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## Collective Mobilization and the Social Memory of Environmental Destruction

### A Methodological and Theoretical Frame Proposal to Socio-environmental Conflict Analysis

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#### Abstract

In the aftermath of the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974 Revolution, a rural village in the Portuguese region of Beira Baixa staged a six-year conflict between peasant landowners and a mining company. The former, discontent with the company's financial proposals, organized a protest taking advantage of the opportunities generated by the ongoing national political changes. This paper's purpose is to present the methodological and theoretical frames underlying the research and analysis of the above-mentioned socio-environmental conflict. The methodological approach combined ethnographic fieldwork, oral history and research in private, corporate and institutional archives. As for the theoretical device, it was intended to analyze collective mobilization in the context of breaking political structural changes, identity processes and social memory frames – a theoretical apparatus built from multiple disciplinary proposals, articulating environmental history and anthropology, as well as social movements theories.

#### Keywords

social movements; socio-environmental conflict; Revolution; political opportunity; social memory

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### INTRODUCTION

The present paper revolves around the methodological strategies and theoretical framing implied in the study of a socio-environmental conflict that took place in a small village, Gaia, located in the Northeastern corner of the Portuguese region of Beira Baixa. Erupting in 1974, the conflict lasted for six years, opposing a group of small-scale landowners backed by a large part of the village's population against a mining company. The study aimed at understanding how collective action and local resistance processes develop in a context of sudden national political change, as well as examining how the social memory of past environmental depredation participate in the definition of vocabularies and repertoires of contention<sup>1</sup>. Identifying the motivations that led the villagers to protest or tracing the strategies and

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<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted in the scope of a doctoral dissertation in Contemporary History presented at the University of Santiago de Compostela and supervised by Lourenzo Fernández Prieto (Silva, 2011).

repertoires of contention became indisputable dimensions of inquiry. It was also subject of investigation the leadership frames, the mechanisms and forms of community solidarity, and the relations established between the local movement and the political opportunities available from the outside. The integration of these elements in a wider frame of analysis, broad enough to enlighten as much angles of the problem as possible, meant dealing with various narratives available from diverse sources – enterprise, municipal, regional, State and private archives, as well as documental collections kept in United States libraries. Considering that a substantial number of Gaia's inhabitants still recalled the impacts of mining activities in the region, oral sources ended up playing a fundamental role within the research methodology.

If the nature of the sources presented a methodological challenge, its analysis posed another defy, this time, a theoretical one, inviting, again, to work within a multidisciplinary frame. Considering the historical context that sparked the conflict, the study of social movements literature and of Portuguese post revolutionary political transition were mandatory to contextualize local collective action. As discussed later, the theory of political opportunity structure (POS) came to be a major model for the analysis of Gaia's conflict<sup>2</sup>. However, the POS theory did not cover all the dimensions of the conflict and certain aspects of local mobilization in Gaia defied the mechanist and structural trends of the model. The POS model also reveals its inability to deal with the roles of emotion and identity<sup>3</sup>. In fact, emotion and identity played a prominent function throughout the conflict, structuring the repertoires and rhetoric of contention, acting as expressive and instrumental elements of the protest (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

Jointly with the POS theory, environmental history offered important inputs to the study. Research on socio-environmental struggle, on the clash between capitalist and non-capitalist systems of production (Martinez Alier, 1992, 2005; González de Molina 1993; Soto-Fernández *et al.*, 2007) or on the use of vocabularies of contention (Guha, 1990, 1997) helped understand the material and ecological substance of local mobilization. This theoretical composition is completed with the phenomenological approach proposed by the anthropologists Ingold (1999, 2000, 2004) and Milton (1996, 2002) – a contribution particularly helpful to analyze the relationship between the social memories of mining activity in the past and collective action occurred from 1974 until 1980.

### **THE 1974-1980 GAIA CONFLICT IN A GLIMPSE**

The conflict broke out in April 1974, when the company operating in the Gaia valley, Dramin, drove the dredge to the thresholds of the village, preparing to enter a stretch of land – called Marradas<sup>4</sup> – spared by earlier mining works. Dramin's activity began in the mid sixties, when Portuguese, Brazilian and United States investors bought the old Portuguese American Tin Company (PATC)'s dredge from a scrapyards, upgraded it and set off to explore the Gaia's valley underground in search of the remaining tin deposits.

Before Dramin's arrival, from 1914 until 1949, the North-American venture inflicted large damages on the soil's agricultural capability, turning the landscape into a barren lunar

<sup>2</sup> See Tarrow (1994).

<sup>3</sup> See Jasper (2008), Goodwin and Jasper (1999, 2006), Polletta (1999) and Polletta and Jasper (2001).

<sup>4</sup> In total, it was about three hectares of land divided into 11 plots.

like environment, as villagers still recall. With the exception of the polycultivated gardens and olive tree orchards in the village's environs, the whole extension of the valley, 10 km along the stream, was turned into a pile of sand and rock debris. It took the effort, by hand, of entire families to recover some of the plots for agricultural use once the mining company's lease rights expired.

In the first trimester of 1974, contacts between Dramin negotiators and some of the Marradas' landowners – at least four of them – showed that the latter would not accept eagerly the company's financial proposals. Upon this disavowal, Dramin did not take long to cast the usual trump mining companies used to throw on the table: the legal expropriation of the property. If some landowners were already dissatisfied with Dramin's conduct since it started operating in the area, their malcontent grew further in face of the menace of being expropriated. The importance of these properties is fundamental to understand the mobilization against mining: besides the fact that they were the few remaining areas untouched by dredging, it was from those plots that their elderly landowners obtained the produce used to complement the household economy all year long. The Marradas was, as some stated in letters sent to Government officials after 1974, the sole and irreplaceable village's pantry.

The movement grew around a nucleus of five landowners led by the 27 years old descendant of a couple of proprietors, a Portuguese Democratic Movement (MDP) supporter, previously drafted for a colonial war tour of duty in Guinea Bissau, where he reinforced his Marxist and revolutionary sympathies<sup>5</sup>. This group remained tight until 1980, having successfully mobilized large numbers of Gaia's inhabitants to join the contestation, especially in 1975. The exposure of the conflict in the media also resulted from this group's action, especially through its network of contacts. In fact, the Gaia conflict was mentioned publicly for the first time in *Jornal do Fundão*, in November 1974, one month after the first popular assembly had taken place in the village. As these popular assemblies happened, the protest broadened to the community and managed to attain the movement's first political ally: Belmonte's newly designated Municipal Administrative Commission, headed by a well-reputed local MDP militant and dictatorship resistant (Reed, 1995). From October 1974 and during 1975, what started out as a quarrel intended to secure private property rights, soon took the form of a collective mobilization focused on protecting the integrity of an environmental setting portrayed as common heritage.

The main arguments protesters held throughout the conflict stressed how those plots were irreplaceable to the survival of their owners as well as of other villagers who benefited from the produces cultivated on the premises. On the other hand, Dramin claimed that the protest was nothing more than an opportunistic and egotistic attitude of a handful of landowners interested in pulverizing financial deals, an act regardless of local and national collective interest. For Dramin, the future of the company and the jobs depended on recovering the large quantity of tin thought to exist under the Marradas' gardens and orchards. However, according to the protesters, Dramin had overweighed the profits that mining the Marradas

<sup>5</sup> The MDP was a progressive left wing party gathering a wide array of political sympathies, ranging from progressive catholic socialists to pro communist supporters. In popular opinion and according to some authors, the MDP was accused of acting under the Portuguese Communist Party's influence (Cerezales 2003; Reed 1995).

plots might generate. They also claimed that it would only take the company three months of labor to dredge the area, while risking turning the soil unproductive for a lifetime. But the protesters' arguments went beyond the productive uses of the property. The plots, presented as the last remaining piece of land untouched by industrial mining, were promoted to collective heritage site, and therefore stood as a referral of historic continuity, as if the Marradas' landscape and resources bound the community to her pre-mining past. The symbolic and use values of the land brought the protesters' argumentation closer to the discourse and positions held by the same State agencies that fought to implement alternative paradigms of development not necessarily dependent on industrial productivist models<sup>6</sup>.

Following the trend of post-Revolutionary events, in 1974 and 1975, the conflict took the public space as its main stage. More than five assemblies in Gaia and meetings in Belmonte gathered landowners and other community members with the mining company's representatives, the military, the municipal authority and State sent emissaries. The Armed Forces 5<sup>th</sup> Division, actively engaged in the last months of 1974 and in the first semester of 1975 in the Campaigns of Cultural Dynamization, visited the village and tried, unsuccessfully, to influence a settlement between Dramin and the protesters. In April, a couple of months before the "hot summer of 1975" – that is how the period of mass popular mobilization that swept the country ended up being called – the confrontation in the village nearly came to violence when a meeting between a group of landowners and an engineer from the Ministry of Agriculture was disturbed by company workers amidst shouting, physical menaces and the calling of Belmonte's National Republican Guard forces. This event, according to the leader of the protest, was decisive to bring the League of Revolutionary Unity and Action (LUAR)<sup>7</sup> elements to "protect" the population. The very same presence of LUAR can be read as an indicator of police inability to guarantee the maintenance of public order (Barreto, 1987).

In the meantime, in July 1975 two key decrees enacted the legal protection of highly productive agricultural soils and set a limit to surface mining activities<sup>8</sup>. This legislation obstructed the expropriation of the *Marradas* plots and gave rise to endless juridical debates throughout several Governments from 1976 to 1979.

The 25<sup>th</sup> November 1975 brought to an end the Revolutionary process, refraining its left wing progressive surge. Hence, the cycle of political opportunities for Gaia's anti-mining movement started to faint. As the constitutional order was settling in and the period of State crises (Cerezas 2003, Rezola 2008) reached an end, the protest gradually left the public stage of manifestation and migrated to the State corridors and offices, inaugurating the conflict's juridical phase. Still, the protesters kept following high-level juridical discussions from the village, receiving constant notifications from governmental services and non-official information from public servants stationed in ministerial departments. Up until 1979, the successive constitutional governments could not decide on Dramin's behalf, unable to figure out how to override the soil's protection legislation.

<sup>6</sup> Like the IV and V Provisional Government's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries or the National Environmental Commission.

<sup>7</sup> LUAR is an acronym meaning "moonshine" in Portuguese. It was a left-wing clandestine organization founded in the early 1960s by the Estado-Novo's notable oppositionist Palma Inácio.

<sup>8</sup> The decrees 375/75 and 376/75.

The President of the National Environmental Commission, Correia da Cunha, stood vigorously on the side of the protesters, having visited Gaia and Belmonte in 1976. From that year until late 1978, Correia da Cunha and the Commission presided by him were the most enthusiastic allies of the movement and, by then, its major institutional backup.

The conflict ended when the IV Constitutional Government, headed by Mota Pinto, acknowledged the arguments in favor of Dramin and revoked the 1975 laws that protected the most productive agricultural soils. In its place, a new set of decrees, far more benevolent to mining interests, were approved. Clearly, this government's pragmatism assumed preference for the superior interest of the *Marradas'* tin deposits instead of its gardens and olive trees. Hence, in July 1979, the public utility of the plots was declared, opening the way to expropriation.

However, Dramin did not follow-through with the expropriation procedure. Suspecting it would take longer than the company could afford, a negotiation process was started with the landowners. In the end, the plots were dredged and the owners received compensations up to three times more than what was offered in 1974.

#### **DEVISING A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL *BRICOLAGE* FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF A SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT**

The conflict's underlying ecological dimension demanded summoning environmental anthropology and environmental history. However, the theoretical contribution of both disciplines was not enough to explain the dispute's implicit political scope. At the same time, to look at the conflict merely from the structural paradigm of political opportunity could carry the risk of neglecting the observation of micro levels of social action, identity and social memory

Thus, the challenge implied articulating a theoretical design versatile enough to cover the different angles rendered by the object of study. In this sense, a triangulation between environmental anthropology, environmental history and social movements theories was put together. From the first, Ingold (1992, 2000, 2004) and Milton's (1996, 2002) phenomenological proposals allowed integrating in the analysis the realms of environmental perception and emotions. From the second, stemmed interesting systematizations of socio-environmental conflictuality, particularly on the clash between rural production practices and mercantile capitalist systems, as the works of Martínez Alier (1992, 2005), González de Molina (1993) and Soto-Fernández *et al.* (2007) evidence, or Guha's (1997) studies in the production and use of vocabularies of contention show. Thirdly, in the last three decades, political sciences, political sociology, history and social psychology immensely contributed to enrich the studies on social movements: Tilly's (1985) cycles and repertoires of contention, Tarrow's (1994) political opportunity structures and Klandermans' (2002) frames of injustice supplied the major corner stones that held the theoretical and conceptual approach to the Gaia conflict. Polleta and Jaspers' (2001) attention to the identity and emotional factors behind collective action also contributed to this theoretical *bricolage*, indeed useful to curb the risks presented by macro political approaches.

Inside this theoretical triangle, bearing points in common with all the sides, were Halbwachs' (1925) proposals on social memory and its use as interpretive tool of human action and discourse; Scott's (1985) ideas on everyday forms of resistance and hidden transcripts of contention, important to analyze local resistance forms under the Estado Novo's authoritarian rule. It was also subject of consideration Fox and Starn's (1997) idea that, under certain circumstances, namely in rural contexts, collective action do not follow the same organizational principles, motivations and objectives as urban, labor or new social movements do. From the study of rural mobilization in Latin America, these authors propose the concept that peasant mobilization is often focused on the solution of casuistic problems and grievances, not forcibly aimed at large scale social or political change.

An evident lack of space forbids the thorough scrutiny of all the theoretical models used. Therefore, the paper will focus on the theoretical duo that stands out in the conflict's analysis frame: the political opportunity structure (POS) and the phenomenological paradigm of environmental perception.

POS theory offered an interesting and fairly comprehensive framework for the interpretation of local collective mobilization in Gaia. The model, largely drawn from Tarrow's (1994) work, allows seeing mobilization as a result of the capacity local actors have to grab emergent political opportunities. It also helps identify and analyze the resources and the mechanisms of solidarity used by collectives to bolster consensus around the movement and the protest<sup>9</sup>. POS presents a valuable tool to understand how Gaia's protesters perceived and took the opportunities laid ahead by the 1974 Revolution. The changes in political alignments and the decline of the long established corporate, political and social elites did not escape the leaders of the anti-mining movement in Gaia, as shown by their constant efforts to co-opt newly arrived political and institutional allies<sup>10</sup>.

In spite of the POS's versatility, its structural and mechanistic scope tends to neglect micro analytical approaches, bypassing the study of cultural and identity elements, as Polletta and Jasper (2001) noted. Though POS proponents recognize the role of identity in collective mobilization, they end up turning it into a variable dependent on the structural frame that controls individual and group action. In the case of Gaia's conflict, identity appears inseparable from the social memory of mining in the past and, simultaneously, as an instrument and an expression of mobilization.

The collective memories of past environmental depredation gave the adversaries of dredging the factual and symbolic arguments needed to uphold the legitimacy of the protest and, overall, to attract the solidarity of other villagers. In this sense, identity marked constantly the claims hoisted by the movement. Such identity statements were not based merely on symbolic relationships with the landscape, but also and most strikingly, on the engagements with resources and with the specific modes of production reliant on small-scale farming.

<sup>9</sup> Solidarity and consensus are, according to Tarrow (1994), the primary constituents of collective action, without which mobilization can hardly thrive.

<sup>10</sup> The movement's main institutional backup came from Belmonte's Municipal Administrative Commission, Belmonte's left-wing progressive MDP party structure, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the State's Secretary of Agrarian Structuring and the National Environmental Commission.



The examination of the relationships that bind people to their environment can contribute to a broader understanding of collective action, especially when mobilization and protest are motivated by issues concerning the control of ecological resources. In this scope, environmental anthropology, particularly Ingold and Milton's phenomenological approach, become useful to study how the perception of the environment and the relationships between individuals and resources influence protest behavior and shape the repertoires and vocabularies of contention. In essence, according to these anthropologists, individual attitudes stem from the contact people have had with their world and that very same experience guides their future actions and constructs their symbolic reference systems. This viewpoint allows observing the conflict of Gaia in relation to its historical background, setting forth an understanding of current social action in line with past experiences, perceptions, and the ensuing mental elaborations.

Ingold and Milton's proposals also open the way to consider the emotional and identity components of collective mobilization. A feature, as several authors have pointed out (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Goodwin & Jasper, 2006), was virtually absent from Tarrow's POS model. Closely related to environmental perception, emotions should not be overlooked when it comes to analyzing socio-environmental conflicts. The emotional torrent that flows from the quarrel's rhetoric is just too overwhelming to be underestimated, as these examples, taken from the correspondence exchanged between some contenders and various State officials and organizations show: "I beg you to help us in our moment of painful suffering"<sup>11</sup>; "they [Dramin] mean to starve us to death by taking away this morsel of land"<sup>12</sup>; "to take away from us these tiny plots is like leaving us dying here, surrounded by sand and rocks"<sup>13</sup>; "if this land was to be destroyed [...] dozens of families would be thrown into misery, abandonment, misfortune and famine"<sup>14</sup>. An emotional registry also present when it comes to express identity statements: "these poor people"<sup>15</sup>; "[we are such a] tiny little people", "weak peasants"<sup>16</sup>; "the most underprivileged"<sup>17</sup>. A register of humility inversely proportional to the opponents' character portrayal as an hegemonic and prepotent entity: the "bogeyman"<sup>18</sup> company made out of "big landowners, driven by the worst instincts"<sup>19</sup> and working "like a pack of dogs"<sup>20</sup> "meaning to drive everybody to starvation"<sup>21</sup>. This emotional registry reinforces the contenders' dramatic tone and becomes even more evident when compared with Dramin's blunt

<sup>11</sup> Letter sent by a landowner to the State Secretary of Agriculture, 14-11-1974, private archive.

<sup>12</sup> Letter sent by a female landowner to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 16-12-1976, Direction of Industrial Services and Geological Resources (DSIRG) archive, folder 797.

<sup>13</sup> Letter sent by a female landowner to the Council of Ministers' Presidency, 20-2-1978, Câmara Municipal de Belmonte (CMB) archive, box 228.

<sup>14</sup> Petition subscribed by four landowners sent to the Comissão Nacional do Ambiente (CNA), 15-12-1976, private archive.

<sup>15</sup> Letter sent by a female landowner to the Council of Ministers' Presidency (PCM), 21-2-1978, CMB archive, box 228.

<sup>16</sup> Letter sent by a male Gaia resident to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, November 1974, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Letter sent by a male landowner to the State mining services, 1976, private archive.

<sup>18</sup> In Portuguese, the expression used was "papão" (bogeyman). Letter sent by a female landowner to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, 10-4-1975, private archive.

<sup>19</sup> Petition subscribed by 29 individuals sent to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 8-12-1976, DSIRG archive, folder 797.

<sup>20</sup> Letter sent by a male Gaia resident to the Prime Minister, Vasco Gonçalves, November 1974, CMB archive, box 228.

<sup>21</sup> Letter sent by a female landowner to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 16-12-1976, DSIRG archive, folder 797.

“rational” argumentation obsessively centered in denouncing the immediate economic advantages of mining:

The people’s very existence lies in these furrows [...] their roots, their hopes, their bread, their life, their pride and all their wealth; if they were to disappear, you might as well dig a ditch and bury all these humble people in it<sup>22</sup>; Here, people work from dawn to dusk [...] no days off, not even Christmas, no dole, no social security, and all for a miserable return. Nonetheless they love their land, for once they’ve watered it with their sweat; it gives them their bread and their living. They have their roots in this land, it’s where their parents and grandparents lived and where they, their children and grandchildren will choose to remain<sup>23</sup>.

If isolated, political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, identity and culture, could only partially explain collective action processes, not allowing analyzing the larger spectrums of mobilization. Juxtaposed and articulated, political opportunity structure and perception of the environment can render more intelligible the dynamics and diachronic range of social movements. Such a combination helps recognize local actors as creative agents able to frame autonomously their strategies and instruments of resistance and protest, far from being mere passive interpreters of opportunities offered by changing political systems.

#### **PAPERS, PHOTOGRAPHIES AND VOICES: THE DOCUMENTAL RESEARCH AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF A SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT**

Since the early stages of research design that ethnography stood as a chief component of the methodological strategy. The very own nature of the object of study invited, if not demanded, that written documental sources were confronted with the representations, memories and opinions locals had about events and facts.

The possibility of reaching actors that took part in the conflict, on both sides of the dispute, as well as living witnesses of mining activities during the first half of the century, called for the use of oral history as a complementary instrument of ethnography. The latter, through participant observation, allowed greater proximity between the researcher and the context of observation. Collaboration between oral history and ethnography seems almost inevitable, considering that intensive anthropological fieldwork may provide for a closer and thorough insight into social memory (Sobral, 1999; Godinho, 2004).

Instead of resorting to long stays in the field, on-site observation was based on scheduled visits in different occasions of the year, from 2004 until 2011, lasting one to four weeks. Stuck, initially, to scheduled interviews, as time passed and conversations succeeded, contacts in the locality became increasingly spontaneous and interactions grew. In between visits to Gaia, archival research and interviews were done outside the village in search of testimonies that could help understand better, not just the 1974-1980 conflict, but also the experience of earlier mining works in the region.

The seasonal scheduling of fieldwork was meant to take advantage of the possibilities each time of year offered to ethnographic data collection. Winter, especially before

<sup>22</sup> Petition subscribed by four landowners sent to the president of CNA, 15-12-1976, private archive.

<sup>23</sup> Petition subscribed by four landowners to CNA, 15-12-1976, CMB archive, box 227.



Christmas and throughout January, was the most fruitful time for conducting semi-directed interviews and open conversations. Many dull winter afternoons were passed in front of the fireplace, where different family generations and, sometimes, neighbors, gathered. The slow pace of time in those cold, often rainy days, allowed the collection of life and family stories. In the process, written documents and photographic records were used to complement the semi-structured interview plans. It was in these contexts of intimacy that some of the most important accounts were made, exposing the illegal activities around tin contraband, the actions of resistance against mining companies or the traumatic memory of PATC's social control practices (sanctioned and sometimes backed up by the Estado Novo's repressive authorities<sup>24</sup>). On the other hand, the long summer days, regardless of the scorching Beira Baixa's heat, presented an opportunity to visit, along with local cicerones, the places where mining took place. If winter afternoons called to meet at home, reminiscing over personal and family memories, warm summer afternoons encouraged long walks across the Gaia valley, where close contact with places enliven the memories of facts, people and events. Strolling with one of the 1970s contestants and her daughter along the old dirt road on the way to the Marradas, passing by the now deactivated elementary school prompted memories of the first collective assemblies held there in the beginning of the conflict, around September and October 1974. Visiting the surroundings the Marradas plots with local informants, either anti-mining protesters or former Dramin's employees, permitted identifying spots where contenders nearly clashed with each other in violent confrontation, thus hearing the different narratives of the events. These walks around the valley also stimulated the remembrance of early dredging works and the effects brought upon the landscape as well as the effort families had to put to work to recover the land for agricultural use. Holding a large variety of information gathered from 1920 and 1930 cartographic documentation, the possibility of traveling along the valley with villagers meant a precious opportunity to assess the changes in the landscape and to identify *in situ* the areas and mine's concessions shown in old photographic records and topographic surveys.

The statements gathered in the interviews completed gaps and corrected discrepancies present in written documents. The case of LUAR's intervention in Gaia is a good example of how oral testimonies and documental sources complemented each other: evidence of LUAR's presence in the village environs was vaguely mentioned in official correspondence and an undated copy of a public notice undersigned by the so called organization's action nucleus of Covilhã indicated its participation in the conflict<sup>25</sup>. Although a former Dramin manager had already disclosed the interference of external party and revolutionary organizations in the quarrel, the exact identification of the forces involved and their modes of operation were very dubious. As for the protest organizers, the coming of LUAR was not mentioned until confronted with the above-cited documents. The communiqué, served as a pretext for a five-hour conversation with the movement's leader, trying to figure out the story

<sup>24</sup> Such is the case of accounts about arbitrary arrests of local residents by police officers in service of the PATC during the 1930s.

<sup>25</sup> The communiqué appealed to those who stood by the revolutionary principles to oppose the mining company. The protest of the Gaian "peasants" was presented as a fight between "people's power" and "bourgeois imperialist parasites", as a necessary struggle to give back "power to the workers" (LUAR's communiqué, undated, private archive).

of LUAR in Gaia. In this sense, oral testimonies allowed to track the presence of LUAR in the village, to situate it temporally and to reconstruct the steps taken to summon its operatives<sup>26</sup>.

The evolution of the 1974-1980 conflict was also a frequent theme of conversation, as I tried to assemble distinct views of the process from different interlocutors. Those who had closer ties with the mining company, either in managerial positions or as employees, depicted the conflict as a selfishly driven process intended to inflate property value. In their opinion, half a dozen landowners succeeded in convincing the majority of the villagers to act irrationally against the mining company, unable to see that, in fact, they were neglecting the community's own interest. According to a former Dramin manager, the company's offers were not exclusively directed at the Marradas' owners, but also comprised a series of collective infrastructures (installation of watering systems, building of industrial facilities, etc.) – all refused by the “guys who armed the fuss”, as this informant used to say. On the other hand, those who organized the protest and some of their descendants recalled that the conflict could have been avoided if the company changed its behavior, if only Dramin understood that, after the Revolution, no longer could act with the prepotency of dictatorial times. As for the collective offerings made by Dramin (indeed mentioned in some corporate documents), in the course of the interviews, some villagers stated that the projects were thought to benefit the company's own interests and industrial plans. Another interesting aspect is the fact that the historic family liaisons with mining companies ended up influencing present discourse about the socio-environmental consequences of dredge mining in the past. Those who worked for the PATC or whose ascendants constituted its labor force tend to praise the positive impacts of North-American presence such as its role in the industrial development of the region<sup>27</sup>. The individuals producing more negative representations about the region's mining experience descend from families with scarce or nonexistent labor ties with PATC and Dramin, some of them highly involved in contraband and clandestine mining activities, particularly during the 1930s and the 1940s. Coincidence or not, the main six leaders of the 1970s anti-mining movement were descendent of some of the major local tin contrabandists and saw their fathers and grandfathers face the first PATC's expropriation processes in 1917.

Biographic methods, especially life and family histories were essential instruments of research. Considering the possibilities family histories offer to cover transgenerational mobility strategies (Cabral & Lima, 2005), particular attention was dedicated to the collection of family biographies<sup>28</sup>. Family histories, collected in different neighboring communities, besides allowing comparisons between households within the same locality, also revealed how, from village to village, differences in the organization of mining exploration gave way to dissimilar strategies of mobility and participation in economic activities.

Access to oral sources implied identifying residents from Gaia and adjacent villages who worked for PATC as well as their descendants and other elderly population in order to

<sup>26</sup> According to the leader of the anti-mining movement, LUAR's operatives stayed in Gaia for about a week during the summer of 1975 to protect the protesters against the intimidation of Dramin's personnel.

<sup>27</sup> Locals used the dredge as a symbol of early industrial development. The PATC was also referred to as a major opportunity for locals to acquire professional skills and technical training.

<sup>28</sup> Four family biographies were collected, covering several angles of the research object. One, respected a family whose biographic course was made fully regardless of the PATC; another respected the settling in early 20<sup>th</sup> century of the first Portuguese engineer in Gaia; a third and a fourth were collected in nearby villages revealing different family relations with mining activity and, necessarily, unlike strategies of upward mobility.

collect recounts on the social, economic and environmental impacts of dredging. The landowners involved in the 1974 conflict and their descendants were also targeted as potential oral sources, like their counterpart from Dramin. Furthermore, it was worth getting at some of the individuals that, personally or institutionally, had intervened in the conflict, like municipal administrators<sup>29</sup>.

Not surprisingly, since we are dealing with a social conflict – and a relatively recent one – the initial inquiries on the conflict met a certain degree of resistance from local informants. A circumstance gradually attenuated as I acceded the village's social networks. Therefore, the adoption of an ethnographic approach was fundamental to strengthen contacts with informants, tearing down the barriers that stood between the researcher and the interlocutors in earlier days. It is important to notice that the first references to the 1970s conflict came out of written records more than a year after the first visits to the village, and, after four years of fieldwork inquiry, the subject was still cautiously approached by some, regardless of the degree of participation in the strife. Even three decades later, the conflict never loses its bitter imprint. It still carries resentful recollections of interpersonal relations that went sour, broken family relationships, shattered community connections – a varied set of social frictions that time did not dissipate and people preferred to keep enshrouded.

Hence, oral testimonies, company records, press reports, letters, State agencies and local administration official communications were combined, not just to concatenate a sequential narrative of events, but also to question motivations, clarify doubts, challenge assumptions and raise hypothesis. For instance, according to the letters and petitions sent by the protesters, the main argument against dredging the Marradas was based on the fact that those were the last remaining plots that had never been touched by mining – an argument that made quite an impression on State organisms such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries or the National Environmental Commission. However, in several conversations and interviews, at least two former contesters admitted having conducted mining works in the Marradas area in the first half of the 1960s<sup>30</sup>. Relying exclusively on the letters' rhetoric, it looked like the protest was built on environmental values and focused on protecting the integrity of the rural landscape. Other examples could be brought to this discussion, though it becomes clear that the confrontation of historical sources with ethnographic data exposes the weaknesses and strengths of both as well as the heuristic potential of such methodological combination.

The first documental searches were conducted in the Castelo Branco's District Archive exploring the Belmonte's parish and civil records. Data regarding baptisms, matrimonies and obituaries were very important to establish a census of Gaia's population in the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, before industrial mining settled in the region<sup>31</sup>. After consulting the parish records, attention was aimed at the archives of the former State mining services

<sup>29</sup> The locals (or descendants) implicated in clandestine mining and contraband of mineral ores were also targeted as possible informants in order to figure out implicit levels of community resistance and defiance. Scholars like Iglesia (2006) advocate that the contraband of minerals represented a form of resistance against State regulations and dictatorial status.

<sup>30</sup> Right after the PATC's shutdown, in 1963, a consortium of villagers mounted an open-pit mining operation recurring to hydraulic techniques.

<sup>31</sup> It was also an opportunity to identify the village's social and household structure and geographical mobility. On the importance of parish records see O'Neill (1984) and Sobral (1999).

in search of data on the licensing and registration of mine's leases and hoping to find company archives – an expectation promptly dashed. The PATC records, as told by a former administrative employee, were destroyed when the company was shut down in 1963. Even if locals still kept a vivid memory of the North-American company's action along the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became almost impossible to determine through oral sources dates and key moments regarding the development of industrial mining. For this reason, further sources had to be discovered, widening the search to private and United States archives, the country where, in 1912, the PATC was incorporated and most of its shareholders had lived. Indeed, three collections in the United States gathered the scarce company documentation available: the University of California's Bancroft Library archives in Berkeley, the California State University's Meriam Library in Chico archives and the San Marino's Huntington Library collections provided precious detailed information on PATC's operations in Gaia, as well as on its shareholders<sup>32</sup>. In Belmonte, the municipal archives provided further documentation on the setting of mining activities in the region, allowing a glance at the institutional relations between the municipality and PATC during the dictatorship<sup>33</sup>.

For the entire time span of the study – 1912-1980 – the regional press proved to be an indispensable source. It provided important references on the establishment of mining in the area and was an important reference on early conflictuality between the local population and mining companies. Through the regional press, as well as through national publications like *Diário de Lisboa*, it was possible to follow the Armed Forces' Campaigns of Cultural Dynamization in the vicinities of Gaia. In line with its progressive left wing orientation, the *Diário de Lisboa* followed closely the revolutionary process nationwide and Beira Baixa was no exception – from 1975 until 1976, a series of news reports caught the breath of the Revolution in the region.

As mentioned before, knowledge about the 1970s conflict in Gaia came up by accident, while browsing mine records in the archives of the Ministry of Economy. Mingled between old mine's claims, wrinkled maps, blurred blue prints and assorted official communications, rested a set of 10 letters (copies), hand and typewritten, subscribed in 1974 and 1975 by self stated poor landowners, speaking on behalf of the "good People of Gaia"<sup>34</sup> against Dramin, accusing the company of planning to dredge their "last remaining plots"<sup>35</sup>. More than the contestation itself, it was the contents and speech style of the letters that caught the researcher's attention: a languidly emotional record strongly anchored in the idealization of rural landscape and in the memory of past environmental destruction. These letters clearly put Gaia's popular protest in the path of post-Revolutionary political change,

<sup>32</sup> The Hoover Presidential Library archives also provided important documentation. Herbert Hoover owned PATC stocks right before becoming Secretary of Commerce under the Warren G. Harding's presidency and, later, President of the USA (Hoover, 1951; correspondence between E. J. De Sabla and R. Arnold, 2-6-1924, Huntington Library, R. Arnold Collection, Box 159, IV 16a).

<sup>33</sup> An extremely important document – a topographic survey carried out, probably between the 1920s and the 1930s, by a Portuguese engineering firm for the PATC was found in the municipal archives. This document, containing nearly 100 photographs, offered a collection of images taken from various parts of the valley prior to mining and showed rare pictures of the dredge in action. As for the documentation on the activity of law enforcement authorities in Gaia, the scarce records consulted were found in the national archives of Torre do Tombo, in Lisbon, in the collections of the Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>34</sup> Quote from a letter sent by a landowner to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, 14-11-1974, private archive.

<sup>35</sup> *Jornal do Fundão*, 24-11-1974.

therefore inviting to search for new sources. On account of this, the Ministry of National Defense, where the documentation of the MFA and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division are stored became an inevitable place to look for<sup>36</sup>.

In spite of the importance of these sources, the leader of the movement provided an extremely rich collection of documents regarding the conflict. It was a tidily organized file comprising more than 100 copies of letters, official correspondence, reports, press cuts, and other records. The file played a key role, firstly, in sequencing the events and indentifying the distinct stages of the conflict; secondly, in the study of the vocabularies used by contenders; finally, in the analysis of the relationship between State agencies and the movement. This private archive was also helpful to guide interviews and informal conversations with several interveners in the conflict.

The information collected from various sources, oral and documental (whether stored in institutional or private archives) was crucial to scrutinize collective mobilization and contentious action in the context of Portuguese political change after 1974. It was especially fruitful for observing the relationship between the emerging political forces and local popular movements in the aftermath of April 1974 Revolution.

## CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the variety of axes inherent to the conflict asked for the combination of different theoretical and conceptual insights stemming from diverse disciplinary tracks. The articulation between macro and micro levels of analysis provided a panoramic view of the object of study, nonetheless without loosing the sight of detail. This theoretical *bricolage* was meant to contemplate the intertwining of local action and structural change, in order to understand the continuities, relations and interactions between institutional agents and local actors.

In this sense, the methodology and theoretical construction allowed observing the historical continuities between local mining experience in the past and the 1974-1980 conflict. Accordingly, the conflict meant more than a struggle for the control of agrarian resources by peasant landowners; it was also intended to settle the score with a past of repression and exploitation in the stream of the opportunities for dissent opened by the 1974 Revolution.

The POS's structural inclination tends to bound the emergence of collective action to the political opportunities offered by changes in the political system; by doing so, it puts local actors and movement participants in the dependency of extra-local and institutional agents, neglecting that social movements, themselves, might present political opportunities to other movements, agents, powers and institutions operating in higher levels. Thus, the role of political opportunity should not be seen in the context of a single direction causal relationship. It is beyond doubt that the Gaia movement resulted and grew from the perception locals had of opening opportunities; however, the movement itself was able to construct opportunities from the successive structural political alignments and realignments.

<sup>36</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Division was the left wing military branch in charge of the Cultural Dynamization Campaigns in 1974 and 1975. MFA is the Portuguese acronym that stands for Movement of the Armed Forces, the structure composed of middle rank officers that carried out the coup in 1974.

By studying the conflict between landowners and the mining company in Gaia, other levels of conflictuality took shape: struggles for institutional control within the State and struggles for the implementation of conflicting development models and territorial management policies. In face of that, examining a local conflict such as the one studied in Gaia in the frame of Revolutionary changes allows us to look at the Revolution with different lenses and from a quite unusual viewpoint. Hence, the conflict reveals itself as a showcase of political processes, namely, those related to the interconnections between the higher ranks of political action and local popular participation in the suit of post-Revolutionary change.

The conflict of Gaia also reveals how community mobilization can rise in defense of models of resource exploration other than the mercantile modalities based in the indisputable appropriation of ecological resources. Suitably, the conflict revalidates old critiques (Wolf, 1966, 1987; Godinho, 2004) of the images of rural population as static collectives, dependent on external agency, unable to proceed politically. On the contrary, the Gaia conflict reveals the capacity to act autonomously as full social and political actors.

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