

# Violent action among friends: an ethnographic reflection on processes of moral and emotional perceptions and justifications of conduct

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the murder of one young man by another, a childhood friend and neighbor, for a banal motive. It analyzes the trajectory of the victim and his family up to the moment of the crime, his death and the subsequent developments so as to understand the moral frames of reference and accountability of the actors in the recomposition of the victim’s family, the aggressor and his family in order to maintain and improve neighborly ties and friendship. This trajectory confers meaning to the practices, lends support to intentions and justifications, and is significant in terms of understanding the act that led to the crime and the efforts of the families to support the aggressor. It explores friendship, violent actions among friends, remorse, family and neighborhood bonds, and the emotional and moral codes that allowed the aggressor to reassemble the episode that led to the death of his ‘best’ friend. How does crime, through its unique and extraordinary aspects, transmute social and individual relations? What emotional aspects are in play and how does normal daily life resume, including the processes of mourning, repentance and the reconstruction of personal and social bonds between the affected families and the aggressor? How do moral practices and perceptions influence mourning, remorse and forgiveness?

**Keywords:** everyday life, banal violence, justifications, morality.

# Ação violenta entre amigos:

## uma reflexão etnográfica sobre processos de percepções e justificações morais e emocionais de condutas

### Resumo

Discute o assassinato de um jovem por outro, amigo de infância e vizinho, por motivo banal. Analisa a trajetória da vítima e da sua família até a cena do crime, sua morte e o curso seguinte para compreender os quadros morais de referência e prestações de conta dos atores na recomposição familiar da vítima, do agressor e de sua família para a manutenção e refinamento dos laços de vizinhança e amizade. Trajetória que confere sentido às práticas, suporta as pretensões e justificações e são significativas à apreensão do ato que levou ao crime e do empenho das famílias em apoiar o agressor. Explora relações de amizade, ações violentas entre amigos, arrependimento, laços familiares, vizinhança, códigos emocionais e morais que permitem ao agressor remontar o episódio que levou à morte do 'melhor' amigo. Como o crime, no aspecto singular e extraordinário transmuta relações sociais e individuais? Que aspectos emocionais atuam e como se dá a remontagem da normalidade cotidiana, como luto, arrependimento e reconstrução de vínculos pessoais e sociais entre as famílias afetadas e o agressor? Como práticas e percepções morais trabalham no luto, arrependimento e perdão?

**Palavras-chave:** cotidiano, violência banal, justificações, moralidade.

# Violent action among friends: an ethnographic reflection on processes of moral and emotional perceptions and justifications of conduct

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This article discusses the murder of one youth by another, a childhood friend and neighbor, for a banal motive. It analyzes the trajectory of the victim and his family up to the moment of the crime, his death and the subsequent developments so as to understand the moral frames of reference and the accountability of the actors concerning the recomposition of the families of the victim and the aggressor in order to maintain and enhance neighborly ties and friendship. This trajectory confers meaning to the practices, supports intentions and justifications, and is significant in terms of understanding the act that led to the crime and the efforts of the families to support the aggressor.

The study explores the friendships between the two youths and their families, the violent actions between them, remorse, the family bonds, the relations among neighbors, and the emotional and moral codes that allowed the aggressor to reassemble the episode that led to the death of his 'best' friend. How did the crime, through its unique and extraordinary aspects, transmute social and individual relations? What emotional aspects are involved and how does the return to daily normality take place, including the processes of mourning, repentance and the reconstruction of personal and social bonds between the affected families and the aggressor? How did moral practices and perceptions affect the mourning, remorse and loss?

The article is based on data from a broader study about the experience of everyday fears in the composition and reassembling of sociabilities in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba (Koury 2008). The study does not focus on exceptional fears as its analytical base, although these are involved. It looks at commonplace fears and the emotional and moral experiences in situations produced in the day-to-day play of relations and their vulnerabilities.

The article studies the justifications and forms of confrontation in which the individuals in question – proactive agents in configuring the relational and communicational alternatives – present and shape themselves: always in a tense and ambivalent manner. This allows the comprehensive development of viable options for searching for a return to a normative normality that was ruptured and affected by the 'lightning strike' of an extraordinary act,<sup>1</sup> which took them by surprise, changed their relations, and forced them to leave daily life in an attempt to restore 'living well' and the continuity of this everyday world fragmented by the violent action.

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<sup>1</sup> An extraordinary act is understood as a social action for which the consequences of its meaning go beyond the expectations of a given normative normality. An extraordinary act, therefore, disorganizes the moral positions and classifications of a social system, generating liminal interactional spaces and an enormous moral and emotional discomfort for the actors involved. The extraordinary act, when defined as an element of shame-disgrace, implies the loss of face that organizes the interactional flow in a given social event.

The text aims to produce a reconstruction, therefore, but in combination with justifications, apologies and the assumed forms of moral constructions and conceptions of what is just and 'good.' These forms of emergence are seen by the individuals marked by this traumatic situation (Jaspers 1974) as proof of overcoming the suffering caused by the unthinking and extraordinary act of a social actor in relation to the other specific relational figure (the victim) and to the families involved.

A traumatic situation is understood as a scenario in which bonds are engulfed by the relations established after morals have been exceeded by a given limit-situation, and in which the social actors involved find themselves in the midst of producing moral offenses and transgressions. This engulfing of the relations (Scheff 2016) reduces the cognitive-expressive capacities and possibilities for action of each social actor because of the constraints imposed on the individual self in a situation of group embarrassment to which he or she was subsumed, and where collectives and individuals are threatened by a loss of face.

Emotions, and in this sense, the social and moral bonds that form and inform feelings, are the results of tense and uncertain negotiations, highlighted by the transintentional and situated character of action and the contingent and asymmetrical nature of the communication of social contents by individuals in interaction. These problematic aspects of interaction are defined by Goffman (1956, 1967) as interactional vulnerabilities.

Goffman points to the dubious character of shame and social restraint: an "ashamed person" and a "shameless person" appear as expressions that indicate shame not only as a limitation to legitimate action, but also as an aptitude of the social actor for interactional play.<sup>2</sup> In Goffman's (1967: 9) words:

By entering a situation in which he is given a face to maintain, a person takes on the responsibility of standing guard over the flow of events as they pass before him. He must ensure that a particular expressive order is sustained.

The author also comments on the discomfort of copresence and about the emotional and social cost of the moral expectations projected in the interaction in the following terms;

Whatever else, embarrassment has to do with the figure the individual cuts before others felt to be there at the time. The crucial concern is the impression one makes on others in the present – whatever the long-range or unconscious basis of this concern may be. This fluctuating configuration of those present is a most important reference group (Goffman 1956: 264-265).

In this sense, Goffman addresses a vocabulary specific to situations of constraint in which the self is present, but not in 'play' due to the break with moral expectations in relation to the selves in play, which would constitute a traumatic situation. The interactional vulnerabilities indicate a constant need for the administration of situations of constraint, in which transgressions of borders and social hierarchies and of the system of positions of status/role/prestige/performance can cause the loss of face of the social actors involved in a given moral, expressive and emotional order.

Goffman (1956, 1967, 2012) is emphatic in his treatment of the *social situation*<sup>3</sup> and the *self in play* as constitutive elements of the face as an organizational principle of social traffic, which constitutes a fragile emotional and moral world that is repeatedly constructed. In this sense, daily interaction in

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2 See the work of Pitt-Rivers (1971; 1971a; 1977) on the question of shame in the formation of male and female selves in traditional societies, where shame appears as a warning of the limits and borders of legitimate social action and as an internalized constraint on the behavior of the social actors in play.

3 The *social situation* – as a class of events characterized by the copresence of social actors, temporal brevity, spatial limitation, behavioral indicators and reciprocally oriented actions in the context of speech turns, occasions, social assemblages and ritually initiated and concluded interactional exchanges – is organized as a normative, expressive and behavioral order and as a flow of social contents accommodated in a situational form. In the *social situation*, the line that the social actors construct with the other for themselves as a stabilized interactional standard of the self, as well as the *face* claimed as a positive social value based on the social attributes of this line, can be understood as elements of the socially integrated self.

a context engulfed by relations is potentially affected by occasions of sharp vulnerability, fragility, misunderstandings and the threat of breaches of confidence, and can generate limit situations and traumas that escape the control of actors in a communicational exchange and paralyze the social traffic.

The traumatic experience, once established as memory and resentment over the break in social bonds, can trigger a process of moral appropriation of the event classified as critical and responsible for the moral disorder experienced. In this traumatic space of interactions the moral entrepreneur stands out (Becker 2008, 2009) as a catalyst for the impositions of a moral project based on a reading and definition of a given situation. The limit situation and the trauma thus produce elements for the moral recomposition of the broken normative normality: they are windows of opportunity that allow the moral entrepreneur the opportune political, economic, social or moral use of resources for purposes of the moral crusade that is proposed.

Goffman emphasizes the emotional connection that the self develops in relation to its face, understood as a commitment to maintaining reputations concerning status/role/prestige and rights/obligations and to affirming and preserving identity performances and sensibilities. The face as a construct derived from the rules of the game and from definitions of the situation traverses subjectivity and is diffusely located in the flow of events of the social encounter, that is, in the symbolic space between the selves, in such a way that it can only be confirmed and recognized by the relational other in an exercise of reciprocity.

The reciprocal constraint, or daily shame (Goffman 1956, 1967; 2012; Scheff 2016) is the fundamental emotional element of moral order, regulating the possible emotional and expressive order. The line-face relation thus points to Goffman's concept of social as a system of expectations of expectations, in which confidence in oneself and in the relational other, derived from confidence in the rules of the game, is the basic operator of an interactional syntax that is permeated by vulnerabilities, risks and pathologies specific to the interaction.

The selves in interaction respond to the risks of the social encounters with strategies to keep the moral order flowing, that is, to preserve the face as the main organizer of the interaction. The social actors thus indicate that they have pride, honor and dignity in relation to the face that they sense as a property of the self, even though it is a loan to the individual and a form of social coercion and control.

In synthesis, Goffman understands interaction as a self-regulating, self-referential and reciprocal ritual, which emerges as a precipitate of specific intersubjective experience, which is always contingent, risky and dangerous. The structure of the self, therefore, is the result of the relationship of interdependence between line-face, with the preservation of the face being the fundamental principle of interactional order and the responsibility to defend the self, hence a sacred responsibility of the social actor.

In Goffman's words (Goffman 1967: 45):

Universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without. These rules, when followed, determine the evaluation he will make of himself, and of his fellow-participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings, and the kinds of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory kind of ritual equilibrium.

The social, from this perspective, is only possible in the interaction of self-regulating social actors, that is, those who morally and emotionally constrain themselves and others, producing emotional cultures and codes of morality, in social encounters. This self that stands out as a player in the ritual interplay of interactions also organizes an image of itself for the other and for the self, as a narrative of reputations and memory, as an individual line and face.

It is in this sense that friendship, as an intersubjective process that generates the codes of morality and emotional cultures, characterizes a social tie of strong moral requirements because it is founded on individual liberty, on loyalty, on trust and on the sharing of secrets and intimacies (Koury 2014). This relational *We* that is constitutive of the social bond thus conforms *individualities in tension*, in a game of hide and seek with the other that defines forms and limits of action; that is, it is a normative normality that is expressed in expected behaviors.

The relational *We* is understood as an *Organizational Microcosm, Vulnerabilized Frame* (Goffman 2012), *System of Trust and Expectations* (Giddens 2002) and also as a *Community of Suffering* (Turner 2013). The moral expectations created in the conformation of the social bond are guaranteed by strategies for controlling the self and the other, and by punitive practices of shaming and scaring the other.

Once these moral offenses and transgressions are produced – or thus imagined – in the transintentional and tense flow of the interactional game, a traumatic situation is presented for each social actor involved as a sense of shame and disgrace (Scheff 1990), that is, as the presentification of a memory and of a narrative that results in the destruction of the social bond, of the face of the group and of individual selves.

A traumatic situation can be recognized in moral entrenchment and in the feelings of humiliation and resentment that each relational develops in relation to the interactional context. The trauma also unfolds in a process of moral bankruptcy in which identity similarities and dissimilarities are confused in an interplay of self excuses and resentment and accusation of the other.

Resentment is thus shaped as a painful experience of accentuated moral decline, which is related to “a repetitive time that generates ghosts and hostile thoughts experienced through impotency” (Ansart-Dourlen 2009: 351). The resented social actor, in this sense, is found in a situation of deep engulfment that results from a trauma, an injustice, a breach in confidence and shame-disgrace that disrupts his space of relations and thus his ability to narrate the past and project the future.

This study adopts a theoretical and methodological Goffmanian analysis of the social experience formed, which gives meaning to the actions of individuals in their interactions and communicational interplay.<sup>4</sup> It takes the same route to understand the strategies, justifications and pathways used by the members of the families under study for their own actions and their results, and for the conformations that they engender for the return to daily life and the feelings of individual and collective ‘living well.’

The article analyzes, through the anthropology of emotions and morality, based on a Goffmanian perspective,<sup>5</sup> the murder of a 28-year-old youth by another youth, a childhood friend and neighbor, for a trite and banal reason, in a bar close to both of their residences, in the city of João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba state, in 2006. It discusses the involvement of the youths’ two families, the imprisonment, the judicial sentence passed in 2008, and the release of the aggressor in late 2013 for ‘good behavior.’

The article thus discusses the strategies developed by the family members to give continuity to the bonds of solidarity and friendship that had ‘always’ joined them<sup>6</sup> but became deconfigured by the murder of one of the sons through the agency of the other, and the problems involved in overcoming the marks of loss. These marks allow the reassembling of a daily life whose experience is no longer the same, but is felt by the individuals involved as another relationship, which is tense and always in reference to the extraordinary act that changed them and transformed their joint action in an everyday life that is charged, conflictive and burdened by negotiations and silences.

4 This route focuses on Goffman’s readings of Simmel, mainly his concepts of sociation and sociability, the intersubjective game and subjective and objective cultures.

5 The authors refer the readers to the work of Thomas Scheff (2016) and Gilberto Velho (1987) about Goffman’s importance for the anthropology and sociology of emotions and morality.

6 According to the words constantly repeated and referred to by all the members of the two families affected by the action that led to the murder of one of their members and the imprisonment of another.

It is based on the accompaniment of the victim and his family, his death and the subsequent trajectory. It is focused on understanding the family recomposition of the victim and the recomposition of the aggressor and his family, as well as the maintenance and enhancement of the ties as neighbors and friends between the families. It seeks to understand the act that led to the crime and the effort of both families to provide support to and restore the self-confidence of the aggressor.

The article explores the relationship of friendship and violence between friends. It focuses its analysis on family and neighborly bonds, and raises questions about the sense of loss and the moral codes that restructure and allow the aggressor to develop remorse and – with help from his family and their bonds as neighbors and friends with the victim’s family – recover from the act of extreme emotion that led him to kill his ‘best’ friend.

How do the crime and its respective moral appropriation (Becker 2008) transmute, as a singular and extraordinary aspect of daily life, the social and individual relations of the subjects involved in its composition as a social fact? What subjective and emotional aspects act in the events following the homicide and how does their reassembly take place in the return to *normative normality* of daily life, in terms of loss, mourning and regret, and as a reconstruction of personal and social bonds between family members and between the affected families and the aggressor? How do moral practices and perceptions work in this complex process of emotions such as mourning, regret and loss? These questions permeate the entire analysis.

### **The moral and emotional-relational context of the murder**

Since the year 2000, the Research Group in the Anthropology and Sociology of Emotions (GREM)<sup>7</sup> has been studying the relationship between fears and sociability, focusing its analysis on the city of João Pessoa, capital of Paraíba state, Brazil, under the coordination of Mauro Koury (Koury 2008). At first the study used a ‘snowball’ methodology in which one interviewed person led to others. In this way the research came into contact with various social layers, types of professional, forms of employment, religious and other connections, and with different forms of insertion in the city and lifestyles and types of work, which became part of the study.

This is how Arnaldo entered the study.<sup>8</sup> He was a security guard on a street in the elite neighborhood of Tambaú, in the city of João Pessoa. He was known as someone in the ‘whistle gang’: the name given to guards who received a monthly contribution from residents of a street or block and who spent the night on a bicycle (in his case) or a motorcycle, patrolling the neighborhood.

In most cases, it was a somewhat intimidating activity: the residents felt coerced into participating in the monthly contributions out of fear that they would be assaulted if they did not contribute. The activity was very common in the city in the 1990s and the 2000s. Currently, with pressure from security companies, and cheaper forms of entering the market, including the formation of small companies to patrol streets, the ‘whistle gang’ has fallen into decline and even extinction.<sup>9</sup>

Arnaldo had been employed by a security company but was fired. He said that he tried to enter the job market, first in other security companies, he took tests and left his resumé, but time passed and he was always told that he was on a waiting list and would be called when possible. He took odd jobs in nightclubs,

<sup>7</sup> In Portuguese, Grupo de Pesquisa em Antropologia e Sociologia das Emoções.

<sup>8</sup> The names used in this work are fictitious.

<sup>9</sup> The service is now conducted by small established neighborhood security companies that are cheaper and even found in lower income neighborhoods of the city. They have swapped the use of whistles for the horns on motorcycles. The contracts are by street or groups of streets where the employees of the security companies patrol at night on motorcycles, in uniforms that identify the company. When going down the street, they beep the horn to identify their presence.

at shows and restaurants, which is how he met some colleagues who spoke about “mounting a street security business.” One of his new colleagues knew about other groups and said that “it was possible to make some good money” each month.

Arnaldo said that he left the group after a few months because he felt he was not being treated fairly in the division of tasks and the monthly income, and decided to take on “a few streets there in Tambaú.” He explained:

Some former colleagues who worked in security and as doormen in nearby buildings told me that the region looked like it could be a good deal for me. It was a quiet region, but the people were very scared to go out because of poor lighting and the proximity to bars and the circulation of a lot of strangers. That’s how I got into the area (presented by one of the long term doormen or guards to one of the residents of a house in the chosen location).

Arnaldo worked for nearly three years patrolling three streets in a large block where there were a number of houses, but also a few apartment blocks and pressure from real estate developers on local residents to sell their homes. Many began to give in and negotiate prices for their homes with the builders and numerous lots were closed off, indicating that apartments would soon be built on the site.

While patrolling these streets, Arnaldo met Rita, a maid at one of the residences that he guarded. Over time they began to date and Rita became pregnant, around 2002 – the time when the researcher Koury met him – and they made plans to build a small annex behind his parents’ house in the neighborhood of Torre,<sup>10</sup> where they would live together with the coming child. His parents were happy about their son’s marriage; they liked Rita and the idea of having a grandson.

Rita was one of the youngest daughters of Dona Milagres, a woman who Koury had interviewed and whose family he began to accompany among the networks of people formed by her and linked to the city of João Pessoa. Rita already had two children from two previous relationships; one of them lived with the paternal grandmother of one of the fathers, while the other was ‘raised’ by Dona Milagres, with whom Rita had lived until then. Dona Milagres lived in the neighborhood of Varadouro in an old house divided into two homes. Hers was like one long hallway at the end of which was a somewhat larger space where the family gathered for conversations and meals. At night, mattresses were scattered on the floor and cheap cotton curtains made partitions to accommodate and give some privacy to family members.

It was accompanying Dona Milagres and her children and grandchildren, including in the specific case here, Rita, that the researcher met Arnaldo and some of his colleagues who were doormen and guards in local buildings, as well as Rita’s employer, his wife and family members, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Through Arnaldo, Koury had the chance to meet his parents, some neighbors on the street where they lived, and the man he called “my best and only friend,” Noé, who would later kill him.

Noé had been a neighbor and friend since early childhood, the son of a couple who were very good friends with Arnaldo’s parents. They had come to the city together from the interior and since then had been close, living in houses linked by a common gate in the internal wall to facilitate passage between the homes. The latter were thus open in type, not private homes, where the neighbors – or coresidents – could come and go at any time. All the spaces of the residences were shared by the coresidents who were in constant flux, and secrets were leaked and shared. As Arnaldo’s father once said, “we are closer than brothers often are. Hand in glove, we share everything from illusions to daily concerns, the chores with children to hard work and worship at the church, meetings and parties”.

<sup>10</sup> A traditional low-income neighborhood of the city of João Pessoa, PB.

<sup>11</sup> These people will not be studied here, and only referred to when essential to the argument.

It was within this family-community that the tragedy discussed here took place. We call the family-community the family nucleus composed of the two families joined by friendship and compaternity bonds, and by a sharing of everyday tasks and responsibilities that go beyond the home, work and religion to include common projects and projections related to the common good of the nucleus. Dreams, sadness, joy, plans, victories and failures are experienced within the community, in a spirit of sharing and strong personal bonds, forming a type of single collective face that embraced individual faces.

This family-community nucleation – which congregates the two families where Arnaldo (the victim) and Noé (the assassin) were raised and grew up as people – can be thought of within the traditional scheme of family. This scheme is based on the formative principle of a family as a unity composed of a couple and their children, but which in specific circumstances can aggregate other relatives or long term friends, as studied here, and that is formed as a specific network of rights and prohibitions, and a variable and diversified group of feelings, such as love, affection, respect, fear and others, in which the members of this nucleation, the family-community, are found joined together.<sup>12</sup>

At the time of the tragedy registered here, the two families were in a process of expanding their nucleus of intense proximity and personal bonds. The sons had grown up and become involved in romantic relationships with women they planned to live with in residences built in the backyards of their parents' homes. Noé was already in the process of building his extension and Arnaldo, after meeting and dating Rita, had told his parents he would build his home in their backyard, mainly upon discovering that Rita was pregnant with his first child.

There was a celebratory mood among the families because of the marriage of their sons, because of their decision to continue to live with the parents, and because of the arrival of new members: the two wives and grandchild. These members were considered a prolongation and consolidation of the alliance that had first joined the two couples and its continuity over subsequent generations.

The two friends-brothers helped each other to build their 'extensions' and celebrated and shared this new phase of life, with the new projects of adult life that they had in common. Noé worked as a glazier in his father's shop, which he would inherit, and thus felt stabilized in his trade. Arnaldo had been a guard for a private company, but was laid off, and had spent a few months without a job until he began working as a 'street guard,' known at that time in the city of João Pessoa, as mentioned above, as the 'whistle gang.'<sup>13</sup>

Arnaldo considered the job temporary but it provided a basic income that, combined with his girlfriend's salary as a housemaid, was enough to begin their life together, mainly with the help from the family-community in which they lived and trusted. The two families were in a "state of grace," according to Arnaldo's mother, Dona Etelvina. Noé's mother, Dona Geralda, complemented: "we were living a glorious time with our sons preparing to have families and the arrival of the grandchildren."

It is in this situation of trust and reliability, harmony and living well, amid a *state of grace* and a *glorious time*, that the tragedy took place. A tragedy in which a son from one family killed the son of the other couple – sons who were considered by their parents and themselves as more than friends and as more than brothers.

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12 The authors refer readers to the work of Lévi-Strauss (1986) on family nucleation in traditional families, and to other authors who have studied family nucleation among traditional Brazilian families, such as Willliems (1954), Nogueira (1962), Fukui (1979), DaMatta (1987), Fonseca (1989) and others.

13 Arnaldo was aware of problems related to the 'whistle gang' and spoke of the existence of 'bandits' in the group, but said that he was 'honest' and that "I am only in this line because I need work and it's difficult to find it." At the same time, though, he said he was lucky to have this 'side gig' because that is how he had met "the woman of his life," Rita. He added that the people who dealt with him at work, like Rita's employer, know him to be an honest and good man.

## Crime and banality

In 2007, the researcher Koury was at the city bus station when he heard his name called, “Professor, Professor Mauro...” He looked around and saw an acquaintance of Arnaldo and Noé who worked at a booth selling bus tickets. He went over, they shook hands, and he asked how the man was, but before he could say anything else, Arnaldo and Noé’s friend interrupted with a short and bombastic statement and narrative:

Professor, do you know... do you know?! Arnaldo died... Arnaldo from Torre, remember? [Yes, of course...! What happened?]. It was Noé, it was Noé who killed him and was arrested. His family, and Arnaldo’s, took him to the police for him to confess the crime... It’s been nearly a year!... [And Rita? And his parents...?]. They’re alive right? Rita had a boy, named Arnaldo, and moved to the house that Arnaldo was building for the two of them. Seu Raposo and Seu Pedro finished the house and she is [living] with them. It’s so sad. But they are alive!

That night the researcher went to visit Arnaldo’s parents.<sup>14</sup> Rita was at work and Arnaldinho (as his grandparents call him) was sleeping on the small sofa in the living room. Dona Etelvina was in the kitchen making coffee together with Dona Geralda. Seu Raposo opened the door and received the researcher with a big hug. Next to Arnaldinho, Noé’s father Seu Pedro was sitting in a chair!

Seu Pedro spoke right away as he greeted the researcher with a hug! “Great tragedy has struck us, professor! Great tragedy!” In which he was complemented by Seu Raposo: “Yes, it disrupted our lives... we lost Arnaldo and Noé is in prison... all because of an impulsive and thoughtless gesture. Something that happens to boys when they’re suffering.”

The evening passed quickly. They had coffee and talked about the incident, with apologies made on both sides – from the researcher and the two couples. The former apologized for learning so late about what happened, and the couples explained that they had tried to send news, but did not have his phone number and did not know how to find it. They mentioned the disruption in the life of the two families, who continue to be together, and according to them “closer and more friends than before.”

Before leaving, the researcher was advised by Dona Geralda:

In two days we are going to visit Noé in prison, if you would like to come with us, it would be good! Later, as always, we shall go to the cemetery to visit Arnaldo. It will be good for both of them and Rita has time off and will come with us. Then we shall come back and the professor will have lunch with us. How about it?

The invitation was accepted and goodbyes made with lots of hugs to end the night. The next day the researcher went looking for newspapers from the time, 25 May 2006, and found a small note with the headline “Man is killed by friend in a discussion over a woman in a bar in Torre, in the capital.” The small note began with the news that “in the early morning of May 24<sup>th</sup>, a man who was drinking in a bar in the Torre neighborhood, in this capital, killed another in a discussion about a dispute over a woman.”<sup>15</sup> There were also reports of other murders and attempted murders in various low-income neighborhoods of the city of João Pessoa.

Arnaldo’s murder was treated as one more crime for banal motives in João Pessoa. The short news report gave the impression that the two friends had fought over the same woman and for this reason one of them was killed. For the newspaper, it was an unimportant crime, a banal event, the kind mostly indicative of the gratuitous violence between men that is commonplace in the state.

<sup>14</sup> All the ethnographic data used in this work is taken from interviews and participant observation with the two families portrayed, both prior to the extraordinary episode that resulted in Arnaldo’s death, and especially after the resumption of contact with the families and with Noé, following Arnaldo’s murder. Long formal interviews and many informal conversations during the nearly daily stay of the main researcher among the families of the two young men, and with Noé, who was then in prison, formed a vital part of this process of accompanying and observing the resumption of contact between the families after Arnaldo’s murder, which led to the present article.

<sup>15</sup> *O Norte* newspaper, Thursday, 25 May 2006. No other local newspaper reported the incident.

On meeting the parents of Arnaldo and Noé, at six in the morning on the day that they were due to visit Noé in prison and then the cemetery where Arnaldo is buried, the researcher commented on the small article in the newspaper. Seu Raposo opened a bible and removed a news clipping. He showed the news article mentioned by the researcher. Rita was entering the house from the back door with Arnaldinho and a large baby bag. Dona Etelvina ran to the refrigerator and removed some bottles with milk and water, and from a cabinet took a bag with cookies and jars of baby food. Rita hugged the researcher, and in a tearful voice, showed him Arnaldinho and said: "...this is the result of our love, mine and Arnaldo's. It's the living memory of love for each other."

A small commotion stirred the room, soon interrupted by Seu Raposo who said it was time to go or else they would miss visiting hours. They locked the house and walked to the stop to catch the bus that would take them to the prison. On arrival there was already a line of people waiting for visiting hours to begin. Everyone got in line and about half an hour later the line began to move, each person was searched, the bags checked and entry granted. Then they met Noé: there was crying, hugs and kisses, requests for blessings for his mother and father and Arnaldo's parents. He kissed Rita and Arnaldinho and there was more crying. He looked towards the researcher and said:

Look what I did, professor! I disgraced my life and left a child who won't know his father... I killed my friend! How, how... a minute doesn't go by without me thinking of the disgrace that I caused my family, my parents and Arnaldo's parents, to him, Rita, to Arnaldinho... Ah! If I could go back in time, and fix all this... now I only have this endless, endless atonement.

Once again there was general commotion. Seu Raposo took the bible, opened it and, choking up, began to read a passage about repentance and forgiveness. They all embraced and exchanged news as a single sister-family, "which became even more united, by the tragedy that afflicted us," Dona Geralda said sobbing as all the others agreed.

The visit ended, and the group said goodbye to Noé, who hugged the researcher and quietly said that he would very much like to talk to him about what happened, he needed to talk. The researcher replied in a low voice that he would find a way to visit without the families. He looked at the researcher and shook his hand firmly.

Leaving the prison, the group took two buses to get to the Cristo Redentor cemetery where Arnaldo is buried. A small white marble headstone was engraved with Arnaldo's name and his dates of birth and death. On the left-hand side there was a small framed picture of Arnaldo smiling. "The last photo of Arnaldo just before he died. Taken by Rita," according to Dona Etelvina. They all looked at each other filled with emotion. Seu Pedro opened the bible and read some passages, and they all said amen in chorus. Arnaldinho cried and Dona Etelvina and Dona Geralda stepped back a bit and, with Arnaldinho in her arms, she went to the shadow of a tree, took out a bottle of water and gave it to the child. The men stepped away and Rita remained alone at the tomb and began to cry and declared loudly that Arnaldo was her husband and she loved him even more.

Half an hour later the group left the cemetery, took a bus to the terminal and another to Torre. Everyone was tired, the women went to the kitchen to warm the meal that they had made, lunch was served on a table in the backyard, under a large tree.

They talked about the day, about Noé's affliction, what to do for him to get his life back, about the church and the work in the community, about how beautiful Arnaldinho is, how smart and wise, how Rita is a good woman, how she made the families complete, how much they missed Arnaldo, aging, the *weakness* that this stage of life brings, then to little games and small talk. Late afternoon, the researcher said goodbye, accompanied with big hugs, as always, and left.

In the following months the researcher was granted special authorization to meet with Noé, and began to attend the prison at least once a week. He first made daily visits to the two families, then made weekend visits when Rita was off work throughout all of 2007. In 2008 they learned that Noé was sentenced to 20 years in prison from a phone call to Rita. In 2013 the researcher went with Noé's and Arnaldo's parents to fetch Noé at the prison gate. He was released for good behavior after completing one third of his sentence.

On the visits to Noé, the version about the event that culminated in Arnaldo's death gradually came together. It is the same version found in the court papers. In this version, Noé spoke of his involvement with Maria, which had been going on for four years, when they decided to live together. He spoke of his happiness and that of his parents, spoke of building an *extension* in his parent's backyard and of the event that 'broke him,' leaving him 'devastated,' when Maria came one night and told him she would live with another man:

...she didn't know how it happened, but it happened: she met him before she met me, he was away, then came back on vacation. He came on to her, she said that she was committed, but wound up giving in, they went out, drank, she went to bed with him, and this was going on for some time... so she thought it was better to tell me, because from what she said, she was ready to go live with him, in a city in the interior, where he lived and worked.

He continued:

I was stunned, disoriented, I thought my life was over. I thought of killing myself, of killing her, killing her new man. I thought of the shame that I felt and of the shame I would have telling my parents that I was betrayed and would not get married. I wanted to cry, but couldn't, I wanted to crawl into a hole and never come out. I went to Seu Zé's bar and asked for a beer and a bottle of cachaça and began to drink, drink and drink... I didn't want to speak to anyone... not even myself! My head was on fire, it burned, raged, my thoughts were confused: women cheat, but... [at the same time, a beloved woman] and now... what would I do without her... and I drank and drank.

[...] then all of a sudden, in the early morning, Arnaldo came, why did he have to go there? Why? My friend, my brother, my dear... he saw me, alone, drinking. He came up and said "what's happening Noé, this isn't you, let's go home." I pushed him and dragged him to a chair, I asked for a glass, I filled it with beer and said: "Maria left, we're through." "What! he asked. "She's with another man," I said: "She's been cheating on me for a while, and now, early tonight, when I left my father's glass shop, she appeared and told me everything: said that she had her bags ready to travel to the interior with him and live there with him... I'm devastated, I feel like an old rag."

Arnaldo then tried to console his friend-brother, he put his arm around him, saying that he would get over this 'vexation,' and asked him to come home, sleep, because "tomorrow is always another day." He told the owner of the bar not to serve him anymore and to "leave the bill, he'll pay it tomorrow." Noé wouldn't leave, and went back to telling the same story of betrayal and shame that he felt, about how his life would be after that, nothing was worth anything anymore. How would he tell his parents, and how "the neighbors must be laughing at me," and so on.

Arnaldo, according to Noé, became calmer and tried to calm down Noé, but Noé was more and more agitated:

Suddenly, I take a gun from my belt and put it on the table and start saying I would kill myself, at the same time I say that I would kill Maria and her man... Arnaldo said: "Stop the nonsense Noé, you aren't going to do that. This happens... it's sad but it happens... let it go guy. Why disgrace your life for a woman? Every woman is like that. From one moment to another this happens, it's hard to have a woman like our mothers [...]"

Why did he say that? I don't know what happened to me, I really don't know. My brother, my friend was trying to console me, take me home, asking me not to do something stupid, but, when he said that Maria was like the others and different from our mothers, in my head, at the time, I thought he was trying to say that Maria was shameless, a whore. I took the gun from the table and shouted: "What are you thinking Arnaldo, you're crazy. What are you calling my Maria? Do you want to die creep?" I was crazy, possessed, my anger, my shame, I passed it all to Arnaldo. Enraged I shouted and held the gun pointing it at his head... He didn't even say anything, and all of a sudden the gun went off, I pulled the trigger, the bullet entered his head. Arnaldo fell on the table and then on the floor. I killed my brother, I killed my friend, I killed the person I liked most in the world, I thought to myself, and left for the home of my parents and Arnaldo's parents. I arrived shouting: I killed him, I killed Arnaldo, he's in the bar, he's in the bar of Seu Zé.

According to Seu Pedro:

Noé arrived shouting in desperation that he had killed Arnaldo. It was very confusing, Geralda woke up frightened by the shouts of her son. We ran to wake up Raposo and Etelvina to see if Arnaldo had come home. He hadn't! We went running to the bar of Seu Zé, Noé fell on the sofa crying and shouting that he had killed Arnaldo. We got to the bar and Arnaldo's body was there in a pool of blood, fallen on the floor. Etelvina clutched her son wanting to give him new life, crying and crying, Raposo was pallid, he called me and said that we had to go back and get Noé to take a bath for him to say what really happened. So we left the two women with the body, asked Seu Zé to call the police and we returned home. Noé was still sobbing loudly. We got him and put him in the cold shower, we gave him coffee and he told us everything [that happened] until the gunshot. We got him, put on clean clothes and took him to the police station. There he told the officer everything and was arrested. Geralda and Etelvina took the body to the IML [Institute of Legal Medicine] and from the police station we went there.

Seu Raposo said:

The body was only released at nearly four in the afternoon. By then they already had a casket, and a space in the cemetery. Rita was told, poor woman, she had a big belly, she came crying and feeling ill. She held onto the casket until it was taken to be buried. Etelvina was mute, pallid, from time to time she would pass her hand through Rita's hair. Geraldo was in shock. She was still unable to understand what had happened: her son in jail and Arnaldo in a casket. The whole street was there, the church too, there were many flowers. The burial was held and everyone went home. Rita went to her mother's home. Our little world had collapsed.

### **"Our little world had collapsed": Shame-disgrace, loss of face and tragedy**

Seu Raposo's expression reveals the tragedy that had struck the two sister families that lived communally, trusting in each other, combined with daily gratitude for this social bond that had united them for many, many years. Union, respect and dedication to one another in times of joy and sadness were now put to the test by an *'act of madness'* perpetrated by one of the sons against the other son. Each was a son of the two couples, of the two men and the two women.

What would they do from then on? How would they face the other family and the other son, now the son of the other couple who had killed, for a futile reason, their legitimate son? "Our son, [who] only wanted to ease the madness that Noé was passing through," as Dona Etelvina explained on recalling this tragic moment, this limit situation that befell them. Seu Raposo spoke of the long conversations at the cemetery after Arnaldo's burial, with his wife, in the dark house, with the lights out, lying down "holding hands."

Seu Raposo described to the researcher a fragmented world full of anguish, after the *act of madness*, as he morally and emotionally classifies the tragedy resulting from the shame-disgrace and loss of face that made the world collapse in the homes where the two families lived the trust and gratitude of having found and shared their daily life. He spoke of the two sons, one his and his wife's, and the other of the friend-brother couple, who both sets of parents considered to be children of them both, considering themselves to be a single family with four parents and two sons.

He tells of the life of strong personal bonds and great trust between the couples, the daily life without great ambition and seeing the sons growing and becoming men:

We never had great urges to possess this or that: what we had was enough. What was important was to live each day as God wanted and to be thankful for deserving this. It was to see Arnaldo grow up, become a man, begin to work and find a life with a woman, have grandchildren. The rest we made happen with faith in God, but also with the love of Pedro and Geralda and Noézinho, as we called him until just recently. He was a good boy this Noé: he took care of his parents, he was a first class worker, helped, and little by little was taking care of his father's shop and Pedro already considered him a master glass cutter... [smiles].

In the narrative above he speaks of the moral significance that joined the couples and their sons. Moral significance is felt and expressed as a gift (Mauss 2003) [1950], as a moral association between parties joined by close social bonds that reveal at each moment the meaning and feeling of an interpersonal recognition, of care for the relational other, of obligations and gains not always stated, but perceived and gratifying. In this case, these bonds strengthened the trust and gratitude of the two couples and their children and augmented the sense of reciprocity and belonging between them, in a daily exercise of giving, receiving and retribution.

Interpersonal recognition and a system of trust and ontological security (Giddens 2002) now afflicted by the '*mad act*' of an '*enraged boy*' and the '*pain of passion*':

Then came the madness, the act of a boy enraged because of a woman who left him for another man! Drink and heartbreak never go together, the lack of control always leads to danger and it happened... but it happened with Arnaldo, who stopped there to convince him to end the madness... but it happened... boom, a shot in the head and there went my Arnaldo, and our Noézinho was imprisoned, desperate with guilt [...].

Two families that loved each other, who had good sons, were suddenly submitted to pain, and the worst kind of pain. The pain of one son killing the other, a brother, a friend, so close, it was good to see.

The murder of one son by the other, Noé, son of one of the couples of friends, crashed like "a rock on top of us." Seu Raposo recalls the scene experienced by the four of them, or five given that Noé was part of the tragedy that befell his son Arnaldo. He recalls the enormous shame (Goudsblom 2009) in the eyes of his friend Pedro. He recalls how he gained strength to not fall apart and to take immediate measures to control and put in order the disarrangement that had taken place in all of their lives. Arnaldo did die, Noé did become a murderer – desperate and guilt-ridden. The women were terrified and anguished, and the shame of his friend Pedro, with a pained look, the look of a father who had just lost a son and did not have the strength to console his friend, nor knew how, who felt weak and without will, but who needed to be strong, and take care of a situation that no one appeared to have the courage or thought to act on:

We – Etelevina, Pedro, Geraldo and I – now had this madness, this rock that fell on top of us. I recall even today Noé's desperation upon waking his father and mother, and waking us to tell us of his madness and what he had done to Arnaldo. I remember Geralda's stunned look, Etelevina's shock, the end of the world that seemed to be dragging down Pedro, who was grasping Noé by the shirt and taking him to explain to us [...].

I remember the enormous shame in the eyes of Pedro and the desire to say that it was all nothing but a bad joke being played on us by his son Noé. I remember being in shock, not wanting to understand what they were saying and what was happening. But God did not permit this. I became a fortress. I said, where is the body, son? Where is Arnaldo's body? Tell us soon, boy, we must know so we can take steps. This attitude seemed to make everyone realize what was happening. And we all acted as if we were one. We took Noé to his house, the four of us left together running to Zé's bar and there it all unfolded as it had to... we gave Noé a bath, we took him to the police, we left him with the officer, we ran to the IML (Institute of Legal Medicine) to meet Etelvina and Geralda and only left there with the body, and then there was the wake, the burial, and the return home... where only the void was present, and the pain, the pain, the pain that took over our whole body, our words, our lives.

Once set in motion, the action mobilized everyone: the women accompanied the body of the dead son to the IML [Institute of Legal Medicine], the men accompanied the murdered son to the police station where he was held, after a hug from both and a request by Seu Pedro for him to "be a man, be strong and assume what you did," according to Seu Raposo. Then the wake, neighbors, church, burial, the return home, and with this ending, the void settled in. A large void, the two closed homes, lights out, silent, full of shame, of pain and of uncertainty of tomorrow.

What will we do now? Etelvina asked me. I held her hand more firmly and did not know at the time what to say. I asked God to give me back the right words... but I had no words. I cried together with my wife.

The light of day began to penetrate through the windows and the gaps in the doors. Seu Pedro got up from a night without sleep. He had coffee and woke up Dona Geralda: "Wake up woman, we have a lot to do today," he told the researcher with his eyes tearing. In his description:

Geralda was devastated. She did not want to get up, she said to let her sleep, she did not want to get out of bed ever again. She, who would wake me up before the rooster crowed. [He smiled melancholically!] I pulled her from bed and said firmly, come Geralda, our son needs us. Raposo and Etelvina are alone, devastated by Arnaldinho's death... killed by our own son... by our own son. Woman! Come, let's go, without a fuss, that's not like you, woman. None of that. Let's go, let's go and take care of all these things, there is a way out for us to find to avoid the worst, which had already befallen all of our lives.

Dona Geralda "jumped out of bed," Seu Pedro said.

She opened her eyes and said, you're right my Pedro, let's go resolve all this mess... let's go talk with our friends before anything else. They are in a worse situation than us, let's go.

Dona Geralda continued the above story from the time that they opened the gate to the house of Seu Raposo and Dona Etelvina, crossed the gate with a thermos flask of coffee, opened the door to the living room and, for the first time, found the door closed. She said she 'shook,' returned slowly to the gate where Seu Pedro was arriving and said in a low voice: "the door is closed Pedro, what do we do?"

She said that Pedro "went in front," as though ignoring what his wife had just said, and knocked on the door shouting: "Raposo, Etelvina, open the door, let's have coffee and talk, people of God." No one answered and Seu Pedro knocked again and Seu Raposo came, opened the door slowly and said, according to Dona Geralda's account:

"Come in man, we have to talk, yes, Etelvina is in the bath and will be out soon. Let's talk." But for a long moment he did not stand aside from the doorway, his body continued to block the entrance, and we were watching, without saying anything, waiting, how can I say, people of God, how can I say... yes, the order for us to come in.

## Moral and emotional recomposition of social bonds

According to Simmel (1986: 369), pain traces a border around people and characterizes the language of offenses (damaged reputation) as if affirming: “you came too close.” It indicates the distance that cannot be crossed without clear permission. The look in the eyes of friends, after the limit-situation, which created an obstacle in the life of each one of them, required each person to act in order to move beyond their own constraint, which had driven them to silence and withdrawal. The shame-disgrace and the loss of face, casting a heavy cloud over all of them, threatened to keep them from doing what they wanted.

When Dona Etelvina arrived, they were all in their original positions: Seu Raposo with the door open, but blocking the doorway with his body, the couple of Dona Geralda and Seu Pedro, carrying a thermos flask and a tray, waiting to enter the house. She looked at the scene and said: “Get out of the door Raposo, let the folk in!”

This sent a pain into my chest [said Dona Etelvina, looking at Seu Pedro, nearly crying]. We were never treated like that by our friends and even more called ‘folk’! I wanted to run back home, I saw that Pedro was also nearly giving up, but then Raposo got out of the doorway and with his hand invited us to enter and said: “Come in, let’s talk, because today is going to be too long.”

The ill feelings permeated the relations during this first moment of encounter after the tragedy. The silence “made itself heard,” as Seu Pedro put it. They all entered and sat down at the table. The tray and thermos flask were put on the table, yet no one had the nerve to get up and find cups to serve. They all stared inwardly, introverted and hesitant to look at or be seen by the others. They seemed not to know each other, they all seemed to want to leave, but they stayed around the table, sitting in silence.

According to Dona Etelvina, “it seemed like hours passed and everyone was silent, quiet, looking down and to the side. No one wanted to face anyone.” Until, according to Dona Geralda, the door opened and Rita

...entered the room with her big belly, asking, with a sad and sobbing voice: “can I stay with you here today?” It seemed like lightning struck everyone. Everyone looked startled at Rita, Etelvina got up quickly, nearly off balance, while the chair fell on the floor. She ran to her side, kissing and hugging her, holding her belly and said: “my girl, enter, of course, you stay today and as long as you want. The house is yours. Raposo and I are pleased to have you and our grandson, or granddaughter? with us. Right Raposo?!”

Rita left Dona Etelvina’s arms, followed by her, and went to Seu Raposo and gave him a kiss, and later a kiss to Dona Geralda and Seu Pedro. She went to the kitchen and brought plates, cups and utensils saying, “look, people of God, what’s happening? There is food on the table and no one fetched dishes to eat? Let’s have breakfast, I’m starving, I’m eating for ten.”

Seu Raposo, describing this “ray of light” coming through Rita, smiled and said, she brought us back to our senses. Everyone left their silence to speak about the grandson or granddaughter who would arrive, and from there the fact that Arnaldo would not be “at home, to see the baby.”

Another silence threatened the space, but was soon broken by Seu Pedro who said: “Friends, today Geralda and I have much to do concerning Noé who is in prison. We will take clothes and something for him to eat, go find a lawyer, and hug him. He must be desperate.” Seu Raposo, on recalling this episode, affirmed that he felt a shock of reality and, without pausing to think, said: “That’s it, my friend Pedro, you can count on us for whatever you need”.

Dona Etelvina said that although Seu Pedro’s attitude took “a step forward for us to escape the discomfort we were feeling in the presence of our friends and neighbors, as though they threatened us with their presence and with the memory that their son, Noé, had killed our son Arnaldo,” also “left me a bit intimidated by the situation created by his words. I had to say or do something. I got up, I held

Rita, and looked at Geralda and said, “friend, come see the presents that I bought with Raposo for the grandchild... come Rita, come Geralda... then we left and left the men to look at each other and talk.”

The conversation, according to the participants, first involved a big apology for Noé’s *act*. Seu Pedro affirmed that he understood the pain and that there was no possible justification or excuse for such an insane act. A situation of discomfort was experienced between the partners, linked to the emotions lived as partners-brothers-confidants, and as fathers of two youths, in a situation in which one killed the other for a banal reason.

Goffman (1956, 1967) worked with a tragic vision of interaction, calling social life a ‘dangerous game’ of vulnerabilities, where the risk of disenchantment is always present and needs to be carefully administered by the self-regulated social actors for and by a ritual of interaction. In his work he sketched a situation of embarrassment and constraint, of daily shame, as a sensation of discomfort experienced in tense relations, as well as the attempts to save each other’s face from the relational agents in an interactional play.

As Ecléa Bosi wrote, “the periods ‘before and ‘after’ are enough for there to be an [individual] and social memory” (1994: 411). Thus, in this play of saving face, the partners seek the return of the memory of the situation that had them ‘travel together’ and try to reaffirm the values and conventions that had joined them until then. To do so, they sought to recreate the element of current constraint and shame as a type of ‘provocation’ through which the relation must pass to be overcome, thereby allowing a return to the process of friendship, from that point, as a moral requirement and significance for a new control and resumption of their relations.

In this specific case, Seu Pedro affirmed, in his description, the ‘nobility’ of Seu Raposo when he said that:

“This is all too sad, for both of us, for our wives, for Rita and for the grandchild on its way. It is too sad... but we cannot let this sadness come to quench all that we have been building for years, our friendship. That would only make our lives worse, it would be another death in our lives. Arnaldo would not want that, no. We will have to talk a lot, a real lot, about this new provocation, but allow it to bring us closer together.” Then he got up, took me from the chair, I was crying, and he hugged me. I felt blessed to have a friend like that.

Seu Raposo, speaking about the same issue, said that Seu Pedro’s generosity and integrity “made him act like a man” and remove this ill feeling so they could resume their lives together. In the narrative told by Seu Raposo, he affirmed that he got up, gave his friend a hug and said, “let’s get to what is important, Pedro, let’s go to resolve Noé’s situation. That is what Arnaldo would want. Let’s call Etelvina and Geralda to get ready and come with us!”

They all left together to find Noé in anguish being held in a common cell at the police station, awaiting a judge’s order to be taken to prison, where he would serve his sentence. According to Rita, the four of them – Seu Pedro, Seu Raposo, Dona Geralda and Dona Etelvina – reconstructed their relations, always filled with small gaps, silences and restraints, but, whenever possible, these were spoken about among themselves and turned into new ways of recognizing and belonging to each other, like a single family – however, like a single family with a brand that, like all social brands, must be constantly remembered and reassembled as new signs of an alliance in which trust is restructured every day and in which the members control one another.

## Final Considerations

The murder of Arnaldo by Noé assumes a strictly moral connotation, without strategic biases or rational, cost-benefit calculations. An individualist rationality, in this sense, fails as an analytical perspective intending to achieve a comprehensive reading of these contexts of intense personal bonds and copresence in which regimes of gratitude and sharing are tacitly allied.

The murder resulted, then, from a banal misunderstanding between friends-brothers involved in a limit situation that quickly turned into tragedy, and shaped a narrative of moral failure, tragedy and trauma. The sense of banality mentioned here does not deny the cruelty of the violence or the gravity of its consequences for the reassembling of the social forms and contents of a given sociability, but seeks to call attention to the vulnerabilities and fragilities of interactional spaces.

A moral order, in this sense, encompasses an expressive-behavioral and cognitive normality based on daily shame as a moral gyroscope (Scheff 1990; 2016) of the social actor integrated in networks of interdependence. This moral gyroscope signifies the capacity to embarrass oneself and embarrass the relational other in the interplay of reciprocal exchanges and monitoring, in which everyday shame assures each person's tact and sensibility to help keep face as an organizing principle of social traffic.

The banal element of tragic misunderstandings and outcomes, like the murder by Noé, point in turn to the tension and the indetermination of a social situation that is always risky, and vulnerable, a 'dangerous game.' The characteristic trait of situations of sharp tension and disturbance of the moral order and emotional culture of a given sociability is the real or imaginary rupture of the normative and emotional normality: in other words, it involves an exacerbation of the possibilities for material and symbolic exchanges between the relations, even going beyond their limits.

Arnaldo's ill-fated approach to Noé, at a time when the latter was seeking refuge for his seemingly irremediable loss of face, was unable to console his friend-brother and pull him back to the tensions of everyday normative normality, in which the line-face relation of the social actor who moves through social worlds is constantly challenged and threatened without completely losing self-respect and self-esteem. Arnaldo's remarks, however, exacerbated Noé's sense of shame-disgrace, which he felt as a grave moral insult and as a banalization of his broken project and of his dignified and promising past at the heart of the family-community of the two families.

Noé, now a murderer of his friend-brother, reacted tempestuously when Arnaldo, in an attempt to console him, suggested he forget the girlfriend who had betrayed and abandoned him. By affirming that "all women are like that," the argument of banality was interpreted by the relational other as a violent attack on his face, which had been weakened by shame-disgrace, in such a way that Noé was promptly moved to realize the sacred responsibility to defend his self and impose himself in the interactional space as a respected player with a reputation, not as a fool, or in Goffman's language, as a mark (Goffman 2014).

The moral recomposition of the bonds broken by Arnaldo's tragic murder thus involves the forgiveness that the families offered to Noé for the disagreement that led to the fatal crime. Their absolution, understood as a gift, does not signify a forgetting of the *deed* or the tragedy, but a resignification and reassembling of the act through a narrative of guilt, remorse, punishment, mourning, recognition and above all, reaffirmation of commitments to reciprocity at the heart of the family-community that took him in again, rehabilitating his individual face within the group and preserving his past of memories in the emotional community.

The pardoning of Noé can also be understood as a ritual of symbolic recuperation of the figure of Arnaldo within the group, and the symbolic and social recuperation of Noé through the resolution of a social drama of separation, liminality and return to normative normality (Turner 2013; 2005; Van Gennep 2011). As friends and brothers, Noé and Arnaldo are redirected to an imaginary situation of symbolic reordering of the world.

The banal disagreement, in terms of its fatality, is morally and emotionally resolved by the collective through the exercise of forgiveness, not of forgetting. The forgiveness is ritually organized – as a reordering of the common memories and of the reconfiguration of the system of social positions and moral classifications of the group – as the action “by which a group develops ways to channel common energies and dedicate the effort with a sense of moral determination” (Turner 2005: 7). Forgiveness thus reaffirms the similarities and commitments of each person in the group and of the group towards each person, but also imposes silences, interdictions and hiatuses in the moral and emotional reassembling of the symbolic and affective worlds that constitute the emotional culture of that family-community nucleus.

In this ritual process, the Relational We is reaffirmed as a community of affection, of suffering and of projects, in light of the vulnerabilities, risks and fragilities that are part of the interactional exchange. But, above all, it is reaffirmed as a collective face that regulates daily interaction based on an emotional culture and the codes of a shared morality.

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