

MEMÓRIAS DE GENTES E MEMÓRIAS DE ÁGUAS: ALQUEVA E A LUZ

Clara Saraiva

A construção da barragem de Alqueva obrigou à trasladação integral da Aldeia da Luz. O fecho das comportas deu-se em Fevereiro de 2002; no Verão e Outono do mesmo ano a população foi transferida, e, durante 2003, a velha povoação foi demolida. Hoje em dia, passeia-se de barco por cima do local onde estava a antiga Luz.

Luís Campos foi para a Luz e pôs as pessoas a fotografar os seus espaços de vivência, que viriam a ser submergidos pelas águas. Como tal, e numa exposição sobre a “Memória da Água”, mais que escrever sobre o imenso lago que agora se avista do alto de Monsaraz, quero aqui lembrar a relação das pessoas com a sua velha aldeia, a vida e as águas do rio que desapareceu. Gostaria por isso de invocar passagens das conversas que tive com os luzenses, ao longo dos anos em que acompanhei a vida na velha aldeia, a mudança e a adaptação ao novo aglomerado, e que espelham vivências e memórias antigas, esperanças e tristezas de pessoas que agora vivem rodeadas por um enorme espelho de água.

O trabalho: terra e animais

"A vida, antigamente, era muito dura, fosse na lavoura, fosse como pastor. Fazia-se tudo a pé. Corriam-se aí os montes todos em redor. Os períodos da sementeira e da ceifa eram de trabalho mais duro. Cheguei a trabalhar na sementeira até às onze horas da noite, com mais de vinte juntas de gado. Às três da manhã tínhamos de lá estar para limpar os animais, tratar do almoço, e às 5 horas começar, assim que houvesse luz. Na refeição, havia cestos para as azeitonas que tinham um bocal como uma garrafa, para evitar que saíssem muitas azeitonas e os trabalhadores comessem demais. À noite alumiamos-nos à luz da candeia de azeite. Trabalhava-se muito. Agora, quando conto ao meu neto o que eu fazia com 21 anos, ele não me acredita! "

"Nesses tempo havia muita gente e pouco trabalho. Íamos para o Monte da Charneca, a 3 km daqui, e ficávamos lá a dormir, na casa da malta, para se pegar ao trabalho de madrugada. Na casa da malta ficava-se a semana inteira. Ia-se à segunda com pão no alforge, um pouco de toucinho..."

"Faço 90 anos em Dezembro. Eu fazia trabalho de costura, mas gostava era de ir para o campo. Era mais duro, mas mais sadio. Quando comecei andava de sol a sol, por 5 tostões; sem comer eram mais dois mil réis..."

"A agricultura com tractor começou aqui na aldeia por volta de 1952. Ainda me lembro da primeira vez que trabalhei com um tractor. Nas debulhas, a máquina ficava na eira 15 ou 20 dias, e era preciso muita gente para trabalhar."

"No final da tosquia fazia-se uma festa. E nos outros dias, depois de todos os tosquiadores acabarem os seus trabalhos, rezava-se em conjunto."

Festas, bailes e namoros

"Antigamente, quando eu era novo (já tenho 75!), a tourada desta festa (Festa da Sra. da Luz, em Setembro) tinha só um touro. Não havia dinheiro para mandar vir mais! O boi era repartido e comido na segunda feira, na rua. As mesas eram feitas com os taipais dos carros. De casa, só se levava o prato e o garfo...era uma festa! Apesar de só bebermos pirolitos. Já havia cerveja, mas era muito cara! O leilão era feito no fim, com as ofertas que as pessoas davam (havia sempre muito melão!); era divertido ver os rapazes solteiros que tentavam "comprar" as ofertas dadas pelas raparigas em que estavam interessados".

"Quando eu era novo, há 50 anos, havia bailes todos os 15 dias, eram as oportunidades para os rapazes e raparigas se encontrarem.."

"No dia 1 de Maio punha-se o Maio à porta. No dia 3, dia da Santa Cruz, toda a gente ia para os campos apanhar flores: quinta-feira da Ascensão toda a planta tem virtude (..) No Natal, no tempo dos meus pais, fazia-se o madeiro do Natal, no largo da aldeia."

Quotidianos e vivências

"Para a matança, os vizinhos e família vêm sempre ajudar, e dá-se um pouco de carne a cada um. Agora, na aldeia nova, não sei como vai ser, já não vamos poder matar, porque não temos chaminé que dê!"

"A melhor recordação que guardo é a da vida de moleiro, de viver junto ao rio... É claro que era difícil. Na ribeira de Alcarrache, muitas vezes vinham chuvadas tão grandes que tínhamos de tirar os sacos de cereal do chão e levá-los para um sítio mais alto, e esperar num cabeço que as águas baixassem. Uma vez perdemos vários sacos. Mas, mesmo assim, ainda hoje, quando chego ao rio, a minha alma parece outra!... (...) Aqui é que foi a minha criação e a dos meus irmãos!"

"Aprendi a arte de barbeiro com 13 anos. Foi o meu pai o meu mestre. Havia pessoas que pagavam por ano uma quantia em trigo, sobretudo os seareiros. A maior parte das pessoas trabalhava nas herdades todos os dias e só vinham no fim de semana, que era quando se vinham barbear."

"Quando tinha 12 anos resolvi ir à pesca. O meu pai disse para não ir, que a ribeira ia muito cheia. Mas eu fui e apanhei um peixe de 15 kg que o meu pai me mandou entregar à senhora da Amareleja que era dona do moínho onde o meu pai era moleiro. "

"Venho aqui buscar água a este poço, que nós chamamos Poço Velho, e que fica aqui ao pé do Poço dos Hilários. Além deste há a Fonte Santa, no caminho para a igreja. E a Fonte do Coração, do lado do campo de futebol, também dá água muito boa. Nós, as mulheres, encontramos-mo-nos muito aqui nos poços, e no lavadouro, quando se vai lavar a roupa."

"Para se fazer uma casa como esta eram precisos quatro ou cinco dias. Mas a taipa só se fazia no Verão. Há mais de quarenta anos que deixei a arte da taipa."

Medos e ansiedades

"Vimos aqui ao cemitério, cair a sepultura. É a maneira de eles saberem que nós nos lembramos deles. Não sei como vai ser lá, no novo cemitério, não vai ser o mesmo. E nós não as podemos cá deixar, debaixo de água...as nossas alminhas."

"Aqui na horta temos tudo o que precisamos: laranjas, coentros, rabanetes, nabiças, alface, agrião, romeiras, diospiros, macieira, hortelã, oliveiras, vagem, tomate, pimentos, beringelas, salsa, cebola, couves, feijão, melão, espinafres, favas, nespras...e as palmeiras e as duas roseiras, que a dona da horta disse sempre que são uma recordação de família e que não as quer nunca tiradas...mas agora, quando vier a barragem, é tudo destruído! Nem quero pensar nisso!"

"Ontem, na procissão, de repente senti-me muito triste por saber que nunca mais vou ver estes campos, os sítios onde andava de bicicleta quando era nova..."

MEMORIES OF PEOPLE AND MEMORIES OF WATER: ALQUEVA AND LUZ

Clara Saraiva

The building of the Alqueva dam and reservoir dictated the necessity for a complete transfer of the Village of Luz. The dam was completed in February 2002; the population of the village was transferred in the summer and autumn of the same year, and, during the course of 2003, the old village was demolished. Nowadays, people ride in boats over the site of the former village of Luz.

Luís Campos went to Luz and invited the local population to photograph their living spaces, which were about to be submerged by the water. As such, at an exhibition about the “Memory of Water”, rather than write about the immense lake that can now be seen from up on the hill of Monsaraz, I should like to take this opportunity to remember the relationship that people enjoyed with their old village, its life and the water of the river that has since disappeared. I should therefore like to invoke some excerpts from the conversations that I had with the luzenses, the inhabitants of Luz, over the years in which I accompanied the life of the folk in the old village, their move and their adaptation to the new complex of buildings. These excerpts reflect the old life and the memories, hopes and sorrows of people who now live surrounded by an enormous expanse of water.

Work: land and animals

“In the old days, life was very hard, whether you worked on the land or herded the animals. You had to do everything on foot. You spent your life walking up and down the hills all around. The sewing and harvesting seasons were the periods of hardest work. When sewing the crops, I frequently found myself working until eleven at night, with more than twenty head of cattle. At three in the morning, we would have to be there to clean the animals, prepare lunch, and then start again at five o’clock, as soon as it was light. At meal times, there would be baskets for the olives that had a mouth shaped like a bottle to prevent too many olives coming out all at once and to stop the workers from eating too many. At night, we worked by the light of an olive-oil lamp. We worked really hard. Now, when I tell my grandson what I used to do when I was 21, he doesn’t believe me!”

“In those times, there were a lot of people and very little work. We used to go to Monte da Charneca, a couple of miles from here, and we’d sleep there, in people’s houses, so that we could get straight down to work early the next morning. We’d stay the whole week. We’d set off on Mondays with bread in our saddlebags and a little cold bacon...”

“I’ll be 90 years old in December. I used to work as a seamstress, but what I really liked was going out into the fields. It was harder work, but healthier. When I started, I’d work from dawn to dusk, for just a couple of pence; if I didn’t eat, I’d earn a penny more...”

“Farming with tractors first began here in the village around 1952. I still remember the first time I worked with a tractor. At threshing time, the machine would be working for 15 or 20 days, and a lot of people were needed to do the work.”

“When the shearing was finished, we’d celebrate with a party. And, on the other days, after all the shearers had finished their work, we’d pray together.”

Parties, dancing and courting

“In the old days, when I was young (I’m 75 now!), the bullfight that accompanied these celebrations (the Festival of Our Lady of Light, in September) had just one bull. There wasn’t enough money to order any more! The animal was cut up, shared out and eaten in the street on the following Monday. The tables were made from the wooden planks of the carts. All we had to bring from home was a plate and a fork... it was a real party! Mind you, all we drank was lemonade. There was beer there, but it was very expensive! An auc -

tion was held at the end, with people making gifts of whatever they could (there was always a lot of melon!); it was great fun to watch the young bachelors trying to “buy” the gifts that had been provided by the girls they were interested in.”

“When I was young, some 50 years ago, there were dances every fortnight, and those provided the opportunities for the boys and girls to meet each other.”

“On May 1, we’d decorate our doors to mark the beginning of May. On the third of the month, the Day of the Holy Cross, everybody would go off into the fields to pick flowers: on Ascension Thursday, all plants are said to have virtues (...) At Christmas, in my parents’ time, we’d burn a Yule-log in the village square.”

Everyday life and customs

“For the traditional killing of the pig, neighbours and family members would all come and lend a hand, and everyone would get a bit of meat. Now, in the new village, I don’t know what it’s going to be like, we’re not going to be able to kill the pig any more, because we don’t have a big enough fireplace!”

“The fondest memory I’ll always have is of my life as a miller, living down by the river... Of course, it was a hard life. In the River Alcarrache, it would often rain so hard that we had to lift the sacks of grain off the ground and put them in a higher place, and then wait for the water level to subside. Once we lost several sacks. But, even so, today when I walk down to the river, I feel like my soul is different now!... (...) It was here that I and my brothers were all brought up!”

“I learned the barber’s trade when I was 13 years old. I was taught by my father. There were some people who used to pay with a certain amount of wheat each year, especially the ones who worked in the fields. Most people worked on the big farming estates every day and only came home at the weekends, which was when they came to get their hair cut and their beards shaved.”

“Once, when I was twelve years old, I decided to go fishing. My father told me not to go, warning me that the river was very full. But I still went and caught a fish that weighed more than thirty pounds, and my father sent me off to deliver it to the lady from Amareleja who was the owner of the mill where my father worked as a miller.”

“I come here to fetch water from this well, which we call the Old Well, and which is right here next to the Hilários Well. Besides this, there’s also the Holy Fountain, on the way to the church. And the Fountain of the Heart, over by the football field, also provides good quality water. We women tend to meet here a lot at the wells, or at the washing place whenever we’re washing clothes.”

“To build a house like this it used to take four or five days. But you could only make dried mud in the summer. I stopped practising the art of wattle and daub forty years ago.”

Fears and anxieties

“We come here to the cemetery to whitewash the walls. It’s our way of letting them know that we still remember them. I don’t know what it’s going to be like in the new cemetery. It won’t be the same. And we can’t leave them here, under the water... our poor little souls.”

“Here in the orchard, we’ve got everything we need: oranges, coriander, radishes, turnips, lettuce, water-cress, pomegranates, persimmons, apples, mint, olives, peas, tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, parsley, onions, cabbages, beans, melons, spinach, broad beans, medlars... and the palm-trees and the two rose-bushes that the woman who owns the orchard has always told us are a reminder of her family and that she never wants them to be pulled up... but now, when the dam and the reservoir come, it’ll all be destroyed! I don’t even want to think about it!”

“Yesterday, in the procession, I suddenly felt sad because I realised I’ll never see these fields again, the places where I used to ride on my bike when I was young...”