

WAY AND SHORTCUTS OF AN INTIMATE GEOGRAPHY

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Abstract

The personal, academic and scientific relationship with Lúcio Cunha over half a century prompted this essay, which recounts, based on our experiences, between reality and fiction, how practices and ways of being are interconnected with the evolution of the Coimbra School of Geography. With Geography in the background and functioning as a unifying feature, the path taken was fertile in complicity and affections that shaped an Intimate Geography that will be mapped from three space-time coordinates: origin, pilgrimage, return.

Keywords: Intimate geography; Affective geography; Geography of Coimbra; Lúcio Cunha.

Resumo / Resumen

CAMINHOS E ATALHOS DE UMA GEOGRAFIA ÍNTIMA

O convívio pessoal, académico e científico com Lúcio Cunha ao longo de meio século despoletou este ensaio onde se relata a partir das nossas vivências, entre realidade e ficção, como práticas e modos de estar se interligam com a evolução da Escola de Geografia Coimbra. Com a Geografia em pano de fundo e a funcionar como traço de união o caminho percorrido foi fértil em cumplicidades e afetos que moldaram uma Geografia Íntima que será mapeada a partir de três coordenadas espaço-temporais: origem, peregrinação, regresso.

Palavras-chave: Geografia íntima; Geografia afetiva; Geografia de Coimbra; Lúcio Cunha.

CAMINOS Y ATAJOES DE UNA GEOGRAFÍA ÍNTIMA

La relación personal, académica y científica con Lúcio Cunha a lo largo de medio siglo motivó este ensayo, que relata, a partir de nuestras vivencias, entre la realidad y la ficción, cómo las prácticas y los modos de ser se interconectan con la evolución de la Escuela de Geografía de Coimbra. Con la Geografía en segundo plano y actuando como elemento unificador, el camino recorrido fue fértil en complicidades y afectos que moldearon una Geografía Íntima que será cartografiada a partir de tres coordenadas espacio-temporales: origen, peregrinación, retorno.

Palabras-clave: Geografía íntima; Geografía afectiva; Geografía de Coimbra; Lúcio Cunha.

INTRODUCTION

This text was prepared on the occasion of the retirement, in August 2024, of Portuguese geographer Lúcio José Sobral da Cunha, a colleague from many working hours. His long and impressive university career would culminate in him being awarded the title of Professor Emeritus (2025) in recognition of his significant contributions to the university. After graduating in geography (1976), Lúcio Cunha completed his PhD in Physical Geography (1989) with a thesis entitled *As Serras Calcárias de Condeixa-Sicó-Alvaiázere - Estudo de Geomorfologia* [The Limestone Mountains of Condeixa-Sicó-Alvaiázere - A Study of Geomorphology]. After his Aggregation (2002), he became a Full Professor (2004) at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra.

He has held senior management positions at the University of Coimbra and was Director of the FLUC [Faculty of Arts] where he provided scientific support, pedagogical coordination and taught various subjects related to his main areas of scientific interest, namely: geomorphology (karst geomorphology; fluvial geomorphology; geomorphological heritage; geomorphological risks), physical geography, spatial planning and environmental studies, climate change, climate risks, automatic cartography and GIS.

Lúcio Cunha took part in several research projects and was part of various international research networks, especially in the context of partnerships with universities in Brazil. He was the coordinator of the Nature and Environmental Dynamics Research Group at the Centre for Geography and Spatial Planning Studies (CEGOT). Our personal, academic and scientific closeness meant that we could share some projects and experience unique moments that marked more than half a century of close friendship. When we recall this past, we end up remembering the history of the Coimbra School of Geography and how certain passages in our personal journeys, although different, have shaped us so much. Geography was always the uniting feature that brought together commitments, bonds, and affection that moulded a certain Intimate Geography whose mapping, balancing between reality and fiction with hints of some magical realism, we will sketch from three space-time coordinates

. Origin: the stones in the middle of the road were overcome by the camaraderie and commitments arising from activities on the sidelines, which were almost always more important in the recreational field than in the scientific one;

. Pilgrimage: journeys and wandering across borders carried out within the scope of projects in which we have participated in the country, in Cape Verde, and in Brazil have flooded our imagination with references that nurture The New Geographies of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which we continue to pursue;

. Return: the quest for the future and for places never visited is not just a maxim, but the conviction that the best way to honour our past is to be alive and to continue the journey, real or virtual, in search of unknown territories where we believe the secrets of the world are hidden.

ONE TERRITORY, ONE PATH: GEOGRAPHY, A MARK OF UNITY

The stones speak? since they speak / but not in our way, / that all things know / a story they can't keep quiet.
// Under our feet / or in our hand / what would they think of us? / What will they think of us? (Maria Alberta Meneses, *As Pedras* [The Stones])

The successive generations of students who preceded us at Coimbra came to the University feeling the same aspirations and uncertainties, well summarised by Fernando Namora: "I've been stumbling for eighteen years / - and I don't even know / Nor do you / If I'll reach flat land" (Relevos, 1937). When we started the Geography course at the beginning of the 1970s, the voice of Aristides de Amorim Girão still echoed in the corridors of the Faculty of Arts and Alfredo Fernandes Martins, a true living legend, vaunted all his flair and dandyism between the Bar and the corridors of the 4th floor where, in between classes, he took his ritual walks. The freshmen looked at this unusual scene with distance, curiosity and some apprehension. As the years went by, some might have the privilege of

gaining access to this Olympus, of being invited on one of these initiatory journeys.

The distance from the lecturers was compensated for by the complicity, established underground, with the staff of the Institute of Geographical Studies: Mr Pereira, like an emperor without an empire, tried to keep order in a library that was desecrated at every moment by student irreverence (Shush! Watch out, he might be coming!); Mr Coroado, more reserved, kept to himself in the Drawing Office, before being joined by the extrovert Vitor Torres; Mr Ferreira, the jeep's helmsman, tested his driving skills on many occasions in the dark paths of hills and valleys. He was an adventurous companion on many field trips, study trips to remember that showed us the inside of an unknown country and the geography that books will never teach us.

It was impossible to conceive then that the FLUC Bar would become so insipid with an unsustainable post-modern lightness, that the signage on the 4th floor would become archaeology, a simple memory that testifies to the function for which such a space was conceived: to welcome and teach students. The Maps and Reliefs Room, the Practical Work Rooms (TP1 and TP2), the Library, the Drawing Office, and the Institute of Geographical Studies, with their respective Lecturers' Offices, drew the map of our sentimental Geography, a territory that received a technocratic reorganisation that made it immaculate but robbed it of the soul that was given to it by the lively enthusiasm of the students. The increase in the number of students and the demands of the educational innovation that was ushered in with the 25th of April forced an expansion and the invention of new work spaces. The occupation of a corner of the corridor and a room allocated to the students for meetings and group work ended up being transformed into real spaces of freedom.

In nostalgic moments, our spirit still wanders around these places full of memory, loaded with their own topophilia, spaces for study, research, creation and socialising, perhaps for healthy territorial and other disputes. In practice, this ecosystem functioned as a co-working space, anticipating today's incubators where the public authorities invest so much to establish creative research environments, certainly more artificial than the one that was enjoyed there.

These spaces of memory and affection, formal and informal, appropriate and lived, take us back to an unrepeatable time and to a Faculty on the verge of being swept away by a wave of freedom and change that arrived with vigour and without warning. This lived Geography and the related imaginary map were the hallmark of Coimbra Geography before IEG migrated, for good reasons but without the consequent results, to a new space and received, over time, other names that only signalled the fading of its core essence as Geography was losing its magic as the true aggregating cement of a community.

Geography was the beginning and will surely be the end, the cause we embrace, the bond that cemented a timeless complicity. It's impossible to forget the more personal side, the times spent between Avenal and Quinta do Cadete, up and down the road with colleagues like Rui Marinheiro, looking for some nook or cranny for a gastronomic get-together. This is how a friendship was established that has resisted the erosion of time.

ORIGIN: THE STONES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Education by stone: through lessons; / To learn from the stone, to go to it often; (...) // In the sertão stone doesn't know how to teach, / And even if it did, it wouldn't teach anything; / There you don't learn the stone: there the stone, / A birthstone, is embedded in the soul.

(João Cabral Melo Neto, A Educação pela Pedra [Education by Stone])

Involvement in leisure and cultural activities, complementary to academic ones, strengthened camaraderie. Our love of photography led us to the AAC Centre for Photography Studies and to spending afternoons developing and printing in the Section's darkroom. The unforgettable lessons given by Professor Alfredo Fernandes Martins (Fred) and the stories bewitched by his fertile imagination, where heroes such as Marcel Loubens who ventured into the bowels of the limestone and ended up "resting for eternity in the austere depths of the abyss" stood out. We ended up practising speleology and travelling through the limestone mountains at weekends with colleagues from other courses, prospecting

in fields of lapiés, descending into caves and entering rock shelters. The nomadism of that time was favourable for trips to shores and banks, spur-of-the-moment getaways that could take us to Covão do Fetal, Lisbon, or Pratas, after five in the afternoon, when Dona Ana was taking the sardines out of the frying pan. In this extracurricular geography, António Gama was instrumental.

Inspiring and thought-provoking, he opened up space for random conversations, casual reading, and provided unknown books that were not in the literature references or that still circulated only in restricted reserved networks. I would like to mention *Épistémologie de la Géomorphologie* (Alain Reynaud, 1971), a book he gave us in 1973, as if it were a new bible. The innovation of the concept raised expectations and led us to believe that the theses of Henry Bulig or the then fashionable discourse of Jean Tricart, radical and critical, seemed to consign the dominant geomorphology to the shadows of history. The fever and eagerness placed in these demands were the advent of a new time about to appear unannounced

When it came to the big choices, we were placed at the crossroads where there were two antagonistic geographies, Physical and Human, since the third way, represented by Regional Geography and seen as a compromise, suffered from relative discredit because it abused excessive description. If the example of the Masters pushed us towards the Physical, the decision on the object and area of study was influenced by their reference works, which were balanced between rivers (the Vouga, the Mondego, the Dueça) and mountains (the Estremadura Limestone Massif, the Valongo Mountains).

The edges of the Sicó mountain range were traversed to study the Dueça in its most upstream section and, in my case, the modest Rio dos Mouros, upstream of the canyon that is clearly visible in Conímbriga. A river without water, when people still called it the Caraglio Seco, it manages to maintain as much autonomy as possible as a direct subsidiary of the Mondego before dying, without honour or glory, in the ditches adjacent to the great alluvial plain. Namora, with roots deep in Sicó - his parents were from Vale Florido, Ansião - recognised this modesty: "There, a stone's throw from the town, the Rio dos Mouros.

It was born from a trickle of water, from the sweat of a rock, between heather and hills. Still in the midst of the mountains, it's a tiny stream that's not enough to quench the thirst of a flock. But then the land suddenly starts to turn wild, with cliffs that have the air of mountains, and the river crashes between the brambles and the boulders in sound and foam, with a roar that, in winter, with the floods, shakes the ears of the mountains and of men." No wonder Alberto Caeiro eternalised the modesty of so many of these streams - "few know what the river of my village is / And where it goes / And where it comes from" - which, despite everything, bind us to the land to which we are forever linked by indescribable emotional ties.

The journey to the roots that these rivers provide invariably takes us back to the Sicó of the green years, to the beginnings of scientific research, to a time and space that are unparalleled today. Sicó is a lithological and hydrographic frontier region, with separation between the Mondego and Tagus river basins, and transition between ways of life.

A rosary of emerging springs that border the massif are the sources of many other rivers that flow in opposite directions: the Nabão, which flows south towards Tomar in search of the Tagus; the Dueça, Mouros, Anços and Arunca, which flow east in search of the Mondego. We are in an enclave, in a remote, isolated space that was much more overlooked when pastoralism and rudimentary agriculture prevailed as a means of subsistence for the inhabitants lost in the places scattered among the various Sicó mountains (Rabaçal, Casmilo, Furadouro, Degraças, etc.).

The dichotomous local geography sets stone against water, pitting the Sicó mountains against the Mondego valley, the barren land against the irrigated land on the floodplains between the tributary streams. The diversity of this physical matrix determines the use and organisation of space, the diversity of the ways of life of the people that inhabited this territory: the wine, olive oil, and Rabaçal cheese from the mountains complement the maize, rice, and vegetables produced in the valley, in the alluvial irrigated areas embedded between tuffs, clays and sandstones. The mountain dwellers, olive oil and cheese makers from the dry limestone lands would then go down to the market in the town of Condeixa on Tuesdays and Fridays to meet the farmworkers and millers from the floodplains to exchange the novelties that the land offered them at the cost of a great deal of effort and sweat.

PILGRIMAGE: TRAVELLING AND WANDERING ACROSS BORDERS

Pilgrimage. I come from a wilderness that doesn't exist / in your strict geographies / I don't know where I come from / and I won't even be able to return there / because I've never pinned down the exact / formula of its nourishing matrices. (Fernando Namora, Nome para uma casa [Name for a house])

After graduating, we travelled along different and very distant geographical paths. We found ourselves on the threshold of a new era favourable to other routes, when the world opened up and our horizons would never be limited to the Sicó of the green years. Joining the EEC opened a new chapter for Portugal and for us; subsequent internationalisation was boosted by increased funding for research. The Atlantis Network was set up in 1997 between seven (7) European and Latin American universities (Coimbra, Salamanca, Poitiers, Middlesex, Peru, Mexico and UNESP-Presidente Prudente) and coordinated by Professors José Manuel Pereira de Oliveira (UC) and Messias Modesto dos Passos (UNESP). It was the first internationalisation project supported by the Alfa Programme. Geography, Research for Development (Geoide) was a project launched within this framework that had subsequent replications which led to other co-operations with broader and more lasting consequences, which have continued to the present day. Other initiatives and new partnerships with universities in Brazil and Cape Verde have extended bilateral cooperation while formalising cross-border dialogue, particularly with Salamanca, within the framework of the Centre for Iberian Studies.

The articles written, the books published, the participation in dozens of seminars, the lectures and courses given at universities in those countries do not sum up the importance or significance of what remains of three decades of fruitful travelling. The fieldwork that usually complements these activities has left deep memories and remarkable experiences. The learning acquired on these trips was reinforced by intense and immersive experiences that were never seen as voyeurism or scientific tourism. For this reason, there was always a reluctance to turn them into immediate "scientific articles" for simple quantitative academic productivity, because we considered them superficial, almost always indulging in regional and local typicalism where the picturesque or certain picaresque episodes are emphasised, which are ideal for newspaper articles or illustrating tourist guides.

The many events and fieldwork trips carried out in this context made it possible to understand the vitality of geography in Brazil, its true dimension, regional diversity, the depth of its interior, the real meaning of the sertão [hinterland, backcountry]. This roaming has allowed us to make contact with remote lands, to meet diverse people who have enriched and moulded our most intimate geography through their experiences. The stages of this common journey took us to places as different as Presidente Prudente or the Pontal do Paranapanema, Londrina and Ponta Grossa (Paraná), Bahia (as well as Salvador, the impressive Cachoeira and S. Felix), S. Luís do Maranhão (Lençóis), Pantanal (Matos Grosso do Sul), Rio Grande do Sul (with all the splendour of the Pampa), Paraíba (entering the sertão beyond Patos, where the waters of the S. Francisco transfer arrive), Amazonia (Belém do Pará, Santarém, Rio Tapajós).

Cape Verde was a different kind of enchantment because of its emotional proximity, since it was a gentle introduction to Africa without leaving Europe, an approach to Brazil without crossing the Equator. In Fogo we travelled with Orlando Ribeiro, in Santiago with Ilídio do Amaral and Maria Luísa Ferro Ribeiro, in Mindelo we followed the picaresque imagery of Germano de Almeida, we listened to Mayra Andrade who will never erase the mythical voice and unique style of Cesária Évora. It is only when we get to Chã das Caldeiras in Fogo, Chã da Igreja in Santo Antão, or Tarrafal in Santiago that we appreciate the true Cape Verdean soul. When you walk along the Porto Grande waterfront, with Monte Cara in the background, you realise that it's not fantasy to say that in Cape Verde the nights are warm.

These references that people As Novas Geografias dos Países de Língua Portuguesa our imagination are living legends on a map that is still under construction, where we will continue to draw the incomplete geography of the world. These references, picked up at random wherever we have wandered, are essential for continuing a study in which so much has been invested: As Novas Geografias dos Países de Língua Portuguesa [The New Geographies of Portuguese-speaking Countries].

RETURNING: SEARCHING FOR THE FUTURE AND PLACES NEVER VISITED

Stones on the path? I keep them all, one day I'll build a castle... (Fernando Pessoa)

A career spanning more than half a century cannot be summarised in such a limited space. When it is time to take stock, when all the scientific work that has been done is forgotten, it is the life that has been lived that comes to mind, that imposes itself and ultimately prevails. When your retinas feel so tired, without forgetting the stones encountered along the way, it's comforting to return to the paths travelled on such utopian and unforgettable journeys.

When we come to the question of Us as the future, it is the author of the question, Eduardo Lourenço, who gives the most consequential answer: "Peoples and individuals only have the past at their disposal. It is with it that they imagine the future." The journey will continue, we believe, in search of new places never visited, lands where we truly believe the true secrets of the world are hidden.

CONCLUSION

The digression in time and space reported in this essay is the subjective interpretation of a complicity built over half a century. The experiences, practices and ways of being in science are described in a register where magical realism intersects with fiction to reflect two personal, academic and scientific paths coming from the Coimbra School of Geography. Geography, which from the very beginning served as a unifying feature, both dictated the respective itineraries and wove the complicities with which the most intimate map of an indelible affection was drawn.

This odyssey followed the triptych common to most travelers, as well as other migrants and other refugees: origin, pilgrimage and the return to a resigned twilight. Because we want to believe in an endless return and an unattainable eternity, we once again turn to the unavoidable Drumond to, with all due respect and apologies for such profanity, plagiarize his verses

And now, [Lúcio] José? / The party [isn't] over, / the lights [aren't] out, / the people [haven't] vanished, / the night [isn't] cold.

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Jacinto, R.M.M. - The author contributed to the elaboration, realization and manipulation of the data and writing.

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