob Levi Moreno's View

The logic concerning the factors affecting the treatment of patients in psychodrama and rituals is largely similar. Thus, it is possible to consider the person affected by the disease as akin to a modern therapist and analyze changes in their formation through the philosophy of treatment from Moreno's perspective. In the initial stage, Moreno emphasized the need for a definite and accurate insight into the individual. He identified a human being within a group as the mediator of factors such as spontaneity and creativity, which activate its internal roles and guide actions. Moreno emphasizes the importance of dialogue, viewing words as a medium for self-confrontation and interaction with others.

The significance of collective gatherings is undeniable in the Zar ritual. Holding the ceremony in a group setting underscores the necessity of community involvement. The Ahl-e Hava (people of the air) find strength in plurality. These people see their greatest power concerning the defeat of supernatural forces in mass communication. The person with the disease seeks to play a role among the people who formed their habitat. Gaining a respectable place in Ahl-e Hava's society is linked to the mass communication of these people in Majles-e Bazi. Therefore, the affected person will exert their utmost effort to be proud and win in these Majles. Mama/Baba Zar is based on dialogue with Muslim or pagan forces. According to what happens in psychodrama, peace in ritual is also meaningful and a triumph in the formation of successful verbal communication. In psychodrama, this is a direct relationship between the patient and the therapist, but in ritual, the patient requires the presence of an intermediary to communicate with the "wind." The interactions and relationships formed between the patient and other factors in both treatments are the most essential elements for the treatment and treatment stages.

Moreno believed that humans are constantly moving toward self-actualization because, throughout their lives, they face the challenges of being and acting and thus have an innate desire to interact. Formed interactions directly affect human emotions, the soul, and the body and are considerable from this perspective. Moreno makes the universe a collection of interconnected atoms and knows that they form networks and a community.¹⁷

The human response to life stimuli is based on external and internal data derived from various experiences in specific situations. From birth, human beings experience an innate sense of dependency by going through stages of development. The infant takes and plays different roles in life without the ability to make informed decisions and then experiences a world in which the distinction between experience and representation is revealed. At this stage, the child has a relative awareness of their social roles and raises many questions concerning their existence. The child develops self-development and dynamics in the role of the child through the questions raised. Interactions are important in learning roles.¹⁸

¹⁶ Giacomucci, *Social work, sociometry, and psychodrama: Experiential approaches for group therapists, community leaders, and social workers*, 34.

¹⁷ Jacob Levy Moreno, *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society* (New York: Beacon House, 1951), 11.

¹⁸ Norbert Apter, "The human being: J.L. Moreno's vision in psychodrama," *International Journal of Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (2003), 33.

The roles that people encounter throughout their lives can be divided into several categories. These roles can be physical, cultural, social, or dramatic, depending on the imagination. Moreno believes that the biggest contributor to mental health disruption is being placed in patterns that cause an uninterrupted repetition of a role. Relying on a fixed role eliminates the patient's action and creativity and renders them incapable of creating a new situation. In the Hormozgan region, due to cultural and economic conditions, most children who belong to the lower class of society engage in family business from an early age. Not spending childhood in the usual way destroys imagination to a significant extent. The games created by children prepare them to accept real roles in society, while the elimination of a large part of childhood and the adoption of heavy responsibilities at an early age will lead children to a large extent to become one-sided.

Therefore, the social chain of the Hormozgan underclass is limited to people who have experienced the same conditions and have the same priorities. According to Moreno's theories, these people are impaired from the perspective of mental health because they have been in the cycle of repetition throughout their lives and are limited to a few predetermined roles, so there has been no useful communication and interaction with them. The greatest loss for this group of society can be seen in their lack of experience in dramatic roles. The imagination in this stratum is largely destroyed by immersion into social roles. The importance of the ritual is that it creates a suitable platform for these people to experience dramatic roles. The special privilege that Ahl-e Hava receives at this event is to experience a new situation that does not exist in their daily lives. By changing their roles, a person with Zar recognizes gaps in their life and confronts them. In Majles-e Bazi, the affected person has the opportunity to have the vision of power by playing the role of a powerful force that has taken over their body. The imagination of these people peaks during Majles-e Bazi and is expressed in the form of the visualization of dramatic roles. The sick person in this chamber, by the power that they display against the wind, has a special place in a new society and finds them in a society whose types of interactions are very different due to new roles and shared experiences.

The changes that have occurred reveal a new dimension of the patient's personality that leads to internal confrontation. Similar to the process in psychodrama, the internal confrontation in the ritual reveals concealed truths and leads to a correct perception of oneself. Therefore, the mechanism of coping with psychological trauma in these two treatment methods largely follows the same logic. In both ways, patients want to improve their physical and mental conditions. In rituals, Ahl-e Hava wants a situation in which they experience a different social level; therefore, the process of disease and the stages of treatment in this ritual can be largely dependent on the element of indoctrination.

In psychodrama, the basis of therapy refers to individual roles. In this therapy, most of the actions are based on psychiatric and scientific propositions. In psychodrama, the therapist consciously places the patient in a position to experience a mental journey into the past and to predict the future based on the decisions made by the present. The therapist connects the roles of the patient's childhood to the present to recreate it in a different space. Through this technique, the patient can realize the hidden mental, physical, and behavioral dimensions. Moreno believes that psychodrama is an exercise in confronting the reality of life and provides a platform for experience and action. Just like Ahl-e Hava, who considers themselves responsible for the treatment process and has no judgment on the patient, the society in which the person is placed is important in psychodrama. Moreno emphasized creating a safe and reliable environment and considered the lack of judgment on the patient to be a fundamental principle in treatment. Thus, mutual understanding between the treatment agents and the individual patient was consciously considered in both treatment methods. Confrontation with multiple individual roles and creating a balance between them occurs intentionally in psychodrama and unconsciously in ritual.

Children in Hormozgan imitate the patterns of their parents from an early age. In this segment of society, where poverty plays an active role in lifestyle, survival is a top priority; children experience different tasks due to the financial needs of the family and enter the field of work from an early age and usually continue their family business with their fathers. This situation is largely confined to boys and girls who have been involved in housekeeping and domestic responsibilities since childhood. Therefore, the period of growth and maturity in these children can be assumed to differ from the standard definitions. Thus, it can be considered that the downtrodden children of the Hormozgan region have never had a chance to flourish and develop spontaneity.

Moreno places people who have never had the opportunity to experience spontaneity in a dramatic atmosphere. Moreno believes that the elements used in play regenerate qualities such as creativity and spontaneity because they are intrinsic and acquired in nature. In the theater, the patient is placed in a position to understand clearly through role switching. They are the ones who are true to themselves and others. The association and reconstruction of memories have a significant effect on paving the path to healing.¹⁹ Majles also follows dramatic patterns in the Zar ritual. One can

¹⁹ Apter, "The human being: J.L. Moreno's vision in psychodrama," 31-32.

see the sufferer as an actor/actress who simultaneously plays their true role and the role of the force that has conquered them, and through the technique of substitution, he/she encounters their dramatic roles. Imagination is formed, and in this situation, it reveals the hidden characteristics of the patient. In most cases, a person who performs rituals has an unhealthy mental state before suffering from a physical problem. The formation of this ritual is suitable ground for dealing with internal injuries and leads to psychological changes in refining the individual.

Moreno knew the value of words and actions equally. In the proposed psychodrama sessions, the therapist would recount their psychological trauma in the action they shared before speaking. The parts of the ritual play are dedicated to the movements of the possessed body through music. What happens in the ritual is based on experience and experimentation, and it follows psychology. The psychological evacuation of the possessed person by the movements brings them closer to experiencing spontaneity. Individual creativity is an important element that has the potential to flourish more in a dramatic atmosphere; therefore, the stimulation of imagination in the possessed person is the compensation for the lack of dreams and fantasies in the childhood of the sick person.

The interaction and improvised response concerning the created situations in psychodrama and ritual place the patient in the same situation. In both treatments, the patient changes from the reporter's position to the actor's position, thus their first encounter with the created situation involves all their feelings and memories and acts as an improvised action. Following the created actions, the reactions also matter. In psychodrama, these reactions are performed by a professional crew, but in the ritual, traditional therapists in the form of Mama/Baba Zar try to communicate with the patient through symbolic elements to empower their personality in the face of individual and collective experience.

According to Moreno's opinions, therapy relies on words to require a secondary process of interpretation that is itself a product of the therapist's philosophical orientation. Given the primacy of action during human evolution, language can be considered a late development. Moreno considers humans to be active actors in the realm of real life who interact with other actors and actresses. According to him, every human being is a reflection of their cosmic aspect, and thus they are considered beyond their biological dimension.²⁰

Hormozgan's view of humans also extends beyond biological nature. The people who believe in rituals consider the world to be the dwelling place of unknown forces, and in this way, man is a creature from the perspective of these people who can make a connection to peace or confront the supernatural forces; therefore, man has a powerful and self-referential nature and relies on himself to defeat whatever has shaken him. Furthermore, Moreno considers man the only savior for his inner harm, and the only condition of his victory is an inner journey to confront the truth. In both of these cases, the goal is to balance mental reality and objective reality, and this balance is necessary to master spontaneity. Moreno's conception of treatment promotes creative flexibility and adaptability. In the ritual, all efforts are made to create harmony and balance between the patient and their mental realities.

The release of energy from a patient can be considered a key factor in treatment. Children drain energy through interaction and mobility in the form of play. Moreno believes that children can achieve creative expression by sharing their emotions through their special psychological and physical baggage, which is released through imagination. Creativity is a sign of good mental health. By reconstructing the elements of drama in therapy sessions, Moreno penetrates and gives objectivity to the patient's subjective truth through improvised dramatic plays. Creativity formed to objectivize mental images, although they can be deviated, opens doors to recognition and development. In psychodrama, the patient has the opportunity to become the main hero of the story and be defined as the center of events.

Creativity is also considered a central pillar of rituals. The patient is a reflection of an imaginary character called Zar. They appear in the role of a character who has no physical touch, and their obvious traits are hypothetical. The patient relies entirely on creativity to play the role of such a character. Creativity is formed through body movements, sound, and interaction. The sick person not only plays the role of the "wind" that has taken over their body but also confronts it by choosing motifs that represent strength and persistence. In this way, the patient actualizes aspects that were previously unknown and inactive. The process performed in the ritual puts the patient in a different and new position, unconsciously confronting them with the concealed layers of their mental state. According to Zarka Moreno: "Man will fear spontaneity until he learns how to train it."²¹

The mediating elements in psychodrama help reconstruct events and guide the patient toward a correct treatment course. The people who play in the play are not allowed under any circumstances to undermine the patient's personality or interfere in their decisions. All these people's focus is on the importance of the present. In this regard, the design of the scene may be used to instill memories or a special occasion to reveal hidden feelings. The psychological and physical structure of a patient's personality significantly affects how they perform and interact. Finally, the scenes

²⁰ Zarka Toeman Moreno, "Psychodrama, role theory, and the concept of the social atom." In *The Evolution of Psychotherapy: The 1st Conference* (Routledge, 1987), 344-345.

²¹ Moreno, "Psychodrama, role theory, and the concept of the social atom," 342.

displayed by the patient share a pattern that is of particular importance to the therapist. During treatment, patients will confront and describe situations they have always avoided. In a theater, reality is reflected through a mental illusion. It can be assumed that in psychodrama, illusion and truth eventually meet at the same point.

Ahl-e Hava is a reflection of the ideal society of the sick person; these people have a lot in common and agree on their core beliefs. The most significant event of the ritual is the sense of collective identity. Similar to adjuncts in psychodrama, the presence of Ahl-e Hava helps form a chain of active connections. In Majles-e Bazi, dramatic elements are symbolically placed within the therapeutic atmosphere. The symbols used in this atmosphere have a special meaning for the people of Ahl-e Hava. Music is another important ingredient that contributes to atmosphere building in both therapies. Through music therapy, a large portion of the patient's energy is released, and the excitement formed through individual creativity is exhibited in action. The importance of the mental hallucinations of a sick person in Majles-e Bazi is palpable. According to Moreno's views, illusionary space is considered an instrument of self-expression, so it can be assumed that the therapeutic process formed in the ritual is largely in line with Moreno's theories of psychodrama.

Emotional Integrity Free from Organized Logical Regulations

Emotional connections are explored in relation to the role of community in shaping personality. The performative context of the Zar ritual and psychodrama creates a space distinct from everyday life, where existing truths are either distorted or reproduced. In this setting, individuals encounter relationships that reflect the structured systems and patterns of their real-world experiences. These social frameworks, while contributing positively to personality formation, often entangle individuals in cycles of dominance, ultimately shaping their thinking, lifestyles, and responsibilities in predetermined ways. One beneficial aspect of rituals is their ability to produce new systems and laws born from collective interaction. In the Zar ritual, participants who share similar life experiences reach a shared understanding of the consequences of their social status and the harms associated with a lack of participation in communal gatherings. Together, they form a community referred to as Ahl-e Hava, meaning "people of the air." Within this community, they establish rules specific to their shared context—rules that lose relevance outside this group. In psychodrama, the therapeutic team strives to provide the patient with a new communal experience, one that compensates for the void of emotional connections in their lives. Through this process, patients revisit their relationships, gaining a unique perception of their dimensions and those of others. This exploration offers fresh insights into social relationships and fosters emotional growth. The performative context created in psychodrama challenges existing logic and truths by disrupting conventional notions of time and space. This disruption allows for the construction of individual roles, enabling patients to break free from oppressive relationships and engage with their realities in transformative ways.

Instinctive Response and Sensory Experience Rehabilitation

In psychodrama, the patient has the opportunity to discover themselves in new and different situations. They can create moments on stage that are unlikely to occur in their ordinary lives. Through this process, the individual awakens their instincts through reactions stemming from their emotions and expresses themselves without fear of judgment or rejection, doing so without censorship. In these circumstances, the patient becomes closer to understanding their sensory experience and, as a result, better recognizes their motivations and inner feelings. In the Zar ritual, everything unfolds in the moment and follows the current situation. The Zar healer instructs the afflicted individual to let go and activate their instincts in response to the music and actions occurring in the gathering. Thus, when faced with music, an individual releases their body and allows themselves to express words and behaviors that arise from their unconscious. Therefore, the presence and readiness of both the physical and mental aspects in the psychodrama and the Zar ritual are of great importance, and both therapeutic methods provide a suitable environment for experiencing sensory awareness without feelings of fear and avoidance.

Embodiment as an Experience of Freedom

In the Zar ritual, the body plays an enormous role. One may imagine that liberation and spontaneity are realized through the body. In the Zar ritual, the body becomes a medium that reveals and displays imagination and unconscious. The individual afflicted by Zar manifests their psyche in the form of an unknown entity within their body and, through the mediation of music, makes it accessible to the unconscious, going so far as to allow the body to act beyond conscious control and enter a trance state. Through this process, individuals experience a moment in which they perceive the essence of their body and become aware of it. This awareness is typically an experience that transcends their ordinary life experiences; before this, they viewed their body merely as a tool for personal duties and roles, failing to recognize

it as a means for self-expression. In psychodrama, based on Moreno's previously discussed theories, the primary focus is on the therapeutic process that occurs through the body, as words alone do not encompass all dimensions and aspects of the individual and are insufficient for expression. In psychodrama, the body provides a platform for playing another role, thereby facilitating the stage of understanding and awareness of another psyche through the body. Thus, in both cases, the patient gains a body experience that enables the realization of freedom.

Conclusion

The Zar ritual is a ceremony practiced in many southern and southeastern parts of Iran. At first glance, the philosophy of treatment underlying the Zar ritual may appear incomprehensible when viewed through the lens of modern psychological and medical knowledge. However, a closer examination reveals striking similarities between these traditional methods and contemporary psychotherapy. Moreno's theories on psychodrama emphasize unconscious factors that are also at play in rituals, offering an explanatory framework for the treatment process. In both approaches, the patient is often trapped in a cycle of fixed roles, losing a clear perception of their inner dimensions. Through the therapeutic process, the patient gained a detailed understanding of these roles and, using imagination and creativity, released suppressed energy. This process enables psychological refinement and prepares individuals for social interactions by helping them confront their subjective reality and objectify it through action.

Despite these parallels, there are notable differences in the patient-therapist relationship in psychodrama and ritual. In psychodrama, treatment is conducted by a psychiatrist, whereas rituals involve traditional healers. Indigenous treatment in Hormozgan follows the cultural and environmental characteristics of the region, while psychodrama transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. The belief in the magical powers of traditional healers during rituals has a profound psychological effect on patients. The healer's unique position within the Ahl-e Hava community distinguishes them from other members, especially the patient. In contrast, psychodrama centers the patient as the primary focus, emphasizing their emotions and role in the therapeutic process.

The collective wisdom of the Ahl-e Hava plays a crucial role in patient treatment. A significant local belief in Hormozgan is the coexistence of supernatural forces, or winds, with humans. This belief system instills anxiety about being powerless against these forces, elevating the status of traditional healers who are thought to possess the power to confront them. A considerable portion of the healing process in this context relies on the power of the mind and indoctrination. It can be argued that these beliefs have unconsciously shaped profound mental constructs, influencing all aspects of life, including treatment approaches.

The shared techniques of psychodrama and the Zar ritual offer valuable insights for developing practical therapeutic measures for individuals with Zar in Hormozgan. Recognizing these similarities provides a foundation for integrating scientific advancements into traditional practices while considering the community's mental and cultural background. Studying psychodrama methods and adapting them to the Zar ritual represents a significant step toward addressing individual trauma and establishing foundational psychotherapy for the Ahl-e Hava community while preserving their cultural identity.

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