Narrating Experiences of Victimization: emotions and micro-politics[1]

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Introduction

This paper analyzes relations between morality, otherness and violence. Its object is the set of emotions mentioned in narratives of victimization experiences in one specific kind of urban violence: residence robberies. Theoretical framework is that of the anthropology of emotions, drawing upon "contextualism" as an analytical trend, due to its emphasis on emotions' micro-political capacity (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990).

Methodology is based upon in-depth interviews. Data analyzed is a set of eight interviews conducted with three couples who have been, husband and wife together, through experiences of having their residences robbed while at home. Two other women who have been through similar experiences in the company of their husbands were also interviewed (their husbands did not agree to be interviewed). They belong to different age groups: the couples are 84/85, 55/52 and 43/42 years old and the two women are 66 and 50 years old. They all have children, namely ten (first couple), two (second couple), one (third couple) and two (each of the other two women). The first couple lives at a middle-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro's north zone; the two women and the second couple live at the city's south zone and the third one at Barra da Tijuca (a well-known area inhabited by emergent middle and upper class groups). Among the men, there is a retired public servant, an engineer and a manager at a multinational corporation; among the women, there are three housewives, a *marchand* and a small enterprise's business woman.

The paper focuses on a standard narrative used to refer to these experiences, emphasizing the way perpetrators are portrayed and the feelings victims say they had for them. Argument is developed along three sections. In the first one, theoretical assumptions are discussed with special attention devoted to: a – main trends in anthropology of emotions, according to Lutz and Abu-Lughod's (1990) sketch of the field; b – the concept of "micro-politics of emotion", that is, emotions' ability to translate, into individuals' subjective experience, macro-level aspects of social organization; and c – analysis of particular emotions in light of this micro-political ability, e.g., sympathy, disgust, contempt, and humiliation.

[1] A first Portuguese draft of this paper was presented at the 33th Annual Meeting of ANPOCS, held at Caxambu, Brasil, October 2009.

The second part approaches interviewees' narratives, examining the way they represent perpetrators. Emphasis is on attitudes and characteristics attributed to them, in an effort to identify associations between "disorder", "dirtiness", "poverty" and "ignorance". The second part is dedicated to the analysis of emotions elicited by victimization, outlining a particular emotional dynamics between, on one hand, humiliation/fear/powerlessness, and, on the other, anger/contempt/sympathy.

1. Emotions, Violence, and Micro-politics

1.1 – Emotion as a Social Sciences' Object: sketching the field

Anthropology of emotions has undergone strong development since mid-eighties in the United States. Among the foundational works in the history of this research field's formation, Rosaldo's (1984) discussion on Clifford Geertz's interpretativist approach and its impact on the study of aspects of human experience such as self, affects, and personality can be pointed out as a necessary reference.

Based upon several ethnographic comparisons with material deriving from fieldwork among Ilongot people, Rosaldo establishes as anthropology's task to explain the way culture (in its public and symbolic dimension) interferes with individuals' psychological experiences. For her, the main point is the relation between emotion and thought; emotion would be shaped by thought, which by its turn would be permeated by emotional meanings (p. 143). In an attempt to clarify the frontier between thought and emotion Rosaldo suggests the key distinction lies on the kind of involvement of the social actor's self, thereof deriving her well-known definition of emotions as "embodied thoughts":

> "Emotions are thoughts somehow 'felt' in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin. They are *embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved'. Thought/affect thus bespeaks the difference between a mere hearing of a child's cry and a hearing *felt* - as when one realizes that danger is involved or that the child is one's own" (1984: 143).

Rosaldo goes on to state that emotions are social practices, structured by ways of understanding and conceiving of body, affects and person, which by their turn would be culturally defined. This certainty leads her to make explicit a feeling of unease with the assumption of emotion's universal nature.

This perspective, whose essence could be defined as a belief in the cultural construction of emotions, also guides Lutz's (1988) exam of Euroamerican conception of emotions. Built upon an effort to understand Ifaluk's emotions, her work takes on that self-reflective form

anthropologists are so familiar with. Lutz outlines a detailed pictured of Euroamerican notions about emotion, in which the key opposition would be emotion-thought.

This opposition would make itself explicit in Euroamerican views in several versions: in academic environment, as affect/cognition; in its romantic form, as passion/reason; and in common sense, as feeling/thinking. These dualities would share a common feature: they would be the individual's most authentic realities. It is there that true self would show itself, in a more authentic way than in speech or other forms of interaction (Lutz, 1988: 56).

Lutz's description of this Euroamerican view of emotions (referred to by the author as an "ethnopsychology") is centered around a couple of terms to which emotion is often opposed: thought and estrangement. When compared to thought, emotion is depicted as negative; when in relation to estrangement, emotion is portrayed as positive.

These works by Rosaldo and Lutz, because of the efforts they make to theorize about emotional phenomena having as starting points comparisons between different ethnographic data, can be placed as representatives of that theoretical trend Catherine Lutz herself, a few years later, would name as the "relativistic" approach to the study of emotion. In this trend, the central issue would be the distancing from the belief there would be something essential in emotions; on the contrary, emotions are viewed as cultural constructs of obviously variable nature.

This "relativistic" approach composes, along with two other perspectives to the study of emotions, a "map" of the ways to think about emotion which Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990) sketch in the introduction to an edited volume. These two other perspectives would be "essentialism" – which, as its very name suggests, would be defined by the assumption that emotions are universal facts, flowing from the intimacy of individual experience and inaccessible to socio-cultural influences – and "historicism" – which would share with "relativism" the idea that emotions are cultural constructs, only this time diachronically understood.

Having this "map" as a background, Lutz and Abu-Lughod propose a new approach which they name "contextualist". Its theoretical inspiration is Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse", understood as a kind of speech which configures that about which it talks, instead of establishing with it a relationship of reference to something which would exist outside the realm of speech. This perspective allows them to focus on the micro-politics of emotions and to discuss emotions' indebtedness to the existing power relations between social groups; for this reason, emotions would at the same time express and reinforce these relations.

Lutz's paper included in that edited volume would itself be an example of this approach. In her article, the author goes further in her own considerations about emotions'

place in Western culture, based on the assumption that "any discourse on emotion is also, at least implicitly, a discourse on gender" (1990: 69). Her focus is on the existence of a "rhetoric of control" associated to gender, which, according to her, would make discourse on emotions to be also about power.

Based upon a set of interviews conducted with North American men and women of middle and lower classes, Lutz analyzes the way the theme of control is present in their discourses. Her starting point is a paradox pointed out to permeate Western view on emotions: they would at the same time be "signs of weakness" and a "powerful strength". This paradox would be central to the ambivalence that would characterize female condition in Western thought: "emotionality is the source of women's value, their expertise in lieu of rationality, and yet it is the origin of their unsuitability for broader social tasks and even a potential threat to their children" (1990: 77).

Lutz also suggests there would be similarities between this way of conceiving of women's condition and Taussig's (1984) study on colonialism, in which he points out an ambivalence in colonists' view of natives; in such a view, fear and awe would alternately switch positions with disgust and denigration. For Taussig, this would be a process in which "a 'colonial mirror' reflects back onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations" (Taussig, 1984 *apud* Lutz, 1990: 77). Lutz sees in this comparison a chance to raise a hypothesis about the existence of a "paradox of will" that would be recurrent in domination relationships:

> "A 'paradox of will' seems consistently to attend dominating relationships – whether those of gender, race, or class – as the subordinate other is ideologically painted as weak (so as to need protection or discipline) and yet periodically as threatening to break the ideological boundary in riot or hysteria. Emotion talk, as evident in these transcripts, shows the same contradictions of control, weakness, and strength. Given its definition as nature, at least in the West, emotion discourses may be one of the most likely and powerful devices by which domination proceeds." (1990: 77-78)

This issue of the relations between emotion and power is at the core of other studies conducted by social scientists, who, although affiliated to different disciplinary traditions, also devote their efforts to the understanding of micro-political work performed by particular emotions, highlighting the way studies on the grammars of emergence and expression of these feelings can elucidate macro-level aspects of social organization. The next section is devoted to a brief sketch of some of these studies.

1.2 – Emotions in a Micro-Political Perspective

1.2.1 - C. Clark: sympathy and hierarchy

Clark (1997), drawing upon a conception of the relation between society and emotion as a two-way road in which emotions would be socially configured while at the same time contributing to the modeling of social structures, undertakes an analysis of the grammar of sympathy, that is, of the set of norms and logics that rule giving and receiving sympathy. For her, sympathy belongs to the set of emotions that establish bonds between people. Sympathy is also valued in Western societies as a "reaction to the other's misery". However, not everyone is equally entitled to sympathy in distress situations. This grammar of sympathy establishes boundaries between groups, drawing "a line between 'us' and 'them'" (p. 19).

Her effort concerns revealing "socioemotional economics" of sympathy. To Clark, sympathy is an asymmetric feeling which is at the same time made possible by occupation of different social positions and contributive to signaling and reinforcing that asymmetry between that who gives and that who receives sympathy. It is precisely this asymmetric nature of sympathy that leads her to this notion of an "emotional micro-politics":

> "Even when sympathizers do not consciously intend it, giving sympathy can have micropolitical consequences. Ironically, a sympathy transaction in the socioemotional economy may bring people closer *and* at the same time widen the social gap between them." (Clark, 1997: 228)

Sympathy presents yet an intimate relationship to morality, generating dramas in which cultural conceptions of justice and deservingness are made explicit. Giving sympathy demands an evaluation of the other's deservingness in relation to justice or injustice, being therefore a "morality-constructing act" (p. 22), for it is based upon a decision whether the other is guilty or a victim. To make up this decision, it is therefore necessary to answer two basic questions: "who should get *our* sympathies?" and "why?" (p. 22).

1.2.2 - W. I. Miller: disgust, contempt and boundary-drawing

In a similarly theoretically oriented perspective which emphasizes emotions' micro-politics, Miller (1997) undertakes an analysis of disgust and contempt as emotions which delimitate *status*. Their ways of establishing hierarchies, however, present some differences: contempt applies to subtle social distinctions, being able to assume several different appearances, while disgust "marks boundaries in large cultural and moral categories that separate pure and impure, good and evil, good taste and bad taste" (p. 220).

According to Miller, disgust is a feeling related to identity-building through exclusion of the other: "those who disgust us define who we are and whom we are connected with" (p. 251). Disgust also has a strong moral dimension; its daily presence shows itself as a kind of "moral idiom" one can recur to in order to express distress and frustrations. Among the "moral

vices" which can be expressed through this "disgust idiom" one could list hypocrisy, stupidity and abjection. Disgust would therefore build up "hierarchy in moral and social order", defining boundaries between communities:

> "Disgust has other powerful communalizing capacities and is especially useful and necessary as a builder of moral and social community. It performs this function obviously by helping define and locate the boundary separating our group from their group, purity from pollution, the violable from the inviolable." (pp. 194-95)

Among disgust's abilities, one could still count its power to explicit the kind of norms it is linked to. Miller distinguishes between two kinds of norms: those we accept discursively and those we submit ourselves to. The first kind of norms is "maintained by talk and discussion", while the latest "dominate our wills" (p. 201). Each kind of norms would have each own feeling related to its transgression. Guilt would mark deviance from "discursive norms", while disgust would be the feeling attesting to the transgression of the second kind of norms. As Miller states: "nothing quite pays homage to the grip of a norm than literally getting sick at the thought of violating it" (1997: p. 201).

When he turns his attention to the analysis of contempt, Miller focuses on the issue of its role in "the production and maintenance of social hierarchy and political order" (p. 206). To him, contempt is a mechanism that simultaneously creates and contests hierarchies, therein residing its political significance.

His analysis proceeds through a comparison between two kinds of contempt: downward contempt and upward contempt. Downward contempt is the one devoted by someone who depicts himself as superior in some scale of social organization to someone else thought of as inferior in the same scale; the upward contempt, evidently, goes the other way around. Miller's work revolves around the place upward contempt occupies in three societies: heroic society, the *ancient régime*, and democracy (1997: 207). He suggests that modern democracies favor the appearance of upward contempt, while at the same time making it difficult to be guiltlessly contemptuous towards those "below". His somewhat ironical hypothesis is that democracy is a political system that allows for "mutual contempts".

The micro-political perspective of emotions is made explicit when Miller states his view of the relevance of studying these feelings – disgust and contempt – to the understanding of social organization:

> "Contempt is the emotional complex that articulates and maintains hierarchy, status, rank, and respectability. And differentiated status and rank are the eliciting conditions of contempt. So what we have is a kind of feedback loop in which contempt helps create and sustain the structures which generate the capacity for contempt. And there is good reason to believe that the particular style of

contempt will be intimately connected with the precise social and political arrangements in which it takes place." (1997: 217)

1.2.3 – J. Katz: humiliation, anger and morality

In an interactionist approach, Katz (1988) undertakes an analysis of emotional dynamics that can be found in homicides, such as in the case of a father who beats up his baby because it does not obey his orders to stop crying, a woman who sets his husband on fire because he does not let her study or a man who kills his neighbor for parking in front of his garage. The author questions some explanations for these crimes traditionally offered by common sense knowledge, both in their "sociological" and "psychological" versions: socio-economic causes ("misery" as a reason for aggressiveness) or pathological causes (the perpetrator's "monstrosity"). Katz agrees to the fact that socio-economic or pathological aspects may even concur to these aggressions, but they cannot explain what happens in that particular situation; after all, the father may live in conditions of material deprivation or suffer from psychological disturbances, but there were other times when the baby cried and did not get killed for that, even though "misery" or "pathology" were present all the same. What has happened in that particular scene that might explain that line of action?

Katz examines the aggressors' depositions as registered by police officers and suggests that the victims' attitudes have been interpreted by their assailants, in those particular situations, as defying a higher "Good" which would be essential to their self-image, launching then a kind of "righteous slaughter". Re-read in light of this dynamics, the baby who does not stop crying is defying parental authority; the husband who disrupts his wife's efforts to study is disrespecting women's rights; the neighbor who parks in front of the other's garage violates property rights.

In all these scenes, Katz identifies an emotional dynamics that initiates in a "holistic" feeling of humiliation, as something that takes hold of the perpetrator and threatens his self-image, in a seemingly eternal way. Anger would come from a fundamental need to protect this self-image, acting therefore as a counterpoint to humiliation and prompting physical aggressions. Those physical aggressions do not, on the one hand, have as a main purpose to kill the victim (they can be halted by a change in attitude, such as an apology, for instance); on the other, the victim's death may not be enough, with the infliction of still other injuries to the body. These situations could thus be explained by an emotional complex made up of humiliation and anger, whose logics would be the preservation of a kind of morality conceived of by the perpetrator as essential to his identity.

2. Representing the Agressors

The way interviewees portray their aggressors is marked by images of "chaos" and "disorder". They are, accordingly to several narratives, "agitated" and "messy":

> "But they were very incompetent. I have a feeling they were not from (*summer village*). I think they took part in these (…) stupid parties that happen in the beach, where people do that kind of things, so dirty, so noisy, everybody does whatever they feel like right there in the middle of the street, it is a general mess." (Rafael)[2]

> "Our wardrobes have sliding doors. All we could hear was that noise, ploft, ploft, because we have four bedrooms, there, and everything was so noisy, and then we heard them tearing up those sheets made of nylon, not of pure cotton, and I said 'my God, what is that?'." (Magnólia)

> "And then I got really mad, you know, because they were there, throwing cigarettes at the floor, you know, messing everything up, tearing all our clothes, taking my coat which I loved, the one my husband had given me in our honeymoon…" (Joana)

The assailants' depiction may occasionally go even beyond "disorder" to include "dirtiness", as in Rafael's quotation above or in the dialogue below:

> "They then took a long time. Because they ate, they opened the refrigerator, made a huge mess, a terribly loud noise.
> They were filthy, weren't they?" (Magnólia e Rafael)

There are other moments when assailants are individually depicted. On such passages, there is a frequent opposition: "agitated" *versus* "calm", this "agitation" being frequently associated to drug consumption. A few examples:

> "But... you know... being specific, there were four assailants, one of them was clearly the leader, he was a very balanced guy, he had a gun when he came in but as soon as he realized the situation was under control, he got rid of the gun.
> *What did he do with it?*
> He gave it to the other guy, I don't remember it exactly, but he did not keep holding it. And there was another one, he was totally hallucinated, he walked around with two guns, he pressed the tv's buttons to change channels with the gun, you know…" (Luís)

> "*What do you remember about them?*
> They were very agitated, among them, you know?
> *How old were them, more or less?*
> Oh...they were pretty young. There was the chief, he was very neat, he dressed very well, he was black, handsome, thin, he was not…thin, tall, handsome, a handsome guy…he was calmer. He was the boss. (…) I saw four of them. There were four of them inside, but there was another one outside (...) I was wrong, there were five assailants, but these ones who were inside the house with us, they were more agitated, but the chief was not. They were agitated, they smoke, they kept saying 'we have got nothing to lose', and they kept laughing, very nervously."

[2] All names are fictitious.

(Joana)

"There were three of them. Two of them were even good-looking and there was the oldest one, he seemed to be sort of drugged, he was very agitated, and they wanted more stuff. I said: 'No! We do not have anything, we do not have jewelry or anything', you know?' And they...We saw they were searching the whole house, you know?" (Vania)

"The other ones were very mean. They put the gun right here, they pressed the gun against your head. This one did not do this, he never did this. The one who did that to me pointed it from a distance, but I felt he was not doing that…He was not going to do it, that was the feeling I got. For some reason I trusted him better. And he was not on drugs. One of them certainly was. The other two were not. One of them was very calm." (Ana)

"I guess the most aggressive of them was in charge. (…) The one who was the most organized, he said that if we behaved well everything would be fine, during the robbery they did not act like that. You know? He gave us a hint that everything would… that it would be a calm robbery, but they did not keep from intimidating us, from threatening us, neither from this kind of violence of tying us up, of putting guns against the head. I think… You know, I think the difference between them was the role they played. Their personalities, maybe the youngest was a little more aggressive, you know?" (Guilherme)

I have quoted here this long sequence of excerpts taken from seven different interviews in order to emphasize the significance of this "disorder" issue in the way victims portray their assailants. "Disorder" is occasionally associated to "filthiness", in a kind of symbolic bond that evokes the classical definition of dirtiness as something which is "out of place" (Douglas, 1976). This depiction also brings us back to Caldeira's (2000) discussion on violence as a kind of "disorder", clearly identified in the universe she researched through a narrative strategy which initiates by describing daily situations suddenly disrupted by the emergence of violence.[3]

A second trait in these depictions is the association of assailants to poverty:

"All of them were middle-class, but one... one of them maybe belonged to a C class, poorer, but he was not someone about whom you could say: 'No! These are deprived people, they come from, they were born…in a very difficult situation. They were not like that, all of them had, maybe they were even somewhat educated, they could tell that painting was by Monet.
And you think that would have made any difference to you?
Yes... You know, it would have been less surprising. I think the difference was the surprise, to realize they were people who had some education, at least a high school degree. The boss was even in college, you know? He had not graduated yet, but he was there. Taking his courses… It would have been… I would have been less surprised, but in a kind of rational explanation. See, he needs it! But that

[3] This kind of narrative strategy is also present in my data, as commented elsewhere (Coelho, 2006).

> was not the case. The difference would be being stroke by this expectation I had that people who commit robberies are people…highly deprived, who come from very difficult situations, who have had no opportunities in life, and crime would be a rational consequence of this social environment they live in, you know? But I had no clue whatsoever that was the case with them. One of them, you know, he practically lived at (*a street known by its luxurious residences*)." (Guilherme)

Guilherme's narrative makes explicit an expectation that in the other interviews is only implicit: the bond between criminality and poverty, where material deprivation is conceived of as a basic motivation for robbering. This association is more subtle in other passages, occasionally binding together poverty, criminality and "slums" or "suburbs"[4], in a kind of relationship largely established by common sense knowledge in middle and upper class groups in Rio de Janeiro

> "...it was a middle-class group. I mean, two were high middle-class, two of them. None of them lived in slums, the other two were…middle-class… one of them low middle-class, the other one was poor, but none of them lived in slums. (…) this one was the only black one, the other was dark, the one who was downstairs, one of them was dark and the other one was white. And… one came from (*a street known by its luxurious residences*)." (Ana)

> "... the fear I had was that I saw myself, you know, abandoned there, in some suburb, raped, shot down, or dead, I saw myself in my head, thrown in some kind of hole…" (Joana)

This association between violence and class differences is noticed in these narratives in yet another way, this time even more subtle: speculations concerning the reasons their residences would have been chosen by the assailants. There are many passages in which the interviewees reveal suspicions, based on minimal clues, that people who had worked for them – and not by chance performing tasks of low professional formation and poorly paid for, such as gardening, cleaning or construction – might have, intentionally or not, gave away information to other people belonging to their social environment (defined accordingly to income and/or place of residence). These information would then have elicited coveting, therefore transforming them in targets for these robberies. A few examples:

> "Because this guy who cleaned the building, he was on vacation and on that day a new guy came, he was supposed to work there for a month and the syndic had hired him without even meeting him first (…) nobody noticed he got in and out, nobody knew him, nobody had seen him. We imagine it might have had something to do with him. That is the only explanation, you know." (Vania)

[4] In Rio de Janeiro the suburbs are residence areas mainly occupied by low middle-class or low class groups.

"But in the other one (*another robbery she suffered*), I knew they had studied our house, they knew there was stuff there, I thought it was due to maid's talk, because maids usually love to boast about their housewives being richer than their friends' housewives. She must have said something (…) because there was a maid who worked in our house (…) she was very impressed by what we had… you know? And then I thought that, at my mother's house, they knew there was something." (Joana)

"There was something... we had had very large repairs done in our house and we had hired a contractor. And we were here and the maid was there. And then she told us that the house was full of people during the cleaning period, it was a general cleaning, general painting, in and outside, you know… and the maid said 'oh, these two guys, I think they have worked here, because they have the same kind of body'. But we could not be certain of that." (Magnólia)

"And there was still another problem because we hired a man to pick up coconuts, we have some coconut trees at our house. And this man took a boy of about thirteen years old, but he was like a dwarf, but he was thirteen years old, to help carrying the leaves, this kind of thing. And our dog was at the yard with them, because it is a very sweet dog, he always came when we called him, that sort of thing. And at a given moment… and Rafael has this habit of keeping his money in his pocket, he does not carry a wallet. And when he has to pay for something, be it a cab, be it an offering at our church, any sort or payment, he pulls all those bills from his pocket and starts sorting them out. The coconut man saw that when he payed him, the boy saw it too. And there was this moment when someone said something about the dog and the boy replied 'this dog is no good for nothing'. And then we were there with that problem, an old couple, a no-good dog and a man who had in his pocket…word must have spread…I mean, this is just a thought of mine, you know? And I have talked to some of my children and all of them think that it is really possible that… I don't mean that these people came to our house, but they may have said something to other people there at (*an area at the summer village*) who may have something to do with Baixada…[5]
And this area, how is it, is it a middle-class area?
No, no. It is sort of...there is a lot of... some slums.
More deprived.
Yes, there are some shops.
A lot of shops.
But it is a very, very low middle-class..." (Magnólia e Rafael)

This explanation to this kind of violence which associates it to a rigid separation between social classes is therefore based on a bond among criminality, poverty and area of residence. It is particularly clear in this last passage, in which the couple imagines the existence of a network which would connect people who live in an area where there are "slums" in a summer village to people who live at Baixada, who would then have gained access to information about an alleged "richness" attributed to them by a gardener. This logic seems to

[5] "Baixada" is a metropolitan area next to the city of Rio de Janeiro largely associated in middle and upper classes' imaginary to poverty, violence and criminality.

connect these interviews to the "despotic" discourse on violence, following a typology elaborated by Soares e Carneiro (1996). The "despotic" discourse would present, among other characteristics, the assumption that there would be urban loci of violence, basically identified with the "slums".

The third and last aspect of this depiction is the *ignorance* victims attribute to their aggressors. This ignorance is not, however, explicit as in the case of poverty, disorder or dirtiness. It is not nominated, being instead suggested by depreciatory or even ironical comments made *en passant*:

> "They have sold, they must have sold it for any price...they must have sold it, because there are things which have a high value and there are things which are worth nothing, you know. I deal with this kind of thing, antiques, jewelry…and sometimes you look, I see it in weddings, all the women are wearing jewelry, they look wonderful, but there are some really expensive and others which are worthless but cause the same effect, it is a diamond in which there is charcoal, the other does not, you see… you learn that…
> *And you think they sold it for any price because they did not know its real value, or for not knowing where to sell it...*
> I think it is because they do not know the real value and also because they have to submit themselves to selling to dealers who are not good dealers, who are also thieves, and who are going to buy, who are going to make money at their expenses." (Joana)

> "Each thing I remembered I had I thanked God for that. And there were some things they wanted and some they didn't. So… they were delighted with foolish things, for example, a backpack, a traveling bag, you know? Nobody noticed that because Guilherme barely used it. They found it great, wonderful, they took it, but they left other things which were maybe more valuable. Like a golden watch.
> *Haven't they seen it?*
> They have, I gave it to them, but they didn't want it, they didn't understand, so..." (Ana)

> "Oh, there is something interesting, when it was my turn to go to my room to show them my stuff, I could then warn them there was a gun in there, I had a gun I kept under the bed. I showed him the gun, I pointed to him where it was, he took it, by then we were both in my bedroom, standing each one by one side of the bed. He then took my gun, put it in the middle of the bed and said: 'let's see who is faster', with his gun in his belt. And I said 'no, I won't do it, this is not my *métier*, and I then regretted having said that because I had to explain to him what *métier* meant, you know?" (Luís)

> "And then they started to pick at my stuff, they took my id. By that time I had a high post and had a special id. I said 'this is it. I'm done'. But they were illiterate, fortunately. And he looked at my id, he kept looking at it and said 'you must be one of those people who can talk to the president anytime you want'." (Rafael)

These quotes allow us to notice an effort to establish the narrators' superiority concerning a cultural level depicted as inferior: aggressors are illiterate, with limited vocabulary and unable to recognize the value of the very same things they wish to steal. This effort is suggestive of a kind of *contempt* interviewees would demonstrate toward assailants. This is the hint that takes us to the next section.

3. Interviewees and their Feelings Toward the Assailants

The narratives are permeated by expressions concerning emotional experience throughout the robberies. Contempt, only alluded to in those passages who refer to the assailants' alleged "ignorance", is made explicit in other moments, particularly in comments about the interviewee's superior economic situation.

> "... he said to me (*mimicks an order*) 'give me your cell!'. Then, in order not to be without a phone, he had not searched me, I took my cell of my pocket and gave it to him. A beautiful cell phone. A gift she gave me. The one I have now is lousy. That's great. When I give this phone to a robber he will say 'poor thing. Keep it, sir.' (*laughter*). 'I don't want that'." (Rafael)

> "The only thing they took from her (*her daughter*) was her cell phone's chip. For us not to be able to communicate. She…they… 'Her cell is much worse than mine!'. Guilherme, then, at that time we thought, I thought to myself: 'mine was bought and yours is stolen, but that's alright!'" (Ana)

> "... they went like this: 'Yeah, these people there, this middle-class building, these people have got nothing!' I said: 'Yeah, kiddo, there is nothing here. My husband is a public servant. How much do you thing he makes? If you want to rob a place full of money then go look for a place where there is wealthy people. Here in this building everybody is broke. You won't find anything expensive here.' That's what I told him." (*laughter*)

The ironical style used to tell these moments, the internal dialogues, the jocosity, they all suggest the interviewees rejoice in this self-proclaiming as people who do not own much. That is what Rafael seems to be doing when he laughs while imagining the "pity" the robber would feel for him when he saw how cheap his cell phone was; that is also what Ana does when she replies, in an internal dialogue, the robber's observation concerning her cell phone, emphasizing she had means of her own to buy it; and then there is Vania, delightfully reproducing the conversation she had with the robbers when she told them she had nothing valuable.

But how can this *self-proclaiming* as poor or poorer than the other work to claim a hierarchically superior position? I emphasize "self-proclaiming" because it is obvious in other passages (including those already quoted earlier about the "poverty" of the robbers) that the

interviewees perceive the robbers as poorer than themselves. What kind of work does this self-proclamation perform then in a subjective level?

In his classical essay on gift-giving, Mauss (1974) analyzes the *potlatch* ritual performed by northwestern American tribes. In this ritual, huge amounts of goods are destroyed in an effort to claim social prestige and to gain power: if I destroy it, I do not need it, and if I destroy more things, it is because I have more things, and therefore I am more powerful and superior to the other. By laughing at the idea that robbers might think of them as materially deprived the interviewees place themselves in a hierarchically superior position. "I have so much more than you do and I am so sure of it I don't even need to show off, I don't even care about your assumption that I am poor": they perform, through speech, a discursive *potlatch*.

Úrsula sums up this general "mood" explaining she does not react to robberies because she needs to protect her life, for she has a lot at stake, while the robbers do not have much they could lose: "I do not react to robberies because I think I have a lot at risk, you know? And they do not."

These comments, put together with those about the robbers' ignorance, suggest the victims address a feeling of contempt towards their aggressors. If we now turn back to Miller's (1997) analysis about this feeling's ability to establish hierarchies, we can then identify the first feature of the emotional dynamics that characterize these victimization experiences: an effort to re-establish, through a feeling of contempt, a superior place in a subjective level.

Contempt is not, however, the only feeling able to perform that. Sympathy, as Clark (1997) shows, is a feeling which has this very same micro-political capacity. Sympathy is also present in some passages, as in this excerpt from Vania's narrative:

> "You feel shocked when it happens, you feel pity, but nothing really important.
> *Do you feel sorry for these guys that robbed you? What do you feel for them?*
> Well, when it happens you get pretty upset, you know? My husband went like this: 'I wanna memorize their faces, because if one of them is ever taken to the hospital I will say: "Hey! Do something about it!"' I mean, he said that, but I think I would too. At the time. I do feel sorry for them, because they are poor things, they are… they are people who have got nothing… I think they do not have love. There is a total lack of love in there. So, those are people who've got nothing. And they have nothing to lose, not even their lives, because they are risking themselves and they are not afraid of anything." (Vania)

Úrsula talks explicitly about yet another feeling: powerlessness. Her narrative establishes several relations between powerlessness, fear, anger and pity:

> "One of them was really tall, you know? And he said, this one with whom I got into the closet with, he said, he was the one who kept threatening us all the time, he was the one who dropped the bullets from his weapon, he went looking for them, he was dark, you know? He was tall, and he said he was on probation, he was stealing so he could eat, you know? He said he had a four-month old

> daughter and no money, he said he had tried to find a job but when people found out he had been in prison he had been fired, he said he was stealing so he could eat, you know? (…) This one I felt pity for him, one feels sorry for them, you know?"
>
> "This guy who was with me in the closet, you know, when he got out he made a lot of threa...He kept looking at me: 'You'll see!' You know? These kind of things. And then you get scared, I mean, you get a kind of feeling that is sort of mixed, it is pity mixed up with fear, you know? And also with a sense of powerlessness, because you see, the guy got in there, what is he going to do?"
>
> "At the moment I do not feel anger, you know? There are people who say: ' You did not feel anger? Did you not feel like grabbing a gun and shooting everyone?' I don't do that. You see? I did not have this kind of feeling. Mostly I felt sorry for them. The lieutenant said to me: 'I can't believe you said that. You are saying he is not guilty!' I told her: 'but I cannot lie to the judge!' I even said to her: 'Can't you see his mother is there? Don't you feel sorry for her?!' You see? What led him to this? Because if a son chooses to go the wrong way, either it's drugs, or something else, rich or poor, the family is always to blame. Because the family did not know how, you know? There was something missing, you see? Because it is not possible for someone to be born with an evil nature, you know?"

The first two excerpts show pity as something that derives from fear and powerlessness concerning the threats made; in the last one, pity is an alternative to the anger that might be elicited by threats. When this is the case, the logics implicit in this emotional dynamics is a conception of causality in which the origin of the aggressor's behavior would be extrinsic to his consciousness (his "nature"). In the above mentioned analysis of sympathy, Clark (1997) comments upon the existence in the United States of a "sociologization" of the conceptions of responsibility for one's own actions, for the individual would not be guilty of anything since he would be constituted by macro-level conditioning factors.[6] That is precisely the kind of logics which seems to inform Úrsula's reasoning: "guilt" never lies on the individual, but always on the social environment that forms him and orients his actions.

There is one last passage that reinforces the role played by pity in this emotional experience of victimization. After we had "officially" concluded the interview and turned off the recorder, Joana said that, until she was robbed, she lived as if she were in a state of "anesthesia", as if she did not "see people". After she was robbed, she began to "feel sorry for *them*".

She does not nominate who are these invisible people who, when noticed, elicit pity in her. We can only deduce who they are through her associations, for she goes on by telling a

[6] This issue of the relationship between one's responsibility by one's misfortune and the eliciting of sympathy is also addressed in other analysis of this feeling in other historical and cultural settings, as for instance French's analysis on attitudes toward amputees in Cambodian refugees' camps (1994).

story about someone she meets by chance in the streets who she had never noticed had worked as a maid at her house. She concludes: “to me, she was only a detail in my life”.[7]

I have began analysis of these narratives by pointing out the existence of a bond between violence and poverty, which would be related to perceptions of differences between social classes. This association reappears at this point with this emotional nuance: the “other” who robs her is the very same “other” who works for her, and who, when noticed, generates a feeling of *pity* for his condition that substitutes for the original indifference. This pity would establish a hierarchy in which she, the interviewee, occupies the superior place. Joana’s pity seems then to perform that micro-political work which, according to Clark (1997), could be lined up among sympathy’s micro-political abilities: the establishing of borders between social groups.

This perception of the aggressor as an “other” of a different nature is made apparent in a statement Úrsula attributes to her husband, who would have said that to one of the robbers in an effort to convince him he had no guns or valuable things: “we are good people, man! We have nothing here! I never did any harm to anyone! I am a doctor! I treat people *just like you*!

And therefore not like him.

Conclusão

The analysis has shown there is a set of feelings that form emotional dynamics who perform several subjetive “works”. These victimization experiences elicit in the individuals humiliation, fear and/or powerlessness, which can, at least hypothetically, flow through three different “channels”: anger, contempt or sympathy. All interviewees make a similar “situation definition”: any physical attempt to react or attack the aggressors is not advisable, for it could put at risk their own and/or others’ physical integrity. That emotional dynamics Katz (1988) describes in which humiliation turns into anger seems then to be out of reach for these victims.

But the homicides Katz has studied are not purely instrumental actions: they are mainly expressive actions through which aggressors intend to recover self-esteem and re-

[7] Joana’s comments illustrate in a particularly synthetic way that “diagnosis” discussed by Soares of the “invisibility” that would characterize relations between the two sides of the “divided city” (Ventura, 1994) Rio de Janeiro would have become: “those ‘below’ are frequently unseen by those above, unless they are frightening, they bother or present some kind of threat, be it imaginary or real” (Soares, 2000: 41, my translation).

establish moral values understood as a kind of supreme Good. What is left, then, when the situation's definition seems to make this line of action impossible?

It is my suggestion that contempt and sympathy are feelings that can accomplish, at an emotional level, the same results physical aggressions do: due to their micro-political dimension, contempt and sympathy re-establish a hierarchy disrupted by the invasion of their houses, by the deprivation of their goods, by offenses and threats, by occasional physical aggressions.

These feelings, however, accomplish still something else: when related to a representation of the aggressors as "messy", "poor" and "ignorant", contempt and sympathy suggest we are faced with a perception of urban violence as associated to social classes differences, hereby understood in economic terms and/or areas of residence. It is precisely this hierarchy between two distinct "social classes" – to which "aggressor" and "victim" would belong – that violence would disrupt and these feelings would seek to re-establish.

Humiliation, fear and powerlessness form, along with anger, contempt and sympathy, an emotional complex permeated by a dynamics particular to these victimization situations, which can guide us towards the understanding of the subjective experience pertaining specific perceptions violence.[8] This set of analytical clues to the study of violence intends to further explore limits and possibilities for the sociocultural analysis of emotions, hereby taken, in this emphasis in their *micro-political dimension*, as promising roads to the investigation of themes of uncontested relevance of the social sciences' agenda, such as the various forms of urban violence.

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[8] I have elsewhere examined other emotional dynamics associated to different perceptions of violence, such as humiliation-courage in relation to a perception of violence as a condition of hopelessness (Coelho, 2009a); the triad anger-calmness-fear and its relation to gender (Coelho, 2006, 2009b); and the role performed by calmness as a discursive strategy of self-appeasing (Coelho and Santos, 2007).

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