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Abstract

Landscape, time and dwelling are intertwined categories in many depopulated places in Portugal. This chapter questions the possibilities of "dwelling" in central Portugal during the current pandemic. The empirical focus was put on a rural parish where we have been carrying out ethnographic research since 2018. Located in the district of Castelo Branco, in the municipality of Proença-a-Nova, Mó is an almost uninhabited village (in 2020, it had only 3 permanent residents). In recent decades, rural exodus has been intensified by the (un)certainty of occasional fires that have devastated the region. In 2003, the village was besieged by fire and, even though the houses and human beings were spared from destruction, everything around Mó was turned into ashes. The pine forests surrounding the village were burnt along with many of the animals living in them. The analytical focus of this paper is, therefore, put in questioning the possibilities of "dwelling" in this rural hamlet of the interior of Portugal during the current pandemic. We will argue that during the current times, there has an increase in the social value given to nature by residents.

ON SCHIST WALLS, WILD BOARS AND OLIVE TREES: LANDSCAPE AND DWELLING IN RURAL PORTUGAL[1]

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Introduction: Dwelling, living, waiting

In this chapter, we use of the concepts of landscape and dwelling borrowed from anthropologist Tim Ingold (1993, 1995, 2005). According to Ingold (1993), "the temporality of the landscape may be understood by way of a 'dwelling perspective' that sets out from the premise of people's active, perceptual engagement in the world (Ingold,1993: 152). Based upon this author's approach "'to dwell' aptly conveys this conception of the production of life as a task that has continually to be worked at" (Ingold, 2005: 504). Therefore, Tim Ingold's perspective on dwelling is based on "the thesis that the production of life involves the unfolding of a field of relations that crosscuts the boundary between human and non-human" (Ingold, 2005: 504).

We assume the premise that to dwell is to build and maintain links with other, more or less distant, living beings. Building upon this, to dwell means to live together. This is a coexistence that happens with inanimate beings and objects, although these can also be loaded with memories or meanings. We question relations between people, things and environment during these pandemic times. Entangled in ethnographic data, some empirical examples are put forward, eliciting people's relations with nature (schist walls, wild boars and trees). The case of the schist walls follows this view: previously built to hold terraces used for agriculture – usually vegetable gardens, vines and mainly olive trees – today they make up the scenario of a new reality that almost reintegrates itself with nature. To dwell also

means to live with wild or domestic animals, plants, and other fauna and flora. Domestic animals, mostly dogs and cats, have disappeared along with the inhabitants, but the local space has been colonised by other animals. Some animals, such as foxes and squirrels, and vegetable species have been reintroduced successfully, their procreation facilitated by public policies that were paid for following the fires. Other living beings that became natural invaders are wild boars, which occasionally invade the surroundings of the village. Lastly, old (and new) olive trees stand forlorn in the village outskirts, reminding humans of the environmental challenges and the uncertainty brought by contemporary times.

We argue that during the pandemic, there has an increase in the social value given to nature by most residents. Valuing Nature (Harvey, 1997) and dwelling within the forest, has been a resource used by people in order to try to gain control of their daily lives against the disruptive suspension of current times. The ability to walk though (or to drive around) the village schist walls and surrounding forests became a common daily habit (in mornings and afternoons, weekdays and holidays). Thus, the spatial practice of walking emerged both as a means for passing time, as an aesthetic practice and as a way to self-promote physical and mental health among neighbors and family relatives.

A Small, Remote Place?

The village of Mó belongs to the municipality of Proença-a-Nova and, more specifically, to the parish of Alvito da Beira and Sobreira Formosa, located at thirty kilometres from Castelo Branco, the capital of the district. The local history of places like Mó and many other rural peripheries have been largely underrepresented in academic arenas. In the region under study, the countryside rests

rather invisible in academic scene. The only references are related to historical works by local priests (Catharino, 1933) or regional monographs by non-professional local ethnographers (Vilhena, 1995). Vilhena (1995) points in her research the resilience of communitarian ties among rural villagers of Proença area. Particularly, in the case of Mó, the remotedness and struggles of the village are expressed in one of the few publications which give a description of the small place. Dating from the 1980s, when there were a few dozen residents inhabiting it, it is said:

> *"History: Mó is a village lost in the far reaches of the municipality, bordering the municipalities of Oleiros and Castelo Branco. The oil press built in small dimensions corresponds to the struggle for emancipation of the small owners against those of Alvito da Beira". (Lagares, 1982, p. 16).*

As mentioned earlier, in recent decades, rural exodus has been intensified by the (un)certainty of occasional fires that have devastated the region. In 2003, the village was besieged by fire and, even though the houses and human beings were spared from destruction, everything around Mó was turned into ashes. The pine forests surrounding the village were burnt along with many of the animals living in them. It is, therefore, the second time in the 21st century that Mó has become (almost) completely isolated from the rest of the country. In August 2003, time or the perception of time was suddenly frozen in the village. At that time, isolation was significant, because the fire burned down telephone lines, electricity poles, and, in addition, it also made people's hopes for the future burn. After the fire, and in the years that followed, the village shrank: several people migrated, others died. In 2020, seventeen years later, Mó is, once again, a besieged village, forced to isolate itself,

trying to protect itself from a an entirely different kind of natural disaster. This time, however, the village did not shrink, it stretched: four houses in the village have people again. These are people who have fled from the city in search of their roots and to find a safe place in the pine forest, to spend their time during the state of emergency decreed in Portugal in this coronavirus pandemic. Over the past months, accessing the internet is a daily challenge, which forces the residents of Mó to leave their houses to climb the nearby mountain. To work or simply to communicate, people climb (on foot or by car) to the top of *Barreira*, a mountain located northwest of the village. We all coexist in this meeting space, where we intermittently pass each other, at a distance, on different days of the week and at different times of the day. The residents all inhabit this mountain, now transformed into a balcony for talking on the phone and traveling to the virtual world.

Mó is the place of origin of the mothers' family of one of the authors of this chapter. Like most of the village's population, the Ribeiros are a family of migrants for several generations, dwelling in-between Mó and other places in Portugal and the world. Since the 1960s, generations of Ribeiros have visited the village during the holidays and other times, from when they were children. In March 2020, just after the recently decreed Covid-19 pandemic by the WHO (World Health Organization), and amidst a climate of terror, distrust and fear, we moved to the village of Mó. Until the pandemic, returning to the village was viewed as a weekend leisure activity. However, since emergency period was launched in Portugal due to Covid-19, the village house became the family's main dwelling place. As Michael Hertzfeld (1997) points out, "Fieldwork brings anthropologists into contact with many styles of self-narration" (1997: 169). In this empirical

setting, one of the authors used autoetnhography. In this context, following Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) "autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography. Autoethnography can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing "home" or "native" ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer (1997 :9).

Two Ethnographic Vignettes

In this section, we explore the daily lives of two people in Mó, intertwined with the author's own experiences, with the objective of illustrating our argument.

Cousin *Zé Maria*

Born in 1967, Zé Maria is one of the 3 current permanent residents in Mó now. He is single and lives with his nephew. His family was among the poorest of the village. Unlike his older brother and most of his uncles or cousins, he never migrated to Paris or Lisbon. He has been a permanent resident in Mó all his life, is single, and has worked as a journeyman (*jornaleiro*) across Portugal, but never outside Portugal. Before the pandemic, he used to do odd jobs (*biscates*) in the nearby villages, and get some money from it. (Zé Maria is a kind of handyman: agricultural worker, bricklayer assistant, informal real estate agent, knowledgeable about herbs and winds). During the pandemic, Zé's life has undergone changes for the better: he has more neighbours, more company to talk in the village square at the end of the afternoon. Although the practice of going to Mó's cellars to drink wine and jeropiga was suspended during the state of emergency, living there is, for Zé, being less alone. Zé has no car and travels on foot and by bus outside the village. The bus only runs on Thursdays. On other days, when he needs to leave Mó, Zé walks or hitchhikes with someone.

Image 1 /
Schist Wall. *Casa do Esquife* building, Mó. The inscription "Do Povo" ("Of the people" dates form 1936 (indicative date) and recalls the practice of communitarian social activities and communal spaces. Author: Ema Pires (2020).

One of his hobbies is hunting wild boar in the vicinity of the village. The population of wild boars, and other animals, increased exponentially after the 2003 fires. This was due to public policies that funded the introduction of wild species in the burnt, derelict forests, with the aim of increasing the populations of animals. However, because of the lack of human populations and other predators that hunt wild boars, these have become majoritarian among other species and have been threatening plants, trees and other cultures. Sometimes, wild boars are viewd inside village at night-time. Zé Maria uses metal traps to catch them. Zé then kills them, using the same methods that in the past were used for killing pigs. After separating the parts of the wild boar, he usually shares a portion of the meat with the other residents. Before the pandemic, it was customary to have collective meals, in the square next to the village's community oven. Commensality was interrupted by Covid-19.
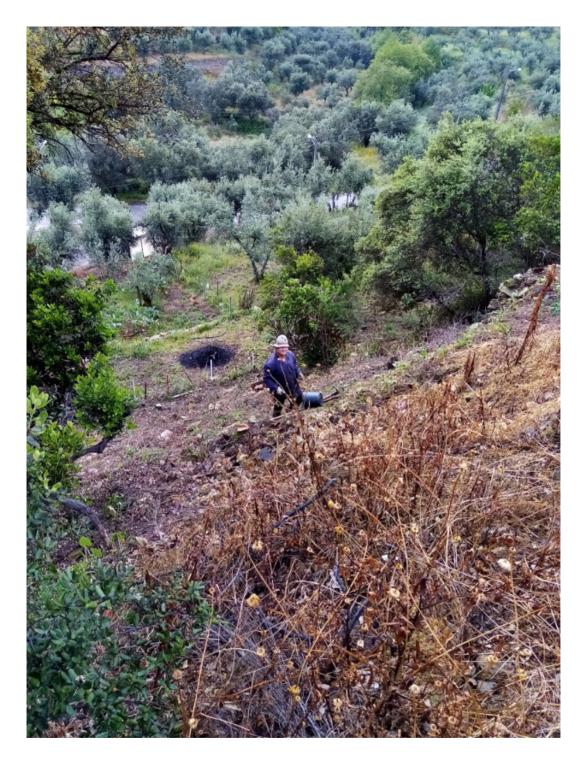
Auntie Rosa
Born 72 years ago in Lisga (a village 10 km away from Mo), Rosa migrated in her early childhood to Mó. There, she worked several years as a maid ("menina de servir em casa"), in the house of one of the well-off families of the village, and left that house to marry a local boy. They migrated to Lisbon, after getting married.

A mother of two children (who live in Lisbon with their families), she spends most of the year travelling between Mó and Morelena (Sintra, near Lisbon), where she is a permanent resident. While in Sintra, she is an active participant in the local church choir. Music is a central dimension of Rosa's life: she is also a frequent user of youtube (for music research) and also of social networks (Instagram and Whatsapp). In the current context of the pandemic, not having daily access to the internet is one of the things that she misses

the most. In Mó, she and her husband, both retired, own 3 houses in the village and have been caring for their properties and their lands. She is the landscape curator of olive trees and vegetable gardens. Besides watering her own plants, she also tends the non-permanent residents' trees. On a daily basis, besides doing regular agricultural and domestic work, she also cares for the invalid oldest lady of the village, who is her relative. Her main hobby is playing organ and singing. On Sunday afternoons, she does not work and, sometimes, organizes a singing session with other residents. Rosa and her husband are living in Mó since early march. They came before the pandemic started, to participate in the tree planting project or reforestation in the surrounding area of the village, a Public funded pilot action designed for the prevention of fires. This project has been given some public media coverage (cf. references) in regional and national broadcasting services. Due to Covid-19, the actions of this project programmed for spring 2020 have been suspended and will be postponed for future times.

Discussion
Portugal is a country of late industrialisation. The interior of Portugal, as is the example of the villages of the municipality of Proença-a-Nova, from where we speak, went through a depopulation process without ever having properly joined the urban-industrial model. In part because of the social achievements originated from the associative power of the trade unions and other associations connected to free or paid work, inland populations have lived and experienced a unique temporality. This temporality makes a link between rural life and the village with the "return" of migrants, such as Auntie Rosa or the Ribeiros and their siblings.

Image 2 /
Permanent Resident Zé Maria, while cleaning one of his vegetable gardens (*hortas*), located in the ascending pathway to the mountain of Barreira, Mó. Public rules and restrictions apply to the compulsory cleaning of the fields with the view to protect the village from fires. Author: Ema Pires (2020).

Image 3 /
Auntie Rosa's field, located in the mountain of Barreira, Mó. Because of the lack of water supply, Auntie Rosa uses plastic gallons to water the plants. Author: Ema Pires (2020).

In order to think of a "time of Mó" as time of the rural interior of Portugal, and thinking of time in a way which does not directly reminds us of the interdependence of the concept of time with the concept of space, we will think of a time of memory rather than a time of place. It means reading the experience of quarantine and the contact with the place (the vegetable gardens, the forest, agricultural land, the village, the internet, collaboration, riverside, etc.) from the perspective of the narratives and the memory of the residents or former residents, in a "disorderly" reconstruction of the memory/memories lived (the narratives) in relation to the one we experienced in April / May 2020. This will be a kind of methodological resource to circumvent the concept of time as being "dependent" from the concept of space that we hope will yield fruitful results. Thus, the memory of Mó - or the memory of the village as a place which is experienced by way of sharing - is the antidote against its extinction, if we consider the "seventy-eight souls" who lived there in 1911 and the only three permanent residents in 2020.

The key author that we use here to think about the concepts of time and memory is the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges (1985), for whom memory is the antidote against death. Thus, we highlight the temporal union of a set of shared and lived memories as an idealistic resource against death and, at the same time, as a resource or antidote that minimizes the interdependent relationship between time and space, like a concept from physics or even metaphysics. Another key author here is Norbert Elias (1989), who structures his thinking starting from the concept of time.

The time of the non-place?

There are a few dozen empty houses in Mó, many derelict, others still functional, whose owners have not shown up in years. From the 78 "resident souls" who wandered here in 1911, it decreased to 3 residents in 2020. Obviously, the first simple and almost naive question we are asking is what happened during that time that caused such a steep decrease in the number of inhabitants? Why has the human population decreased so dramatically, whereas the wild boar population increased so much? The concept of "non-place", a neologism created by the French anthropologist Marc Augé (1992), refers to a place of passage, the place of transition that does not build identity, as is the case of a road or an airport, where people coexist and even interact without building a narrative. As a path or crossing from one place to another, the streets, avenues, means of transport, etc., are "non-places" that always connect us between one place to another place. Places, on the other hand, are endowed with a narrative structure, history and identity. According to Augé (1992), the symbiosis between technology, space and society is quintessential in contemporary societies. Non-places are fluid spaces that allow and facilitate the circulation, communication and the consumption of ideas and things. This space of circulation and movement can not be considered a place because it has no meaning, they are places of connection only between one place and another place. The nostalgic narratives about a place make a place to be constructed as a "non-place", since it tends to transform people into spectators - or at most into narrators - but not into actors. The frozen narratives of "a time" (past), in connection with "the time", present, leave "the real" time of Mó vacant, and an absence of the subject's action. With the disappearance of people and the easier access to new communication technologies, social relations are affected. The construction

of identity breaks with the dimension of the place, allowing the formation of communities separated by a large physical distance. This deeply changes the social relationships and alters the dimensions of the intersection of "different times". In Mó, there are currently different times of coexistence and social interaction between some residents who have never left the place, with others who have left and then returned, and others who have just arrived. The latter is the case of new residents who arrived from northern Europe and bought dwellings and who travel between different places (as well as "non--places") and worlds.

The paradox of these new information technologies is evident, since social relationships are not depthen in many of these interactions. We remain on the surface (with shallow relationships), dominated by the technology, which makes authors like Umberto Eco (2015) say that:

> *"The social media have given legions of imbeciles the right to speak; they once only spoke in bars after a glass of wine, without harming the community. They were quickly silenced, but now they have the same right to speak as a Nobel Prize winner. It's an invasion of imbeciles" (Eco, 2015).*

Thus, the paradox is exactly this, where everyone has the right to speak, including the "imbeciles". Living in Mó has meant the construction of identities and social relationships that extrapolate the dimension of the place and the social relationships built solely through this route, replacing the concept of "non-place". It has allowed for the development of effective connections/bonds, many of these built using new information technologies. As mentioned earlier, there are no mobile phone networks nor internet in Mó. To have access to them, you need to climb up to the top of the nearby mountain. This was the daily practice of several people during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Pires, 2020).

In Brazil, the samba singer Ary Barroso has already sung that 'the deep ranch is located well beyond the end of the world' ("o rancho fundo fica bem prá lá do fim do mundo") (Babo, 1955). In the same way, Mó is also located in a remote and ultraperipheral territory, when described by a narrator who writes from a central place (Lisbon? Proença-a-Nova?). What is the point of living the time of Mó? What time is that?

Mó in-between the time of memory and time of experience.

Mó is far from the central point of reference, which in this case is either Lisbon, Porto, or the coastline of Portugal, places where the time of experience is marked by the history of the development of capitalism. It is for that reason that they are defined as a reference point. Distance, more than being merely geographical (spatial), engenders the course of crystallized experience as places of urban life, services, restaurants, transport, and everything that marks capitalism, especially during its industrial phase.

Here where we are now, in the interior of Portugal, the mark is of a "distant time", because memory, the guardian (reason) of time, brings us to the ancestors of this land, of more and more people spread down these mountains slopes. They "could not" leave this place before, and here they built the time of their experience, the experience of a "Mó" slowly turning and crushing grains with the slow rhythm of the river - a natural watercourse that was still freely available, when the energetic source of the vibrant industrial capitalism was no longer steam and had already moved to oil. After a lot of

struggle, these people have left, and their crystallized experiences are now recognized as "a time that is gone".

But what about now that the territory is reinhabited by people who establish a different relationship with it, for whom is necessary to build other experiences? Looking at the experience and conscience of our grandparents, time gains the ancestral meaning of an enigma. However, looking at the daily experiences in the territory, a new flow of life opens up and, therefore, of a transformative power, in particular "in a time" when social isolation becomes an asset, or a value, for those who intend to privatize it.

(In)Conclusive Remarks

Time regulates life in society and, since the industrial revolution, time and space (timed work on the factory floor) are factors that intensify the capitalist system or the market society. For Norbert Elias (1989), time was the ability to synchronize and standardize, a social convention, a symbol that summarizes and standardizes social behavior. Our argument is that for Elias (1993: 31) "time is the cement that seals".

Living in Mó for a period of time is an experience of "living outside of time for a while" because the pace of social relationships is different, even though the author thinks time is as a civilizing process. It implies considering that there is "a time", the time of civilization that introjected its psychological repression, allowing the standardization of behaviors. It turns out that nature has exhaust valves and subterfuges, and the pace of social relationships has been dictated by needs linked to the new and unusual element of the pandemic.

If the calendar remains as a measure of time, or the measure of the succession of facts that are not repeated, our concern is: will the pandemic experience, which kept people in different isolations around the world, enter the genealogy of time? If the pandemic is the metrics, the diversity of isolation experiences will crystallize in a civilizing synthesis, which apparently is different from that radicalized by the industrial society, by the frenzy of urban centers and of the market society. We introject the time of this experience outside of time, automatically seeking to relate and standardize it, but surely (perhaps without even realizing it) that time breaks free (and escape us).

Building upon Tim Ingold (1993), in this short chapter we have assumed that "the temporality of the landscape may be understood by way of a 'dwelling perspective'" (Ingold, 1993: 152). In Mó, during lockdown and up until the present, residents Zé Maria and Auntie Rosa are a portrait of Ingold's "premise of people's active, perceptual engagement in the world" (1993: 152).

Post-scriptum:

At the time of writing the final revised version of the current chapter, from 25 to 28th July 2020, the landscape of Mó has been again under the risk of destruction due to a major fire in the region. To dwell, has meant, during this days, actively engaging with other people (in cooperation for fire prevention), filling water deposits with as much water as possible, cleaning the houses from the burning ashes that fell from the sky, and waiting, at the top of the mountain, for the fire to go away. Time has apparently been suspended again, but this time, Covid-19 was temporarily forgotten as a danger, in the face of this bigger danger.

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