

CHAPTER 6

ZOOMING HOME AND FAMILY GATHERINGS IN PANDEMIC TIMES: RITUAL, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relations between home and family in times of a pandemic, transporting the family away from the family home and, apparently, from the family itself. Specifically, it focuses art, culture, and society by shedding light on the enduring role of family rituals in creating and sustaining family identity while affirming the role of information and communication technology (ICT), in both the construction and reproduction of the family dynamics amid pandemic times. Reflection is taken upon a live-by-Zoom art exhibition opening. Family photo albums and several artifacts are used to show the family history, and, at the same time, the installed objects and surrounding narratives invite others to imagine the artist's family as well as each audience member's own family. The opening took place in March 2021, during the second lockdown in Portugal. Methodologically, the chapter draws on data collected through direct observation and autoethnography. Inspired by an arts-based approach, narrative is built on storytelling sociology, while using writing as a method of inquiry and reflexive composition to overcome the limits of the personal narrative. By the end, it is argued that as families “live” at Zoom, family rituals too. Zoom platform reproduces the family atmosphere,

opportunities, and constraints. Looking at the art exhibit opening as a family ritual allows one to think about how individuals experienced family gatherings during the pandemic, but also how art might generate such familial intimacies in such exceptional times.

Keywords: Family; ritual; memory; arts; Zoom

1. INTRODUCTION

Family rituals are conceptualized as special moments or events in the lives of individuals and families (Bossard & Boll, 1950; Imber-Black & Roberts, 1993; Wolin & Bennett, 1984), acting as an important locus for the construction of family identity, both inwards and outwards (Costa, 2013; Gillis, 1996; Pleck, 2000). With these assumptions in the background, this text makes an exploratory foray into the relations between home and family in times of a pandemic, by specifically focusing the enduring role of family gatherings in creating and sustaining family identity while affirming the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in both the construction and reproduction of the family dynamics. Reflection is taken upon an art exhibition opening taken at a distance, using the Zoom platform. The artist was the host and performer of the exhibition titled “My Family Albums” [Os Meus Álbuns de Família]. The opening took place in March 2021, during the second lockdown in Portugal. The gathering joined in a Zoom session with some close friends, colleagues, and a significant number of family members, most of them physically apart since the beginning of the pandemic.

Zoom refers to Zoom Video Communications, Inc., an American communications technology company headquartered in San Jose, California. The company provides different services such as video telephony and online chat services through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform. Of restricted use to some professional and educational sectors until 2020, Zoom has very recently become an expression of current use and widespread knowledge, as services are used for teleconferencing, telecommuting, distance education, and social relations. Zoom’s solution software usage saw a significant global increase after quarantine measures were adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As *The New York Times* announced in early March 2020, “We live in Zoom now” (Lorenz et al., 2020).

Using a sociological, specifically a family studies informed perspective, this chapter theoretically explores the relations between art, culture, and society through the detailed analysis of such a Zoom session. After the presentation of the theoretical perspective and the main concepts in use, materials, and methods, the chapter is organized sequentially through the main markers that temporally organize a regular Zoom session: “join meeting” and “leave meeting.” Moreover, understanding is taken from the use of heuristic metaphors drawn from structural elements of Zoom sessions, namely the “speaker’s view” and “gallery view.” By the end, it is argued that as families “live” at Zoom, family rituals too. Zoom platform

reproduces the family atmosphere, opportunities, and constraints. Looking at the art exhibit opening as a family ritual allows one to think about how individuals experienced family gatherings during the pandemic, but also how art, even beyond the pandemic, might generate such familial intimacies.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: FAMILY RITUALS AND PRACTICES, BELONGING, AND IDENTITY

2.1. *Family Celebrations, Traditions, and Rituals*

Anchored in the long-lasting tradition that informs the anthropology and ethnology study of ritual studies, family rituals can be defined as special moments, days, or occasions in the life of individuals and families (Bossard & Boll, 1950). After the seminal work of Bossard and Boll (1950), Wolin and Bennett (1984) established the distinction between three different categories of family rituals: family celebrations, traditions, and patterned family interactions. Whereas the former are the most organized and occasional, the latter are more spontaneous, yet more frequent across family lives. In the nineties, Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts (1993) have suggested a different typology of rituals, distinguishing in “the outside” and the “inside calendar” four types: the day-to-day essentials, family traditions, holiday celebrations, and the life-cycle rituals. Imber-Black and Roberts’s typology of family rituals has made it even more difficult to distinguish between family routines and rituals. According to Fiese (2006), routines and rituals distinguish from one another in terms of three main characteristics: communication, commitment, and continuity. In routines, communication is instrumental, representing “what needs to be done” (Fiese, 2006, p. 11); action is perfunctory and momentary, “with little conscious thought given after the act” (p. 11); and different practices are directly observable by outsiders in the present. As far as the rituals are concerned, the communication goes beyond the instrumental dimension, it is mainly symbolic. Rituals also convey a sense of commitment, as they are enduring and affective, representing what “is right.” Finally, rituals’ meanings extend across generations, embracing a message about their performers, saying that “this is what we look forward to and who we will continue to be across generations” (p. 11). Against this backdrop, Barbara Fiese advocates that some routine practices are simultaneously rituals or benefit from ritual features. Hence, the distinction between family routine and rituals is not constructed *a priori*, rather points to patterns of organization and interaction that somehow “make sense to families” (Fiese, 2006, p. 4).

As no consensus exists around the various classifications of rituals, and the academic discussion between the distinction – or continuum – between routine and ritual remains, in recent years, the study of family rituals has greatly benefited from the concept of the everyday (Pink, 2012) and specifically family practices (Morgan, 1996, 1999, 2011b). Family practices are things families do. This apparently simplistic way of putting things together, is heuristic enough to extend the gaze over the many, often hidden, relations between family practices and the everyday life.

Family practices “are to do with those relationships and activities that are constructed as being to do with family matters” (Morgan, 1996, p. 192). According to David Morgan, family practices are particularly adapted in capturing the flow, fluidity, and the meaning of the everyday life of contemporary families (Morgan, 2004). In fact, family practices allow catching many family-related activities undertaken by family members, namely partners, parents, children, and relatives, while also enabling for simultaneously examining the meanings, expectations, and obligations associated with such people. The family practices concept offers novelty because it focuses more on the interaction than on the family structure, thus, studying families, not for what they are but for what they do. Using the word family “as a topic rather than a resource” (Morgan, 1996, p. 187), when he first conceptualized about family practices, Morgan highlighted the “family connections” as a way of calling attention to the many ways how family and domestic life are integrated and mutually impact each other. Such connections include traditional sociological topics, namely work, household, and stratification, but also other topics such as the body, the home, and food.

2.2. Rituals and the Family Process Construction

The sociological literature emphasizes the importance of family rituals “positive” functions in the family process construction (Bossard & Boll, 1950; Fiese, 2006; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). According to Bossard and Boll (1950, p. 186), “rituals have the attributes of frequent repetition, of being social in nature, and of having an emotional colouring.” Such characteristics seem to strongly contribute to the socialization process, to the definition of family boundaries, and in the enhancement of belonging feelings and creation of a sense of unity and family identity, both inwards and outwards (Costa, 2013; Gillis, 1996; Pleck, 2000). At the same time, the contribution to this comes from the rhythmic repetition of the intimate family acts, linking predictability and performance (Bell, 1997; Collins, 2004). The fact that family rituals often involve several people, being not a performance, in which one is alone, and the emotional coloring embracing such moments in its frequency and nature, including “[...] all the sound, sights, temperatures, touch sensations, and human relationships that always surrounded it” (Bossard & Boll, 1950, p. 37) are also key. Thus conceptualized, family rituals seem to contribute to a simultaneously rapid and in-depth understanding of the polysemy of the family as a simultaneously physical, relational, and symbolic space (Saraceno & Naldini, 2020).

Morgan advocates that the family practices approach grasps more successfully the contours of contemporary families, as it “goes ‘beyond’ more established understandings of family” (Morgan, 2011a). Specifically, focusing on family practices implies going beyond the rigid frontiers of the physical household as the “traditional” and “expected” locus of family relations and being attentive to other places where publicly families present themselves: the street, the square, the park, the playground, the pool, the beach, the supermarket, the cinema, or the shopping. All these places bring to light the insightful concept of “family display,” as conceptualized by Finch (2007). Finch and Morgan’s contributions to

study contemporary family relationships and rituals are of utmost importance to recognize the processes of “displaying” families, as well as “doing” family and the many dimensions through which it occurs, including beyond the physical space in which, traditionally, family rituals they take place, notably the family home (Pleck, 2000).

Family rituals constitute insightful windows to research collective memories and the family identity, mainly using the interview technique (Miller, 2000). Collective memories can be defined as “ways of viewing the world in which the family is seen as playing a distinctive role within society” (Miller, 2000, p. 67). From a sociological perspective, such family collective memories are “considered to be the expression of a common family identity, transmitted from one generation to the next, acting as an anchoring point for traditions and the maintenance of family characteristics” (Muxel, 1993, p. 193). As Miller points out, an expression of such collective memories can be “knowledge of “illustrious (or notorious) ancestors” or being able to trace the family genealogy back over many generations” (Miller, 2000, p. 67). However, family identity is a broader concept, it also includes the emotional connection to certain spaces, objects, physical similarities, specific ways of behaving, and the tastes and keeps important relations to the ways individuals present themselves in a postmodern world (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

The narrative plays an important role in the construction of the family identity, namely through performance, family legacies, rituals, and the storytelling process (Phillips, 2017). The synesthetic experience that rituals involve contributes to the persistence of memory. Family memory is activated by relational and spatial proximity and there is a ritual memory, as Muxel (1996) points out. This memory is expressive and affective, and is transmitted through repetition, thus connecting to archaeological and referential memory in the construction of family memory. Sensory activation through different or specially decorated environments, sounds, smells, colors, and flavors helps to build an image of exception in relation to everyday life, which individuals keep in their memory (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1993). The unique or ephemeral condition of opening gifts on Christmas Eve, blowing out candles at a birthday party, and the emotions brought to the surface when kissing or hugging someone reinforces the strength of the ritual and, therefore, of the family. It is precisely the realization of the ephemeral condition and exception of the moment that brings to light the desire to fix and immortalize it, which is why the physical supports of family memory, such as the presence of photographic or video material, are often anticipated and mobilized for special moments.

2.3. Family Rituals and Technology

Nowadays, ICTs play an important role in connecting families, both across generations and the life course and physical spaces (Neves & Casimiro, 2018). The pandemic generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has given greater visibility to the way in which ICT shapes the experience of family rituals. If, until then, ICT was already widely used for sharing family experiences at a distance

(e.g., sharing photos of birthday parties or pregnancy ultrasounds), the pandemic has, to a certain extent, normalized the synchronous experience on the part of people physically distant and not just the *a posteriori* sharing of such an experience. The development and generalization of platforms for online video calls, meetings, and conferencing, such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, or Zoom, made the communication experience at a distance easy, simple, intuitive, and affordable or even free using simple resources such as a computer, tablet, or personal smartphone.

Considering these developments, “doing family in the digital age” (Zerle-Elsäßer et al., 2023) has become the new normal. Among the various platforms, Zoom Video Communications, Inc., has become well-known during the COVID-19 pandemic as its solutions integrating video and chat came out of restricted use to some professional and educational sectors until 2020, to be widely used for teleconferencing, telecommuting, distance education, and social relations, including family relations (Lorenz et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting population-wide lockdown and physical distancing measures implemented to protect public health have rapidly accelerated the uptake of video-conferencing technologies in worldwide economic and social activities. Accordingly, in 2020, the Zoom Video Communications, Inc. company’s blog gave important advice on “Staying Connected with Family & Friends on Zoom.” Related features were advertised in strong relation to the pandemic times and the need to maintain personal relations beyond work and study. As said,

In a year marked by physical distance, with the pandemic preventing many of us from traveling or getting together in person, connecting with friends and family in other ways is vitally important. While Zoom has become central to communicating with colleagues during this time, it also opens the door to staying in touch with loved ones over video. [...] If you’re missing in-person get-togethers and celebrations, here are some ideas for making your virtual hangouts with relatives and friends more meaningful. (Zoom, 2020)

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. *Outside the Gallery: Context, Anticipation, and Engagement*

Amid a pandemic context, a mix of social media and physical advertisements were used to invite people to the exhibition. Besides general posting on Facebook (Fig. 1) and Instagram, a personalized e-mail, signed by the artist, was spread on the subject “INVITATION | Inauguration of the exhibition ‘My Family Albums: memory at the service of identity in the social dynamics of the contemporary world’” (Silva, 2021a).

The e-mail announced the opening of an exhibition on Saturday, 20th March, at 4:00 p.m. The event would be virtual, through Zoom, even though there was an indication that the exhibition was taking place physically in W52, a space located in the main square in the city of Évora (Portugal), the Geraldo Square.



Fig. 1. Facebook Post Advertising the Online Opening of the Exhibition “My Family Albums” [Os Meus Álbuns de Família].

The e-mail invitation text explored the characteristics of a typical physical inauguration as a way of guaranteeing the presence of guests. The text mentioned:

This inauguration seeks to create memories, to get involved in everyday life and to get closer to what would be the atmosphere of a conventional inauguration, surrounded by people, with all their moments, smiles, and reflections. (Silva, 2021a)

Following, a hyperlink was included within the mail text, redirecting the reader to an online form.

Moreover, the exhibition was included in the “Youth Month” of the local municipality, thus benefiting from widespread publicity (Fig. 2).

As suggested, by following social media and filling in the form, interested parties consented to receive a kit in the postal mailbox. This kit consisted of a set of materials stored in a kraft envelope, which the meaning and purpose of the virtual inauguration would unveil later. It included an A3 format poster, front and back, in color, with a detailed description of the exhibition; an A5 brochure for contextualization and thanks; the A5 photocopy of a handwritten recipe for curd cake “5, 4, 3, 2, 1”; and an herbal chamomile infusion pack.



Fig. 2. Paper Advertising Poster of the Online Opening of the Exhibition “My Family Albums” [Os Meus Álbuns de Família] as Included in the “Youth Month” of the Local Municipality.

On the eve of the opening, people registered in the event received a thank you message by email and a zoom link to access the event.¹

3.2. 4:00 P.M.: Join the Meeting and Enter the Artist’s “Family Room”

As scheduled, a virtual opening of the exhibition took place via Zoom platform at 4:00 p.m. on March 20, 2021. As guests entered the Zoom room, the gallery mode lets one see many people – and families – across the split-screen mode. A few people had the camera off, but most were on, having as a background a

“familiar” domestic setting: the living room, the kitchen, or the porch. Numerous people of different ages and gender curiously populated the screen: alone or as a couple, the nuclear family with the newborn baby and the dog, but also the extended family with several people sitting on the sofa, the others standing to fill a small room.

The silence was then interrupted with Ana Rita appearing in full screen. Using headphones with an integrated microphone, wearing a long green coat, and showing a nervous smile, Ana Rita first welcomed participants for the online Zoom meeting. In front of her, a cameraman who one knew was there but hidden from the screen accompanied the guided tour she described for about an hour. Leading the participants through the physical space of the gallery, the presentation introduced, in stages and in detail, the five main sub-sets of the exhibition: “Family albums, part one,” “Family albums, part two,” “Tales that tell tales,” “House of the yard,” and “At the grandparents’ house.”

As Molder (2016) advocates, referring to the artistic work, to produce authentic work, there must be an integration of the work in the artist’s life or the integration of the artist’s life in his/her work. In this specific case, material based on the exhibition was collected using different sources, namely photographs, diverse artifacts, and a small survey sent to family members (Figs. 3 and 4).

These images are important because they provide us with information about a wide variety of sources that allow us to create the family archive. Of the information collected initially, various elements stand out, namely the addresses of living elements, which allowed the artist to have more direct contact through sending letters. Specific questions were asked about certain events and details related to the objective of creating a family history and statistics and the respective family tree. Family members were also asked about what family is, whether they perceived the concept differently over time, and when someone would or would not be



Fig. 3. Photographic Record of Albums, Photographs, and Objects Sent by Family Members. Varied dimensions. Source: Ana Rita Silva.



Fig. 4. Pages from the Artist's Mother's Diary When She Was a Child, Notebook 21.5 × 32 cm. *Source:* Ana Rita Silva/Personal Archive.

considered part of the family nucleus. Additionally, the artist also requested photographs, or any artifacts associated with family memories, so that she could create a collective memory of her family. The figures portray some of these elements, namely photo albums, items of clothing, books, and school notebooks, among others (Fig. 3). Of these, the artist's mother's diary as a child stands out, where the clippings of photographs taken from popular culture magazines are visible. Some aspects of the materiality of these objects attest to their importance for the construction and importance of time in family memory, notably a certain sepia tone that colors the documents and fabrics, as well as the stains on the paper sheets of the diary (Fig. 4).

Using the family archive and reinventing it under the form of installation, photography, audio, and video, Ana Rita collected several distinct memories, elaborated schematic representations of her family, gave "new life" and meaning to "forgotten" images and objects, and, thus, produced new ways of representing the family and what it means. As an illustration of this, after a first sketch of the family nucleus and studies on the interpretation of the genealogical tree (Fig. 5), a new form of representation was created and an installation was prepared using sisal string, sticky tape, pen on paper and backdrop paper (Fig. 6).

Families are not fixed realities, they change over time and such change causes transformations, namely the entry and exit of people. The graphical representation of families is a quick and easy way to become aware of such changes. Furthermore, observing changes in families provokes a certain amount of

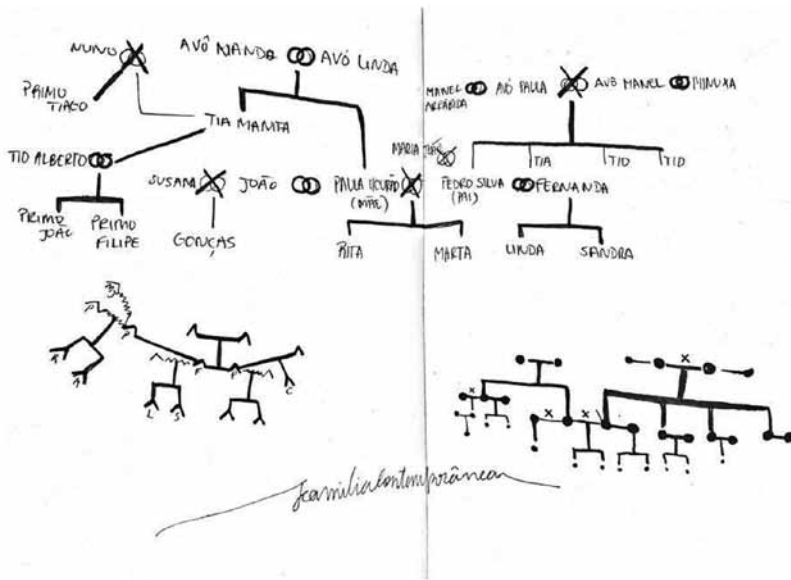


Fig. 5. First Sketch of the Family Nucleus, Studies on the Interpretation of the Genealogical Tree, 2017. Artist's Notebook, 28.3 × 21 cm, Pen on Paper.

Source: Ana Rita Silva.

reflection and leads to the discovery of stories that would otherwise not be told or questioned.

In “My Family Albums,” the process of representing the family began with the artists’ closest family: parents, brothers, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. First, names and past and present relationships were written on paper (Fig. 5). Then, for each person, a piece of paper was cut and pasted on the wall. A thread was tied around each piece of paper, bending it slightly into a conical shape. The exercise began with the artist’s parents, placing, at each end, the names “Pedro” and “Ana Paula.” Then, representing their wedding, the two pieces of paper were joined by a thread. After joining the father to the mother, a new thread appears between the two, which joins and forms a knot, lower down, thus representing a descendant, the first. With the birth of a second child, a line is added that arises from the previous node, and, being younger, this is represented below. In the event of divorce, the line that united the couple is broken, however, the connection between the children between them remains (Fig. 6). It is a process that extends to grandparents, paternal and maternal, repeatedly cutting and pasting papers, creating knots and connections, and making associations with names and respective generations.

Once this phase was completed, the process of recognizing and studying the complete family tree emerged. To this end, the oldest members of the family (grandparents) were asked to present their families in a narrative way, starting with the great-grandparents and descending, from the oldest to the youngest, up to the current generation. Based on this information, gaps in previous information



Fig. 6. My Family Albums – Part I [Detail], 2017. Installation, 76 × 60 cm, Sisal String, Sticky Tape, Pen on Paper, and Backdrop Paper. Source: Ana Rita Silva.

were filled in and new stories were collected that complemented each other based on the family figures of great-uncles and their relationships, births, divorces, and other reported elements. In this process, quick-wearing and easy-to-apply material was used: the pieces of paper are torn to the size of the name, starting from an A4 sheet; the thread is simple and practical sisal twine, borrowed from the artist's mother's sewing boxes, while the names and threads are glued with transparent tape. The nature of the material seeks to represent the plasticity of a family, where the constructions and deconstructions of relationships are recurrent and quite fragile. Furthermore, through a material that is easy to damage and replace, a contrast is established with the idea of irreplaceable families.

Most of the families preserve one or more family albums. Such albums are at the basis of collective memory, both inwards and outwards, conveying the memories that someone wants to show outside, thus conditioning the perception of the outsiders/observers. The ways one looks at such photographs are initially conditioned by the author of the album, who first selected the "worthy" memories. Nonetheless, the interpretation that can be drawn from those is a space open to the eye of the beholder, and the relations from which it derives will depend on the different generational points of view at stake (Silva, 2008).

Despite being unknown to outsiders, family objects and family-related visual memories are always somehow "familiar" as allow an "intuitive" and "immediate" identification of the public that observes them, becoming marks of interest and artistic value. The selection is not closed, in the sense that it will always be possible

to add objects, thus turning the work more complete, either to serve as a link between a grandfather and a distant relative, to immortalize family memory, or to teach and represent family roots and culture. Moreover, anyone will be able to do similar work with their own family, valuing it and making it grow while exploring their differences and particularities (Silva, 2008).

The photographs in the family albums raise questions of identity, adding the notion of relationship with the other, which is also mirrored in the photographic record (Gomes, 2008). Additionally, such gaze is embedded in emotions, the reason why one might be vulnerable when looking at photographs that even without esthetic quality portray one's significant other, such as a grandparent, father, or mother. It is through imagination that photography becomes an enhancer of new stories. The video, which seeks to involve the observer, portrays, and exposes the "flaws" in memory (Gomes, 2008).

3.3. Inside the Gallery: Host, Guests, and Sociology as the (Un)expected Observer

As the gallery setting transposed to the zoom scenario highlighted the host – artist – and respective guests, sociology was the unexpected observer. In fact, the second author, a sociologist with long-lasting experience in teaching the sociology of the family, living and working in the same city where the exhibition took place, was not indifferent to the aforementioned invitation. Motivated by a simultaneous academic-scientific and personal motivation – since she already knew episodically the artist – she promptly signed up for the event. Then, without even knowing it, she began an observation that would lead to the co-writing of this text. With a theoretic and methodological background in family studies, and greatly influenced by ritual studies, the non-participant observation of the online vernissage would almost automatically be read in terms of the major concepts shaping such a perspective. Even though it was a spontaneous observation, concepts such as "family," "family practices," "ritual" and "family practices," "hosts," "guests," "belonging," and "family identity" were readily mobilized.

Immediately after the event, a contact was established, which resulted in the decision on the added value of writing in co-authorship of a scientific article on the topic. Using a qualitative, social research, creative approach (Kara, 2015), the chapter draws on data collected through autoethnography and direct observation, conducted, respectively, by the first and second co-authors. Inspired by an arts-based approach, narrative is built on storytelling sociology (Berger & Quinney, 2004), while using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994) and reflexive composition to overcome the limits of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Speaker's View: Zooming on the Self on Stage

Among others, family routines differ from family rituals as these put together hosts and guests (Fiese, 2006; Imber-Black & Roberts, 1993). The host can be an individual solo, such as when someone celebrates their birthday; the couple,

as happens at a wedding party; the nuclear family when going on holidays; alternatively, the extended family, as frequently happens on Christmas and Thanksgiving Day celebrations and similar family occasions. Guests are selected among close or distant family relatives, friends, colleagues, and members of the broader community.

Rituals embracing the extended family often challenge the personal self by confronting the self-individuals “live by” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) with specific interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). Therein, individuals fight to present themselves as unique, while being part of a broader network made of living and dead people, concrete realities and imaginary, memory and future expectations. For this reason, family rituals constitute important arenas for self-construction.

As a narrative, the exhibition had as its starting point the confluence of two main families: the family on the maternal side and the family on the paternal side of the artist. Specifically, the family history was built upon a narrative made of the intertwining of four families with roots in different geographical places, therein represented by the four surnames of Ana’s grandparents: “Ferraz Pereira,” “Nunes de Sá Mourão,” “Reis e Moura” and “Nunes da Silva.”

Family stories were narrated while presenting the already mentioned five collections. The artistic installation mobilized the use and display of objects such as photographs, clothes, labor artifacts, etc. Moreover, it used both textual, visual, and multimedia languages to engage the audience (Figs. 7 and 8).

When the first sketch of the family tree was made based on the information provided by the grandparents, a “contemporary family memory notebook” was created.

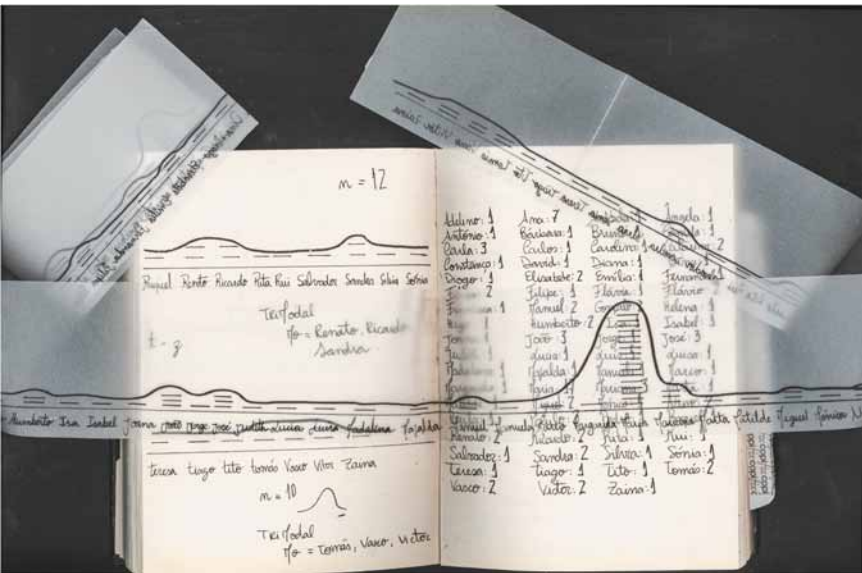


Fig. 7. My Family Albums – Part II [Detail], 2017. Artist Notebook, 28.3 × 21 cm, Chinese Ink Pen and Tracing Paper. Source: Ana Rita Silva.



Fig. 8. My Family Albums – Part II [Detail], 2017. File with 3 Drawers, 34 × 25.2 × 23.2 cm, White Cardboard. *Source:* Ana Rita Silva.

Therein, the artist noted and enumerated the names, simple and compound, as well as age and number of marriages and divorces by gender, among other family data. With all this information, graphs were created to make this data easier to read, in some cases using tracing paper (Fig. 7). As she was receiving more information, the artist changed or added it as necessary, in the notebook and in the family tree itself, explaining these errors in collecting the information in the notebook. All this information generated a collection of memories, ordered, and stored in a file, created specifically for this purpose, and divided by families. The four families studied were placed in three drawers (later adapted to four), distributed, and organized so that anyone could access their stories and carry out a simple analysis. These drawers contain photographic records of all the nuclei of each family group (Reis e Moura, Nunes da Silva, Ferraz Pereira, and Nunes de Sá Mourão), the answers to the letters sent, and some of the belongings received. Next to the archive, there is the contemporary family's memory notebook (Fig. 8). The block archive, massive and with hard lines, contrasts with the fragility it contains inside – becoming protection for documents – and with the family tree that serves as its backdrop. This collection set thus fulfills the purpose of archiving, serving history, providing the information and the documents necessary to reconstitute or write the political, social, or economic history of a nation (in this case of a family), and constituting an important source of relationship research. Much of this information became, over time, a dead archive – documents stored and rarely consulted – in each person's home, as is the case with most family albums. However, this action of ordering and archiving revived them, facilitating access and artistically transforming them into something more than memory records.

A huge panel divided the space, directing the visitor to the room to the left. In it were the works “My family albums – Part I and Part II.” Occupying the entire back wall, Part I – a representation of the family tree, made with sisal thread, tape, and paper, imposes itself as an installation. From this, strands are left for 117 small graphic compositions, narratives that illustrate the family names to which they are associated. These new compositions are also a thread that leads one from the past to the present, and that accompanies the present on this journey. Such objects show “what it was” while adding new data, new clues – reminiscing.

Composed of an artist’s notebook and a four-drawer file, Part II assumes itself as a documentary set, fulfilling the purpose of the file. In the drawers are some photographic records from each family group, answers to the letters Ana Rita addressed to her relatives, and some of the personal belongings they’ve selected as being especially significant. Next to it stands a notebook, including systematic annotations on gender division among siblings, statistical measures of the number of marriages by gender, divorces by gender, and a list of specific compound and simple names across generations.

In another room, the installation “Tales that tell tales.” Therein, a table covered with organized and exposed objects invites the observer to move and explore the various stories portrayed. On the wall, a set of four pieces of children’s clothing (from the artist’s childhood) is framed and superimposed on four ultrasounds. An “archaeological” practice of interrogating the trace or fragment of another space of time is called for, and the purpose of founding a new archive, through the agency, relational sense, interpretation, and concatenation of visual materials, is expressed by opening the possibility of reflecting on the meanings of identity, history, memory, loss or post-memory. In short, thus explores the double dimension of diagnostic and prognostic archiving (Pereira).

In the right corner of the room, behind a large black cloth is the work “House of the yard.” A multimedia installation, which “tells,” through the voice of themselves or their eldest children, the lives of ten of the fourteen brothers of the artist’s paternal grandmother. The setting consists of a rug, a chair, a plant, and a side table with a teapot and teacups that invite the visitor to sit and to watch the videos projected on the wall.

Finally, framed by one of the large windows of the gallery, next to the exit, four black hanging notebooks, contain mp4’s inside, dropping headphones where the visitor can listen to the conversations between the artist and her grandparents. There “live” the “real” stories and narratives, from which the observers will draw their own conclusions.

Notably, on the postmodern scene, where individuals are called to construct themselves (Bauman, 2007; Giddens, 1991), this happens in the context of “proliferating going concerns – social institutions – that increasingly shape the discursive contours of subjectivity” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 95). Family rituals can be envisaged as one of such discursive environments and practices setting “the conditions of possibility for who and what we are or could be” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 101). As a context of interaction in everyday life, based on different forms of communication, the personal self takes shape as the central narrative theme around which individuals convey themselves an identity.

Accordingly, “My Family Albums” worked not just as an artistic product. By bringing together a personal theme, it served as a way of introducing the artist’s self to others, while creating an interest in the public to reflect on their own family life and identity.

4.2. Gallery View: Zooming Out the Family Identity Behind the Scenes

At first, envisaged as a family ritual, the guided tour clearly put the artist as the host while her relatives, friends, academic supervisor and university colleagues were guests. Visibly, all of these were, in fact, “invited” to “attend” and “be there.” Nonetheless, when observed more closely, this event unintentionally allowed the family reunion yearly scheduled at specific times and spaces, suspended for more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similar to Christmas, Thanksgiving Day, weddings, and funerals, family gatherings join in one single room and under the umbrella of “the family,” the many families to which the individual belongs. After the guided tour of the exhibition, guests engaged in a spontaneous familiar interaction through Zoom, diluting the apparent separation between host and guests, and turning the extended family, itself, into the center of the event. In front of other non-family members, the paternal grandmother, then other relatives, first started to congratulate the artist for the achievement. After, words of thanks and happiness emerged stressing the opportunity of bringing together relatives separated by geographical distance and, especially, due to the restrictions posed by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

As the interventions followed each other, it was possible to bring into “full screen” the many families to which the artist belongs: the nuclear family which she forms with her parents and sister, and the various circles of the extended family consisting of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. On the one hand, those speeches gave visibility to the generational differences in the family, often opposing the oldest and the youngest experiences and views. On the other, it is well-known that different generations not only separate; they also unite the old with the older, and the young with the younger.

When referring to the various objects displayed at the exhibition, and to the different media therein presented, the participants point to specific events, times, spaces and emotions; past experiences, memories, and wishes, thus making clearer the frontier between the “different” sides of the artist’ family, either the one from “the father’s side” or “the mother’s side” (Figs. 9 and 10).

The various elements were analyzed, organized, and displayed by typology – whether family albums, newspaper clippings, articles of clothing, or books. Among the objects collected, and particularly regarding photographs, those that presented the greatest esthetic interest to the artist were selected, due to the elements that made them up, their arrangement, the colors, or the narrative presented. In some of them, it was possible to identify the characters, in another part it was the artist’s creative imagination that formed the dialogues. Before this selection, another had already been made by the owners of the materials, before even sending them to the artist. During the (virtual) visit to the exhibition, a new selection is made, as only some objects – and not others – capture the visitor’s attention,



Fig. 9. Personal Archive, 13.5 × 8.8 cm, Photographic Record Wedding Great-Aunt Noémia. Source: Unknown Author.

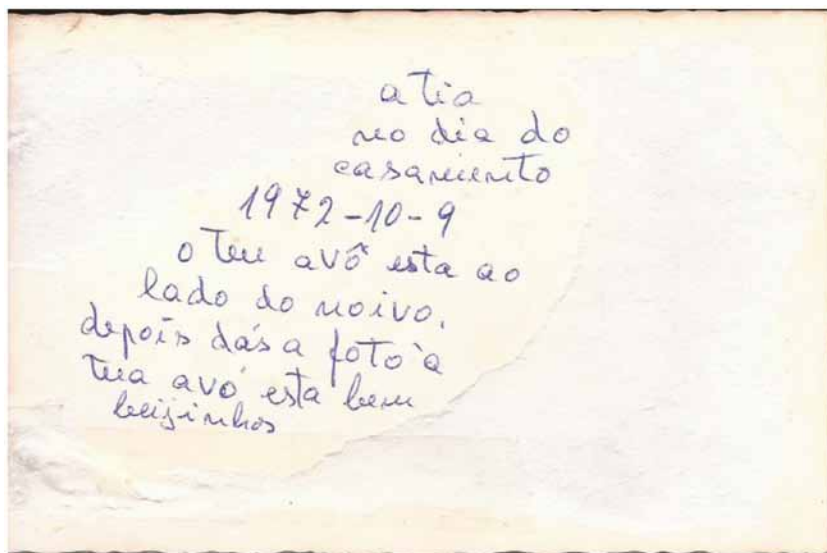


Fig. 10. Personal Archive, 13.5 × 8.8 cm, Back of Photographic Record Wedding Great-Aunt Noémia. Source: Unknown Author.²

triggering new appropriations, causing the evocation of personal stories and identification on the part of the observer, thus turning anonymous those who made them available. Thus, new dialogues are formed that allow the observer to value the stories and narratives present in the objects and images. To this end, some of the elements were stored in boxes and some photographs in respective albums, inviting the viewer to browse the boxes, scroll through the albums, and search for themselves as if they were their memories. For illustrative purposes, the photograph that records the wedding of great-aunt Noémia (Fig. 9) is used due to its objectivity, with the front image that constitutes it being of interest, as well as the notes on the back (Fig. 10), any clippings that may have been made or any other distinguishing feature. This allows the creation of a narrative that is always unique because it is renewed at each moment and with each viewer.

The evidence of being part of a complex and overlapping network of families within the same family also arose from the vocabulary spontaneously prompted in a family-informal context (Aldous, 1996). Familiar vocabulary consists of words or expressions whose meaning is immediately perceived by a limited set of people belonging to the family, while remaining unknown to others, outside the family. Examples of this are the oral interpellation starting with “sister,” “daughter,” “granddaughter,” “great-aunt,” or “cousin”; the use of family-restricted nicknames, such as “Minuxa,” when referring to the wife of the paternal grandfather, Manuela, the mention to specific words, such as “the yard” [Casa do Adro], to name the grandparents’ house, or the “5, 4, 3, 2, 1” [Cinco, Quatro, Três, Dois, Um], to identify both nostalgic and familiar flavors of the curd cake, as suggested, preferably accompanied by a cup of chamomile infusion.

4.3. 6 P.M.: Leave the Meeting and Return to the Everyday Life

The inauguration exhibition ended roundly at 6 p.m. By that time, the Zoom chat was full of messages of congratulations for the work developed by the artist and wishes of success for the future. On the split-screen mode, the family members were discussing the logistic details, aiming to agree on a physical family gathering in Évora.

There is a tradition in Ana Rita Silva’s family that once a year, all the elements come together for a big family lunch. The realization of this event varies in each edition, both in place and date, as well as in those responsible for its organization. Since the beginning of this artistic production, the artist has sought to create a work of art based on human interactions, whether manufactured or real. Throughout the various works of this project work, memories would be captured, recalled, and mixed, allowing the creation of individual and collective realities. Such memories, when shown to the family from which they were initially taken, would provoke “real” reactions which would, after, are at the basis of new artistic work. The realization of this work was discussed within the family since 2017 and was scheduled for 2020, organized by the artist in the exhibition space. Particularly, such a lunch would allow to capture and record, using photography and video, the reactions of the family relatives to the works “My family albums – Part I”; “My family albums – Part II”; “Tales That Tell Tales”;

“Casa do Adro,” and “At the grandparents’ house,” as well as the interaction between the various family elements when viewing and/or listening to the collective memory that was created.

As the pandemics made it impossible to fully carry out the project work, work that would culminate in the work “Almoço de Família” [Family lunch], family members spread across different parts of the country progressively began to feed the idea of taking advantage of the visit to the exhibition scheduled for the period after the lockdown, at the beginning of April 2021, to meet physically.

Around 6 p.m., the discussion focused on the details of such a gathering – who will attend, the day of the week and the exact day in April, if either the weekend or a working day, the travel details from Lisbon and Setúbal,³ where to eat and what to eat. This discussion suddenly brought to the forefront of the Zoom meeting the many obstacles hindering the possibility of being the “one,” “united,” “big,” and “strong” family that runs through the discourses.

In the face of the late hour, Ana Rita then kindly asked her relatives spread across the country to find another way to settle the details of an eventual physical visit to the exhibition. The wishes remained as family members were emotionally leaving the session, saying “good-bye” and “see you soon” to each other.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on a live-by-Zoom art exhibition opening to explore the relations between home and family in times of a pandemic. Theoretically, the starting point focused on family rituals, here recognized as important tools in the construction of the contemporary family, specifically in the development and maintenance of a family identity. Empirically, the analysis draws on data collected through direct observation and autoethnography of a live-by-Zoom art exhibition opening taking place on March 2021, during the second lockdown in Portugal as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Inspired by an arts-based approach and using storytelling sociology, the discussion allows highlighting three major issues that are to some extent neglected aspects yet important and inspiring for future research on family rituals, namely the physical and material dimension of families, the importance of narratives in the construction of family identity, and the ever-changing role of technology.

Families are not just a group of people and the relationships they establish with each other. Alongside an ephemeral materiality, which is exhausted through immediate consumption or is discarded without thinking, there is another materiality that is inherited, acquired, and eventually transmitted between generations. This includes real estate and movable assets, some valuable in monetary terms, such as houses, cars, or jewelry; others are highly valuable from an emotional point of view, such as a wedding photo, a baby’s outfit, or a teenager’s diary. All this materiality is also part of the family and allows, to a certain extent, the constant reconstruction of family memory and identity, since new narratives emerge at each moment, motivated by new encounters and protagonists. Family celebrations, namely family reunions, are a place par excellence for meeting and

mobilizing family memory through the materiality involved. Scholars have long known that the family is a relational and a physical and material space (Saraceno & Naldini, 2020), however, this analysis highlights the need to expand the possibility of such a meeting to the online space, and not just to the physical space.

This chapter is also inspiring for us to think about the importance of narratives for the construction of family identity, beyond oral narratives. As Pleck advocates, changes in the ways in which rituals are celebrated, in some cases, may give the illusion of its disappearance or loss of importance (Pleck, 2000). In fact, criticisms about how little time family members spend with each other (Daly, 1996) can give rise to the illusion that individuals are definitively and irremediably compromising opportunities for oral transmission of family history (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1993). Nevertheless, there appears to be evidence that family rituals continue to allow encounters that enable the transmission of family stories and the construction of a family identity. However, in the age of technology, these are not necessarily physical, nor is this narrative necessarily based on orality. On the contrary, such encounters must be understood as hybrid processes that expand the limits of storytelling (Costa, 2021), combining in different times and forms, people and artifacts, such as photographs, clothes, or different objects, but also the photographs, snapshots, and screenshots that are taken about those photographs, clothes or different objects, the texts that surround them, but also the comments and shares that they provoke, namely on social media, including the succession of emojis, likes, or tweets.

For this reason, it is so interesting and important to reflect on the ever-changing role of technology in family rituals. The analysis that was carried out here seems to suggest that physical distance does not prevent the creation of a family atmosphere with effects like that achieved through physical gatherings. It is true that therein there are no smells or sensory sensations that physical proximity makes possible. However, this does not seem to be as important as the other functionalities supported by distance communication technologies, namely the possibility of having sound, image, simultaneous connection to several participants, sharing of documents, and movement flexibility, for example, when the person walks, makes certain movements, shows something or points in a direction, using either the front or back camera turned on, with or without voice, and allowing everyone at a distance to follow along.

Finally, by allowing a reflection on contemporary family rituals based on a live-by-Zoom art exhibition opening that took place during the pandemic, this text also allows us to consider the potential of bringing art (more) closer to science and, at the same time, contribute to advancing research on family histories, family identity and, ultimately, identity in a postmodern world.

In a transversal way, this analysis also demonstrates how specific family rituals, namely family celebrations, which include family gatherings, constitute but ephemeral moments in the life of individuals, which somehow interrupt the daily life, creating a different, special moment as a result of time, space, and emotion key overlapping dimensions (Costa, 2013). Zoom platform seems to reproduce family atmosphere, including opportunities, and constraints. Life goes on, and the episodic, fleeting, and emotionally iconic event will leave only in the memory of the participants.

Differently from routines in the dimensions of communication, commitment, and continuity (Fiese, 2006), rituals are not exhausted at the moment, as their value and meaning can be remembered for years to come, namely through the material support of family memories, such as photographs and filming, today also images – including Zoom split format screenshots – posts and tweets shared on social media. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, both “the families we live with” and “the families we live by” (Gillis, 1996) can be found at family gatherings held through the Zoom platform. Arguably, families “live” at Zoom. Family rituals too.

NOTES

1. ID Meeting: 85379426192, link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85379426192>.
2. Translation of the handwritten note in Portuguese on the back of the photograph:
The aunt on her wedding day 1972-10-9.
Your grandfather is next to the groom.
Later you give the photo to your grandma[,] ok[?].
Kisses.
3. Lisbon is the capital and largest city in Portugal. Setúbal is a city in Portugal, located in the Lisbon metropolitan area, approximately 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the center of Lisbon by road. Lisbon is approximately 150 km from Évora, and Setúbal is 100 km.

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