

Narrating oneself and “putting in common”: life history and proximity communication

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Abstract

This paper reflects the life history method, from a proximity communication approach, further elaborated in-depth as a theoretical-methodological frame of reference in the thesis “Proximity and confessions: experiences in homelessness and building of oneself. Life histories and resistance in Historic Downtown Salvador, Bahia”. At the interception of these paradoxical methodological frameworks, the aspects of “the meeting of worlds” and “the truth of the other” were highlighted, thus enabling an assessment of the role assigned to sensitivity, respect for the other and the fair extent to which one places oneself, while also valuing the dialogic contexts between narrators and the researcher embodied in qualitative research.

Keywords: Life history. Proximity communication. Intersubjectivity. Homeless subjects. Historic Downtown Salvador.

Introduction

The methodological proposal of the doctoral research entitled “Proximity and confessions: experiences in homelessness and the construction of the self. Histories of life and resistance in the Historic Downtown Salvador, Bahia”¹ guided the delicate encounter of the subjectivities of the interviewees and the researcher, and a methodological principle, related to the researcher’s communicative posture, was evidenced at the moment of the meeting with the research participants. It was possible to consider the Life History Method associated with the idea of communication as a paradoxical device of proximity and distance, developing this aspect during the doctoral internship held in 2019, at the University of Beira Interior, Portugal, together with the Department of Communication and Arts and the Communication, Philosophy and Humanities R&D Unit - LabCom. IFP, with the study of texts authored by Paulo Serra (2006a; 2006b), in which this professor addresses the concept of sensitivity in Lévinas’ theory of communication. For the French philosopher, “before being a ‘circulation of messages’, and underlying it, communication is ‘proximity’, ‘relationship of proximity’ or ‘relationship with the Neighbor’, ‘approximation and contact of the neighbor’” (LÉVINAS, 1994, p. 224, 228, 235) (SERRA, 2006b, p. 5); above all, in this theoretical framework, communication as proximity, even if in asymmetrical origin, and precisely for this reason, implies the ethical question, which would correspond to the “responsibility for the other”.

In relation to Life History, there is a range of academic articles that refer to it as a method, mostly based on the writings of Paul Ricoeur. In this article, we were interested in highlighting the relationship of Life History with elements of the self-narrative (autobiographical method) and its application: from the observations, dialogues, and records that occurred in the development of the method throughout the study, paradoxical communicative situations emerge.

Bringing methods and experiences together: the making of a research

The doctoral research, of a qualitative nature, involved the production and recording of life histories of subjects who live or have lived on the streets in the Historic Downtown of Salvador, in the state of Bahia, Brazil. The choice of a qualitative approach, and this method in particular,

1 The thesis, defended in 2021 with PosCultura – IHAC/UFBA, considered the question of how the identities of subjects who live or lived on the streets in the Historic Downtown of Salvador are constructed and expressed and produced, through the Life History Method, four self-narratives. From those, two complementary analytical perspectives stand out: if in some way, all four life histories produced could be tied together by a thread that crosses them, implying an institutional other whose voice in the background echoes the pastoral presence, - and if through the concept of social framework elaborated by Goffman (2012), based on interpretative schemes that organize social experiences, Sampaio (2004) leads us to understand charity as a social structure - ethical subjects also emerge from the memories and experiences that constitute those narrative identities, between gestures of reflexivity, resistance and “care for oneself” (FOUCAULT, 2006).

was justified by the understanding that the memories and experiences of the subjects in street circumstances would demand a more porous and fluid way of working, capable of configuring through a reflexive and re-signifying practice, the individual and collective perspectives of the subjects inhabiting that *possible social world*² (GALINDO CÁCERES, 1997).

In literary terms, in the eighteenth century, and according to a certain consensus, from Rousseau's Confessions onwards, the appearance of the self enabled the elaboration of the autobiographical genre, valuing memoirs, writings in intimate or epistolary diaries as spaces of decisive self-reflection for the establishment of individualism as a characteristic of the West. This trend was replicated in scientific terms, with the emergence, especially in the social sciences, of methods that considered biographical narratives as sources of information, serving the scientific curiosity of common life. (ARFUCH, 2007).

Life histories can refer to a product, process, or means to obtain it. As a qualitative research technique of social research, Life History emerged in the early twentieth century, influenced by journalistic interviews and based on the social psychology of the American philosopher Georg Hebert Mead (1863-1913). It gained relevance as part of a tradition that sought to understand the sociocultural influences on individual expressions and practices, especially in the twenties, in productions of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, under the coordination of Robert Ezra Park.

With the decline of the Chicago School, life stories were almost extinct; in the post-war period, the academic world began to privilege objectivism and quantitative methods. It was only in the mid-1970s that French sociology discovered this method. (SANSEAU, 2005). Over the decades, there have been variations in its application and the parameters of interpretation of its results among the authors who have worked with the method, encompassing a diversity of positions on the nature of the Life History, its structure, the conditions of production and analysis, the techniques of realization, exploration, and communication.

Considering the need to elaborate the *corpus* of the doctoral research referred to in this paper, the life stories were produced from in-depth interviews with four narrators, two women, and two adult men, identified only by the initial letter of their names (Mr. L., Mrs. M., Mr. F. and Mrs. N.)³tag. We opted for the number of informants in the research based on the choice directed to the detailing and deepening of the life histories, to the detriment of a greater number of narrators, following methodological indicators found in the literature. On the other hand, the

2 We borrow the expression of Galindo Cáceres (1997), in reference to representations (comparable and complementary to each other) of how a certain world is configured at a given moment. Those representations take on meaning when they are related to the other configured objects.

3 They are approximately contemporaneous (they have the same age group, between 55 and 58 years old), and have had 10 years or more of experience living on the streets, corresponding, in those aspects, to the percentages recorded in relation to the homeless population in Salvador, Bahia (CARVALHO *et al.*, 2017). The connection of those narrators with the central area of the city obeys a varied range of daily activities, in different times, past and present. All of them have in common the participation in social projects.

method proposed by Galindo Cáceres (1997) mentions at least three distinct moments for the production of life histories, namely:

1st. Exploration, when the first contact with the narrator takes place.

2nd. Description: resuming the narrator’s spontaneous story, recording in detail the elements of the text and the circumstances of the record. The informant should be asked to participate in the ordering of the topics to be presented and discussed. This stage provides for the return to the informant so that he/she can evaluate, validate, or refute the analyst-researcher’s reading.

3rd. Background analysis of the Life History: from the two previous records, the basic and central components are selected and discussed with the narrator. All the material of the second stage is re-ordered according to the general criterion of vital situations and objectives. The previous analytical reading is presented to the informant for his comment and adjustment. The amount of information enables the analyst to create hypotheses about the informant’s life axes, elaborating a third interview guide according to the interests and thematic options described by the informant. The thematization of this last stage improves the information about the life history and the analytical relationship of the social actor with his/her history.

In those terms, we sought to ensure, with the exception of one of the cases, a minimum of three in-depth interviews with each narrator, not rejecting the idea of continuity if we understood that there were still significant aspects of the life story, essential to theoretical reflection, without having been addressed. Fontanella and Magdaleno Júnior (2012) also advocate the sensitivity of the researcher and the participants regarding cognitive and affective elements, aiming to determine the sufficiency (saturation) of the encounters and the volume of data produced.

In practice, for each of the narrators, except for one of the women, there were three formal meetings in places chosen by the research informants, according to the possibilities and circumstances. The series of in-depth interviews varied with regard to the researcher’s intervention: the first interview, we tried to conduct with as little interference as possible, leaving the interviewee free to choose the themes and the associations between them. The second and third interviews, however, had greater interference in the form of questions and interjections, conferring a character of dialogue and expressing an approximation between the researcher and the narrator.

The group of narrators could be divided and differentiated in many ways. Perhaps the most important consideration of their current moments of life in relation to the street circumstances or, on the contrary, through the acquisition of their own *place*: Mr. L. and Mrs. M. had their own homes for about 5 years, through social programs. Mr. F. and Mrs. N. recently left the street and shelter circumstances and started to receive the rental assistance paid by the City Hall, with which they rented small and precarious living spaces. The two informants who already had their own homes preferred those places to carry out or continue the interviews, allowing the researcher to get to know other spaces and elements that make up their private

lives when it was possible, for example, to perceive the way they organize, care for and beautify their homes, objects that they value, in addition to part of the daily dynamics of their lives. The other two narrators, still in shelter or social rental circumstances, opted for conversations in public spaces, squares, cafeterias, or bus stop shelters.

For the cases that encompassed troubled circumstances typical of the scenes of the interviews in the field - interviews conducted on the street, in commercial establishments, in the midst of passers-by and car noise, with frequent interruptions, etc. -it was necessary to reflect on the implications of street conditions on the subjectivity of the narrator subject, on the feasibility of evoking memories and elaborating a self-narrative in adverse contexts. Thus, we also understand the faster saturation and the greater circularity and repetitions of the discourse in the case of the narrator, with whom we conducted only two in-depth interviews, without discarding the action of escape mechanisms and preservation of her subjectivity, as *“defensive habits in the face of the experience of interiority.”* (GALINDO CÁCERES, 1997, p. 147).

In view of those and other specificities verified in the field for the production of life histories, we reflect on the paradox of communication as a device of proximity and distance for the making of the academic-scientific experience that implies acting in the sense of the possibilities of carrying out research.

“Putting in common” and the distribution of a force

Within the scope of this article, we take in greater particularly aspects of the production of Mrs. M.’s story to exemplify communicative situations that occurred in the field. However, we also mention dialogical circumstances involved in the elaboration of other life stories.

In the in-depth interviews conducted with Mrs. M., the experience of interiority (GALINDO CÁCERES, 1997; GIDDENS, 1991) was marked by discomforts, explained by the narrator. There was a drop out at a certain point and a long period for the conclusion of their participation in the research. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with Ms. M.: the first, on 08/22/2018, the second a few days later, on 09/04/2018, and the third, only almost five months after that second meeting. It so happened that, a few days after the second interview, on 10/24/2018, Ms. M. canceled her participation in the research by phone before, however, reinforcing the indication of other participants and valuing the initiative.

Faced with her refusal, at that moment, the researcher only reaffirmed that yes, the decision would be hers, and at any time. In fact, the last meeting would have been marked by Mrs. M.’s discomfort in narrating some of her most painful memories, by moments of silence, of emotion, and by the desire to forget (RICOEUR, 2007):

[...], it’s not easy. Do you see the person like that and think that Mrs. M. suffered? Suffered! What I’ve been through was suffering, it’s no joke, for us to get to where we are, we go through half a world of things! [...] I know it was a struggle, it

was a lot of struggle, I don't even like to remember the past I've been through! ... suffering [she gets emotional], the person gets back on their feet, half a world of things, you know? Right? [...] If I say something here, to cut the conversation short, if I say something to you here, that I don't even like to remember, when I lived this life of the world [She lowers her voice, finally, whispers something inaudible, I propose to turn off the tape recorder]. (Ms. M., interview, 2018).

More than three months later, in one of the meetings of the Pastoral Group of the Street People, when the researcher met her again, she decided to tell Mrs. M. that she would not give up her story. She seemed pleased and content, and asked for time to consider the matter. She informed that she would have surgery the following week, and the researcher was willing to accompany her, taking her to the hospital, and in visits to her home that occurred after the medical procedure. On 01/25/2019, the researcher went to Mrs. M.'s house, and she was accompanied by Mr. F., another research informant. The researcher had already held two meetings for interviews with Mr. F. and, at that moment, he seemed willing to continue narrating what was going on in his life. He spoke of the birth of his granddaughter, the recent loss of more relatives. Mrs. M. watched attentively and seemed in some way stimulated to retell her own story. After Mr. F.'s departure, the researcher agreed with Mrs. M. to present her with the short story proposal she had written based on the previous interviews, so that she could then define her participation in the research, and so it happened. The third and final interview, representing their re-entry into the research, was conducted on 01/29/2019.

We believe that Mrs. M. needed time to reflect and situate herself in what it implies to elaborate and tell her story, also to understand the movement of approximation of the researcher. Perhaps it seemed decisive that the researcher affirmed the relevance of her narrative and her participation in the research, in addition to having been a witness, in otherness, of Mr. F.'s enthusiasm in narrating the events experienced by him, at the same time that the successive contacts that occurred between Mrs. M and the researcher, not specific to the interview scenes, seemed decisive. They established openings for the development of trust.

More broadly, in our view, the accumulation of circumstances of social vulnerability results in traces of insecurity and distrust experienced by the narrators. Those are mistrusts that have reason to exist, insofar as traditional bonds and forms of trust have been broken; that access to resettlement systems is limited, such as the possibility of understanding and exercising “new trusts” that are required by expert systems (GIDDENS, 1991), in addition to the incompetence of the “expert systems” that fail to meet the demands of that social world: how can we believe in public administration and government programs that do not guarantee the minimum needs of the population? How can we have confidence in the police and the judiciary in the context of repeated and unpunished violations?

The first moment of the researcher's approach to the research public reflected, therefore, either the time of the research that sought to align the principle of scientific objectivity with

the subjectivities of the individuals involved in the investigation, or the encounter of those subjectivities. The circumstances experienced in the field, and those that encompass the production of meaning of life histories as resources for qualitative research, are certainly quite complex and often go beyond the technical dimension.

In terms of difficulties, we would like to assume that the researcher also experienced moments of insecurity, in which she found herself on the verge of losing everything. Several times she was reminded of Bourdieu's warnings (2003, p. 703) about "failed interviews", and certainly, many mistakes were made on the part of the researcher in those moments of approximation and encounter. From the lowest to the highest degree, we can mention: the mistake in the use of some terms due to not knowing enough about the language and the proper terms used in that social universe, such as the word "belly" to say "pregnancy", or the expression "to live with", "I got a woman", or "to friend",⁴ instead of "marriage/marry"; forced or misplaced questions, due to unconsciousness or ignorance (BOURDIEU, 2003).

A concept coined by Bourdieu (2003, p. 695), which is close to the idea of communication as proximity, is that of "non-violent communication". By considering the objective structures to which the research relationship is subordinated and the cultural dissymmetry between narrators and researchers, the author suggests trying to avoid objectification of the subjectivities of the informants and to ensure the intellectual and affective participation of the researcher.

From this last aspect, we could return to the central question of this article and evaluate to what extent the Life History Method implies the paradox of communication as proximity and distance between the researcher and the subjects informing the research. First, however, it would be appropriate to ask: in the practice of research, what would exemplify its communicational paradox?

In the asymmetrical relationship that is established, and that is evident in the field, would communication as proximity and distance make it indispensable to assume that something escapes the power of the proponent self through the game (research)? Could you allude to the need to share, between the researcher and other research subjects, "points of reference", such as information on aspects of relevance, difficulties, misunderstandings, or challenges of doing research, that is, indicators of the "truth" for the researcher?

From our experience in the field, the Life History Method would imply "putting in common" by suggesting the distribution of a force (SERRA, 2006b) of the attestation of the power that the informing subject has in relation to carrying out the research, which involves the idea of assuming the need and vulnerability located among researchers, academics, technicians or managers (BOURDIEU, 2003, p. 10), who depend on the authorization of those subjects, and on access to those social worlds that they seek to understand or, in the case of managers, in which they intend to intervene.

⁴ We later understood that this last form expresses one of the variables of the study, which is the religious question. A friend is one who "has not had the blessing of God and lives in sin". In this construction, sin is revealed in the relationship by the bond of friendship between man and woman.

To declare the indispensable participation of the other in the research process is both to recognize how much this other touches us and to recognize a weakness. It is the refusal of the panoptic function favored by the predominance of “the gaze” in a “double reduction [of sensibility], oculo-centrist and epistemological, to which the [scientific] tradition has subjected it”, and its ligaments/slippages characteristic of the modern – “the seeing of manipulating, the contemplation of doing, the ‘theory’ of ‘technique’” (SERRA, 2006a, p. 6). According to Serra (2006a, p. 5-6), mentioning Sartre, there is the possibility of the inversion of the Benthamian panopticon, when the “gaze does not represent only a power of the one who looks over what is looked at; it represents, too, a power of what is looked at over what looks at it.”

The risk of “putting in common” an analytical path

Reproducing Benjamin’s (1987) phrase, Ecléa Bosi (1994, p. 88), when mentioning the relationship between memory and narrative, reminds us that “narration is an artisanal form of communication”, emphasizing that “[...], it is necessary always to be confronting, communicating and receiving impressions so that our memories gain consistency.” (BOSI, 1994, p. 414). The aspects of the comparison of points of view and exchanges in communicative situations mentioned by Bosi (1994) would reinforce the process of elaboration of self-narratives.

With regard to life history from the perspective of proximity communication, theoretically, there would be at least two ways of relating those devices, which are mutually implicated: the most direct form of life history understood as a communicative activity and the one that considers proximity communication *a requirement* for its effectiveness. With regard to the first perspective, it would be the case of pondering that “Biographical analysis is essentially a communicative situation”, requiring communicative or dialogical activities.

[...]: the informant must *tell* his or her life story, *describe* life situations, *and argue* about significant and recurring problems in his/her life and how he/she relates to them. The researcher, by meticulously working on this communicative material, also becomes another interlocutor, integrating the dialogical circuit of knowledge production. (CARVALHO, 2003, p. 294)

The communicational element would be implicated in the research that has the history of life as a method in some of its dimensions:

I – **between narrator - and oneself**, within the narrative itself, when the possibility of (re)agreeing and (re)living the experience has with the communicative element the *guiding thread* that gives meaning to the past retold in the present of the life history (BOSI, 1994);

II - **between narrator - and reader**, while betting on the sensible for the reverberation of the narrative voice in intersubjectivity.

Moreover, if it is true that Sartre considers such power as a form of “bad faith” - insofar as the subject, placing himself in the situation of an object, tries to provoke in another passive a feeling of admiration or love - there is a whole sociology, which has in Simmel one of its initiators and in Goffman one of its best-known representatives, who sees this power, the power of “self-presentation”, as one of the central aspects of the intersubjective relationship (SIMMEL, 1991, p. 226-7; GOFFMAN, 1996; SERRA, 2006a, p. 6).

III – **between narrator – and researcher/listener**, in the moments of approximation and during the interviews, that is, in communicative situations – and here we could already speak of proximity communication as a *requirement* for the effectiveness of the Life History Method, in which the word is what makes it viable, because “The passage from the ‘element’ to the world of things also presupposes, as a decisive element, language: it is the word [...] which, by fixing things, gives them identity and stability. [and] allows the commonality of ‘communication’ (LÉVINAS, 1994b, p. 148; SERRA, 2006a, p. 9).

In narrative, this common is verifiable, for example, when the narrator selects “scenes” and “arguments” that model the life history based on interactions with others (MARTUCCELLI, 2009; ORLANDI, 2017) or in the forms of anticipation of the interlocutor’s inquiries (BOURDIEU, 2003):

Mr. F. – [...].Then I went downstairs, near my mother’s house, I went, I got the stove from the neighbor’s house, she helped me, I put it on my head, then I went down to the junkyard, gave 3 reais and 50, the stove, then I came back again, I shoveled Feira de São Joaquim, I went to take the bottle of pet to the boy who buys it in my hand, [...].

Patricia – This place was also close to your mother’s house and you didn’t go there.

Mr. F. – I didn’t go, to tell you the truth, nor did I go. I even wanted to go there and see what the case is, if my nephew has finished beating slabs, if he has already finished his work, he is doing things little by little.

Patricia – And there’s no way you can go there just to see your mother, talk for a while, and then leave without...

Mr. F. – ...No poor people, no nothing...

Patricia – No problem, isn’t that possible?

Mr. F. – Yes, a Genilson, Genilson there [from Sister Dulce’s Hospital], he was even telling me [this]..., Genilson has a room [of care] for us to talk, this thing of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], right?, people who call, who go there. (Mr. F. interview, 2019, emphasis added)

If “the self-designation of the speaking subject is produced in situations of interlocution in which reflexivity is associated with otherness” (RICOEUR, 2006, p. 111), in the dialogue/interview, the role of the researcher-listener includes attentive, interactive listening, and “the data obtained are always ‘a joint product of the interviewer and the subject, i.e., of the interaction between them’ (HELLING, 1987, p. 74). This interaction [...] is, in fact, a fundamental requirement for the effectiveness of life histories as a methodological procedure.” (RIBEIRO, 1995, p. 131).

In this context, the relationship between the researcher and the narrator is established by a “contract of mutual trust”, in an “inter-subjective approach” for reciprocal access to the two subjectivities. (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 2003, p. 57). An unusual aspect of this communicable element occurs in the sharing of suffering: if, through listening/proximity, the narrated experience is projected into the possibility of becoming the listener’s own experience, in the same way that the narrator extracted from his own life and from the lives of others the collection of his experience (BENJAMIN, 1987), in the subject-subject relationship (subject in transference to subject) the painful experience of existing (FREUD, 1997), or simply existing, constitutes sharing. “And since ‘singularity is understood to be singularity’, ‘fraternity with one’s neighbor’, language is ‘responsibility for others’, for their ‘pain’ and for their ‘lack’ – a responsibility that ‘does not refer to my freedom’ (LÉVINAS, 1994a, p. 233; SERRA, 2006a, p. 11).

In the specific of the four life histories produced in the thesis study, the interviews conducted in the field bring characteristics of the narrators’ lives that configure their conditions of social suffering, which imply constraints, and which often require courage to denounce:

Patricia: Do you think she didn’t want you to quit [housework] why?

Mrs. M.: for me to stay inside the house, take care of her boy and be what? slave!, that she put me to take care of the house!, then, she was ready, I think she wanted me to stay, for sure because.... [...], she paid me to take care of the child but... She didn’t pay me the right money, she paid me like this, um... She didn’t pay me [the tone of her voice shows an embarrassment with the situation, or with the question], because at that time people didn’t pay salaries, she gave me some change... (Ms. M., interview, 2018).

At the confluence of the paradoxical methodological devices to which we resorted in the research, two aspects that guide the process of intersubjectivity are evidenced: the encounter of worlds and the truth of the other.

Several authors record the possibility of this meeting of worlds, of different configurations and points of view, whether in the narratives (BOSI, 1994; RICOEUR, 2007), either in the life history (GALINDO CÁCERES, 1997), or in the communicational sphere:

Just as space is not made up of simultaneous points in themselves, just as our duration cannot break its adhesions to a space of durations, the communicative world is not a bundle of parallel consciousnesses. The strokes blur and pass through each other, forming a single conveyor belt of ‘public duration’. (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1991, p. 19).

On the other hand, life histories describe the detailed memories and the positions of the self and the other in the historical scene, and in the moment of encounter: it implies thinking about the “truth” of the other, putting worlds in mediation, bringing together different, contrasting points of view, in short, an exercise of recognition and otherness (LISBOA, 2013), because “Communication does not suppose ‘transcendence’, the ‘radical separation’, the ‘strangeness’ of the interlocutors, the ‘revelation of the other to me’, the ‘experience of something absolutely foreign’, the ‘trauma of astonishment’?” (SERRA, 2006b, p. 4).

Concepts such as *sensitivity guide the* “ethical communication of proximity” that is established even from the relationship between an *I* and a *you*, unequal and unsymmetrical. (SERRA, 2006a; 2006b). In Paulo Serra’s reading, Lévinas’ philosophy reconstructs the concept of sensibility by demarcating it into three complementary moments: sensibility affirmed as fruition; sensibility affirmed as proximity, contact, the original element of language itself [“the original language”]; and in a third moment, “in which sensitivity is described in terms of ‘fruition’ and ‘wound’ (or ‘suffering’), understood both as [...] “vulnerability” (Lévinas, 1990: 102 ff. and passim)”. (SERRA, 2006a, p. 7).

Vulnerability to the point of a kind of disenchantment, reflecting a final gesture of perceiving oneself in the other, even the most radical understanding, of the foreign other, “[...] in its appearance in the flesh of the world”, reliefs, deviations to be recognized, deciphered, in the poetic words of Merleau-Ponty:

For they are not fictions with which I would populate my desert, children of my spirit, possible forever unactual, but my twins or the flesh of my flesh. I certainly don’t live their lives, they are definitely absent from me and I from them. But this distance becomes a strange closeness as soon as the being of the sensible is rediscovered, for the sensible is precisely that which, without leaving its place, can harass more than one body. (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1991, p. 15).

The paradox of communication is thus affirmed in the sensitive movement of approximation and distance that restores the wholeness of being, equating the fundamental problem of all communication, which is also the fundamental problem of all ethics, by questioning and answering about the viability of a relationship of the subject and identity (I) with exteriority and otherness (other) (SERRA, 2006b): “That this relationship exists is

only a possibility, always condemned to uncertainty and risk: ‘One can certainly only say of communication and transcendence its uncertainty. (...) Communication with others can only be transcendent as a dangerous path, as a beautiful risk to be taken. (LÉVINAS, 1990, p. 190; SERRA, 2006b, p. 7-8).

Final considerations

Throughout the writing, we seek to present reflections on life history and proximity communication as paradoxical methodological devices, in the making of doctoral research, with a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative approach, which aimed at the production of self-narratives, evidencing the identity processes of those narrating subjects.

By considering the specificities of the life circumstances of those narrators, marked on the one hand by insecurity and social suffering, and on the other, by the need for listening and recognition, in addition to the vulnerability and hesitations of the researcher, as shareable elements – dialogical (intersubjective) that marked the fieldwork, we reflect on the Life History Method of associated with the concept of proximity communication, brought by Paulo Serra (2006a; 2006b) from the philosophy of Lévinas.

Thus, we evaluate the contribution of communication as a proximity to the life Histories method, which includes the academic-scientific work itself and implies acting in the sense of the possibilities of carrying out the research, by proposing the encounter of subjectivities between narrators and researcher, and by relating the experiences of all participants to the elaboration of self-narratives, which are always constituted, in a dialogical way, between narrator and listener/reader.

In view of the interurrences found in the research and application of the Life History Method, we highlight the paradox of communication involved in dialogical situations and the theoretical-epistemological alternatives offered by communication as a proximity to the understanding of the research outcomes, implying “the commonality”, and the distribution of a force (SERRA, 2006b).

Adhering to intersubjectivity is a dimension that allows us to reconstruct sensibility (SERRA, 2006a). In the terms of research that has the life history as its method, immersion in the game of research cannot be absolute, without access to parameters, without milestones for the experience, which includes the other, stranger, on both sides, in a two-way street, in communication.

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Galvão, P. C. S.: investigation – formal analysis - conceptualization, data curation, writing – original writing – reviewing and editing; Sampaio, A. D.: project administration – conceptualization – supervision – methodology - writing – reviewing and editing; Serra, P.: conceptualization - supervision, methodology - writing – reviewing and editing.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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