



Contributions to the analysis of love between couples who live on the street¹

Contributos à análise do amor entre casais que vivem na rua

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Abstract: This article aims to address the loving relationships – affective and sexual ones – among the homeless, understanding such relations as an event – culturally significant instances in a given context. The present study is grounded on the theoretical constructions of Marshall Sahlins about this category, as well as on the studies focused on the analysis of how bonds and emotions are combined and inscribed in the social field. From participant observation and analysis of bibliographic productions, we sought to understand how these loving relationships are experienced. The results of the study indicate that love on (of) the street is an event as the street is re-invented. Before being a place of suffering, it is a space for the private, for experiencing intimacy, for building bonds and loving relationships. In their daily lives, homeless people go through this experience according to their way of life, within their field of possibilities, in general, these encounters are inscribed as stories of possible loves.

Keywords: Homeless. Affective and sexual bonds. Event.

Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo abordar os relacionamentos amorosos – afetivos e sexuais – entre moradores de rua, entendendo tais vínculos como um evento – acontecimento culturalmente significativo em determinado contexto. O presente estudo ancora-se nas construções teóricas de Marshall Sahlins acerca desta categoria, bem como nos estudos voltados à análise de como vínculos e emoções se conjugam e se inscrevem no campo social. A partir da observação participante e da análise das produções bibliográficas buscou-se entender como esses relacionamentos amorosos são vivenciados. Os resultados do estudo indicam que o amor na (de) rua se constitui em um evento na medida em que a rua é reinventada. Antes de ser um local de sofrimento, a rua é o espaço do privado, de vivência da intimidade, de construção de vínculos e relações amorosas. Moradores de rua em seu cotidiano vivenciam tal experiência de acordo com o seu modo de vida, dentro do seu campo de possibilidades, em geral esses encontros amorosos se inscrevem como histórias de amores possíveis.

Palavras-chave: População em situação de rua. Vínculos afetivos e sexuais. Evento.

Submitted on: 6/11/2020. Revised on: 17/1/2023. Accepted on: 5/3/2023.

¹ Translated by Flávia Wanzeller Kunsch.

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Introduction

Intimate and loving relationships between homeless people are common among those who inhabit this space and they follow the same patterns of marital relationships, except for the lack of housing and an acceptable space for the exercise of intimacy.

“Gina² is my love, I go through anything with her, I'm hungry and cold on the street. We have plans, maybe we'll get married one day [...]. We eat and drink what we have. I like to see her smile when we wake up, she is the best part of my life. I'll only leave the streets if it's with her.” Elias reported during a social assistance approach, whose objective was to remove them – he and his partner – from the street. However, the only possible form of reception, at the time, was to shelter them in different places, something unthinkable for them. We made a point of writing down the used argument in their file, given its grounds and origin, even though we knew that the host institutions did not recognize the request made as legitimate. Now, Adriana and Alexon, both homeless people as well, as described in an article by G1 (GIANTOMASO, 2020), met on the street, but established more intimate relationships in a shelter, adapted for temporary accommodation, in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in this social segment. Adriana reported that, after a week at the shelter, Alexon decided to leave the place: “I couldn't let the love of my life go away!”, admits Adriana. From then on, they began to live together as a couple.

The testimonies indicate that, subverting expectations and projections around this environment, the street can also mean, for those who survive in it, a locus for building networks of affection and not just a space of pain, isolation and loneliness. Therefore, the street, the physical and social space where these subjects' bodies are located, is also a place for the construction and reconstruction of values, ways of life, survival strategies, friendship bonds and also possible love stories.

What both accounts (by Gina and Elias; Adriana and Alexon) reveal to us is that, as the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1987) argues, “[...] the use of conventional concepts in empirical contexts subjects cultural meanings to practical reassessments” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 174). For, “[...] nothing can guarantee that intelligent and motivated subjects, with diverse interests and social biographies, will use the existing categories in prescribed ways” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 181). The creative actions of historical subjects imply the reassessment of meanings in practice, historically altering cultural schemes in the world or in the action: “Cultural meanings, overloaded by the world, are thus altered” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 174). Therefore, culture is not something stable. It is always an intersection.

Starting from the argument in defense of the inseparability of cultural reproduction and transformation, Sahlins suggests the concept of structure of the conjuncture, fundamental to the understanding of cultural change. This concept is associated with the way in which cultures react to an event, allowing the immediate context to dialogue with previous structures. In the author's definition (SAHLINS, 1987), an event consists of the “[...] practical realization of cultural categories in a specific historical context, as well as expressed in the motivated actions of historical agents, which includes the microsociology of their interactions” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 15). Further on, he complements (SAHLINS, 1987): “[...] a set of historical relationships that, while reproducing cultural categories, give them new values taken from the prag-

² The names of participants in this study have been changed to safeguard confidentiality.

matic context” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 160). The structure of the conjuncture, as it is a concept inserted between the event and the structure, can be considered a mediating notion between synchrony and diachrony.

This article, in dialogue with such reference, has as its main objective to approach, through bibliographical productions and participant observation, the affective and sexual relationships of people who have the street as a permanent living space³, an urban characteristic that rises to the condition of an event – a culturally significant occurrence in a given context, placed to pressure the structure of the conjuncture. For this purpose, we borrow Marshall Sahlins’ theoretical constructions about this category, as well as studies aimed at analyzing how bonds and emotions combine and are inscribed in the social field. (LE BRETON, 2009; PAUGAM, 2008, 2019; REZENDE; COELHO, 2010).

The problem of the homeless population has been a theme addressed in several areas of knowledge and widely studied in the field of Social Sciences from different historical, structural and cultural perspectives. For the compression of this social category in contemporary times, different authors were mobilized: ARAÚJO, 2008; BURSZTYN, 2008; ESCOREL, 1999, 2008; CEFAL, 2013; FREHSE, 2013; BRAGA; SOUSA, 2019; HONORATE; OLIVEIRA, 2020; NUNES; MACHADO, 2022; SPOSATI, 2009.

However, the focus of theoretical production has still focused on analyzing this phenomenon from the perspective of poverty, exclusion and its resulting vulnerabilities. There is still a shortage of studies and research on the topic of emotions in the lives of homeless people⁴.

It must be considered, in this regard, that the social images projected around the street do not recognize it as a space of affection. In the wake of the classic opposition house *versus* street, within Da Matta’s proposal (DAMATTA, 2012), the house would be the place of privacy and intimacy, and the street, the space of anonymity and disorder. Contributing to this debate, the historian Robert Pechman (2009), understands that, since the 17th century, the street has been thematized by disorder, vice and danger: “[...] it is from there that the threat promises to corrode the society, with the plague, the epidemics, the diseases, the dirt, the miasma, [...], prostitution, sexuality, begging, incivility, violence, revolt, insurrection and... the revolution” (PECHMAN, 2009, p. 353). We understand, therefore, that love on (of) the street subverts, in some way, such projections.

The choice for such an object of investigation is directly related to our professional trajectory of 18 years of experience in the field of social assistance in a large Brazilian metropolis, intervening directly in the issues of families and individuals in situations of vulnerability and violation of rights, as well as through our practice in higher education, working with the theme

³A survey carried out in 2020 (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2020) by the Municipal Secretariat for Social Service and Human Rights, in partnership with the Municipal Secretariat of Health and the Municipal Institute of Urbanism Pereira Passos (IPP), pointed out that the street scene in the city of Rio de Janeiro was composed of individuals of different profiles who could be grouped into two broad categories: those who use the street space as a workplace, generally precarious workers in the informal market (street vendors and collectors), who live in distant regions and have no way to spend daily resources with transport; and those who use the street as a permanent home. In general, the first group maintains family ties and the second does not.

⁴By way of illustration, we carried out an exploratory search in Capes’ database of journals in the last 5 years (2015 / 2020) with the keyword ‘street population’ and identified 792 productions. With the filter ‘street population and emotions’ 28 scientific productions were identified.

of social exclusion and the place of emotions and feelings associated with those who survive this situation.

Along this route, we noticed in the narratives of co-workers familiarized with the theme, as well as through participant observation, in various moments of dialogue with homeless people, the little, or even non-existent, social perception that among homeless people couples form, united by loving, affective and sexual bonds.

We defend the relevance of this issue, after all, affective-sexual relationships play a central role for human beings, composing the fundamental threads of the social fabric. Individuals who are living on the streets, although stigmatized and excluded from fundamental aspects of society, as people, are not exempt from expressing feelings. Therefore, even if disregarded, emotions constitute an important place in the lives of these subjects and affective-sexual relationships (dating, marriage, fling or any other definition), on the other hand, following the idealization around love, are incorporated into their way of life, nurturing their dreams and possible projects⁵.

We understand that the approach prioritized by this study, focusing on the affective-sexual relationships of couples living on the streets, can contribute to new perspectives on the issue, deepening and complexifying the understanding of the phenomenon, thus providing elements so that one can understand and treat this problem from other perspectives. It impacts the work, therefore, on the creation of consistent public policies, programs, projects and actions aimed at this segment, as well as on the improvement of professional performance strategies in this area.

1 Homeless population in Brazil: contextualizing the debate

The issues raised by this study are closely related to the pauperization process, the intensification of inequalities and the consequent social exclusion, historically experienced by segments of Brazilian society. This process came about, above all, from the transformations of social relations: from seigneur-slave to bourgeois-capitalist, in the context of the country's urbanization (VALLADARES, 1991). Since then, it has been possible to observe that poverty in Brazil has a color, given that it is mostly composed of black men, women and children, who, even after the abolition of slavery, were not fully incorporated into the dynamics of the emergent – industrial and capitalist – society⁶.

⁵The passage, uttered by Shylock, a Jewish moneylender character, in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, although it brings instigating questions to think about anti-Semitism, it also offers the possibility of reflecting on the process of dehumanization of stigmatized social segments, such as the street population: "I'm a Jew. So, a Jew doesn't have eyes? A Jew doesn't have hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? He's not fed by the same foods, wounded with the same weapons, subject to the same Same diseases, cured by the same medicines, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as a Christian? If you cut us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? can we take revenge?! If we are like you in the rest, we are also similar in that." - Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* Act 3, Scene 1 (SHAKESPEARE, 2017, p. 286-287).

⁶ Data published in a bulletin by IBGE (2020), *Inequalities by color and race in Brazil*, point out that, in 2018, people of black or brown color or race made up most of the workforce in the country, adding up the number of 57.7 million people, that is, 25.2% more than the population of white color or race in the labor force, which totaled 46.1 million. However, in the same year, the average monthly income of white employed people (R\$ 2796) was 73.9% higher than that of black or brown people (R\$ 1608).

According to Telles (2001), Brazilian poverty subsisted on the fringes of the labor market, in the underworld of the informal economy, in the confines of the rural world and oligarchic heritage, that is, in what presided over the country's entry into the capitalist world. For the author, our poverty was never formulated on the horizon of citizenship. The homeless population is, unquestionably, the most acute expression of this pauperization process of Brazilian society⁷.

The Brazilian State, especially in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, guarantees the social right to housing⁸ for all citizens, however we know that this is still a far-reaching issue. For, as Gueiros (1991) teaches us, “[...] the legal status is not a guarantee of the exercise of rights. The forces that suffice for the inclusion of law at the legal level are not always sufficient to force its implementation” (GUEIROS, 1991, p. 54). When we look closely at the large Brazilian metropolises, we notice that the phenomenon of the homeless population has a varied profile – people from different age groups – and it has been increasingly expressed in terms of exclusion and isolation.

It is worth noting that Brazil does not have official data on this population segment, which negatively implies the implementation of public policies aimed at tackling the issue. The Demographic Census of 2010 and the ongoing Census of 2022 include only the domiciled population in their count.

Thus, the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), since 2015, has based its estimate on the homeless population in Brazil using official data reported by 1,924 city halls. The last technical note from IPEA (NATALINO, 2022) analyzed the evolution in the number of homeless population between 2012 and 2022 based on a theoretical model that considers variables of demographic growth, centrality and urban dynamism, social vulnerability, equipment and social assistance services aimed at street population, as well as the number of homeless people registered in the Unified Registry. For 2022, the Institute estimated that there will be 281,472 homeless people in Brazil.

This comparative study by IPEA (NATALINO, 2022) shows that between 2012 and 2022 there was an increase of more than 300% in this populational segment, especially in the Southeast Region (53.75%), following the same scale as in previous surveys. Between 2020 and 2021, the explosion of this phenomenon is due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the increase of vulnerabilities and poverty, which resulted in an increase in the number of people living on the streets. As the most vulnerable segment of the population, for not being able to meet the standards of hygiene, protection and isolation recommended by health organizations, the homeless population is configured in this context as a complex issue, both from the point of view of public policies, and as an object of scientific studies and research.

Furthermore, taking as a reference the census carried out in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 2020, by the Municipal Institute of Urbanism Pereira Passos and by the Municipal Secretariat of

⁷ According to the research carried out by Silva (2012), this urban phenomenon gained relevance in the international context in the 1990s, with the significant increase in the homeless population in large European capitals and in the USA. These countries carried out the first *Homeless Censuses* and the descriptive reports on that issue. In Brazil, the first initiatives to serve this public were carried out by religious organizations in the 1950s, a task later absorbed by volunteering and, since the 1990s, by the State.

⁸ Art. 6 - Social rights include education, health, work, **housing**, leisure, safety, social security, motherhood and childhood protection, assistance to the homeless (BRASIL, 1988, emphasis added).

Social Assistance, in partnership with the Municipal Secretariat of Health, 7,272 people were living in conditions of extreme social vulnerability in the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro⁹. Regarding the profile, it is highlighted that: the majority are male (80.7%), between 18 and 49 years old (65.7%) and with low education (Elementary School – 67%). The concentration takes place mostly in the central region (31.9%), an area that houses the historical and economic centers of the city. According to the data, 62.8% declare they perform some activity to earn income. Among the main activities identified are the collection of recyclable materials or garbage (47.5%) and the informal sale of products on the street (26%). Around 3,289 respondents reported using at least 1 type of drug, with 797 cases of crack usage and 1,169 of cocaine. The condition of extreme social vulnerability was further accentuated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Approximately 750 people indicated that they had taken to the streets after the pandemic began and the main reasons were home and job loss.

Despite this reality, it must be considered that the implementation of the National Social Assistance Policy (PNAS) in 2004 (BRASIL, 2005) represented an important advance in the field of social assistance for this segment, as it assured this population of specialized care services.

The PNAS (BRASIL, 2005) reordered the assistance policy in the country, raising it to the status of a public policy within the scope of the Social Security System, fostering material conditions for the creation and implementation of the SUAS (Unified Social Assistance System) as a decentralized, participatory and non-contributory system which aims to ensure social protection for individuals and families by offering social assistance actions, services, programs and projects. Social protection under the SUAS is organized by levels of complexity into Basic and Special Social Protection. The theme of the homeless population is a complex demand, whose reference is the services of medium and high complexity offered in the spaces of the Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance, the Specialized Reference Centers for the Homeless Population and the Accommodation Units, which by their nature must carry out active search actions, social approach, care / follow-up and institutional reception.

We also have the approval of Federal Decree No. 7.053, in 2009, which instituted the National Policy for the Homeless Population and its Intersectoral Follow-up and Monitoring Committee, another important regulatory framework. One of the relevant points raised by the decree is in relation to the definition of the homeless population, understood as follows:

Art. 1 The National Policy for the Homeless Population is instituted, to be implemented in accordance with the principles, guidelines and objectives set forth in this Decree.

Single paragraph. For the purposes of this Decree, the homeless population is considered to be the **heterogeneous population group that has in common extreme poverty, interrupted or weakened family ties and the lack of regular conventional housing, and that uses public spaces and degraded areas as space for housing and support, temporarily or permanently, as well as accommodation units for temporary overnight stays or temporary housing** (BRASIL, 2009a, no page number, emphasis added).

In the light of the decree, this segment in Brazil would be formed, as suggested by Bursztyn (2008), by the “[...] unnecessary, [...], the nomads, excluded and survivors [...]” (BURSZTYN, 2008, p. 139) or merely *lumpen*, who survive on handouts, public or private charity and odd jobs and informal activities. They are still, in the definition of Escorel (2008, p. 139), “[...]”

⁹The Census carried out in 2022 is not yet available for public consultation.

characters and scenarios of the social drama, naturalized and trivialized in their misery and isolation who live in the streets without being able to settle down and exposed to their own fate". It is configured, in this sense, among the most challenging issues of contemporary poverty and one of the greatest expressions of social exclusion.

Castel (1997), when addressing the issue of social exclusion, discusses a set of deprivations related to instability or expulsion from the labor market, relational insertion, weaknesses in protective supports or social isolation. For the author, there is a mode of existence of a certain number of groups or individuals rejected from the common circuit of social relations, are the indigent, the dropouts, with no fixed address, that is, the *disaffiliated*, individuals who no longer belong, who are no longer linked to the universe of work and/or to broader social networks. For Castel (2000), disaffiliation is the category that manifests itself with the greatest impact on the individual's life, given the rupture it promotes in relation to the hegemonic social reproduction norms, changing the forms of sociability, impacting on the social references of housing, family, friends and other forms of identity and social insertion of the subject.

Paugam *et al.* (2003), deepening the debate, understands that poverty, in addition to a state of material shortages, is a specific and inferior social status, which implies processes of loss of references (desocialization) and social disqualification. He understands that this is "[...] a dynamic process that has multiple dimensions, in addition to the economic and social issue, it permeates the identity of the subjects and the perception they have about their own situation and their relationship with others" (PAUGAM *et al.*, 2003, p. 47).

Dialoguing with these authors, Escorel (1999) considers the phenomenon of the homeless population beyond the extreme dimension of poverty, misery and exclusion. Thus, it considers the personal aspect of the individual, deprived of family, direction, income and place in the world, whose survival routine is marked not only by the search for places, support networks and identity, but, notably, through a trajectory marked by fears, absences and prejudices.

After all, living on the street imposes on subjects a condition of invisibility, anonymity and breaking with socially expected patterns of habits and customs, many of which are associated with the process of forming civilized men (ELIAS, 2011) – such as having meals sitting at a table, using a fork, knife and napkin, sleeping in a bed, taking a shower, having sex in a private space, performing physiological needs in suitable places¹⁰. In this sense, survival in the context of the street imposes the suspension of notions of shame, hygiene and the very idea of individuality, a central component of modernity.

Despite this difficult situation, the homeless population, contradictorily, through their practical actions, also gives a new meaning to being in this place. Because living in this space requires creativity and adaptations to face this reality. We defend the argument that such an urban happening rises to the status of an event, as the street is reinvented as a private space, for experiencing intimacy, for building bonds and loving relationships.

¹⁰ According to Le Breton (2009), the control of bodily excretions – spitting, blowing, urinating, defecating, belching – was transported to the interior of man, as well as the repression of emotions and bodily expressions, previously performed without care in relation to the presence of other people, allowing man better conditions of civility.

2 Sahlins' contributions to the concept of event

The fundamental axis of Sahlins' reflections in his work *Islands of History* (1987) is built on the relationship between history, structure, event and cultural dynamics. For this author, “[...] history is culturally ordered in different ways [...]. The reverse is also true: cultural schemes are historically ordered because, to a greater or lesser extent, meanings are reassessed when realized in practice.” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 7).

In this sense, culture is historically both reproduced and altered in action. For, if, on the one hand, people give meaning to objects and organize their projects based on pre-notions of a cultural order; on the other hand, the creative actions of historical subjects imply the reassessment of meanings in practice, historically modifying cultural schemes. To the extent that meanings are subjected to empirical risks, the symbolic is pragmatic and the system is the synthesis of reproduction and variation.

For the author, the structure – symbolic relations of a cultural order – is actually a historical object: “[...] the problem now is to explode the concept of history through the anthropological experience of culture. The consequences [...] are not one-sided; [...] a historical experience will explode the anthropological concept of culture – including the structure” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 19). The structure is realized both in convention and in action. Thus, if the relationships between categories change, the structure is also transformed. For Sahlins, culture – for being a historical object, therefore, arbitrary – would function as a synthesis of stability and change, of past and present, of diachrony and synchrony. Therefore, culture is not something stable. It is always an intersection.

In order to show that history and structure do not exclude themselves mutually, Sahlins analyzed the impacts of the arrival to the Hawaiian Islands of James Cook, captain of the English Royal Navy, during the 18th century:

Upon arriving in 1779, Cook was initially greeted as a god come down to earth, specifically as Lono, one of the greatest gods in the Hawaiian pantheon. When, a few months later, Cook set sail but was unexpectedly forced back into port, the mood of the Hawaiians changed dramatically and Cook was killed in a fight over a boat. (SCHWARTZMAN, 1984, p. 272).

For the author, Cook's experience proved that the world is not obliged to follow the logic by which it is conceived. According to Sahlins, from the *event* of Captain Cook's return, the natives orchestrated it in their own way, with their historicity, giving it meaning according to their cultural categories: “[...] different cultures, different historicities” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 21). It is also evident that the transformation of a culture is also a way of its reproduction. We can see in such an analysis a classic example of the author's theory about the relationship between structure and event:

Each in their own way, the leaders and the people reacted to the foreigner according to their self-conceptions and their usual interests. Traditional cultural forms embraced the extraordinary event and recreated the given distinctions of status, with the effect of reproducing culture as it was constituted. The specific conditions of European contact gave rise to forms of opposition between leadership and common people that were not foreseen in traditional relations. In the world or technically in action, in acts of reference - cultural categories acquire new functional values (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 174).

In this way, an event, as shown by Sahlins, does not constitute in just one happening of the phenomenon, but what is given as an interpretation, and acquires historical significance only when appropriated by the cultural scheme.

3 When love enters the street scene: affective and sexual relationships of couples living on the streets as an event

According to Sahlins (1987; 2004), an event is implanted in the human domain through culturally established values. Considering that our interest and investment in the past do not consist of a simple desire to understand what was done and conceived before us. For the author, between the *facts* and us, there is a context and a system that mediates what we understand as an event, being "[...] culture precisely the organization of the current situation in terms of the past" (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 193).

In historiographical practice, disturbances to a given normative flow are those commonly raised to the level of events. Specific beings, objects or acts are totaled according to the context in which they occur. They are therefore able to affect the order of a given system. Conversely, according to the context of a system's relations, categories and hierarchies are particularized into specific people, places, objects or acts.

The event unfolds simultaneously on two planes: as an individual action and as a collective representation; how the relationship between certain life stories and a story above and beyond these others; the event is a single update of a general phenomenon; we have, on the one hand, the historical contingency and the particularities of individual action and on the other, those recurrent dimensions of the event, where we can recognize a certain cultural order (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 143-144).

From this perspective, we can think of love on (of) the street as an event, in the proportion in which it reveals itself, beyond its individual and collective dimension, but, above all, in the symbolic dimension. Thus, translating into an update in the way of living and inhabiting this space, thus breaking with a perspective of a unique history of pain and suffering for those who live on the street, representing a shift in the way of performing the experience and space of the exercise of loving experience. In the end,

If we go through the history of painting, from the 18th century onwards, if we go into 19th century literature, if we go into 20th century cinema and if we take a peek at 21st century advertising, we will see how the street will be thematized by the bias of disorder, [...] place of rowdy. [...]. Rua will always remember the rabble, living without a roof, the absence of family, the lack of ties, exclusion. (PECHMAN, 2009, p. 263).

Ensuring survival in such an inhospitable environment requires the subjects, who permanently live in that place, to know how to manage it, establishing links with networks of solidarity and mutual care. It becomes relevant in this aspect to know the public services available, with emphasis on health and social assistance, support organizations for bathing, feeding, among others.

It is important to highlight in this last issue that the homeless population carries with it a trajectory of breaking work ties and the ideal of citizenship. Furthermore, their bonds of affiliation and kinship, for the most part, are frayed or even broken. Isolation and loneliness are

words commonly evoked to describe the situation of these subjects. For Escorel (1995), the main characteristic of isolation is impotence and inability to act.

I cannot act because there is no one to act with me. [...] isolation becomes unbearable when the isolated man is 'of nobody's interest'. And then isolation becomes loneliness. Loneliness means the experience of not belonging to the world, which is one of the most radical and desperate experiences that man can have (ESCOREL, 1995, p. 9).

However, as understood by Paugam (2019), establishing bonds is part of human existence, assuring men and women protection against the risks of everyday life and recognition of their existence and identity. This assertion is strongly expressed in the survival strategies of the homeless population.

Living on the street is not guaranteed with isolation practices and without exchanges, it is necessary to weave networks of solidarity. Those who fall on the street cannot live alone. To be accepted, 'you cannot be a parasite', and this includes sharing from asking passers-by for money or food, performing small services such as cleaning the street, taking care of the garbage of a commercial establishment, doing small favors for merchants or street vendors, among others (KUNZ; HECKERT; CARVALHO, 2014, p. 927).

Therefore, individuals, even if they go through processes of rupture, have the need and the ability to establish new bonds, built by bonds of love, friendship, solidarity, affinity or by participating in the same way of life, that is, by sharing a form of social organization with strategies, use of space and establishment of relationships connected to livelihood (PAUGAM, 2019).

It is through the way of living on the street, with its particular rules and codes of conduct, that the population living in that place, through creative actions, move encounters and resulting affections, building and rebuilding bonds, which can unfold in a specific type: affective-marital relationships.

In this perspective, if the event 'is a difference that makes a difference', the existence of couples who experience love on the street imposes disturbances on a given normative flow – more than a simple irruption of an urban event, typical of everyday life in the fabric of the city –, implying the possibility of reassessing the meanings and categories associated with the ideas of isolation, loneliness and absence of ties, historically attributed around living permanently on the street. Thus, the ways of conceiving 'living' in that place and 'being' in that place are widened.

However, it is necessary to consider that an event does not exist without the symbolic system: "[...] it is that the definition of a 'something-happened', as an event, as well as its specific historical consequences, has to depend on the structure in force" (SAHLINS, 2004, p. 322). Happenings only become events when they are projected as something significant with historical effects, housed in the culture in question, whose way of welcoming is never the only possible one, since the event is an interpretation of something that happened, and interpretations vary. In the words of Sahlins (2004, p. 372): "Cultural orders are event-systems, since they reproduce themselves through a world of which they themselves are not producers".

From this perspective, as already discussed in this study, when we look back, we do so within a cultural logic in which we are inserted. Sahlins departs from the conception that people use cultural orders to shape their construction and action in the world. When they act, people bring their constructs into play, using them to refer to the world. For, *The eye that sees is the organ of tradition* (BOAS, 1986).

Anchoring ourselves in such contributions, we can affirm that the perceptions that circulate in greater numbers in society around conjugality do not recognize as a couple two people living on the streets who live in an affective-sexual relationship. This fact is reflected in the design of public policies.

In the specific case of the city of Rio de Janeiro, there are no public accommodation services in the couple modality. The rooms are collective and the lodgings are organized by gender and age group. For this reason, many couples do not adhere to shelter and remain sleeping together in the street¹¹. The denial of the legitimacy of these relationships also appears in the content of the municipal public ombudsman, a service designed to respond to complaints, requests and complaints from citizens of Rio de Janeiro¹². Among the complaints regarding the homeless population, through this channel, those recorded by the presence of couples sleeping together and having sex on the street can be found. Such facts also allow us to glimpse the stigma (GOFFMAN, 1988) around these subjects¹³.

We emphasize that, although the non-recognition of these relationships prevails, there are initiatives, coming from civil society organizations, such as the National Movement of the Homeless Population and the National Movement of Homeless Couples, which claim the guarantee of the rights of homeless couples as a family. Returning to Sahlins' contributions, we can think of such movements as those with the potential to not only incorporate a systemic order, but to transform it through acts-mediations that represent the dispositions of an entire group. The acts of socio-historical individuals are transformed into icons of concepts that interact with the social structure.

The individual is a social being, but we must never forget that he is an individual social being, with a biography that is not identical to anyone else's. He is someone who 'we must pay attention to'. This is because, [...] if there is a 'me' who embodies the attitude of some group at some level of generality, there is also an 'I' that preserves a potential freedom to react to the 'generalized other' (SAHLINS, 2004, p. 309).

We understand that in the “[...] social imaginary, the idea of the couple is evoked as a pair associated by affective and sexual ties on a stable basis, with a strong commitment to reciprocal support, with the aim of forming a new family including, if possible, children” (FÉRES-CARNEIRO, T.; DINIZ NETO, 2010, p. 270). In other words, a conception of conjugality

¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has circumstantially altered this reality. Many municipal governments have designated emergency shelter units specifically for homeless couples, as in the cities of Salvador and Rio de Janeiro.

¹² The public ombudsman is in line with Law n. 12,527, of November 18, 2011 and with Municipal Legislation. Pursuant to Decree No. 42,719/2017, the ombudsman is an instance of participation and social control responsible for handling manifestations related to policies and public services provided under any form or regime, with a view to assessing the effectiveness and improving management public.

¹³ The term stigma, according to Goffman (1988), is used to define a deeply derogatory attribute, it is the mark or sign that designates its bearer as disqualified or less valued; it is said of the individual who is disqualified for full social acceptance.

thought from the reality of the average strata of society, whose project and the idea of a couple are well defined from a way of life typical of this segment, in which common goals of children, acquisition of goods and preservation of individuality are present. This social repertoire is still closely linked to the ideal of romantic love and marriage.

According to Giddens (1993), the appreciation of affection and eroticism as the basis of the marital relationship, as well as the ideology of romantic love, are inventions that are supporters of bourgeois ideology, from the 18th century onwards, when sexuality starts to occupy a central role within of marriage. During the 19th century, romantic love made *passion* love a set of beliefs and love began to be projected onto the idealization of the other, assuming a dreamy and unrealistic character.

And it is the categories associated with the paradigm of romantic love that homeless couples come to question. Finding themselves linked to this perception of love, the ideals of beauty and cleanliness, of experiencing intimacy privately, away from the public eye. By not fitting into this pattern of love relationship evoked in greater numbers in the social imagination, such couples, through their practical actions, live this experience within the possibilities presented by their way of life.

However, as Sahlins demonstrates, the world is not obliged to reproduce itself as thought by traditional categories, as cultural meanings change based on new functional values attributed to categories, either through changes in the world or through acts of reference. By transforming the relationships between categories, the structure ends up being transformed as well: “[...] culture functions as a synthesis of stability and change, of past and present” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 180).

In the course of events, when interpreting the past, men and women rethink their categories, subjecting them to empirical, everyday risks. In this perspective, the original meaning of cultural categories is remodeled by the introduction of new meanings, new symbols, leading to changes in society's way of thinking and acting.

We argue that these couples experience possible stories and loves, permeated by a multiplicity of emotions and feelings, as highlighted by Goldenberg (2001) using Simone de Beauvoir (1980) as a reference in the famous work *The second sex*. Between a man and a woman there are many possibilities for affective relationships, such as: love, friendship, sexual pleasure, complicity, camaraderie, trust and tenderness. Each couple within their field of possibilities finds an ideal form for their relationships. The author's elaborations are quite appropriate to situate and legitimize relationships between couples in any situation.

Final considerations

Taking our professional trajectory as a starting point, as social workers in a large Brazilian metropolis and in the exercise of higher education, we seek to analyze the phenomenon of love on the (de)street as an event, as proposed by Sahlins. The interlocution with the author's thought and with other references from the sociological and anthropological fields allowed the development of the central idea of this study: love, lived on the street, a space historically associated with “[...] conflict, confusion, disorder; something of the quality of the external, the public, the mundane [...]; something of the popular, plebeian, vulgar order” (PECHMAN,

2009, p. 356). Thus constituting a significant cultural event, an event, since it subverts traditional cultural categories under which love is thought, linked, notably, to the ideal of romantic love.

We understand that, even though people living on the streets are not alien to such projections around love, the street does not offer any conditions for the ritual of this experience, given, taking especially into account the lack of space reserved for intimacy, much less for proper hygiene. We argue, therefore, that homeless couples live the affective-sexual experience according to their way of life, within a field of possibilities, thus enjoying history and possible loves.

Love on (of) the street therefore becomes an event, as the street is reinvented as a space for the private, for experiencing intimacy, for building bonds and loving relationships. And, continuous act, a place of exercise of sexuality and eroticism, experienced, now, under the indiscreet and disapproving eyes of society. It is evident, therefore, that “[...] the world is not obliged to obey the logic by which it is conceived” (SAHLINS, 1987, p. 174).

In light of the references that substantiate the professional ethical-political project of Brazilian social work, social workers must be able to investigate, welcome and forward the demands of the dyad, offering different perspectives on this social phenomenon. It is, therefore, a matter of examining the street not only as a space for production relations, but also for the production of relations (PORTELLA, 1995). In this way, the possibilities of understanding and political engagement in the defense and expansion of the rights of the homeless population increase.

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