

REFLECTIONS ON FEAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN CIVIL DEFENCE ACTIONS¹

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Initial considerations

Analyzing the universe in which the actions of civil defence mainly occur is like entering a vast and unpredictable territory. Vast, because it covers the narrow band of atmosphere that comprises our habitable world and encompasses the entire breadth of our occupation both in terms of territory and existence; unpredictable, because it is within this universe that the emotions and the challenges of existence are brought together, settle and come into conflict. This conflict involves all events that may lead to possible calamities, such as changes in climate, oscillations in the Earth's crust, changes to the air, water or soil systems, as well as fire. All these elements play a part in cataclysms. When these events affect mankind, they generate catastrophes capable of decimating lives and hopes. However, it is not only natural events - though often influenced by human beings - that form part of this list. Economic, social, existential and technological crises are equally responsible for increasing in the risks in the society where we live. Everyday tensions can be either physical or virtual, due precisely to the culture of globalization publicized, and even cultivated, by the media. In practical terms, there is no way of separating them from imminent risks. It is as if humanity were sitting on a barrel of gunpowder about to explode.

The German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2010) triggers debate when he problematizes the so-called risk society. According to him, human society suggests "a difficult balance between the contradictions of continuity and rupture within modernity, which are once again reflected in the oppositions between modernity and industrial society and between industrial society and risk society" (p. 12). It is a society in which the inherent unpredictability of nature needs to establish a dialogue between the "dichotomies that define

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order in the world” and this is certainly no simple and easy dialogue. On the contrary, it presupposes understanding, concession and the ability to overcome obstacles.

It is within this context that Civil Defence finds its place, in a mission to mitigate the damages caused by adverse conditions in disaster situations, as well as enhancing policies for prevention and preparing for emergencies and disasters, providing the possibility for immediate response and contributing to the reconstruction of life in society. Its primary role, according to the National Civil Defence Policy (2007), is to “guarantee the natural right to life and safety”, in a clear reference to the overriding need to preserve and maintain quality of life in circumstances of crisis and disasterⁱ. However, from a factual perspective, in a world which is multi-faceted, this role proves to be arduous and complex. This is because this interaction is trans-disciplinary where the areas involved do not always have similar characteristics and purposes. In addition, it implies a need for joined-up action which may not only be of a political nature but involve a number of different sectors of society.

This being so, when considering this complex social context, in which there is a need to seek paths that lead to spatial, mental and emotional clarity, we perceive that it is essential to reflect on the emotional aspects of human disasters, especially those of social nature. This is prerequisite for adopting any course of action in moments of crisis, be it with a view to a project for the prevention or minimization of environmental disasters, or in the rebuilding and recovery of affected areas involving a principal element: human beings – victims, due to their constant condition of vulnerabilityⁱⁱ as a result of social crises or disasters of any kind and in whatever consequences. This awareness and reflection should be aimed at building a healthier and safer society, considering the way in which people belong to or are productive in their specific worlds. As it was well stated by Barros & Barros (2012),

the term social disasters, instead of natural disasters, would perhaps be more appropriate, given that natural disasters, with no human victims or material and non-material losses to society, cannot be considered [disasters] (p. 686).

Thus, it is understood that the capacity to adapt, that is resilience, to this other and new post-traumatic reality is one of the main aspects to be considered in relation to environmental disasters, whether of a low, medium or high-level. This is the case because this concept, unique to every culture, is also a determining factor for the reconstruction of affected areas and populations. In addition, there is a need for an approach that identifies, acknowledges and establishes contact with the fragility of others as a fundamental aspect for overcoming situations in which suffering and fragility are common themes. It is essential to look from the perspective of possibility, the presence of others, relationships and reactions; it is necessary to have a regard for the future and pre-emptive action which presupposes possible solutions focused on existential care. There is a need to look at the emotions involved from the point of view of those exposed to this reality, since their vulnerability is at issue, not only physical or mental vulnerability, but emotional vulnera-

bility and that associated to the limits to which people are exposed. Therefore, based on a reflection on the emotions, especially fear, the aim of this study is to demonstrate the importance of such emotions within the context of Civil Defence. According to Bruck (2009) Civil Defence,

is a subject which addresses the limits, the unexpected, extreme contradictions, the unconsidered and the sudden, the urgent, emergency, extreme traumatic stress, finitude, loss and the anguish of annihilation (p. 4).

Given that the basis of this study consists of an essentially reflexive aspect, the methodology followed an obvious path which, besides the bibliographical and iconographic research, was grounded on the testimonials of the Civil Defence agents. During the interviews, they kindly granted on their involvement in carrying out actions and in helping and supporting victims. The material, recorded on audio and in field observations, made it possible to attempt an analysis of the questions relating to the aim of this study: the value of the emotions and the importance of perceiving the other; the significance of establishing not only vital contact to sustain life, but also allowing for the transportation of sentiments so as to guarantee that respect for life is not just a mechanical act and ensure that the possibilities of a lasting, or resilient, emotional reconstruction are real.

To think about resilience it is necessary to think about trust within the society that faces risks. In this sense, it is worth turning to another sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1991), who emphasizes how much modern life is based on the “trust in abstract systems” (p. 87), which not only comport trust in institutions in general, but especially in the expert systems. Modernity is reflexive. There are implications on the knowledge that society needs to absorb and its trust in organized social practices based not only on overcoming pre-existing fears, but also on overcoming those associated with an open-ended, uncertain and unpredictable future, where fear makes all people equal in their fragility and strangely vulnerable in the face of the risks to which they are subjected.

Within the specificity of each culture, it is important to note that some risks may even be valued, since they are enablers of a better quality of life, such as in the case of employment opportunities in places generally considered to be potentially hazardous. In a context in which choice tends toward less risk, the emotions associated with risk and danger remain in the background and may even be overlooked. For Bauman (2008), however, the idea of risk is closer to us and should be understood as “obstacles that have come too close for comfort and can no longer be ignored” (p.18). He draws attention to the danger of disregarding the lack of credibility in relation to potential risks and banalization due to the emotions they involve. He argues that “no danger is as sinister and no catastrophe wounds as much as the ones that are seen to represent an irrelevant probability” (p. 24). Indeed, safe living requires constant care and attention to planning and prevention, both tailored to fit the time and spaces in question, in accordance with the specific parameters of each situation.

An indispensable emotion

Planet Earth is a tangle of activities, all of which are inter-connected at some level. Some of these activities are so interwoven that their dependence is on levels that we are as yet unable to fathom. It can be said that it is almost impossible to conceive events separately from human involvement and, with the exception of those which have exclusively local consequences and are isolated from mankind, the outcomes are generally dramatic, with serious physical, material and emotional implications. There is an implicit notion that mankind is, almost always and simultaneously, a mentor, a contributing factor and a victim of everything that occurs in nature. Recalling the words of Chief Seattle, spoken in 1855, "*Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves*". If this is the case, we are profoundly connected to events that unfold in the wake of unexpected phenomena, and these, in turn, form emotions which are almost invariably strong, profound and intense – among which the emotion associated with fear is one of the most frequent.

Since the dawn of time, we have depended on fear for survival. It was, probably, the most preventive characteristic borne by our human ancestors. Thus, imminent risks and dangers were often avoided through the use of natural defence systems which directly involved fear. This emotion is present in our day-to-day lives and that of every living being. Hollanda (2009), defines it as "a feeling of active unrest at the notion of real or imagined danger and threat; terror and misgiving". The definition is coherent with a feeling of anguish which cannot be ignored. Fear, nevertheless, is also an ally, it is part of well-being. In real or imagined situations, it prepares the body to withstand extreme pressures and react to situations of threat. As a psycho-physical state, it generates reactions capable of permitting actions that would not be possible under normal conditions.

Fear forms part of the human emotional make-up and is, in essence, a subjective emotion. Even when it involves a collective subject, it is based on the assumption that it is an individual, or more precisely, an inter-subjective feeling, since it normally involves a relationship between subjects or between a subject and any given object. In a state of terror associated with desperation, every fibre of the body draws on the memory of a previous experience. In this sense, the body is unconsciously preparing for reacting in the face of a frightening or desperate situation, or even for survival. In everyday situations, fear can be managed, unless it is a phobia. However, in major catastrophes these parameters may not be enough to give us a clear idea as to the reach of this emotion. Calamities - like the one which occurred recently in Brazil, when rains and flooding struck the Serranaⁱⁱⁱ region of Rio de Janeiro, in January 2011 - show that often there are no words to express the drama experienced by all those involved. With all due (and necessary) proportion, from the victims who were directly involved to those who merely watched events on the news, the feeling was that something very serious had happened: the events defied measurement in quantitative or qualitative terms and were eventually reflected through statistics, given the magnitude of numbers involved. However, the pain, fear and traumas generated by this dramatic event are beyond measurement.

However, calamities are not only the result of natural events, even when accounting for human intervention. There are many dramas that are caused by other factors. They may be the result of societies built upon elements which have fear as their main guiding principle. It is instilled in its citizens – not always subliminally. In other words, fear is often imposed, not as a matter of survival, but as a way of providing incentive for illicit trade, dubious benefits, trafficking and organized crime. It constitutes a kind of culture of fear. In these societies, the perception that terror functions as a backdrop to make room for illicit or insane actions may even go unnoticed in some situations. Holy wars are started and fuelled by fear. Nonetheless, even amidst apparently organized and successful societies, social disasters can be caused by emotion. They tend to lead to the structural breakdown of the society, giving rise to phenomena such as violence, crime, social and cultural instabilities born of neglect, particularly in education, generating calamities that, differently from natural disasters, may generally be expected. Despite referring to terrorism, the American political theorist, Benjamin Barber (2005), stated that “fear is a far more potent weapon against those who live in hope and prosperity than against those who are languishing in despair and have nothing to lose” (p. 37). But it is worth remembering that there is always something to lose. In this case, fear loses what could be described as its positive characteristics, or its vital essence that stimulates the instinct for survival, leading human beings to feel the anguish of the absurdity of human condition. Valêncio (2010) suggests that there is a social-political perspective that is reflected in daily life and exposes the vulnerability of the subjects involved.

Fear and hopelessness are some of the subjective expressions of vulnerability in certain subjects. They are often the result of everyday experiences of vertical social interactions that frequently allude to the legitimacy of repressive and oppressive social-political practices brought to bear on ways of thinking, habits, preferences, places, voices and identities that do not conform to the norm and which are considered by some to be ‘appropriate’, ‘in good taste’ or ‘beautiful’. That is, they are emotional states which may arise in a real and spatialized system of unequal exchanges, whose organizational logic does not accept refutation. (p. 34).

But fear is also produced by continuous suffering or by existential atrocities that have become such an implicit part of the context that it is no longer possible to distinguish between states of alert or contingencies. Both phenomena are often boosted by the strength of cultural patterns, such as the re-occurrence of flooding, dry spells and drought, considered to be the most significant types of disasters. When Beck (2010) argued that “the process of modernization became reflexive, converting itself into both theme and problem” (p. 24), he had already drawn attention to the recurring situations to which society as a whole is subjected and that often, “the promise of safety comes with risks”. Without intending to be apocalyptic, fear literally hangs in the air when it is observed that not only climate is changing, but that there is indeed a certain civilizational discomfort which draws nature and intentionality together. This is precisely what determines how

humanity presents itself and how it is configured today in terms of political and social constructions. However, living involves risks and everyone, even in fear of what might come to pass, needs to understand and prepare themselves for any situations that may arise, Beck (2010) warns us: “Fundamentally, therefore, risks have something to do with anticipation, with destruction that has not yet happened, yet is threatening; it is precisely in this sense that risks are already real in the present” (p. 39). He also suggests that in the risk society, the prevailing affirmation is “I am afraid” and argues that “the solidarity of need has been replaced by the solidarity of fear” (Beck, p. 60).

All perspectives of (and about) fear constitute landscapes, called by the Chinese geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2005) “landscapes of fear” that prove to be increasingly present and ever closer to human daily life. According to this author, the reference to such landscapes “refer both to psychological states and to the real environment” and “represent the almost infinite manifestations of the forces for chaos, natural and human” (p. 12), referring us back to the vulnerability to which we are systematically exposed in every sphere.

Thus, it is necessary to understand fear in order to improve our ability to confront and overcome it, with a view to attaining what will be, in many senses, a healthier society. In other words, the aim is to find emotional alternatives in moments of crisis – before, during and after – since trauma does not end after an event, but persists - even if victims refuse to accept or understand the pains and vicissitudes of their situation.

Reflections on an inherent emotion

Thinking about fear implies thinking about life itself. We were born with the predisposition to feel and experience an emotion that carries part of the essence of survival. Humanity would probably be happier if the mechanisms that trigger fear were removed, but our species would certainly never survive to secure this happiness.

For some, fear may be a process of rationalization that leads not only to acceptance, but coping mechanisms. It is a fact that it is easier to assimilate what we are better able to understand. But this understanding may equally take place through feelings and experiences. In this sense, sharing pain can also assist in the shaping of emotions and makes a positive contribution to acceptance and overcoming.

Since bygone times, emotions have been considered and analyzed within their specific context. Aristotle (384 A.C – 322 A.C), in *Nicomachean Ethics*, made reference to fear as the inclination of the soul or a favourable reaction (or otherwise) to the needs of the animal, taking into account the natural condition of life. Pleasure is the adaptation or restoration to this condition, while pain is its opposite, or that which distances living beings from pleasure. According to Abbagnano (2012), emotion is philosophically defined as

Any state, movement or condition that leads animals or persons to perceive the value (impact or importance) that any given situation has on their lives, needs and interests (p. 362).

Therefore, feelings must be perceived in relation to what exists and to the value attributed to it. In other words, something which for many could represent fear, because of their culture or vulnerabilities, for others may be nothing more than a process of adaptation or even adjustment to their needs. For example, living close to a volcano, traditionally perceived as a divine blessing, can be seen as curse for people who are forced to inhabit such places due to work or housing needs.

According to Aristotle, in *Rhetoric* (referred to in Abbagnano, 2012), “fear is a pain or anxiety produced by the prospect of future adversity that could cause death or pain”, (p. 363). In other words, there is an expectation regarding the meaning and the role of fear, which may be seen as a prospective event something that terrifies, causes anguish and must be understood and overcome. Here, specifically, one can refer to potential risks and disasters. In this line of thinking, fear is inherent to living beings and manifests itself in the intersections between emotions, axiologies and expressivities. Axiologies relate to everything to which a value can be attributed. Life is attributed maximum value - even though the material results of acquisitions often achieved through tremendous effort and traditions, their place and their roots are for many people almost as valuable as life itself. Expressivities are the result of the conditions to which one is subjected: in cases of disturbances, minor accidents or major catastrophes, balance is threatened, generating anguish which, when taken to extremes, can lead to serious and permanent after-effects. Improving the understanding of fear and traumas resulting from disaster situations is vital to increasing the resilience of any society.

For the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (2009), fear is a recurring emotion and involves perceiving everything that actually occurs. It is felt in concrete and threatening circumstances. He argues that fear contributes to affirmation of man, which comes about from his own being, as if recognizing that this being can only exist through himself, through his own feelings. This is a being in search of him or herself, but who does not attach meaning to the inadequacy to which he or she is subjected and, therefore, attributes it to others and to circumstances causing the alienation of the events by the person experiencing them. This conception allows us to further analyze the responsibilities that an emergency or border-line situation could generate, such as emotional paralysis or even an escape, at exactly the moment when an urgent attitude is needed.

This being so, fear, which in certain contexts is an important element for social order and organization, may stand in the way of re-establishing normality, since it relies on its own memories, traumas and situations of despair. Anguish, even with its own sense of indetermination and imminence, is caused by the resulting mental state, where feelings are caused by pain and fear in dramatic and extreme situations, such as war and major catastrophes, natural or otherwise. The American writer Susan Sontag (2003), in her text *Regarding the pain of others*, explores the iconography of war and conflicts, and gives an interesting account of what is captured in moments of drama, pain and catastrophe. She expresses the human difficulty in administering their own expectations and uncertainties, leading to fear and anguish. She shows us how “Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us” (p. 76), since it is in photographs - striking images - that the feeling of fear generally comes to the fore. Each one of the photographs

could be the object of Civil Defence actions, but, unfortunately, they are representative of even greater madness, since they are artificial, derived from the worst disaster possible: intolerance, arrogance and human indifference toward their own kind.

Fear and breakthrough in the actions of civil defence

In critical situations, a reaction of fear does not only impact on the victims who have been directly or indirectly affected by the event in question. Fear pertains to all involved, to all who find themselves in a situation of risk and to those who also put themselves at risk for the sake of others, either during the event itself or in rescue and life-saving actions. In this sense, we can observe the inherent nature of fear, as if it belonged to everyone involved in its various facets. Fear, therefore, develops through interaction, as the product of the relationship between individuals and, culture and society. In other words, fear not only relates to universal principles and individual experiences, but also to interpersonal aspects, given that social and cultural factors influence, in their own way and in accordance with different cultural repertoires, the emotional sphere.

In a certain way, all living beings may be susceptible to fear which may occur both in low-level situations of risk, such as domestic accidents, and in major events, involving catastrophes. It would be wrong to think that only victims experience desperation. This being so, fear in situations of risk represents the assumption that there is a possibility of escaping the situation, facing or, at least, bypassing it somehow. Also in this sense, survival belongs to all.

Physiologically, fear serves as a red alert which prepares the body for situations of imminent risk. Also, in risky occasions memories of a similar event – potentially stressful and previously experienced situations – can be retrieved and used as a mechanism through which danger can be analyzed, calculated and utilized to avoid unnecessary future confrontations, triggering appropriate reactions and acting preventively. It is as if the body had a switch to protect itself and assimilate viable solutions.

According to studies in human evolution, our human ancestors developed this mechanism on account of the unpredictability of life in the past, when there were no guarantees of survival. Similarly, considering the same unpredictability of modern-day disasters, natural or otherwise, it is necessary to be constantly prepared to react to circumstances and the unexpected turns of any given event. Therefore, following psychobiology, by employing trigger mechanisms selected over the course of the evolution of the species, the body releases hormones that give rise to internal mechanisms, enabling the entire organism to perform operations which have been meticulously prepared to happen when there is urgent need. Thus, it sets off an alarm and uses a primitive code to associate sights, smells and sounds with potential danger and with emotions such as fear or, in the last resort, panic. It is these states that enable us to operate in situations of crisis, be it by fighting, keeping still or escaping, in accordance with the best available option. It is not a simple process. In fact, it involves far more than just being afraid. It involves having the conditions to survive in extreme situations.

The most common and most easily observed physiological signs, according to specialists in this field, are: stomach flutters, heavy breathing, accelerated heartbeat, sweating, dry mouth, shaking, blurry vision and even fainting. Thus, when a deafening noise or tremor shakes a structure or when the rain does not stop or waves begin to rise, it is fear that allows people to react, either through freezing on the spot or by running away in expectation of attempting to save one's or another person's life.

But what is the focus of fear? It seems evident that in many situations, including disasters, with the exception of specific phobias, fear is triggered by a number of essentially valid reasons: pain and suffering, death (one of the most visceral), the unknown, not being able to save oneself, material loss, lack of identity caused by loss of home and lifestyle, loss of loved ones, incapacity to rebuild a life, suffering, doubt, lack of perspective, worry about the future and as many reasons as subjectivities will allow for and in accordance with the understandings and perceptions of fear held by each specific culture. Dealing with fear arising from any dramatic event and its effects, specifically in the spheres of natural or human disasters, may require extreme care. Not least because it is necessary to understand that some emotions are existential, almost unanimous, and require more than assistance and urgent care, they require care in life situations in their most complex and diverse dimensions.

In the field of psychology, specifically the psychology of disasters, there are techniques that help formulate ways of coping with the traumas and pains caused by situations experienced, especially for comforting and ensuring the minimum of support to the subjectivities in question. But to overcome this emotion without completely ignoring or denying it, and without neglecting any urgent, direct and necessary care, also requires an understanding that there is more than just a physiology of fear. Fear develops through complex, philosophical and existential processes and it is important to understand how these processes can epistemologically assist in overcoming, becoming resilient and in reconstructing the strata of society affected. Furthermore, it is important to remember that, despite the fact that statistics are valid documents for the analysis of any disastrous event, the pain of each individual victim needs to be appreciated, since, though the analysis of a tragedy has implications for those affected, it must always be contextualized and based in the assumption that every life is important and every person's suffering bears its own unique and singular characteristics.

One of techniques employed in psychology is known as psychological debriefing. According to the psychologist Ney Bruck (2009), debriefing is a

generic term to describe the immediate interventions that follow trauma (generally within three days), which seek to relieve stress in order to prevent long-lasting pathologies, via the narrative reconstruction of the experience and cathartic venting of its painful impacts.

Another technique, Visual Kinaesthetic Dissociation (V/KD), utilizes "the change in the way a person who has experienced a traumatic situation mentally represents a given event" Bruck (2009). The main objective of this technique is to break the link

between the visual and emotional registers of the event, so that the emotional register can re-organize itself.

There still appears to be no consensus regarding the techniques for providing emergency care to victims. However, this is not strictly the purpose of this study, rather its aim is to establish a connection between fear and the actions of the Civil Defence agencies, although it is pertinent and fundamental to point out that all possible therapeutic help is vital to prevent fear and trauma from becoming an intrinsic part of the new post-disaster event reality. It is important to note that people react to situations of calamity in very singular ways, and even standards previously established as natural parameters to begin procedures for psychological and therapeutic care do not necessarily correspond to the facts experienced. At the moment of a disaster and the immediate aftermath associated to the post-trauma condition, one can encounter infinite forms of reaction that will depend on the vulnerability of the context in question, the capacity for understanding and the thought structure of each individual involved, opening up possibilities in which conventional techniques may not necessarily produce the desired effect.

Thus prevention is still the best way to prepare people, raising their awareness for re-adaptation to the new life situations and for coping with adverse events. When developing a culture of disaster this kind of knowledge is open to prior evaluation, which does not involve rationality alone, but also prepares the emotions, even if only vaguely, for different possibilities and new interpretations and orientations.

Emotions in action

In broad terms, Civil Defence is a subject that concerns the population in general, since it relates to the exercise of citizenship, encouraging greater environmental awareness as well as involving educational and axiological practices, given that they refer to the human condition of survival itself. It is important to highlight that, currently, Civil Defence has been widely debated and analyzed, not only by the agencies that are more directly involved, but also by the academia and other sectors. Civil Defence can and should be accessible to everyone and it must encompass the four premises for disaster reduction: Prevention, Preparation for Emergencies and Disasters, Response to Disasters and Reconstruction. Thus, it will be possible to attain solutions that lead to the principal goal of Civil Defence: “the natural right to life and safety”^{iv}

Based on the fact that fear is inherent to everyone and the idea that conditioning and training may assist in the emotional preparation in disaster situations, interviews were conducted, in November 2012, with military officers from the Brazilian Fire Department (4th Maritime Group – 4th GMAR) holding the following ranks: 1st Sergeant, Warrant Officer, 1st Lieutenant and Lieutenant Colonel, who had served for different lengths of time and had different degrees of experience. Individual interviews were held at the Itaipú Headquarter, in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro. Although it was decided that interviewees should be allowed to freely express themselves, interviews were guided by a pre-established questionnaire which favoured questions regarding situations of risk, fear during action, sensations and examples of situations experienced both in and out of their role in Civil

Defence, as well as their expectation of receiving therapeutic care. The selected group were able to describe their fears and weaknesses when facing dangerous situations. It is worth noting that the subjects interviewed represented only part of the professionals acting in disaster events in general.

The informants have to deal with the most dramatic and critical emergency situations and their accounts almost invariably lead to reflection due to their extraordinary events especially within the context of Civil Defence. Indeed, common to all the interviews was the recognition that firemen are gifted, they have something that defies all explanation. This gift is a *sine qua non* condition which enables them to dedicate themselves fully to their jobs. Their devotion, involvement and love for their profession were made absolutely clear during the interviews. Demands made on these professionals were not only external. They know that, in many cases (if not all), they have to be at 100% of their physical, mental and emotional capacity to deal with events. Thus, they seem to be constantly alert and aware of everything that is happening around them, even when they are off duty. Due to special conditioning, acquired during training sessions at the academy, they become aware of their fears and are able overcome them to save people's life.

During the course of their accounts – which took place amid noise, the sound of sirens and call outs for emergencies that distracted the attention of the officers – it was clear that they wished to express not only their feelings, but also the desperation felt in situations of loneliness and impotence and in the urgent need to find solutions amidst chaos. These accounts show that not only fear of the unknown, but also situations involving adrenaline and mixed emotions are fundamental for action, since it is never possible to know what is to come: it could be a rescue at sea, on a mountainside, a car crash, a collapsed building, a landslide, or people buried alive, at any time of the day or night. Faced with these situations, fear and its effects need to be managed. *“We, rescue workers, have to know how to control and administer this fear so that it does not have a negative effect on our professional performance”*. One of the officers adds that fear is a necessary element in actions to save lives. *“There must be fear, because if you have no fear, you end up being over confident and over-confidence is when you run the risk of accidents, even if you are a professional”*. Through this perspective, without fear there is no possibility of facing danger, since fearless actions would reduce the chance of survival. *“There can be no hesitation; you are afraid when you enter the sea, but when your feet hit the water that fear has to go, because otherwise the rescue cannot be performed; all that remains is adrenaline...”* So, fear reminds them that they are human, not superheroes, as the job itself may so often lead them - and also the population that is involved in the events - to think. Saving lives is an act of heroism, in which - apparently - there can be no emotion involved; as if the agent were above suffering. But emotions are always present and are embedded in each gesture, even though distancing is an imperative, precisely in order to preserve the necessary strength and balance.

In truly dramatic situations, recounted with pride and care, the aspects of trauma and fear are managed within the intrinsic need to find a solution to the situation, to safeguard life. For example, in extreme cases of sea rescue, involving strong currents and gigantic waves, in which the rescue workers themselves doubt their ability to fulfil their

purpose; or in fires occurring in houses or communities where, due to critical conditions, officers not only deal with painful events, but also with the pain of harsh daily reality, which could itself be seen as disastrous. Another finding, related to rescue manoeuvres, referred to the obvious suffering of the victims who pour out their fear and panic on the men that have come to rescue and save them. They are obliged to act as administrators of the emotional shocks that arise from facing the danger that they (and victims) undergo. They try to be balanced and attempt to stabilize sufferers after the crisis, but, sometimes they have unsatisfactory professional training to cope with the magnitude of the effects this shock is capable of causing.

It is worth remembering that all situations are unique and singular. Thus, rescue workers attain their professionalism with time which provides constant training and successive missions that result in increasing experience. Trauma occurs when they are not successful; when they are unable to save someone and life is lost in their hands. They come back sad, downcast, trying to understand what went wrong and struggling to come to terms with the situation, as well as perceiving the need for greater effort and more training. These are men on a constant mission to exceed, even amid uncertainties and neglect.

One particularly striking point is the need to share the emotions experienced. The human dimension reminds us that those who help, save, care and protect others also need to be helped through their pain, saved from their traumas, cared and protected from their strongest emotions. Because heroes, as they are considered to be, also love, suffer and have fears, what leads to a reflection about their individual roles during calamities. *“Yes, we are afraid, but not of losing our own lives, we mostly fear losing the life that we have pledged to save or also losing a colleague in the course of duty”*. Many recall colleagues who did not survive the events in which they were present together and in which they gave their lives attempting to save the lives of others, people who were unknown to them but who were the true essence of the oath sworn within the corporation.

“Being a fireman is like a game on emotions”, stated one of the officers with pride. They must be able to control their emotions, avoid creating expectations, accept certain outcomes and some fatalities, and to be aware of the fact that they cannot, no matter how hard they try, perform miracles. *“We have to be the last to give up, it’s our duty”*. Because they do not quit, they make the need for emotional support absolutely clear. Therefore, religiosity is present at all times and it seems that the vast majority of the officers, have their own beliefs systems. For many, prayer facilitates understanding, for example, of the abnormality of a situation, of the fear felt by the victims and of the desperation and terror that some scenes can produce – *“We have to know how to deal with this and to mentally draw away from the situation; we have to understand the victim’s point of view without expecting them to understand ours... that is why, every time I am called out I ask God to help me in every possible way”*. The knowledge demanded to perform their tasks, therefore, goes beyond life-saving techniques. They need to be aware and to know people. It is an exercise involving decoding, understanding and otherness.

The accounts do not encompass their personal life, as if the training and conditioning received allow them to direct every fibre of their bodies and minds to the job in hand. Personal matters are put on hold, awaiting the return to their original state, when

they become men who have families, friends and beliefs. The reward for such bravery, albeit permeated with fear, is found in their victim's appreciation; in the applause received at a beach where everyone gathers to greet them after a critical life-saving action; in the eyes and embrace of a mother and in the life of a suicidal person that is re-validated by the words and courage of a fireman who risked climbing more than 50 meters on a radio mast and relegated his own emotions, his own family and his own life into second place, in the hope of attaining victory through the life of a man: "*My mission is to save lives... but I could have died that day and at that moment your whole life flashes before your eyes. The risk was tremendous... I think that was one of my scariest moments*". The mission to safeguard and preserve life seems to be in their blood; firemen are trained and conditioned for this purpose. Although they face fear and do not reject any rescue because they are afraid, concern is always there. Death is a spectrum which does not stop them. Moreover, each event is significant, because when they succeed, the feeling of gratitude and personal satisfaction is immense. However, it is commensurate with the demands made on these professionals, especially if they cannot act fast enough because unexpected events delay their attempts to solve the crisis, or because the event requires more resources than they have available. The line between applause and rejection is really thin. Indeed, being a fireman is no easy task!

Thus, the interdependence of human relationships can be perceived, since during crisis we cannot reject the help of others. It is impossible to disentangle events from emotions. In all instances, the actions of the Civil Defence agencies focus on the management of life and safety, on restoration and on the hope for a better life.

Final considerations

Noticing reactions of fear which are inherent to or arise from risky situations and understanding them within the context to which the agent has been exposed are means of ensuring an adequate adaptation to a new reality and fostering a society that is more resilient and more aware of its role in the building of a better future. Barros & Barros (2012) argue that it is precisely

when major disasters strike a particular population and everything seems to be lost, that the incredible capacity of people to come together and respond to the upheavals caused results in true lessons for life (p. 686).

It is important to note that, within the context of citizenship, access to people - and to their behaviour and positioning in the face of factual reality - is made easier by a fundamental interest in their personal concerns and the reality in which they find themselves. When people notice the needs of the others, they are able to build an approach which facilitates the solution of an emergency event in a given risky situation. This approach might, on the other hand, seem to be distant from the concept of urgency. However, awareness must comprise a focus that validates the presence of others, as well

as their inherent individualities and commitments. Within the multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary nature of Civil Defence is embedded the duty to reflect on a myriad of emergency issues. In particular, it is essential to reflect on the emotional dialogues developed, so as to ensure that the “set of preventive, rescue, assistance and reconstructive actions designed to avert or minimize disasters, to preserve the morale of the population and to restore social normality”^v, is consolidated and contributes to the minimization of disasters.

The importance of recognizing fear in others must be highlighted. It is essential to perceive singularities, as well as social, cultural and environmental aspects, from which, very often, fear cannot be dissociated, be it in situations of crisis or in daily life. Furthermore, it is important that this understanding of fear can play a part in assisting and rescuing, and in contributing to the minimization of risk events by sharing experiences, discussions, and informative preventive measures. The aim is to perceive the reality of the emotions involved in care through multiple perspectives. This is rooted in the fact that human beings are the main focus of a point of view where quality of life and guidance are the preconditions for potential preventive solutions. It is always through this differentiated angle that facts and attitudes should be pre-judged, if possible without distancing and always aware of the main focus, humanity.

Fear is likely to always cast a shadow on societies, as a sombre backdrop that expands before-eyes which hesitate about the future. Despite all the fear that may result from natural cataclysms or human interventions that determine the progress of the human race, BECK (2010, p. 15) reminds us that “life must go on after this”.

Notes

- i On April, 10th, 2012, Law number 12.608 was enacted. It redefined the guidelines and the objectives of the National Protection and Civil Defence policies.
- ii According to Castro (1998), it is the “ Intrinsic condition of the receiving body or system that, when interacting with the magnitude of the event or accident, represents the adverse effects, measured in terms of the intensity of probable damage or harm. It is the opposite of safety”. (Civil Defence Glossary, p. 188).
- iii Região Serrana, mountainous region in the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro.
- iv The purpose of the National Civil Defence Policy.
- v Definition of Civi

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REFLECTIONS ON FEAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN CIVIL DEFENCE ACTIONS

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Resumo: Este artigo invoca um tema recorrente nas consequências de desastres, naturais ou causados pelo homem: a emoção do medo. Dificilmente uma catástrofe não deixa sequelas e invariavelmente o medo está entre as mais frequentes. A questão ou problema de pesquisa mais premente é determinar em que medida o medo se torna um aliado nas possíveis ações preventivas da Defesa Civil ou quando refletimos sobre o que ocorre com as vítimas em suas expressividades pós-traumáticas. Objetiva-se um caminho onde essas expressões emocionais, especialmente a emoção do medo, possam contribuir para o fortalecimento das experiências em situações de calamidade. Além da pesquisa bibliográfica, foram realizadas entrevistas com agentes de Defesa Civil envolvidos no processo das ações, no socorro e amparo às vítimas, utilizados na tentativa de compreender a emoção vivenciada, que pode viabilizar possibilidades de prevenção e construção de uma nova realidade.

Palavras-chave: medo, desastres, defesa civil

Abstract: This article raises a recurring theme in the consequences of disasters, whether natural or caused by men: the emotion of fear. A catastrophe hardly ever nature leaves no sequelae and, invariably, fear is among the most popular. The research question or problem more pressing is to determine to what extent the fear becomes an ally in the possible preventive civil defense or when we reflect on what happens to the victims in their expressions posttraumatic. The objective is to construct a path in which these emotional expressions, especially the emotion of fear, may contribute to the strengthening of experiences in disaster situations. Apart from literature, Interviews were conducted reports of agents involved in civil defense actions, to save, rescue and assist victims, are used as a means of understanding the emotion experienced, that can enable possibilities for prevention and building a new reality.

Key-words: fear, disaster, civil defense

Resumen: En este artículo se propone un tema recurrente en las consecuencias de los desastres, naturales o provocados por el hombre : la emoción del miedo. Apenas un desastre no deja secuelas e invariablemente el miedo es uno de los más frecuentes. El tema o problema de investigación más urgente es determinar en qué medida el miedo se convierte en un aliado en las posibles medidas preventivas de Protección Civil o cuando reflexionamos sobre lo que ocurre con las víctimas en su expresividad postraumático. El objetivo es un camino donde estas expresiones emocionales , sobre todo la emoción del miedo , pueden contribuir al fortalecimiento de las experiencias en situaciones de desastre . Además de la revisión de la literatura , se realizaron entrevistas con los agentes de Protección Civil de las acciones involucradas en el proceso , el alivio y apoyo a las víctimas , se utiliza en un intento de entender la emoción experimentada , que pueden facilitar las posibilidades de prevención y construir una nueva realidad.

Palabras clave: el miedo, los desastres , la protección civil
