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Narrative resources and political violence: the life stories of former clandestine militants in Portugal

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Abstract

This study analyses the experiences, both violent and non-violent, of two former clandestine militants who were part of distinct politically violent organisations in the past in Portugal. It explores the narrative resources at the origin of personal political awareness and their influence on political activism, taking into (particular) account the impact of the early family narrative environment and of the moment in history in which individuals were living. It also demonstrates the ways in which past experiences are reconstructed by self-constructions and representations in the present. Activism at the edge of age is, thus, shaped by the meanings of past memories, which are used dialogically to preserve a valued identity.

Key-words: political activism, political violence, life stories, life-course, storytelling, narrative resources, narrative analysis, identity, memory.

Individuals respond to the conditions and stimuli of their environment in ways which are consistent with their life stories, that is, with the perceptions they hold about themselves, others and their political, social, cultural, economic, and historical milieu (McAdams, 2008). Such perceptions are generated by the narrative resources available to individuals, which derive from their personal cultural repertoire composed by the "early narrative environment of the family", by the stories individuals access while growing up (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p.54), and by the social interactions that occur across their life course (Elder, 1994).

Personal stories of involvement in politically motivated violence are the focus of the present article. This social phenomenon has been very little explored in the Portuguese context, but it can still be retrieved from one of the few places where it lives: the memory of the individuals who took part in armed organisations. Therefore, I suggest that the stories people tell about their lives are connected with and shed light on the social, cultural, political,

historical and human contexts which frame these same stories and these same lives, enriching the study of political violence. Yet, it is important to note that personal stories are socially constructed and cannot be taken as *the* representation of *the* reality, but as *a* representation of *a* reality (see Esin et al., 2013). Stories are the vehicles through which individuals represent their experiences, based on the narratives available at their temporal and spatial locations; narratives which constitute the cultural and social resources which enable individuals to put their stories together (Spector-Mersel, 2010), giving meaning to themselves and to the world (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988), and shaping their personal identities (McAdams, 1993). Thus, story and narrative are different. As Smith (2016) argues, "people tell stories, not narratives", but their stories draw on their narrative resources or, in other words, on their cultural knowledge, on their relationship with the receiver, and on the shared and divergent understandings of which stories are appropriate in different contexts (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

Storytelling, history and autobiographical memory

According to Cohler (1982), and corroborated by several other studies (see for example, Habermas & Paha, 2001; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008), the acquisition of a coherent life story narrative is possible for the first time at the life stage of adolescence. In developmental terms, it is only at this point in life that individuals are able to give both internal and external context to their life stories and to "integrate memories and self-concept into a coherent overall account" (Habermas & Hatiboğlu, 2014, p.38). Adolescence enables individuals to conceive and talk about themselves and others biographically, recognising the temporal linearity of their stories, how stories connect and offer explanations for different life events, and what social, cultural, and historical contexts surround and influence their lives (Habermas & Hatiboğlu, 2014). At this stage, individuals start building their narrative identity, which, according to McAdams (2008, p.243), corresponds to "an individual's internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self". In this sense, as Somers argues (1994, p. 606), "it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities […] all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making". In this sense, stories do not only work "for people", but they also work "on

people", leading their construction and understanding of reality, and their course of action (Frank, 2010, p.3). In this context, Jackson argues that:

> Our lives are storied. Were it not for stories, our lives would be unimaginable. Stories make it possible for us to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause. To relate a story is to retrace one's steps, going over the ground of one's life again, reworking reality to render it more bearable. A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without. In this way we gain some purchase over events that confounded us, humbled us, and left us helpless. In telling a story we renew our faith that the world is within our grasp. (Jackson, 2002, p. 245)

Personal stories are also closely linked to history, portraying historical shifts in a culture, establishing collective memories and bridging cultural history and personal biography (Plummer, 2002). As defended by Andrews (2002, p.84), "stories are products of their times". Thus, the historical contexts of people's stories are therefore key to their understanding. Plummer adds:

> Narrative processes refer to a wide array of social actions that make stories and narratives work. Structures of narration speak to the historical and cultural structural contexts in which these processes are embedded. With these concepts in mind, storytelling becomes a creative political and symbolic strategy to bridge the macro and micro, the process and the structures: it becomes a key human active way of transforming how we grasp, connect to and change the world. (Plummer, 2017, p. 3)

This author suggests that there is a new area of storytelling and politics emerging which focuses on the organisation of stories under different political systems. This is particularly relevant to the present article, because the stories of my interviewees encompass different political systems in Portugal and showcase a "before" – life under an authoritairan regime – and an "after" – life after the Revolution and within a democratic system. Such a transition creates opportunities for new stories to emerge and to tell stories differently, in a more open and democratic way.

Finally, through stories, individuals also attach meanings to episodes stored in their autobiographical memory, which in itself is "an active construction embedded in a social weave of dialogues that are negotiated not only between an individual and his or her

immediate social environment […] but also, equally importantly, between the individual and the larger cultural milieu" (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p.47). In this sense, according to Bruner (2003, p.213), the self relies on selective remembering to "adjust the past to the demands of the present and the anticipated future". This is corroborated by Mishler (2004), who considers that the same identity-defining episode may be told very differently in different circumstances, creating multiple life narrative storylines and constructing different identities.

Storytelling and political violence

The fact that stories are rooted in the place and time in which they exist and in the social relationships in which they are created, repeated and transformed (Frank, 2010) influences the establishment of "cognitive and affective processes" that may gradually lead to violence and that are strengthened by violence itself (della Porta, 2013, p.19). Resorting to political violence is therefore not automatic, but a process: "actions of some kind associated with other actions and reactions, often expressed in some sort of reciprocal relationship" (Taylor & Horgan, 2012, p.130). In addition, such actions are often not violent, because various "underground organisations evolve within and then break away from larger, nonviolent social movement organisations" (della Porta, 2013, p.159), and these in turn are permeated by stories and storytelling. Consequently, the aspects driving individuals to political violence involve a relational, but also a cultural component, which highlights the symbolic nature of the phenomenon and its roots in images, stories, experiences and conditions available to individuals at a given time (see, for example, Cordes, 2001; Tololyan, 2001; Arena & Arrigo, 2005). Thus, stories are shared collectively and individuals grow with such stories and use stories to justify their actions, because stories "make the unseen not only visible but compelling" (Frank, 2010, p.41). Selbin adds the following:

> It is the articulation of compelling stories […] that allows people to deploy them in ways which resonate with others and empower them to seek to change the material and ideological conditions of their everyday lives. (Selbin, 2010, p. 6)

This author defends the line of reasoning that research should go beyond the usual material and structural factors and focus on the thoughts and feelings of political activists, recognising

the role played by stories and narratives "of past injustices and struggles as they fight for the future" (Selbin, 2010, p. 9).

In this vein, this article investigates the narrative resources available to two different individuals who engaged in politically violent activism at a younger age and in different periods of time in Portugal. It also looks closely at how the telling of the past is reconstructed in the present and for the present.

Method

Participants

The data for this study was drawn from my doctoral research on the narratives of political violence in Portugal (see Da Silva, 2016). Former clandestine militants in Portugal were interviewed in-depth, allowing the collection of twenty-eight life stories. These compose a very rich description of the experiences of social actors who, at a certain point in time, took the leap into political violence, but who are much more than former clandestine militants. In the present article, I am only focussing on the stories of two individuals, Rita and Jaime, because despite having been both born during *Estado Novo*'s dictatorial regime[1], in 1949 and 1958 respectively, their age difference and contextual influences have had a distinct impact on their political activism.

Data collection

Interviews involve a close personal interaction, as well as the production of potentially powerful knowledge, which makes ethics extremely significant during the research process, particularly when it involves sensitive topics (see Renzetti & Lee, 1993). While as a researcher I am aware that interviews assign the interviewer both the role of participant and observer, not all interviewees share such awareness of this duplicity of roles. This is especially so in a setting where the researcher presents him or herself as very interested in the subject, friendly and trustworthy (which is supported by information sheets and consent forms, holding the impressive university logos). In this context, the responsibility regarding

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[1] The dictatorial period corresponds to *Estado Novo* (New State), which was started by a military coup on the 28th of May 1926 and ended by the Carnation Revolution on the 25th of April 1974. This Revolution began a process of transition to democracy in the country.

the data collected lies with the researcher, who must reflect the potential "societal uses of the knowledge produced by academic social science interviews" (Kvale, 2006, p.497) and, particularly, its impact on the research participants and the ways they can be ethically protected. Therefore, my ethical concerns were not limited to certain stages of the research (e.g. data collection), but were rather present throughout the entire process, from the moment individuals were contacted to take part on the study, to the analysis and representation of their accounts. In this vein, all interviewees received the verbatim transcript of their interviews in order to have the opportunity to correct any inaccuracies, to make sure that their views were correctly represented and to exclude any sections that would make them feel uncomfortable if publicly revealed. At this stage, informed consent was again requested from the interviewees, as suggested by Josselson (2007), in order to make clear that I was going to use their statements to shed light on the subject under analysis and not on their personal lives. In addition, I clarified that their stories would be treated as possible versions of the social world, as expressed by Dingwall (1980), so that they would not feel betrayed or expect me to affirm or endorse their version of events. Lastly, all transcripts were anonymised and the quotations to be included in the final outputs carefully chosen, in order to protect the interviewees' identities and, at the same time, to produce a coherent and thick account of their experiences (Jackson, 2009; Stark & Hedgecoe, 2004).

Data analysis

Narrative inquiry focuses on the storied nature of human conduct (Sarbin, 1986), considering that "social reality is primarily a narrative reality" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 211). According to Andrews (2007), the way individuals present themselves through the stories they tell encompasses their past, their present and their imagined future, as well as the audience they are talking to and the narratives they have constructed over the years. This author goes even further and adds that personal narratives do not only talk about the individual, "but provide a small window into the engines of history and historical change, as we both shape and are shaped by the events of our day" (Andrews, 2007, p. 51).

In order to read narrative texts, Josselson (2004) considers that a hermeneutics of faith or a hermeneutics of suspicion can be put into place. The former reads narrative texts as representations of lived experiences and aims to explore and represent their meanings at a different level of discourse or abstraction, while the latter reads narrative texts as disguised and explores their hidden meanings. In this study, I employ a hermeneutics of faith to

understand Rita's and Jaime's meanings as best as I can, and I take interpretive authority (Chase, 1996) for my understanding of their words, which are reproduced for the credibility of my interpretations of their meanings (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Rita

Rita grew up in a small village in the Alentejo, which is a large region situated in the south of Portugal, between the Lisbon area and the Algarve, geographically marked by its extensive, open, rolling plains. In the Alentejo the population had always relied mainly on agriculture, livestock and forestry, whose production during *Estado Novo*, according to Rita, was in the hands of a few landowners, who would contract workers from the region at a very low wage and in very precarious conditions.

This context of extreme poverty and injustice strengthened the political opposition in the region and attracted the attention of the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which had a strong presence in the area. As Rita affirmed: "that area provided many members for the party [PCP], which was only natural, because it was the only force that brought some hope to people. People had nothing to lose, really". Consequently, coming from the Alentejo meant coming from an area marked by resistance to the regime, from a place where daily hardships made people aware of the need to fight the system, fight for justice. In this sense, these people were more likely to join the ranks of the PCP, which was the only active opposition party in the country during the *Estado Novo*, despite it being banned by the regime and forced to stay underground. In the 1950s, Rita's parents opted to go underground in order to work for the PCP, leaving her with her grandparents until she finished primary school. At age ten Rita joined them, mainly motivated by the "normal" desire to live with her parents – "I could not live with my grandparents forever. I wanted to join my parents" – but also by the conviction that it was 'the natural thing to do", because she was brought up to see the misery and repression in which people lived. She described how aware she was of the limitations of life underground: "we could not go to the movies, we could not play, we could not have close friendships, we could not have a boyfriend. Everything was very limited, so people would not suspect us." As a consequence, in her adolescence she questioned her choice: "when we enter adolescence, we understand everything better. At that point we can ask ourselves: do I want to stay here or not?". Ultimately, she decided that "continuity is usually the normal way". Thus, over time Rita's decision became more politically rather than relationally grounded, leading her not only to remain underground for eight years, but also to join a training course

in the Soviet Union when she turned eighteen. Rita spent eighteen months in the Soviet Union, where she met her husband with whom she resumed the underground life upon their return to Portugal in order to found the armed organisation ARA (Armed Revolutionary Action). This was again, something that Rita considered "normal" and in her opinion "well done", as "everything" was "working to overthrow the regime".

Regarding her role within the ARA, Rita considered that it was never operational in terms of the direct commission of actions, because her place was mostly in the background, supporting her husband. Such a role followed the rules of the PCP (the political party behind ARA), which presupposed that women should act as housewives, lending an air of normality to different situations. These rules were justified among ARA members by the position of women in Portuguese society at the time. Rita was the first to recognise that at the time it was very difficult for a woman to move around as freely as a man: "Men could move around better. We have to situate things. At that time, in the 1960s and 1970s, women did not have, as they do now, freedom to do whatever they wished". However, Rita was involved in the planning of different actions, going out with her husband and children, for instance to observe possible targets while having a picnic. Her role did not lack challenges and difficulties either, particularly concerning the relationships with the neighbours and raising two children in a context where both parents where living under a false identity. In relation to the first aspect, Rita had to make sure that the neighbours would not connect the armed actions happening around them with her family, particularly her husband, whose picture often appeared in the media. Nonetheless, for Rita, the second aspect was worse for two reasons: health issues and the compulsory separation from children who reached school age (a normal practice of PCP's clandestine militants). The first situation was especially relevant to Rita, because her youngest child had asthma and she said that once she thought that the little girl would die at home. She also always had the separation from her children at the back of her mind and considered it "a terrible thing":

> When the children reached school age they had to go somewhere. Either they would go to the Soviet Union, which happened to many and ended very badly – the children were separated from their parents and then, in several cases, they did not want to be with their parents anymore; or they went to live with family, grandparents, which was the most usual. [...] If it wasn't for April 25th, such a thing would have happened to ours. And that's one of the terrible things, it's one of the most terrible things, for sure.

However, Rita felt extremely relieved that the April 25th Revolution, which caused the end of the ARA, happened before she had to personally make such a choice. Yet, at the same time she also indicated that she knew that it was something that could have happened and that she would have had to go through with, as her own parents had done in the past.

Rita did not have difficulties returning to life aboveground after the Revolution, because she considered that everything was much easier and that she was still young enough at the age of twenty-five to adapt to a new reality. At present, she is not politically active, because in the years that followed the Revolution her husband had problems with the PCP and left, never joining another political party again. Rita was not involved directly in the problems, but she was indirectly affected and also distanced herself from the party. Nonetheless, she believes that having grown up within the party marked her life, particularly her position regarding socio-economic inequalities.

Jaime

Jaime is the youngest of ten siblings. He considers that his family was poor, however less so when he was born, because a few of his siblings were already working and contributing to the household finances. He started working at age twelve after finishing primary school and was sixteen years-old when the Revolution took place in 1974. Jaime did not consider that his family had an influence in his political activism, which he attributes to two factors: having been born during the dictatorship and having worked since he can remember. These were the circumstances, in his opinion, that made him become a leftist who cannot live with injustices and inequalities. In order to illustrate the origins of his awareness of political and economic injustices, Jaime told the following story:

> One of the things that struck me the most in my political adolescence – I don't think I was even involved in political activity yet – but something that impressed me deeply was the time right after the April 25th. For four or five months, I went with a group of friends to play soccer in a nearby estate, which was owned by landed gentry. The place had a square, a grocery store, a cafe, a tavern, peasant houses, a GNR [rural police] outpost, and a soccer field. The nearest village was twenty or thirty kilometres away. What happened? The pittance that the workers received was soon spent in the grocery store and in the tavern, and anyone who protested had the GNR to deal with. And the guy, a gentleman, a very highly regarded rural gent, because his workers had

soup to eat... the scheme was set up in such a way... that everything would return to him... the added value was always his.

Thus, across the next decade of his life, Jaime's political awareness developed and led him to perceive the new democratic state as the establishment allowing the return of the past – of dominant right-wing forces, of capitalism and even fascism. For Jaime, it was as if the capitalist families had gone on holiday after the Revolution and then came back three or four years later untouched to occupy the same positions in society as before. It is in this context that Jaime started to believe that "violence is a weapon" that can be used "according to the political analysis of a certain situation". Jaime subsequently became involved with the FP-25 (Popular Forces of April 25th), which he saw as "the armed arm of the workers" against the abuses of the employers. In this context, "shooting the knee" of an abusive employer would be

An attempt to convey a practical message for both sides, for the employers and for the victims who had been laid off. If there was a guy who was not paying the salaries, or who had fled to Brazil, that guy needed to realise that he could not do that. And since the state did not act, at least there were some guys that would keep him frightened.

For Jaime, FP-25's victims were in fact perpetrators, because they were responsible for the suffering of others. Ending their life would not just be a response to the bad treatment of a particular individual or group at a particular time, but prevent other similar instances from occurring, conveying a message "as clear as water". Jaime highlighted that their struggle also created victims on their side, who were killed by the police, which was quite difficult and painful both personally and for the organisation. Thus, Jaime does not show regret for his actions, but defends the accomplishment of a political choice – a choice that was so important in his life that he even mentioned it in a speech on his own wedding day.

Near the end of the organisation, Jaime was shot by the police and arrested. However, four years before finishing his sentence, in 1996, the government approved an amnesty to all FP-25 militants still in jail, but Jaime did not accept it. For him, the most important thing was to pay his debt to society and only then be able to live unreservedly:

I am the last prisoner who got out of jail. It closed the inquiry. I am the person who spent more time in jail. And you suddenly see the doors opening, everyone leaving

and you stay, because you would not sign a paper, you have your dignity. I owe nothing to society. Therefore, I consider myself an activist, a political activist, who was with others in the political struggle until the end of the fight, I risked it all and suddenly I lost. I lost and such a defeat brought about ten years in prison, but I left without owing anything to society, because I served the sentence until the end. I did not get out with a pardon, or with an amnesty, I left with my time served. I served it all, I owe nothing to society.

Jaime cherishes his past very much because it provides him with "some sense to position things" in the present. It allows him to remember who he was, what he did and why he did it, because he believes that his core values remained the same over time and still define his current political self. Thus, Jaime displays a continuity between his past and his present in terms of his ideals, beliefs and social activism, considering that he has always had a very strong attraction towards civic participation that does not allow him to be passive, and that is simply who he is:

> You are facing someone who, despite everything, maintains the same posture he had 25 years ago regarding his social, ideological and civic participation. I have this need to feel that I am contributing with whatever I do, be it at local political meetings, at the Left Bloc [political party], at work. I'm a leftist man […] I have very strong convictions about social justice and quality of life, which I have kept intact since I've been involved in the political struggle, for 30-odd years, exactly the same thing.

Finally, the continuity of the strong convictions held by Jaime over time also include his radicalised views on how to solve social issues. However, he recognises that his age no longer allows him to take part in politically violent activism:

> Rewinding what I experienced in the 1980s, I do not say that if I was twenty years old today that I would not do the same. Due to my way of seeing society and of being integrated in that society, I am unable to live with injustices, with the arrogance of those who have a uniform or a tie and a pen, I cannot live with it. Now, what will Jaime do? Do you think I'll get away ahead of the police, at fifty seven years-old... I can no longer escape. This is something of which I am completely aware. Now, that does not stop me from looking at the situations that I face every day and saying: what

we need here is the FP-25, or something else, to bring at least some justice regarding what we are facing.

Discussion and conclusion

The concept of "linked lives" was put forward by Elder (1994, p.4) and refers to the "interaction between the individual's social worlds over the life span". For this author, the "social forces" present in the life of different individuals are responsible for the development of their life courses. Within this concept, it is possible to situate one of the most relevant narrative resources which can be clearly observed in the life of Rita: her family narrative environment. From an early age, such narrative resources contributed to the development of her personal political awareness, as well as to later choices in her life, such as supporting the creation of an armed organisation to fight a political system which she perceived as deeply unfair. In Rita's discourse, for instance, the repetition of the word "normal" is interesting: it was "normal" to wish to join her clandestine parents, it was "normal" to remain underground and it was "normal" to be involved in the process of founding a political organisation to fight the regime. In fact, what Rita considered "normal" in her personal story represents the choices she made, motivated by the meanings she chose to give her life. These meanings, following Brockmeier (2009, p.222), enclose three basic characteristics: 1) they are relational – for Rita it all started with the desire to be reunited with her parents, and later her involvement with a political violent organisation was closely related to the fact of being the partner of one of the organisation's founders 2) they are societal and historical – the need to fight an oppressive and violent regime despite great personal sacrifice strongly influenced Rita's socialisation and 3) they are not deterministic, but set out a variety of possibilities for action – along the way Rita had opportunities to turn in different directions, yet she chose "continuity". Thus, Rita, like every human being, was not able to escape the cultural meanings of her environment and had no other "choice but to choose", setting the course of her unique life story (Brockmeier, 2009, p.222) and shaping her narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Hence, her life story is intensely bound to the time and context she lived in and to her cultural socialisation, mainly led by her family experiences and narratives, which moulded and was moulded by her own personal narrative (Somers, 1994; Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Moreover, people's stories are rooted in the narrative resources of their historical contexts (see, for instance, Plummer, 2017). This is an aspect that can be clearly seen in

Jaime's life story, who was born in the last years of *Estado Novo*'s regime, which already knew some turbulence. In his early teens, he saw the regime being overthrown, giving place to a period of euphoria and politicisation, which shaped his political awareness and activism. Thus, as an adolescent, Jaime was greatly impacted by the political environment of his time, which from a life course perspective indicates that the impact of social change on the developing individual is in part led by factors associated with their "life stage […] at the time of the change" (Elder, 1994, p.6). A life stage in which they were ready, and in some cases eager, to embrace social and political ideas and ideals (see Sugarman, 2001), seeing themselves and constructing a narrative identity as being a "product" of the Revolution and of all the intense political activity that followed it. Habermas and Hatiboğlu (2014, p.33) consider this inclusion of context in constructing the life story as a key feature of adolescence, allowing the personal narrative to become coherent with "a family constellation, a family history, a socioeconomic and sociocultural situation, and a historical situation". This perspective builds on Cohler's (1982, p.218) belief that in adolescence "persons remodel their histories in a manner analogous to that in which a nation much later rewrites its history, in order to create successive legends about the past relevant to that later point in history". In addition, Andrews (2007, p. 206), remarking on the relationship between political activism and times of social turmoil, says that individuals' "starting point is always the political narratives they have inherited". This is a perspective that was patent throughout this article, which explored how different interviewees, in different moments of time and under different political systems, developed a consciousness that shaped their political awareness and framed their subsequent activities. In the first moment of time in my analysis, which is represented by Rita, militants are portrayed as the "children of the regime" whose discourses, identities and actions were shaped by the way they perceived and related to *Estado Novo*'s dictatorial regime. In the second moment of time, which is represented by Jaime, militants are portrayed as the "children of the revolution" who were, at a young age, socialised and politicised in the euphoria of the Revolution and who engaged with an armed organisation in the 1980s. These individuals used their different contextual variables as resources to form their narrative identity, as well as to attain meaning to their past experiences, which are dialogically reconstructed and recounted.

Regarding the continuities and discontinuities in terms of political activism in the life of both Rita and Jaime, it is interesting to note that Rita was part of an armed organisation that contributed to the fall of the regime and, consequently, perceived the Revolution as its goal and as the victorious end of their politically violent activism. Thus, in Rita's story the

need to keep fighting cannot be found, which does not diminish the pride she feels in relation to her past. However, Jaime's experience is different, carrying a sense of defeat because of the arrests that caused the dissolution of the armed organisation and the subsquent decision of some militants to accept an amnesty while in prison. Consequently, for Jaime, the struggle is not finished yet, he is still committed, through legal political activism, to the pursuit of social justice. Despite not having changed his mind regarding the use of violence for political purposes, Jaime considers his age and concludes that it is not up to him anymore. Therefore, it is important to note that, as also considered by Horgan (2009), disengagement from a politically violent organisation does not always imply a transformation of personal perspectives. In other words, disengagement is not synonymous with deradicalisation since it is possible that disengaged individuals like Jaime, who, despite not committing violent acts anymore, still hold the same perpectives and activist identities that feed into political violence. Although his body no longer allows his personal engagement, at least in physical terms, he does not rebuke others who choose such political means. In this sense, it is possible to observe two individuals who reconstruct themselves in the present and justify their current political activism (or lack of it) according to their representations of past experiences and events.

In this study, I traced the narrative resources by which two former clandestine militants in Portugal were moulded as subjects through their interactions with the social and political contexts of their time. I identified and analysed the stories that shaped these activists' lives, exploring how such stories impacted their past experiences and choices and how they are put at the service of constructing their present selves. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that the meanings people assign to their autobiographical past shape who they are in the present and constitute the narrative resources that form their life stories, shaping their personal narrative according to the moment in history in which they were living.

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