

## VIOLENCE AND HUMAN RESCUE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LOOK OVER SALVADOR'S PERIPHERY<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** The article reports a research whose objective was to understand the fundamental lived experiences (traduzo vivência como experiência vivida – lived experiences) of people inserted in a context of violence and investigate the repercussion of these experiences in their formative process, taking as reference the phenomenology of Edith Stein. The research was carried out in the neighborhood of Uruguai, in the outskirts of Salvador (BA) and the access to the lived experiences was done through producing a daily journal and open interviews. We carried out analyzes of the individual course of four participants and fifteen interviews in which eight fundamental lived experiences were described and analyzed from a formative point of view: improvisation; death; woundedness; violence; solidarity; periphery; maternity and religiosity. The study showed Edith Stein's contribution to the understanding of violence from an anthropological point of view and to a more humane approach to those who inhabit the peripheries. It showed that even in a context of violence, the person is able to position himself freely in the face of external situations and determinations, structuring and seeking perspectives of life beyond what is given. In this sense, a possible intervention in contexts of violence would be to help people to distance themselves from the lived and to strengthen themselves internally in order to elaborate personal responses, actively participating in itself formation and in the transformation of its context.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; violence; human development.

## VIOLÊNCIA E RESGATE DO HUMANO: UM OLHAR FENOMENOLÓGICO PARA A PERIFERIA DE SALVADOR

**RESUMO.** O artigo relata uma pesquisa<sup>3</sup> cujo objetivo foi compreender as vivências fundamentais de pessoas inseridas em um contexto de violência e investigar a repercussão destas vivências em seu processo formativo, tomando como referência a fenomenologia de Edith Stein. A pesquisa se deu no bairro do Uruguai, periferia de Salvador (BA) e o acesso às vivências ocorreu pela confecção de um diário de bordo e pela realização de entrevistas abertas. Foram realizadas análises do percurso individual de quatro participantes e de 15 entrevistas em que foram identificadas oito vivências fundamentais, descritas e analisadas do ponto de vista formativo: improviso; morte; chagas; violência; solidariedade; periferia; maternidade e religiosidade. O estudo mostrou a contribuição de Edith Stein para a compreensão da violência do ponto de vista antropológico e para uma aproximação mais humana daqueles que habitam as periferias. Mostrou que mesmo em um contexto de violência, a pessoa é capaz de se posicionar livremente frente às situações externas e às próprias determinações, estruturando e buscando perspectivas de vida para além do que está dado. Neste sentido, uma intervenção possível em contextos de violência seria ajudar as pessoas a tomarem distância do vivido e a se fortalecerem interiormente de modo a elaborar respostas pessoais, participando ativamente da própria formação e da transformação do seu contexto.

**Palavras-chave:** Fenomenologia; violência; desenvolvimento humano.

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## VIOLENCIA Y RESCATE DE LO HUMANO: UNA MIRADA FENOMENOLÓGICA HACIA LA PERIFERIA DE SALVADOR

**RESUMEN.** El artículo relata una investigación cuyo objetivo fue comprender las vivencias fundamentales de personas insertas en un contexto de violencia e investigar la repercusión de estas vivencias en su proceso formativo, tomando como referencia la fenomenología de Edith Stein. La investigación se dio en el barrio de Uruguay, periferia de Salvador (BA) y el acceso a las vivencias ocurrió por la confección de un diario de a bordo y por la realización de entrevistas abiertas. Se realizaron análisis del recorrido individual de cuatro participantes y de quince entrevistas en las que se identificaron ocho vivencias fundamentales, descritas y analizadas desde el punto de vista formativo: imprevisto; muerte; llagas; violencia; solidaridad; periferia; la maternidad y la religiosidad. El estudio mostró la contribución de Edith Stein para la comprensión de la violencia desde el punto de vista antropológico y para una aproximación más humana de aquellos que habitan las periferias. Se mostró que incluso en un contexto de violencia, la persona es capaz de posicionarse libremente frente a las situaciones externas ya las propias determinaciones, estructurando y buscando perspectivas de vida más allá de lo que está dado. En este sentido, una intervención posible en contextos de violencia sería ayudar a las personas a tomar distancia de lo vivido ya fortalecerse interiormente para elaborar respuestas personales, participando activamente en la propia formación y la transformación de su contexto.

**Palabras-clave:** Fenomenología; violencia; desarrollo humano.

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### Introduction

Studies on violence demonstrate that it has become a central category for the apprehension of reality, and was recognized in the 1980s as a public health problem (Magrini, 2014; Brazil, 2005). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), among sixty countries in the world, Brazil has the second highest mortality rate due to aggression, with the most intense violence in poor neighborhoods of major cities where: police violence and the homicide practiced among young members of drug trafficking stand out (Endo, 2009; Mesquita Neto, 2011). To this harsh reality are added other forms of violence that, although not as obvious as physical, are no less harmful. It is what Santos (2013) denounces in reporting the stigmatized view of the periphery, usually evidenced in its negative aspects and neglected in its beauty. It is a reductionist view, reflecting both a violent urbanization process marked by deep social inequalities and narratives that favor visible violence and tend to typify society as aggressors and victims, associating the former with the poor (Magrini, 2014; Adorno, 2017).

We can see, therefore, that the use of the term violence tends to be more controversial than descriptive due to the ideological and prejudiced burden that accompanies it (Castañeda Salgado & Torres Mejía, 2015; Minayo & Souza, 1997). Violence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon to which various origins, scope and effects are attributed (Adorno, 2017; Castañeda Salgado & Torres Mejía, 2015; Brasil, 2005). For this reason, scholars warn of the need for an analysis of violence in its particular manifestations and the articulation between them (Brazil, 2005; Magrini, 2014).

In this sense, we must consider the fact that the experiences of violence reported in this study concern residents on the periphery of a large city. The acts, contents and meanings of the violence suffered and practiced must be understood having in mind the specificities of this context. On the other hand, following the example of Moreira, Abreu and Oliveira (2006), who understand violence as the exercise of violating the existence of the other without being able to accept him in his existential integrality, this analysis is not restricted to the context, but proposes an understanding from the anthropological point of view, considering the constitution of the person and his formative process.

Therefore, we understand by violence any simplistic action and/or view that reduces the person to one of the aspects of his reality, violating his integrality and dignity. If at first glance this statement seems obvious, it is not so evident when anchored in everyday experience where reductionist views of the person become naturalized, even incorporating into the practice of psychologists, pedagogues and other professionals who deal with the human being. As an example of this situation, Safra (2006) denounces the disastrous consequences of psychotherapeutic treatments driven by perspectives abstracted from people's life experience and by the tendency to reduce ontological questions to the psychic record. In the field of education, Santos (2007) points to the unpreparedness of the social projects that work in the peripheral regions and the difficulty of reaching young people who do not fit into an ideal profile.

This reflection illustrates the important role of a fair anthropological view in the confrontation of violence, which motivated the choice of Edith Stein as reference for the research in question. A member of the Husserlian phenomenological school, Edith Stein shares the thesis that phenomenology is capable of providing a rigorous foundation for psychology in order to overcome the scientism model restricted to the causal laws of nature. This is because she proposes a method of knowledge in which it is aimed to “return to the things themselves”, suspending established assumptions to let the phenomenon appear in its essence (Reis; Holanda & Goto, 2016). Husserlian phenomenology was the method adopted by Stein (2013) in her anthropological researches.

According to Stein (2013) all action directed to the human being is guided by a particular conception of person, even though there is no awareness of it. Stein investigated the constitution of the human being, highlighting its different dimensions and also the unity between them. In presenting bodily, psychic, and spiritual experiences (intellect and will), Stein helps us to look at the psychic phenomena without reducing the person to them, and to understand violence beyond physical aggression. It is an invitation to sustain the tensions inherent to the coexistence of different dimensions (singularity, social dimension, freedom and psychophysical conditioning), resisting the temptation to affirm one over another.

Along the same lines, Stein (1999b) helps us to apprehend the formative process in a dynamic way, that is, from the interrelationship between the innate dispositions, the environment and the personal positions, in an integrative view that breaks with the reductionist views that the human being is the fruit exclusively of the environment or of his own will power.

In this sense, the objective of the research was to understand the fundamental lived experiences of people living in a context marked by violence, as well as to investigate the repercussions of these lived experiences in their formative process, based on the phenomenology of Edith Stein. It is worth emphasizing that, although the issue of violence was present, we try not to dwell on this theme, maintaining an open attitude to let emerge the subjects’ own way of experiencing their life context, which we present below.

### **The Uruguai neighborhood**

The context studied was the neighborhood of Uruguai in Salvador, Bahia. A place marked by violence, but also a *sui generis* reality in many ways, starting with the fact that it is part of the “Alagados” region. It arose in 1934 with the occupation of migrants from the interior of Bahia, who came to work in the industries of the region. Due to the great contingent of people and the lack of resources, the new inhabitants built their houses on the water, in the molds of the stilts. Over time, the residents themselves who used garbage and trash were landing the neighborhood. Currently, with the help of the government, the region is practically all landed and urbanized, but still faces difficulties such as the accumulation of garbage and floods.

Another mark of Uruguai was the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1980, which made the neighborhood known worldwide. This fact, coupled with the presence of Sister Dulce, the mother of the poor, who began her social work there, and the visit of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who founded a house of her congregation there, gives the neighborhood of Uruguai a strong religious sense.

Finally, a singular aspect of this reality is the fact that the hill where the Church of Our lady of Alagados is located, built on the occasion of the visit of the pope, is also known as a place of “*settlement of accounts*” and “*corpse disposal*” by drug dealers and police officers. In this way, the point of reference of the sacred is also a milestone of violence, bringing together in the same place the manifestation of two extreme aspects of the human. The contrast and coexistence between the sacred and violence refer to the way each person deals with these dimensions and was one of the criteria that motivated the choice of Uruguai as a privileged place for understanding the formative process in a context of violence.

### **The formative process according to Edith Stein**

By speaking of human formation, we mean the realization of the “self” of each one that happens in the currentness of life as a result of the interrelationship between innate personal dispositions, context

and free will (Stein, 1999b). This dynamic can be understood from Edith Stein's description about the constitutive dimensions of the human being.

Relying on the principle that the created world presents itself as a hierarchical series of reality, where each level contains something of the former and something new that points to the next level, Stein (2013) understands the person as a microcosm that contains in itself something of the vegetable and the animal being, but also something that is proper to the human and that surpasses him, pointing to beings who are pure spirits, such as the angels. These characteristics reveal the person, respectively, as a living organism, as an animate being and as a spiritual being.

As all living organism, human being is formed from an inner vital principle whose purpose is the formation of a specimen of the species. Therefore, it is not a question of forming the person from an external model, but of developing what is contained in it, in potential, and that shapes him as a human being and as a singular person. In fact, unlike vegetables, the human being is formed as a unique specimen, because according to Stein (2013), the inner principle, or core identity (*kern*), gives a singular mark to each person, so that predispositions of his formative process make him become himself. Rus (2015) compares the core to a musical score:

To the extent that it delimits for each person the field of his possibilities, core can be compared to an inner score, the designation of an innate logos whose structure indicates to each one the repertoire that corresponds to him and within which each one is called to develop his essence (p. 84).

The core imprints its mark on all dimensions of the person, but differs from them. Stein (2004) affirms that this life derived from the soul has little to do with the changing reality of life. It does not develop, has no definite shape or contour, and therefore does not become accessible to us as an articulated thought. It is presented as "a type of awareness much more primitive than rational knowledge" (p. 132), and which is felt as something impregnated with value as it points towards an authentic existence and the realization of the self. When accepted by the person, the inner call that emerges from the core can take shape in words, desires, voluntary acts, and actions.

This ability to feel a value is called by Stein (1999b) by *Gemut*, and can be translated as mood. *Gemut* is a soul force that indicates to the person when something is valuable in the formative sense, helping him in the decision making as to what he will accept, or reject, because only what is welcomed in the inmost of the soul, by free adherence of the person, becomes food for his formation.

The receptiveness of the person to values is also due to the "character", understood as a set of qualities of the soul, which correlates with a certain range of values, making the person open and sensitive to them (Rus, 2015). In this sense, the direction of the becoming of each person can be intuited from the *Gemut* and the manifestation of the personal character.

Stein (2004) still emphasizes that what the person is – and that must take shape throughout life – remains somewhat obscure to him and to others. According to the author, it is very difficult to perceive the inner call that sprouts from the core of the soul since the person is dragged out of the self all the time, affected by what comes from outside, in a movement that refers to the dynamic of instinct and reaction proper to animate beings.

According to this dynamics, the external sensitive data is received by the person and joins his emotional sensitivity, – and general vital states such as freshness, malaise – being ordered into categories of pleasure or displeasure and generating an involuntary reactive impulse (Stein, 2013). This instinctive life is expressed by Stein (1999a) as the psychic life or psychic dimension of the person. In the animal, the continuous exchange between external and internal influences (instinct and reaction) is subject to its own and predictable laws. In the human being, although this movement is also involuntary, the type of reaction depends on the vital state of the person and his individual characteristics, and the reactions can be contained or transformed. With regard to the vital state, Stein (1999a) affirms that the intensity of an experience is associated with the degree of intensity of the vital sphere, that is, if we are tired, the intensity of living will be low. On the other hand, in the state of freshness, the senses and the sensations are sharp and able to capture all the impressions. Another state exemplified by Stein (1999a), and with which we find ourselves in the description of the residents of the neighborhood of Uruguai regarding the experiences associated with violence, is the state of over-excitation. It can happen in situations of very strong or risky stimulation, as well as at decisive moments in life. In it, the living reaches

a high degree of tension and the impressions are also captured with ease, such as in the state of freshness. This may deceive us as an increase in vitality; however, the later state is a prostration that does not reach rest, so that the real state of the person becomes one of exhaustion. Stein (1999a) also states that the more intense the experiences, the harder it is to take distance to reflect on them. Consequently, the possibilities of being able to stand freely in the face of what happens in these situations are lessened. It is worth clarifying that this stand freely does not mean denying or repressing his own instincts, as this would also be a form of reaction. It is a matter of recognizing them and, at the same time, subjecting them to the evaluation of the spirit and the free decision to give flow to the reaction that arises, and may also transform it into new forms of expression, contain it, or even, accept the impossibility of self-control.

This capacity of subjecting impulses to a critical evaluation and a taken of free position, moving from reaction to action, is proper to the spiritual being of the person, the third constitutive dimension pointed out by Stein (2013). The spiritual dimension concerns the free will, the intellect (ability to reflect, evaluate) and the conscience (knowing about himself, realizing his own existence and therefore being able to say "I").

According to Stein (1999a), the spiritual life corresponds to the level of acts or intentional experiences, in which the self is intentionally directed to what is presented, whether for the interiority – when it assumes a reflective attitude that allows to understand the other experiences – or for an external object. The connection between the acts of a person occurs by motivation and the reason that links the acts is not the act itself, but its meaning content. As an example of this relationship, Stein (1999a) cites the situation in which we received a letter and we rejoice. The reason for our joy is the arrival of a desired letter (the meaning that this letter has for us) and not the awareness of its arrival.

We have, therefore, the human being as a living organism (formed from an inner principle), as an animated being (instinct and reaction) and as a spiritual being (self-conscious, capable of reflecting and acting freely). These dimensions are radically interwoven with each other, so that the person is formed as a unitary and dynamic whole. Body and soul (psyche and spirit) are formed governed by the same inner principle (core) and affect each other in their development. As the soul forms, it forms the body. At the same time, it needs the body to mediate its relationship with the outside world, to acquire material for its provision and to intervene formatively in the world. Therefore, according to Stein (2007), the body is a "scenario" where the life of the soul develops and is the "organ for the encounter with the outside world" (p. 487). The unity of the person and of this complex formative dynamic is given by the self, the point of irradiation of all the experiences. It is from the self that each one can dialogue and position himself in front of the external context and their own determinations themselves, in a movement that Stein (1999b) calls self-formation.

The self can walk towards the center (core) or toward the periphery of the soul and, according to Stein (2004), the person tends to take position from the point of reference in which the self usually remains. Thus, there are people who tend to remain in the sensitive pleasures, others who are moved by the search for truth, choose as a point of reference the activity of intelligence. For others, the self is the center (they are ego-centered), and finally, there are those who seek to accomplish what they recognize as divine will.

This latter attitude leads us to a particular experience in which the person experiences the relationship with the Transcendent. It is a religious experience that, when welcomed, becomes a fundamental element in the formative process of the person. According to Ales Bello (2014), the essential element of this experience is trust in a Power whose presence we feel in our interiority, but which surpasses us. This experience leads the person to an attitude of faith that will guide his whole life. That is why Ales Bello affirms that it is a central experience in the life of the person, becoming the basis of all the others.

Returning to the notion of the human being as a microcosm, and based on the statement by Stein (1999c) that something cannot touch the human being if it does not find in him an original habitation, we can affirm that the elements proper to the divine (unlimited, eternal, etc.) would not be conceivable and desirable if they were not present in us. These traits can be identified in the identity core, since it is an immutable dimension (Ales Bello, 2014). In addition, the spiritual being of the person has its root in the divine spirit, considered by Stein (2013) as the "purest form of the spiritual being" and that has as essential characteristic, besides those mentioned, the ability to "flow while conserving", that is, "to give itself and give existence to things, without dispersing or losing itself" (p. 151).

In the human soul, this characteristic of “flowing while conserving” manifests itself as an opening that enables it to penetrate something spiritually and to apprehend it in an intentional way. By welcoming something in itself, the spirit increases, so the opening does not mean to be consumed, but gaining strength, hence flowing while conserving. On the contrary, to become closed in on himself, which often happens motivated by caring for himself, ends up weakening the person, as expressed by Stein (2013): “By opposing the natural orientation of his being, the spirit suppresses its own strength, it is extinguished without being able, however, to suppress the being itself. He becomes an obscure and impotent being, and at the same time closed in on himself, and cannot be radiated into anything else” (p.151).

Therefore, openness is proper to the human being as a spiritual being. It is an essential condition for the formative process as it enables the apprehension of the spiritual values (cultural properties) of the environment. On the other hand, in itself it does not guarantee the formation. This is because the soul can also be dispersed and lost (which differs from the divine spirit), when the object to which it opens itself is not capable of receiving something spiritual in itself. In this sense, Stein (2013) points out that the “flowing while conserving” occurs more intensely when the person gives himself to the spirit par excellence, that is, the divine spirit: “Who abandons God is conserved by him and rediscovers himself in him” (150). The abandonment to God is associated with the posture of faith and also with the sense of sacrifice present in religions, in which the divinity is offered, through a sacred rite, something valuable that ultimately is configured as an offer of the person’s own life (Ales Bello, 2014).

Given the considerations made, we can say that the formation is the fruit of the interrelationship between the direction provided by the identity core, the influences of the environment (formative material) and the decisions of the person, who to each situation can choose what he welcomes as own in the soul. It is, in essence, the possibility of elaborating personal responses in the face of circumstances, in order to let his self to emerge in the actuality of life, or, according to Savian (2014), to “play with the determinations to which he is subjected and produce his unique and conscious way of living” (p. 247). We present below the research method.

## Method

Stein (2013) states that if we want to know the human being we must pay attention to what we live in ourselves and in the relationship with the other. This affirmation points to the manifestation of the spiritual being of the human person as consciousness. The human being not only lives, but realizes what he lives from an original consciousness, which differs from reflection (second-degree consciousness), but which is a condition for it. The “self-conscious-being” is equivalent to an “inner light” that allows our experiences not to go unnoticed, but become lived experiences, that is, “an activity of the subject captured at the moment when he is living it” (Ales Bello & Mobeen, 2012, p. 27).

The study of the lived experiences of people living in a region marked by violence was precisely the objective of this research and that inserts it in the phenomenological framework of research. This is because, according to Ales Bello (2006), the phenomenological study is not aimed at the apprehension of factual data, but rather at the understanding of an experience in the way it was apprehended by the consciousness of the participating subjects. The apprehension of the fundamental lived experiences of the inhabitants of the neighborhood of Uruguai was based on the creation of a logbook and open interviews. In the daily journal, the experiences of the researcher, in living with the residents during four visits to the field, were recorded. The coexistence enabled a lively meeting with the residents and allowed access to lived experiences that could hardly be revealed in a timely interview.

The choice of interviewees was based on heterogeneity, so that the sample was delimited by the geographical region and not by age, sex or type of experience. In all, 22 interviews were conducted with nine former residents (five women and four men), two French missionary priests and eleven youths (seven men and four women). All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, among which the 15 most significant were selected from the point of view of access to the experiences. The analysis process took place in two phases. In the first phase, four interviews were selected (Helena, 55 years old; Thais, 21 years old; Bruno, 58 years old and Juliano, 25 years old), in which the degree of openness

allowed an analysis of the participants' individual trajectory<sup>4</sup>. In each report, the lived experiences concerning the different dimensions of the person according to the anthropology of Edith Stein were identified and it was discussed how these lived experiences were inserted in the formative process of each one of them. In the second phase, the focus of the analysis of individualities shifted to highlight the lived experiences common to the 15 interviews and their repercussion from a formative point of view. The following are the result of the analysis.

## Results and discussion

The individual path of four participants allowed to recognize common formative movements, marked by five moments that presented themselves in varied ways in the dynamic of each individuality. The first is characterized by *psychophysical experiences of strong intensity*, usually linked to violence (robbery, drug trafficking, bullying). The second is characterized as the lived experience of the *personal limit*, in which the person realizes his ontological condition of being mortal (suicide attempt, death threat). For the four interviewees, the acceptance of this truth motivated a movement towards interiority and *listening to themselves*, which we defined as the third moment, in which the call of the core was felt and took the form of a personal project. The fourth moment is described as the *inner struggle* between the purpose of following the call for realization and the psychic movement of seeking well-being and permanence in the *status quo*. Finally, the fifth moment is marked by the *free decision* to follow the call of the core and by the process of transformation of the person and his context.

In the path of the residents, it was fundamental to *listen to themselves* and to the inner call of the core, but not enough for them to take on their own life. It took a minimum amount of vital force to move forward and the elements identified as a source of strength were the loving presence of the other (solidarity), religiosity, art, life history of the person and the history of the neighborhood of Uruguai. These elements point to the eight fundamental lived experiences captured in the second phase of the analysis: 1) improvisation; 2) death; 3) wounds; 4) violence; 5) solidarity; 6) periphery; 7) maternity; and 8) religiosity.

The lived experience of improvisation (1) concerns an openness of the inhabitants to adapt to the adverse circumstances in order to realize their ideals, an experience that is often accompanied by an urgency in which the rhythm of life is imposed early by necessity and by opportunity. This lived experience was rooted in the very founding of the neighborhood of Uruguai, when water and garbage became the raw material for the construction of the home, as illustrated in the following report:

*Here there was tide... My husband put the boys inside the canoe, we arrived here put a mattress on the floor, put a lot of wooden planks, all very small, and a sheet... It stormed heavily (...) My dear, the only place that did not wet was where I put the bed... I put my three boys to the bed... My husband and I, we were moving this way [balancing on the board]. I cried... The tide came in and went out, those pieces of wood passing by us, so we took to nail them on the walls covering the shack (...) I put sheet on the walls to close the shack... That was how we were living life (Estela, 76 years old).*

The lived experience of improvisation includes the sense of sacrifice, in which the acceptance of precarious and even inhuman conditions coincides with the dedication of the person's own life for the accomplishment of something valiant. A movement of hope and gift that translates as a search for the "*promised land*" for a decent life.

From the formative point of view, we see that the miserable living conditions were experienced as a necessary path to self-realization. In this case, the spiritual dimension of the person was implied, and although seeing themselves powerless to change many situations, the free acceptance of these conditions as an inherent part of the personal development kept them in a position of subjects and not of victims of their own existence. Other people, however, seemed to stagnate in their ability to adapt to adverse conditions, in a movement that was translated more as a reaction to external demands than as a personal response at the service of a life project.

<sup>4</sup> The names of the interviewees are all fictitious and the ages correspond to the year in which they were interviewed, between 2012 and 2015. The research was approved by the Committee on Ethics in Research with Human Beings.

The second lived experience captured was that of death (2), which we describe as the daily coexistence of the residents with this limit of the human condition, through the loss of family and friends, the “*settlements of accounts*” on the streets, and the imminent risk of loss of their own life (stray bullet, threats). It has also been understood as an existential condition in which the person feels that he cannot realize the “self”. From the formative point of view, for some residents, the lived experience of facing their own death awakened them to the “existential death” that they were living, motivating them to a radical change of life and a more conscious action in their own formation. For others, this experience culminated in a religious conversion in which the discovery of self as a limited being revealed the existence of an Unlimited Other. In addition, the environment of imminent risk seems to shape people to develop a vigilant attitude in everyday life that leads them to say that they walk on the streets “*just as crabs. We know what the other is doing.*” (Zaqueu, 69 years old).

It was also possible to observe sufferings resulting from this lived experience, especially among children and young people, which are manifested in the reactive closing movement, excessive fear and lack of confidence in the other and in themselves. From a formative point of view, in this case, the choices are guided by the search for relief from the discomfort in pleasures (video game, drink) that often take root in the person in the form of addiction, generating dependency.

The third fundamental lived experience is that of the wounds (3), understood as the marks of past experiences, sufferings forged in the body or soul, which remain active in their daily lives, as illustrated by the report of a 52-year-old resident, a carrier of HIV virus:

*In my wanderings there, I contracted the HIV virus (...) That was a stab in my life. So how do I cope with that? (...) I look at the cross of Jesus because Jesus took something and did not let go. This is my cross (...) I have to bend over backwards every day to survive. I am learning to love (...) one of the strongest experiences is to be living this sexuality, sex fasting (...) for me it is a very strong experience.*

The wounds solicit the spiritual dimension of the person and motivate the formative process in that they call for authentic decisions of the self. According to the resident, the disease motivates him to support the decision to avoid sexual intercourse, in an attitude that teaches him to love the other. The wound educates, transforms and promotes a change of habits that shape his character. In his case, the religious dimension plays an important role in sustaining this free decision. The example of Christ is a source of spiritual strength that sustains him in the decision to “embrace” a situation that he did not choose, but before which he experiences the freedom to have a position in an attitude of acceptance. Therefore, the experience of the wound acts as a constant call for a free personal positioning, which must be recommenced every day, so that the person is not taken by circumstances, which could mean succumbing. In addition, the wound carries the past with itself, placing the person before his history and provoking him to accept it, to integrate it as part of himself.

The fourth lived experience captured was violence (4), understood as any situation experienced as violation of the person’s own dignity and integrity. We identify different forms of violence according to the prevalent incidence in the physical (robbery, disputes over space utilization, aggressions, murders and sexual abuse), psychic (discrimination, social exclusion, threat, exile, gossip and defamation), or spiritual dimension (law of silence, empty promises, disengagement, police violence, bullying against youths who do not value crime and the experience of the evil that takes roots in the heart of each person).

Violence has always been present in the neighborhood of Uruguai, although its forms and contents vary in time, along with the increase or decrease in the sense of safety of the residents. According to some youths, the decrease in the occurrence of robbery shows that the violence has decreased. While the ancient residents describe the time of the stilts as less violent, since people knew each other and the houses were closed with “*tramela*” (wooden latch). For them, progress was accompanied by “*organized drug trafficking*”, from which new forms of violence, such as the law of silence, child grooming and exile (impossibility of circulating in some areas of the neighborhood) are results.

If before, the struggle for geographical space was associated with the search for housing (“*Here, in this place, a lot of blood was shed, many were killed because they wanted a piece on the water to build, fights, you know?!*”) (Helena, 55 years old) - today it is characterized as a territorial dispute between rival factions that “govern” on the basis of a perverse ethics that deprives people of certain goods and services by the impossibility of moving freely in the neighborhood.



Another resonance is the fear and the mistrust that hinder the opening to the other and to the self. The lack of contact with himself is aggravated by the law of silence that hampers interpersonal exchange and reflection. The intensity of the lived experiences of violence coupled with the impossibility of expression and personal elaboration seem to favor the appearance of symptoms such as stress and somatizations. They are experiences that resemble the state of over-excitation already described (Stein, 1999a). We also highlight the resonance of the context of the crime on the formation of the character of the youths whose routine of violence shapes their feelings, anesthetizing them for the value of life (*"when I started to participate [in crime] I was somewhat afraid, but it became routine, then it becomes something normal"*) (Juliano, 25 years old).

The fifth fundamental lived experience is that of solidarity (5), which consists of the ability of a person to understand the other and to commit himself, being jointly responsible for the realization of his humanity. It can be recognized in the report of Juliano (25 years old) about a resident who intervened in his favor when he was about to be killed by a police officer, who ended up saving his life. This situation illustrates the view of Stein (1999a) that solidarity is the basis of community life. It expresses the recognition of the ordinary humanity and the experience of "us" which is a fundamental part of the formative process, as the person feels part of something and is sure to exist for someone (*"I am not afraid because here everyone knows me"*) (Elisa, 60 years old). A lived experience in which the inhabitants anchor themselves to overcome what is posed (hunger, lack of dwelling, threat) and that confers to the neighborhood the sense of a home.

The sixth lived experience is that of the periphery (6) and concerns the feeling of being on the margins and not experiencing their person as a central value in the community of people to which they belong, as the report illustrates: *"Alagados were known as a place where only the poorest lived (...) No one wanted to come this side because here it was considered that there were only bad people ... People who came to live here were the rest of the rest."* (Helena, 55 years old).

The precarious living conditions in which the residents lived were confused with the people themselves, as if the inhuman context prevented us from seeing the humanity of those who lived there. The result of this dynamic is the prejudice and social exclusion experienced in the difficulty of finding employment and in the omission and violence of the State. From a formative point of view, this experience hinders access to basic rights such as education, health and work, and is an obstacle to integral development. We also draw attention to living with contradictory feelings about the neighborhood, a reason for pride for the history of achievements and the visit of important religious figures and, at the same time, cause for shame and humiliation for social discrimination.

The seventh fundamental lived experience that marks the lives of women in Uruguai is motherhood (7). Many become "mothers-fathers" when abandoned by their partners. Early pregnancy is also common among girls who are expelled from the home or forced to abort, as illustrated by the report of Priscilla, a 16-year-old girl, four months pregnant at the time of the interview: *"My mom talking to me: 'You must take it out!'. She keeps talking to take it out... take it out... But I will not take it out. No, I will not. I said: 'I would not want to be taken out of you!'. Would not I?'"* (Priscila, 16 years old). The lived experiences of violence and death also accompany motherhood in the case of mothers who involuntarily lost their children *"swallowed by the tide"* at the time of the stilts, or murdered in the streets of the neighborhood. Motherhood is still materialized in the lives of some women by *"foster children"*, when they take all of the cares of nephews, younger brothers or neighbors, generating a network of support between them. The life of Carolina (87 years old) is an example of the feminine social relationships marked by the maternal care:

*There were some boys that I was raising and then another one came up for me to care for (laughs). Then another came. 'My dear, I have no conditions...' There was one person who came here carrying a baby and said: 'Leave her here, then you baptize and raise her too' (...) And I kept talking... My answer was this: 'I have no conditions, I pay rent here'. 'Oh dear, I can't, I'm in this situation, they are starving here and I do not know what ...' And I ended up keeping ... And then I was getting by and with the comings and goings of life I was looking after one, supporting another and let's go for it! (laughs). (Carolina, 87 years old).*

The way people live the filial relationship also manifests the strong sense of motherhood. In fact, wanting to give a better life to the mother seems to be one of the great motivations for young people entering drug trafficking. This strong bond with the mother is still evident in the religious field, in the relationship that the residents establish with Our Lady of Alagados, whose image reflects the life of the laundress, who at the “time of *Alagados*” needed to fetch water away from home, crossing the narrow and unstable bridges with the child on her lap and water on her head. For Pedro (51 years old), Virgin Mary is a memorial of her history and a maternal presence that “cares interceding for the children with God.”

When welcomed, the lived experience of motherhood is able to mobilize women to the value of self-giving, becoming a source of vital force and motivating them to cope with very adverse situations. In this sense, it mobilizes the formative potential of the person, strengthening them to take the life itself in the hands.

The eighth fundamental lived experience is that of religiosity (8); whose importance can be seen in the report of Elisa (62 years old), that “*faith is palpable down here*” (laughter). *Because faith cannot be explained, but here in Alagados we live and feel. In Alagados it is impossible not to live the faith.*”

Despite the attitude of common faith, it was possible to identify different ways of living religiosity. For some, the relationship with the divine occurs punctually, motivated by psychic fulfillment (search for comfort). In these cases, substitute elements (art, crime, a material good) assume the role of the sacred in people’s lives and start having an important formative role. For others, the religious lived experience is central and guides the others, as in the case of Helena who lived a conversion after an attempt of suicide. She experienced abandonment to God in the face of a limiting situation, so that the divine brought new perspective and hope for her life: “*God took me out of the grave.*”

In a formative perspective, the lived experience of religiosity motivates the recognition of person’s own dignity and worth, as the person feels loved by God (“*people say that we are poor (...) if we have God in our hearts, how can they say that we are poor?*”) (Daniel, 58 years). It also resonates on the formation when life itself acquires a sense of sacrifice to God, which softens fear and motivates confrontation of violence.

The repercussions of religiosity also take place within the community, as can be seen in the role played by the Catholic community in the neighborhood, illustrated in the following sentence: “*If the Church really lives the Gospel message, by capillarity, it penetrates the culture, promotes social life (...) in Alagados there is no division between faith and social action*” (Bruno, 58 years old).

The Catholic community filled in gaps left by the public authorities through the social projects it promotes and took the neighborhood out of anonymity: “*There was the need for the Pope to come here so that the rulers could look at the Alagados.*” (Helena, 55 years old). It also penetrated neighborhood locations that were avoided by the residents, giving new meaning and new ways of occupying the space. The most emblematic case of this transformation took place on the hill of the Church of Our Lady of Alagados, known as a place of slaughter, which came to life as a place of religious worship, education of children (with the introduction of a school tutoring) and celebrations, being experienced by some as a “*Mount Tabor.*” A final repercussion that deeply affects the formation of the residents is the relationship of understanding and mercy that springs from Christian ethics and breaks with the reductionist views that separate people into good or bad.

## Final considerations

The individual analysis illustrates a common formative movement in which people have achieved a degree of freedom such that they knew each other, became aware of the lived experience and managed to give a meaning to that lived experience by structuring perspectives of life beyond what was given, giving new direction to their lives according to the call of the core. Capturing this dynamic was important as it evinces the strength of the call to the person’s realization and the coping resources of each person, avoiding a fatalistic view arising from the notion that the human being would be only the result of the environment and therefore doomed to the failure in a context of violence.

This does not mean, however, that all people experience the formation process in the same way. Some residents seem to remain in the struggle for survival, begging for an authentic existence, unable to

activate their own strength to fulfill as a person. In these cases, we see a fragile and dispersed self in the outer demands, so that the environment begins to govern the formative process.

In this sense, a possibility of intervention would be to promote actions that would make it possible to strengthen the inner life, to help people to perceive themselves, to express themselves and to distance themselves from what was lived in order to reflect and elaborate personal responses, thereby exercising the spiritual dimension and developing freedom and responsibility. In addition, in order for a person to freely assume his own life, a minimum amount of vital force is required, and the elements that proved to be a source of strength for the residents of the neighborhood of Uruguai were the history of the neighborhood; art (music, dance); the lived experience of solidarity; life history, when welcomed in its totality, and religiosity.

Finally, we emphasize the contribution of the anthropology of Edith Stein to a more humane and less reductionist approach of those who inhabit the peripheries. Understanding, for example, that the authentic reason for linking the actions of a person is not the act itself, but its meaning content, is a fundamental reading key that helps us to deepen the inner life of the person, understanding the values and senses that mobilize it. By accessing this dimension, it is possible to think of interventions that help people find alternative ways to achieve the same meaning content of an acting with violence. In this sense, the anthropological basis offered by Edith Stein contributes to the understanding of each singularity, avoiding reductionisms and generalizations that prevent an approach to the person in his humanity.

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