

Team Garra: Using the Team of Life to facilitate conversations with Brazilians living in Sydney

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This paper outlines an application of the 'rites of passage' and 'migration of identity' metaphors from narrative therapy and community work, in conversations with Brazilian immigrants in Australia. The author also employed the 'Team of Life' methodology, which was highly culturally-relevant, given the Brazilian people's love of soccer/football, as well as the 'narrative timelines' methodology and 'definitional ceremony' map of narrative practice.

Keywords: Team of Life, rites of passage, migration of identity, collective narrative timelines, Brazil, soccer, football

INTRODUCTION

Since I came to Australia in 2006, I have been involved in conversations about this experience with Brazilian friends and students who came to Sydney to study or to start a new life. Very often I have listened to people's complaints about the difficulties they faced in adapting to this new culture – stories of pain, despair, disconnection, and negativity were the ones most told. I knew that, despite these stories of hurt, these people had developed creative and powerful ways to respond to these negative experiences, but somehow these ways were not being acknowledged.

When I heard about the Team of Life (Denborough, 2008), I thought it would be a very appropriate methodology to use with Brazilian people living in Australia. Creating a space to talk about the difficulties we face in Australia and the ways we *respond* to them, using the metaphor of soccer, seemed very relevant and helpful bearing in mind that almost every Brazilian person relates to soccer in one way or another. The Team of Life methodology facilitates 'double-storying' – where the hardship can be acknowledged, but also the way students and immigrants respond to this – in a rich and strong way. I was interested in these people's goals and achievements, in what had sustained them during hardships, in which ways they dealt with the absence of loved-ones. I was also interested in ways they could share their stories of resistance and courage with each other.

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA

Michael White (1997), referring to the work of van Genep (1960) and Turner (1967), used the 'rites of passage' metaphor to generate a map of experiences that people breaking from addiction can expect. The three stages of the rites of passage provide people with general guides about the journey they are about to start when they want to break from an addiction. A similar metaphor can be used to map the experience of immigration¹. For many of us, the experience of immigration represents a break from our life as we knew it. When leaving home, many of us experience a feeling of being apart from our familiar sense of being in the world towards a new territory of life where we need to find a new place to be. During the journey, we

walk in unfamiliar ways and we do not really know the length of the walk until we arrive at this new place that will bring us a sense of belonging again.

The first stage of the rite of passage is the *separation phase*, where people step out of their recognisable pathways of life. Immigration is not just a migration of country, but also a migration of *identity*, where people need to assimilate and negotiate aspects of the new culture. I, and the people I spoke with, experienced many feelings such as sadness for leaving the people and things that are important for us behind and, at the same time, feelings of excitement, happiness and fear for the experience of the new things that were about to come. I call this excitement phase the 'honeymoon', as we 'fall in love' with the new experience for a short time. It takes a while to believe that you have made it across the ocean to be in Australia. This stage of contentment commonly lasts for about three or four weeks. Many of the Brazilian students and immigrants I spoke with said they did not realise that it was just the beginning of the journey.

The second stage in the rites of passage metaphor is the *liminal phase*, which is marked by moments of confusion, disorientation, and often of despair. Things that had one meaning in your life before do not quite make sense anymore. It is a feeling of lost identity and of lost grounding. The people I spoke with reported that, about one month after arriving in Australia, the excitement diminishes and adaptation to the new culture is necessary. As a student, I used to refer to this stage as the 'nightmare'. We need to learn the new language, adapt and understand new values, beliefs, customs, get used to the different style of food, and find a job. Many of us cannot read or speak English and rely on the help of friends for simple everyday things like buying a train ticket. The feeling I had was one of being deaf and illiterate at the same time: deaf, because people talk to you and you do not understand anything (and you talk to them and they do not have a clue what you are talking about), so gestural communication is very useful in this stage; illiterate, because you read the signs on shops, buses, trains stations, and the words do not mean anything. You cannot read a newspaper or a magazine as the words are just letters without meaning. Sometimes, we also need to deal with the hostility of people who are not very patient and can be quite arrogant. Sometimes we also face discrimination by coming from a poor country.

After a few months, immigrants learn to communicate, but many also start to get tired of the hard work. Usually students in Sydney work as cleaners, waiters, kitchen hands, in manual labour, and so on. Physically, the body is just exhausted, and emotionally, we can become very sensitive at times. We work most of the day and need to attend twenty hours of studies every week, which is really tiring. Homesickness can also be a large factor at this stage. Most of us have studied hard to get a degree because life in Brazil is very difficult without one. Many of us used to work in areas that we love and were in positions that do not require the use of physical work. Families back home often cannot understand how you swapped a beautiful office for a job cleaning toilets! It is hard for them to understand that it is part of the process. Then comes the question: do I want to stay here or go home? If you decide to stay, you need to extend the visa, which means spending more money and going through the stress of the immigration departments' bureaucracy. Many students at this stage do not cope and go back home without achieving the goals they were hoping to by coming to Australia. Many of them end up using drugs, getting depressed, and some decide to stay here illegally. However, there are many others who do not give up and make it through, arriving at the 'reincorporation phase'.

The *reincorporation phase* in the rites of passage metaphor is characterised by a sense of achievement and acknowledgement of one's skills of living. The person encounters a new sense of identity and a sense of arriving in a place of familiarity. For immigrants, this stage is often signified by learning the language and finding a job in the area you studied for and love. People start to respect you more, but, if they do not, you now have words to express your feelings and protect yourself. We can then also apply for residency and finally adapt to the new life, which I call the 'moment of glory'! This is like moving into a house that you built on your own. Having residency means to have a grounding or connection with Australia, which is very important when you are away from home. The whole process, at least in regards to immigration as experienced by the Brazilian students I spoke with, takes approximately two to three years but can vary immensely from person to person. For example, some people come to Australia purely for academic reasons. These people often experience their 'moment of glory' when they complete their studies and go back home.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCCER TO BRAZILIAN CULTURE

Before I share my experience of working with the group of students, it is important to give some background about the meaning of soccer to Brazilian people. Soccer was introduced to Brazil in 1894, and since then it has become a national passion. Soccer is a way that Brazilian people find to enjoy themselves despite economic, political, and social problems. Soccer brings us a sense of collectiveness, friendship, and happiness. Wherever you go in Brazil, you see young and old people playing a *peladinha* (an informal soccer game). Often, people do not have appropriate shoes to play so they play without them. If there is not a field, they play on the streets or on the beach. If you drive in country towns, you will need to stop your car a few times to wait for young players to stop their game and let you pass.

When it is the World Cup, people decorate their houses, paint their faces, hang flags in the cars and on streets. It is like a big carnival. After each game, there is a party with samba and a barbeque. We are the only country in the world that has won the World Cup five times, which is a source of pride for most of the Brazilian population. It is reason to make people who often do not have anything to eat, be happy.

Soccer in Brazil also brings a story of the resistance of black people. When soccer first started in Brazil, black people were not allowed to play as professionals, as the first clubs of the Southern area of Rio were founded by white Europeans. In 1914, during the *Campeonato Carioca* (Rio Championship), a 'mulato' (a term used at the time for someone with a mixture of a white and black background) called Carlos Alberto, was playing for the Fluminense team. He covered his skin with white rice flour to look whiter during a game against the other team. However, as he got sweaty, his makeup washed off. The hostile crowd persecuted him, yelling '*po-de-arroz*' (rice flour). Nowadays, supporters of the Fluminense Team honour him by throwing white rice flour and talc in the air every time the team walks onto the field, generating one of the most spectacular celebrations and displays of team support (Flumania, n.d.).

From 1930 to 1950, black people fought, resisted, and proved their value and ability when playing soccer, and it was through their innovative way of playing that Brazilian soccer became so well known. They invented the improvisation and the creativity that is known as the 'art of soccer'. Moves like 'the bicycle' were created by the black Brazilian Leonidas da Silva, known as 'Dark Diamond'. Nowadays, a great number of our best soccer players known around the world are black, including Pele, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho Gaucho, Roberto Carlos, Robinho, and Junior Baiano, among others. Soccer would not be the same without black people.

NARRATIVE TIMELINES

I invited some of the people I consult with, and some students that I knew who had the same interests and face the same difficulties in Australia, to talk about the experience of living in a different country². I choose to do this at Centennial Park at the 'Brazilian Field', where Brazilian people gather together every Sunday to play soccer, catch up, and have a barbeque. While I ran the group, a soccer match was happening close by. The only problem was that one of the participants was so passionate about soccer that he needed to go and play for a few minutes during the group! (See Figure 1.)

I started the group using a collective narrative timeline (see Denborough, 2008) to create a sense of collectivity within the group by talking about particular stories of the experiences of living in a different country. I asked the participants to talk about the first time they thought about coming to Australia and where they were at the time. As everyone was in Brazil when they first thought to come to Australia, we drew a map of Brazil, to document this also.

One of the participants caught my attention with his story:

The first time I thought about coming to Australia was in 1983, when Olivia Newton-John recorded the LP Physical. We used to dance to her song in the lounge. The cover of the LP caught my attention as she was in her pink clothes swimming with dolphins. I had been swimming from an early age, and I said to my Mum that I wanted to swim with the dolphins. She said, 'If you want to swim with the dolphins you need to go to Australia'. I did not know what Australia was then,

Figure 1. Soccer at the 'Brazilian field' in Sydney's Centennial Park.



as I was around three or four years old. But I stayed with the idea until I grew up, and here I am.

THE TEAM OF LIFE

Seeing as everyone present enjoyed soccer, we then had a conversation about what we like about soccer and how it connects with the things they value in their own lives. The narrative 'Team of Life' methodology (Denborough, 2008) was particularly important during this process. This made it possible to develop alternative stories and explore the resistance of these students when facing hard times here in Sydney. After this, the students were feeling more connected with each other, and this group of people who did not know each other became a new team because they could relate to each other's stories. They decided to call their team 'Garra'. The word *Garra* does not have a direct translation in English. We say that it is a gift of the Brazilian people. One of the definitions used by this group might give you an idea of what it means:

Garra is the thing that moves you when you are weak, when you cannot run and the game is about to finish and the score is tied at nil all. At the very last minute, when the referee is about to blow the whistle, you score a beautiful goal.

As part of the Team of Life exercise, the students 're-membered' their loved ones and how they supported them to achieve their goals here in Sydney (see Denborough, 2008; White, 2007). A space was also created to re-member those who passed away, both before they came to Australia and while they were here, and how they still contribute to the student's lives:

My grandmother is my coach. She passed away three months after I came to Australia. She loved me as my mother does, but she had her feet firmly on the ground. Before I came she said: 'If you need to go, go. We will miss you but we love you and want the best for you.' My mother would say to leave it (the decision to come to Australia) in

God's hands. One day when my Nana was very sick, I was in her room, and she said, 'Going to Australia is an opportunity your Uncle is giving to you, hold onto it. Despite anything that can happen you are already a winner'. If she was here today, she would be saying: 'The game has not finished, do not stop here. You won just one match but you still have the rest of the championship to go'.

My grandmother was one of my coaches. She died when I was 18. She was ahead of her time. I remember I was in love with a boy when I was younger and she used to take me to watch him from a distance. She had a nice sense of humour and I always remember her with happiness. When I am sad I think about her and say to myself, 'She was an old lady but she was full of happiness; I am still young so I need to be happy too'.

Loved ones in Brazil were also acknowledged:

My father is my 'attacker' [in the 'Team of Life' metaphor]. He is a champion and gives me inspiration. He came from a very poor family and worked on a farm from a very early age. When he was 12, he said, 'I will not be here forever, I'll have a better life'. And he did. He studied hard and became a lawyer and gave us a very nice life.

The collective goal my team has achieved is the recognition of the love we have for each other. Here in Australia, I could recognise that my team is very important to me. Without my family, I am nothing. When I speak with them I always tell them that I love them and I miss them. The loneliness makes me feel closer to them. I always try to show them they are special.

When I think about my team I think they did everything so that I could be here 'attacking'. My team and my strong defence gave me a very strong base and it supports me to go ahead to make things happen. My team is like little nuts and bolts that make up a big machine, which is my life.

Brazil's indigenous people and the environment were also acknowledged in this process.

My field is nature: The richness of nature is my refuge. Any place where there is a bit of water, a bit of light, and something alive, I feel happy. I love to hug a tree, it revives me, makes me strong ...

My symbols are the sun, the water, and the moon ... I like to fight for the primitive aspect of the environment like our indigenous people, who respected the harmony of nature. The indigenous people do not make pollution because they know they will need the environment. They just take what they need but with respect.

ACHIEVING GOALS

I asked the group to list, on a different sheet, which goals they had already achieved in Australia. I showed a video of my favourite goal, made by Marta³ in the game against the USA in the last Olympic Games. It was a remarkable goal – first, because it was scored by a woman and there is still discrimination against women who play soccer professionally, and second, because it was just incredible the way she tackled the opponents. There is no man who has scored a goal like that before! We then spoke about the group's favourite goals as well.

The group wrote their achieved goals on a collective sheet of paper. I did this intentionally, as I was hoping that people in the group who felt they had not achieved much yet would still see the sheet as a 'collective list', and would also feel included and empowered to keep going. The goals the group had already achieved included:

- learning English
- getting a driver's license
- completing a Masters Degree
- attaining a diploma
- independence
- finding a home
- getting a job
- making friends
- finding a boyfriend

- self-esteem
- confidence
- bigger connection with family
- maturity
- trips
- becoming a photographer, and others.

This process was very powerful. The students were very proud of what they had already achieved and could relate to the fact that every obstacle they had faced was not for nothing. I could hear the excitement and pride of this team. It is not usual for people to acknowledge little achievements like asking for a first job. In this way, each small step they had taken to be in Australia was acknowledged. One participant said:

We are all champions for being here today. Even with different stories, we proved if we want something we can do it. The simple fact of making it across the ocean already makes us champions. Coming from a poor country, it is a privilege to be here.

SKILLS IN 'TACKLING' PROBLEMS

We then spoke about the problems we tackled in Australia. We also documented this by writing on a common piece of paper – this was intentional as well, as the group could perceive the problems they faced as collective ones (see Figure 2).

Problems tackled included:

- attaining a visa
- discrimination
- hostility from others
- hard work
- humiliation
- difference of culture
- homesickness
- fear
- anxiety
- loneliness
- the language barrier
- isolation
- inexperience.



Figure 2. The group records the problems they have 'tackled'.

At the same time, we discussed the skills they had used to tackle these problems. I wanted to generate a document from this part of the conversation that could be used with other students who are facing the same problems, and enable this group to make a contribution to others. Drawing on Denborough (2008), I asked the following questions:

- What is the name of a skill/knowledge/value that helped you to tackle the obstacles you face in Australia?
- Can you tell me a story where this skill/knowledge/value has made a difference to you or to others since you arrived?
- Where did you learn it?
- Is this skill/knowledge/value in any way linked to your family or to your culture? Are there songs or images from your family/culture with which these skills, knowledges, or values are linked?

Here are a few examples of the stories generated in this process.

Friendship

Here in Australia, I have learnt a lot about friendship. I have a friend who called me one day at 1am. She was at the bus stop close to her house that was one and half hours from my place. She was scared because there were some strange people close by. I asked if she wanted me to go there even though it would take me one and a half hours to get there. She said: 'No, the simple fact of talking to you makes me feel protected. I just wanted you to know what is happening because you are my friend and I trust you'. Sometimes people think I am an idiot because I do everything I can to help people, and sometimes people do not

recognise it. But I believe if I do good things I will receive something back. I have faith in that if I help here, God will help me there. I come from a poor family and my mother always made sure we had everything we needed. She always used to say, 'It does not matter what happens as long as you are always honest and always have friends. If one day you are down, your friends will be there for you'.

Patience and persistency

Here in Australia, I think we are like an athlete on an obstacle course. You run and jump over the obstacle many times. Sometimes we fall down, stand back up, and keep going. I came to Australia in order to study my Masters degree. When I got here I saw it would not be as easy as I first thought. I had intended spending my first year studying English and the second one doing my Masters but I found out that the course was very expensive and to learn a second language was not that easy. To pay my Masters fee I worked as a cleaner and waitress; in Brazil I was an engineer. Sometimes I worked seven days a week without a day off. There was nothing better to help me learn my own limits. I was exhausted externally, but internally I was feeling very empowered. When my money reached my bank account I used to think, 'I'm getting there. There isn't much to go'. My hair was horrible, my nails were like horse hoofs, I was thin, but inside I would think, 'Wow, I can do it!'

In my first lectures in my Masters course, I did not understand what the teachers were saying. Their accent was very strong. I thought I had thrown my money away. When we had an essay to do, my friends who speak English as a first language would do it in one day. It would take me three or four days. Then my inner voice would say, 'Be patient, you are here and you can do it', and thank

God I did it! I think I'm a winner. My family is a family of champions which is where I got it from ... When my father was fifty he did a test to be a judge. There were only a few vacancies for people from the whole country. He came home with lots of books to study. I was thinking ... my God, do you think you can do it? He got the second-best mark ...

To finish our meeting, I asked the students to write on the timeline their next goal in relation to Australia and when they want to achieve it, to help map just some of the territory in the 'landscape of action' in the future (White, 2007).

FEEDBACK FROM THE GROUP

The feedback from the group about the Team of Life was very good. All of them agreed that the use of the metaphor of soccer was very positive because of its collective aspect. They said it was very useful to know that people go through similar difficulties and struggles but at the same time they have similar values and dreams. One of them said that it helped her to organise her ideas and talk about her experiences which she had not done before. They also enjoyed hearing each other's stories and were looking forward to contacting their Team of Life back home and sharing the importance they have in supporting them through hard times in Australia.

CEREMONY DAY

Later, we held a ceremony day where the stories collected from the students were shared with a second group of students in the same situation as the first one. I used the four categories of enquiry from the definitional ceremony map of narrative practice to generate responses (White, 2007). The process was very powerful for both groups for a number of reasons. First of all, there was a sense of collectivity between the two groups. Important aspects of Brazilian culture were acknowledged, as well as the importance of these values and beliefs in the participants' lives while living in a different country.

Some of the responses from the second group included:

'Listening to these stories just added to my understanding of how life is in Australia. I am not alone. We are all in the same boat. I have a sense that we are all connected and have a feeling of acceptance.'

'I can see that I am not alone. Listening to people going through the things that I am going through and listening to stories of people that have achieved their goals, makes me feel that I also can do it. It might take time but I will get there.'

'Today is a sad day for me, but being here helped me realise that I fell down yesterday, but I can stand up and keep going.'

Reflections of the first group after listening to the responses included:

'Sharing my story made me realise that I am a winner. Sometimes we focus too much on the negative aspects of life; talking about the positive aspects of our experiences is lifting my self-esteem. I am going back to Brazil and I will take it with me.'

'To hear that my experiences here in Australia are important to others is empowering to me. Everything I have been through in Sydney showed me how strong I am, and it is good that it also helps other people to be stronger.'

At the end of the ceremony, a certificate was given to the participants acknowledging the goals they have already achieved in Australia. The achievements of some of the members of the first group, who were experiencing the reincorporation phase, are now inspiring those who are experiencing the separation and liminal phases. Therefore, the first group experienced a *sense of contribution* to the lives of the second group members who are experiencing difficult times (Denborough, 2008). Many aspects of the stories of the first group resonated with the second group and gave them a new understanding of the experience of immigration, and inspiration to look forward to the reincorporation phase.

The above process made it clear that knowing what is ahead during the process of immigration contributes to one's preparation for the journey. People who are starting their lives in Australia and who are in moments of confusion, shared the importance of knowing what they still need to overcome.

IMMIGRATION AND THE 'MIGRATION OF IDENTITY'

When working with substance users, White (1997) talks about the importance of mapping the challenges that users will be facing during their 'migration of identity'. He highlights that, before stepping into the separation phase, it is important to prepare them for the experiences of confusion, disorientation, and despair of the liminal phase, and supporting them to see these experiences through to reincorporation can be very significant to these groups. When working with people who are starting a life in a new country, it might be appropriate to talk about these stages, and try to identify with the person which one they may be in, if this metaphor fits for them. Also, it is important to identify the skills, values and beliefs that these people can take with them into their journey, as well as special support people that can help. In my experience, the Team of Life can be very useful during the process of identifying these values and supportive people.

Exchanging stories between two groups can also be very helpful in mapping these rites of passage. By listening to other stories, people are exposed to accounts of what to expect during the immigration 'migration of identity' and a sense that other people have taken the journey and have made it through hard times. Using part four of the Team of Life, tackling the problems, can be helpful for immigrants to name some of the things they will face. As mentioned above, I asked the students to write on a common piece of paper the problems they have already tackled, but it also could be helpful to document the problems they think they will need to tackle in the future.

It might also be useful to plan in advance a ritual celebration that will mark the person's arrival at the reincorporation phase, and it may be useful to find people to witness their intentions at the beginning of the journey. In our next meeting, the first group and I will co-lead the Team of Life for the second group. Everyone is very excited about it.

At this meeting, we are also going to celebrate the arrival of one of the members at the reincorporation phase who is going back to Brazil after finishing her Master's Degree.

CONCLUSION

Using narrative methodologies to create conversations with Brazilian people living in Australia has been very important in supporting each other in our journey. The Team of Life, in particular, is very powerful in generating these connections. The group members have shared with me that talking about their values and hopes, and acknowledging their achievements, has helped them to look forward. The disorientation and confusion of the liminal phase becomes easier to manage when people can see hope in the future and when they feel they are not alone. Inspired by the stories of others, some of the students who were quite sad, confused, and thinking of giving up, have already taken some new steps.

This group has created a life of its own and the members are extending their connections beyond the group. They are helping each other in their day-to-day activities, including finding accommodation, immigration issues, and finding jobs. Members of the group met at a Brazilian festival and many other people were invited to join the group. We are also involved in rescuing aspects of our culture that were being lost in our isolation. The group continues to meet fortnightly and we still refer to the documents that were generated in our first session. The stories are being shared with new members of the group and people outside the group as well. The sense of contribution grows each time that these stories are shared.

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NOTES

1. The use of the 'rites of passage' metaphor was suggested by David Denborough and it gave a richer frame to my work.
2. The students gave me permission to share their stories and photos in this paper.
3. To watch Marta's goal, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzWsl7sbo7c>

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