“O eterno lá fora”: a hermeneutical framework for analyzing the Portuguese brain-drain: Proposing a narrative hermeneutical framework as a complementary mode of diagnosis and evaluation of the wave of highly qualified young emigration facing Portugal.

Mendes Pereira, Clara

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Proposing a narrative hermeneutical framework as a complementary mode of diagnosis and evaluation of the wave of highly qualified young emigration facing Portugal.

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

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Clara Mendes Pereira
s3293513
Program: MA Philosophy 60 EC
Specialization: Philosophical Perspectives on Politics and the Economy
Supervisor: Martijn Boven

Terra da nossa promissão, da exígua promissão de sete sementes, o Alentejo é na verdade o máximo e o mínimo a que podemos aspirar: o descampado dum sonho infinito e a realidade dum sonho exausto.

Land of our promise, of the meager promise of seven seeds, Alentejo is in truth the maximum and the minimum to which we can aspire: the open wilderness of a dream infinite, and the reality of a dream exhausted.

Miguel Torga

Para a Mitó, a quem devo sobretudo crença.

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Introduction

Since I started living in the Netherlands, a lot of my time back home is spent answering questions: "how is it out there?," "are you making a lot of money?," "have you managed to integrate"? and, above all, hearing "soon, I'll be abroad too." If you are young and Portuguese, and especially if you are higher educated, the odds that you live obsessed with the idea of emigration are high – maybe you want to see the world, and Portugal seems too peripheral; maybe you want to live alone, and in Portugal that goal seems too distant; maybe you see your emigrated friends abroad working less and earning more and the thought of what you are still doing 'here' weighs heavily on your mind.

Youth emigration is a hot topic everywhere, from social to traditional media: "30% of youths born in Portugal live abroad (…) 70% of new immigrants are under 40 years old", reads one of the first *Expresso* front covers of the year. Like most of the contributions to this conversation, articles present a narrative of salvation, whereby all sacrifices that come with emigration appear redeemed in the face of newfound independence and economic gain; and necessity, such that this is the only option that appears logical in comparison to the single counterfactual of an unlivable material status quo in Portugal.

In this conjecture, many Portuguese youths leave. Some may do so for the adventure, but for most this comes paired with the feeling that one must escape the 'lack of future' one expects to be condemned to at home. This thesis shall be primarily methodological in focus and propose a framework whereby we can diagnose and evaluate the narratives that explain, and may reinforce, this 'necessary' emigration. I will focus on the group whom material necessity would likely weigh on the least – higher educated youths – and call the object of study 'brain-drain narratives.'

Problem

Let it first be outlined what the Portuguese brain-drain is, and in what ways it may constitute a problem. By 'brain-drain', one refers to mass emigration of highly educated[1] Portuguese residents, usually in the early stages of their professional life. The word 'mass' indicates that the root of this phenomenon exceeds purely personal factors, such as a need for adventure. Rather, it arises from some shared experience of common causes which motivate a significant number of individuals with different profiles, within a certain demographic in a certain historical time and space, to partake in emigration. These criteria are sufficiently respected: according to the most recent emigration reports, the proportion of highly qualified individuals in the total number of emigrations has doubled in the period from 2011-2021[2]. If the latest available figures,

[1] Undergraduate education or above.
[2] Pires et al., "Emigração Portuguesa 2022: Relatório Estatístico.", p.24.

from 2000, show that 13.1% of people with higher education were moving abroad[3], we may extrapolate this value to be significantly weightier today.

To my understanding, the brain-drain poses a real and severe problem for Portugal going forward. Firstly, it poses risk for Portugal *qua* economy, both in its internal and external standing. Secondly, it places stress on the lived experience of citizens abroad, and inhabitants within its borders. The animating concern of this thesis, then, is that the interaction of economic and lived facets of political life may create a double dynamic of alienation and resistance that threatens the health of the political community.

The economic problems manifest as follows. Firstly, the sustainability of the national social security system may be threatened, accelerating demographic aging. Motivated by a desire to find a better quality of life abroad, we are to expect that today's young emigrants will not consider the country an attractive destination to settle and form families, aggravating opportunities for workforce rejuvenation. Furthermore, the nature of high-skilled emigration suggests that the remaining workforce will be one of lower earnings and therefore lower fiscal contribution to social security and government budget. Overall, we can predict this to threaten the ability of the state to provide a safety net for, and advance towards, social justice and equality of opportunity.

Secondly, concerns may be sparked about the country's direction of development. We may reflect, for example, on the effects that the export of talent and skills may have on entrepreneurship, scientific development, and cultural production. Such a dynamic may put in check the goal of solving the structural deficiencies of the comparatively underdeveloped Portuguese economy, allowing it to cohere and compete with other economies in the European Union. Such an outcome could, additionally, challenge the worthiness of investments in the education and qualification of the population taken on since the fall of the dictatorship in 1974.

The effect on the lived experience of those affected by the issue is not to be neglected. In a direct sense, emigration signifies the dismemberment of affective ties. This is relevant on a few grounds. Firstly, a discontinuity in the histories of families and communities can deepen a sense of isolation and alienation, both for the individuals who leave, and the people they leave behind. This can be not only taxing from a psychological perspective but distances these parties from the possibility of carrying out life projects that are as meaningful as possible. Secondly, this certainly impoverishes the national sociocultural landscape, lacking in people to give it meaningful continuity. Thirdly, a predictably negative reaction to this trend may prove dangerous for the cohesiveness of the country as a political community. It may foster resentment and general dissatisfaction with the political system, which may either contribute to increasing already elevated levels of

[3] Pires et al., p.29.

abstention[4] or radicalize constituencies as has been the trend throughout Europe. This may prove particularly concerning in the current paradigm of growing immigration of low-skilled non-EU labor, whose members have started to serve as scapegoats in the agenda of exponentially growing far-right movements[5]. The point is that this is not a political issue that we expect to be approached in a disinterested manner. As families and friends are separated from each other and their communities in a way which irrevocably changes the lived quotidian of a large chunk of the population, we must take seriously the emotive consequences this may have in the political sphere. We must remember, too, that the emigration that is the object of this thesis is only a subsect of a general growth trend in youth emigration[6], making it an issue of considerable dimension.

Unlike many other contentious debates, opposing parties do not contest diagnoses of the causes or effects of the brain-drain, of which they largely agree. In my preliminary research, all link the causes to an endemic lack of financial independence, a consequence an economy with comparatively[7] low salaries for graduates undergoing a significant housing crisis. Even the government shares the same set of concerns: amid fears of a 'talent-fugue' from the country, Prime-Minister António Costa addressed, in early October, a letter to the European Commission, heading these concerns be taken up as a serious priority on a European level[8]. Setting aside expectable quarrels around concrete policies to deter this phenomenon, political debate surrounds primarily matters of *responsibility* – for its cause and its resolution – and *values* – *why, and for whom* is the brain-drain a problem at all?

It is my hypothesis that a diagnosis that reflects on material causes alone cannot fully account for the issue at hand. In what regards responsibility, it focuses only on the ways in which the material landscape in which Portuguese youth operate is shaped by external actors or dynamics. It fails to engage with how brain-drain narratives can become a self-fulfilling prophecy – as people sediment ideas of political resolution as unfathomable and Portugal as an infertile place for ambitious dreams, we can expect youths to lose hope in anything but emigration, aggravating the national scenario. Furthermore, it does not account for how public debate is made unproductive by failing to recognize the values at stake for different actors and translating between them. In focusing on a material narrative, mediated through data-driven approaches and technocratic language, the government fails to appropriately engage with youths who for whom the issue picks up on symbols from lived experience, expectations, spaces, and emotions. Such a dynamic

[4] As of 2022, this value was at a staggering 48,6 %. Data from Pordata, "Eleitores Nas Eleições Para a Assembleia Da República."
[5] For example, as a program point of the 'Chega' party; Lusa, "Chega contra política migratória de 'portas abertas', restantes partidos criticam xenofobia."
[6] I have chosen only to address highly qualified migration due to its wide media coverage, essential for my methodology.
[7] To the rest of the EU.
[8] Lourenço, "Semanário | Governo pede resposta europeia."

validates in these youths the disempowering sensation of 'not being listened to', poisoning any terrain where transformative solutions could grow.

Method

This thesis will employ a hermeneutic framework brought forth by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in the volumes of *Time and Narrative*, to complement the dominant economistic outlook under which this problem is discussed in the Portuguese public sphere.

This approach has some unique advantages. Firstly, Ricoeur's approach moves the focus of philosophy away from moral and epistemic *truth*, and towards *interpretation*. In my view, such a framework promises to be more successful in addressing an issue in which little contestation surrounds evidence for and magnitude of the issue. A focus on narrative allows us to better address the issues of value translation and responsibility thar we have introduced hitherto, with the added advantage of being harmonizable with, and critically assessed through, data-based approaches.

Secondly, a theory that gives primacy to narrative as a bridge between the experience of isolated selfhood and political subjectivity in a community allows us to bring a discussion with an individualistic focus on material resources to include immaterial values integral to full picture as it presents itself to Portuguese youths.

Thirdly, Ricoeur is a good bet given this project's focus on first-hand accounts of emigration. This is because it is only in the youths themselves that the nexus of interpretation and choice, with emigration as object, is present. In making it methodologically impossible to approach 'the Portuguese economy' as a disembodied realm which purely reacts to material stimuli, human agency and responsibility is highlighted for these agents.

Chapter breakdown

The first chapter will deal with the philosophical problem of narrative as approached by Paul Ricoeur. Through it, I shall clarify why narratives are important for the construction of political selfhood, allowing for the solution of temporal aporias and mediating the self in its communal dimensions. I shall, then, explain how narratives work through the threefold concept of *mimesis*, an essential tool for analyzing the mechanics of interpretation and reproduction present in brain-drain narratives further on. Further, I will zoom in on *economic* narratives, i.e., narratives that have economic realities or processes as their object, qualifying the dynamics by which they can contribute to the arising of mass economic phenomena. Following this, I will introduce the social imaginary – the narration of the 'social bond' – and explain how it structures the perception of the field of action in which economic agents operate. The latter part of this chapter will launch a full picture of the hermeneutic framework to be employed in the study, making explicit

how all the concepts presented work together in the elaboration of economic narratives on behalf of a specific group, informing knowledge and action across different temporalities.

In the second chapter, I will apply the hermeneutic framework towards the diagnosis of brain-drain narratives uttered by Portuguese youth. The diagnosis intends to reveal what characters, spaces, and narrative arcs are present in these stories, and what functions they serve for the interpretation of a space of experience (individual and collective past), out of which arise expectations for the future that call for emigration to be the economically rational action in the site of initiative (present). Following the diagnosis, I shall propose some questions whereby we can evaluate whether these narratives are well-attuned towards their purpose of motivating towards political change.

Chapter I: Interpreting narratives of acting and suffering – a hermeneutic framework

Before proceeding, it is important to tentatively define what is meant by 'narrative'. Something is said to be told in a *narrative* form when intelligibility is achieved through the employment of key devices such as the positing of characters endowed with motivations, within a determinate spatiotemporal realm, allowing for these events to be understood in a *dramatic*[1] form. A dramatic form is a progression which posits certain tensions, interests, and events as the basis for actions, which initiate plot dynamics that will reach a climax and find narrative resolution[2].

In this chapter, I will explain the questions of time and identity that brought Ricoeur to consider narration as one of the key facets of human experience. These questions are underlined by two interconnected paradoxes. On the one hand, there is the paradox of time, as presented by Saint Augustine[3]: the fact that things occur in the world, come in and out of existence, through an apparently causal process, fosters the belief that time, from a cosmological perspective, has the characteristic of *distention*[4]. From a psychological perspective, however, the mind can only experience any point on this temporal line in the present instant: as perception, memory, or expectation. On the other hand, there is the paradox of identity: if a subject, by virtue of her passive embeddedness and active engagement with the world, is constantly brought to change herself, the things/others around her, and the ways in which both relate, can we truly assert that there is anything to make a subject (self-)identical over time, such that she can be identified as acting as the same subject, in a meaningful, non-haphazard way?

The relevance of these paradoxes for the problems identified in my case study – self-realization and translation of narratives – is not to be understated. They relate deeply to what Ricoeur terms the *entanglement of acting and suffering* – the essential predicament of the subject is that of simultaneously being a passive recipient of things that happen in the world, and an active player that makes things happen. The first problem, I believe, has an intimate relationship with the paradox of time. If we tell a story in which economic outcomes are, through a setup of the material world, in truth bound to happen; then the subject is severed from the passing of events in time, such that her psychological experience of it is deemed void from an agential point of view.

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[1] Bottici, A Philosophy of Political Myth., p. 196.

[2] 'Resolution' does not imply that the conflict of the plot be solved. It merely marks the point at which one can *finish* telling a story, without leaving a potential reader confused or dissatisfied. It signals the *completion* of the work of storytelling.

[3] As introduced by St. Augustine of Hippo, in *The Confessions of St. Augustine,* Book XI.

[4] The idea that time advances 'in a straight line' is Aristotelian in origin. For more consult Bostock, "Aristotle's Account of Time."

The second problem relates to the paradox of identity. Assuming that the self-identity of an agent is a precondition for the political and moral task of assigning to it rights and obligations, we must have some view of what makes any identifiable agent 'the same' over time. If we understand these to be a set of fixed and mostly inalterable traits, then we can confidently assume the world they give rise to to be impermeable to transformative changes in direction; we condemn both ourselves and our interlocutors to passively suffering, without being able to take agency over, the consequences of this identity. If we do understand identity to be malleable, inherited but also constructed, then understanding any actor's choices in the world will necessitate that we understand their motivations, tendencies, values, in an open-ended way. Any political discussion that aims at sustained change and negotiation between groups will need to have such insights as a basis.

This chapter will lay out the theoretical foundations that will allow us to analyze brain-drain narratives further on. Firstly, it will dive more deeply into the paradoxes of time and identity, allowing us to understand how narrative plays a role in their solution, and giving some hints whereby we can identify how helpful different narratives are in avoiding the aforementioned issues with the case-study. Secondly, I shall zoom in on the mechanics of narrative, explaining its functioning through a process of threefold mimesis. Thirdly, I will zoom in on the specificities we must account for when examining economic narratives. Finally, I will introduce the hermeneutic framework proper, which will provide all tools for an in-depth analysis of the case study in the following chapter.

Section I: The Reasons for Narrative

I.I.I. Narrative Time

Ricoeur chooses to address the Augustinian paradox[5] of time[6]; by combining it with the phenomenological, and particularly Heideggerian[7], insight on the experience of finitude. This finitude is one that we experience spatiotemporally, in being tied to a body that makes its way towards death, and cognitively, in being unable to grasp the totality of knowledge and thought. This suffering of finitude is paired with our ability to act freely to place an ineluctable weight on our choices. Forced to choose whether to despair over what is not, or to make what *is* worthwhile – it seems preferable to choose the latter. In doing so, we pass onto our choices the responsibility of being meaningful.

[5] Although the use of temporal aporias by Ricoeur is Augustinian, this notion of an "equality of opposite reasonings" had been a matter well discussed throughout the history of philosophy. For more, see Veres, "Review of: The Aporetic Tradition in Ancient Philosophy."
[6] See Fodor, "Narrative, Temporality, and the Productive Imagination.", 202-205, for more on Augustine's paradox of time.
[7] Fodor.

That said, I will make the minimal assumption that a choice made meaningfully may not be random, nor reinforce feelings of meagerness – it should make life worth living. The question of interest is *how* something can be meaningful. The Augustinian paradox can hopefully help us understand. On the one hand, meaning can arise to ourselves alone, in an ever-present psychological sense. On the other hand, we can also conceive of things having meaning in the cosmological continuum of things that occur outside of us. Framing time as an unsolvable paradox would mean that, relegated to experiencing time in the present moment, all we could aim for in the realm of meaning is its extraction from simple experiences in our psyche; we could spend our lives admiring flowers.

Yet, we do not do that. We *need* to make meaning outside of us, in the temporal chronology of things. When we speak of who we are, we do more than utter mental states – we tell stories of the lands that birthed us and those who raised us; we tell stories of who we aim to be and what we aim to leave behind. This will allow us to follow Ricoeur into a central conclusion: through telling stories, humans are able to solve the temporal aporia by fitting in the personal experience of the quotidian[8] within the grander scheme of historicity[9], granting that their interaction can create meaning which may even transcend the boundedness of individual existence.

We narrate so that our actions can find unity in time and meaning in a grander, personal, or collective, scheme. In this way, we can meaningfully combine the idea of *distention* (linear suffering of cosmological/historical time) an *intention* (directed psychologically) into *narrative time*[10].

This allows us to understand the "fundamental structure of action"[11] and its arising necessity for narration. The present appears as a vital point in the dialectic between past and future. On the one hand, the subject is passively imbedded in circumstances and in a chain of causality – in this sense, he *suffers* time. The tern 'suffering' here need not carry a negative connotation; it is merely the case that time – its natural progression, historical events, and the constitution and development of the self – is something whose progression and nature she has no control over *now.* On the other hand, the subject can act with regards to the future, and transforms events which happen to her into events she makes happen freely[12]. The future gains centrality[13] – pointed towards it, subjects may transform their 'limitation' of being cut out from anything but the present moment by using it to take on free action that will see its outcome take shape in a future world.

[8] Resembling the Heideggerian idea of *within-timeness*. See Fodor., p.205.
[9] Also a term from Heidegger.
[10] Dauenhauer, p.123.
[11] Boven, "The Site of Initiative. Towards a Hermeneutic Framework for Analysing the Imagination of Future Threats.", p.109.
[12] Boven, p.101.
[13] On the primacy of the future in Heidegger see Fodor, p. 201- 203.

An important implication is that the "freest action/choice" is that which most successfully takes on the underlying exercise of interpretation of the past and projection of the future. Interpretation requires narrating stories of our own (memories, thoughts, emotions) or others (historical narratives, data, etc.). This will allow us to gain knowledge of context, values and limitations that will be important in predicting the significance and outcome of a future action. Projection is an activity which combines the predictive side given by interpretation with a 'utopic' exercise of imagining future, yet unrealized possibilities. Yet it follows that these are desirable only if they are meaningful. This implies, reversely, that freedom *is not* that which maximizes the set of possible choices and futures, but that which maximizes the possible set of *meaningful* choices and futures.

This is relevant to this study for two major reasons. Firstly, the fact that our present actions are turned towards a production of future meaning that is relevant on a personal and historical level places weight on certain key economic decisions. The decision of where to lives gains weight as it determines the backdrop under which our personal lives are carried out and defines the collection of people one will be around, which may be more or less meaningful to us, and thus more or less conducive to freedom. Secondly, the importance given to one's surroundings (spaces, characters, community, etc.) will then be made explicit in a narration of such a decision to emigrate. If narrators were fully cosmopolitan, emigration (which effectively signifies the insertion into a separate spatio-temporal line and cultural community) would not pose a threat to the creation of personal and collective meaning. However, as I hope to show, statements of youth provide evidence that, in emigrating, they are "uprooted"[14]: their connection to a stable and organic background, whereby they "participate in the life of a community, (…) feel a sense of connection to a place, and (…) maintain temporal links"[15] is severed and will need to be regrown.

I.I.II. Narrative Selfhood

If freedom is a function of the maximization of meaningful choice, we must pose the question: to *whom?* The answer: to the *self*. This subsection will focus on understanding what this self is.

The first rule of selfhood is self-identification. If I could not look back on my memories and into the future and see myself, I would not have agency. This is because, as we have shown, an ability to act presupposes formation of knowledge about the past experienced by the self with which we make future predictions for ourselves. An inability to engage in this inquiry would signify a loss of agential power, forcing the subject to only suffer time.

The question, then, is how this self-identification arises. As a ship of Theseus thought experiment shows, looking at the subject's *sameness* – in Ricoeur's terminology, *idem identity* – is insufficient to answer this

[14] This is a term I borrow from Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots : Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind*.
[15] Rozelle-Stone and Davis, "Simone Weil."

question. Sameness in a physical and empirically verifiable sense (e.g., DNA structure, citizen registration) tells us very little of the identity of the subject that will help drive her future actions. Sameness in character ("constituted by the habits and dispositions he or she has acquired, by the life plans he or she has adopted and either persevered in or rejected in favor of some alternative"[16]) is not guaranteed, as it can always be revised. It is *ipseity*, for Ricoeur, that ensures *self-constancy* for a person, over and against "character and its perduring desires, beliefs, and plans"[17]. Thus 'I' is the reflective recognition of self-constancy, with which, for example, one makes a promise: "no matter how I (*qua idem*) change, I can be held accountable to my promise.

This *ipse* identity arises, for Ricoeur, in narrative. In telling the story of my *idem* identity over time – how it evolved, in response to internal and external factors – I necessarily posit the existence of an *ipse*-'I' which spans this timeline. Ipseity thus posits the self as the inseparable totality of *being-subject* (to one's life story and commitments; to historical conditions and interlocutors) and *being-actor* (i.e., her ability to revise her identity and take on new future commitments.

This has some implications. It follows that the self has a constitutive involvement with her environment – she cannot rid herself of her past by revising her future. This will mean that avenues for meaning for the self will also be a function of other people, environment and values which one has suffered in lifetime – whether in the embrace, or resistance, to them. An active recognition (narration) of these characters, spaces and values provides the language around which the subject can orient herself.

This is important to understand the significance and methodology of this project. From the point of view of the former, it explains why emigration is framed, in the youth testimonies we will see further on, as a sacrifice they would rather not 'be forced to' make. Not only are ties with family and friends strained, but they are brought to carry out life projects in places where their previous languages of signification no longer apply as immediately – abroad, a new language of culture and values must be learned altogether. On the other hand, it also helps explain the ways in which the current landscape of Portugal no longer fits their needs. In the context of an upbringing of open-borders and technological connection, Portuguese youth could find it important to partake in cultural exchange (in travel, work, or community) and inclusive environments. If the economic landscape of the country does not provide financial opportunities for these to be realized or the political/cultural landscape fails to adapt to the youth's values, emigration might seem a freedom-enhancing solution.

An ancillary implication is that narrative time "is [also] interpersonal and public time"[18]. Being public means that it is mediated through shared parts – characters, spaces, values– that compose an

[16] Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 120.
[17] Dauenhauer, p.121.
[18] Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics,* p.123.

understanding of the whole – the collective[19]. Being interpersonal means these symbols are not arrived at through the individual alone, nor incontestable: they find and change their shape in conversation. Hopefully, this provides methodological grounding to my use of first-person accounts in the analysis of the broader issue of a youth brain-drain. I do not do so from an attempt to homogenize individual experiences, but because pointing out the ways in which symbols are shared and contested[20] allows me to trace the importance of these interpersonal elements, and assert the need that they be publicly accounted for.

Naturally, the forward-looking aspect of the subject as *being-actor* also guarantees the self the ability to outgrow this inherited environment. This is the *creative* side of personhood, which allows the self to productively reassemble received avenues of meaning into the production of change: in oneself (e.g., attitudes, morals and projects) or influence it in the community at wide. It also allows us to consider productive narrative reconfiguration as a freedom-enhancing activity. Methodologically, this centrality to freedom secures the role of emotions, cultural values, etc. as *non-negligible* in an ethical or political philosophical analysis. Secondly, it allows us to analyze the fittingness of youth narratives not only in accordance with what *is*, but also against the imaginable possibilities of what *could be.*

Section II: The Mechanics of Narrative

Taking a further step in our conceptual toolkit requires a deeper understanding of how narratives work internally. Ricoeur coins narrative the "living metaphor" [21]. Operating in the "in the field of action and its temporal values"[22], i.e., in the definitive spatio-temporal realm in which characters act alongside each other, narrative presents a plot that makes a "synthesis of the heterogenous"[23], such that "goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action"[24].

Narrative makes this happen by making intelligibility and imagination work in tandem. Intelligibility requires that the plot and is elements be constructed along a prefigured matrix of meaning. In the case of our narratives, this matrix shall work through language and, as the previous section has demonstrated, given by the symbols, events, and dynamics existent in a world which the narrator does not choose. The narrator, thus, may only *identify and interpret* these elements. Whilst intelligibility serves for identification purposes, it does little for interpretation – this will be the task of imagination. A productive

[19] This will be addressed as 'Social Imaginary' in Section IV of this chapter.
[20] For example: do they become more consonant or dissonant? Can we trace a shared tendency in the way in which youths wield empirical data?
[21] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*.
[22] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1,* p.xi.
[23] Heterogeneity refers to the aporetic experiences of time and selfhood we addressed in the previous section.
[24] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1,* p.ix.

imagination facilitates interpretation by being "perceptive of resemblances"[25] among input elements and creatively reconfiguring them to go beyond the reality immediately given through the senses.

For studying economic narratives, it is important to reflect on the relationship between fact and fiction at the heart of narrative. Fiction, as it arises out of the productive activity of imagination, is *necessary* since, as we have previously seen, neither the past nor future exist and are thus by definition unverifiable[26]. Access to them is indirect – we make sense of information (e.g., data) given by the world through recounting or predicting. However, its suitability *qua* economic narrative specifically necessitates that it is grounded in and testable against facts of the world – the same goes for the pre-narrative elements that compose it. Furthermore, it must always be communicable to others, i.e., expressible through a sensical schema of language and symbolism. As such, it must also be open to communication, contestation, and revision.

Following this introduction, I shall introduce how Ricoeur theorizes on these dynamics of identification of fact, interpretation through fiction, and communication through language, termed *threefold mimesis.* This will be essential to provide *detail* to our framework – conceptualizing the steps of narrative construction will facilitate our ability to identify exactly *how* youth-brain drain narratives operate, and *where* they show signs of health or potential improvement.

I.II.I. Threefold Mimesis

To explore this relationship, Ricoeur adapts Aristotelian notions of mimesis, not as simple imitation, but as a three-step process of emplotment (narration, *muthos*) that bridges the gap between interpretation and imagination[27].

Mimesis$_1$

Mimesis$_1$ (m_1) is the task of identification that makes possible the articulation and reproduction of events. As we have previously discussed, this ability is underscored by a pre-figured, pre-narrative understanding of the basic structure and elemental categories of human action that confer it *readability*.

The existence of a pre-narrative understanding of the structure of action indicates that identification occurs through a set of elemental questions[28] – *what* the action is, *who* acted, *how* they acted, *why* they acted and *on whom/what* they acted – that the narrator identifies the elements of the story she will tell.

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[25] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1,* pp. ix-x.
[26] Fodor, "Narrative, Temporality, and the Productive Imagination.", p.187.
[27] In other words, imagination does not preproduce past experiences (imitation), rather it makes future experiences possible by productively emplotting it in a narrative construction.
[28] For this to be possible, we must follow the Kantian idea of an *a priori* existence of categories of intuition (space and time) and of understanding (e.g., cause, substance, reality, etc.). For more on this consult Matherne, "Kant's Theory of Imagination."

Elemental categories are those which will allow the narrator to make sense of the answers to these questions. These are comprised by the "semantics, (…) symbolic system, [and] (…) temporality"[29] of human acting. Semantics indicates that one observes and retells using language and its structures. Because of the phenomenological pre-understanding that events are temporally ordered, Ricoeur suggests that a temporal understanding of action will be diachronic, i.e., that it is concerned with tracing change and evolution throughout time.

Symbolic resources are of most concern to this project. Following the definition of Ernst Cassirer, Ricoeur defines these as the "cultural processes that articulate experience"[30]. These are *not* the symbols that rely on the narration of *that* story to be understood, but rather "the ones that underlie action and that constitute its first signification"[31]. In our case study, an example of this symbol is 'Portugal' – in telling their own stories of emigration, youths will articulate their experience through some pre-understanding of the term 'Portugal'. Although the narrators are not "limited to making use of our familiarity with the conceptual network of action"[32] and can employ their productive imagination to give the term further meaning and interpretation, they start off from a first signification of it, given by its shared understanding[33] in the social imaginary, implying that the symbol will be, without narrative mediation, "decipherable (…) by any other actor in the social interplay"[34].

Mimesis$_2$

Mimesis$_2$ (m_2) will be the stage of composition and configuration[35], of narration proper. At this stage, two main things occur. Firstly, events as experienced by the individual[36] are mediated into participation in a complete narrative[37]. Although this may happen to different degrees depending on the object of narration, it is at this stage that a personal narrative[38] becomes embedded in a wider historical narrative[39]. This opens a possibility for the participation of other people not only as characters, but as interlocutors and fellow participants in a wider social narrative.

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[29] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.61.
[30] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.57.
[31] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.57.
[32] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.56.
[33] See Chapter I Section IV.
[34] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.57.
[35] These terms are used because we are focusing on historical, not fictional narrative; we configure *existing* elements into a story so as to interpret it.
[36] This follows from the discussion in Chapter I, Section I.
[37] Dowling, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et Récit*, pp. 46-51.
[38] Brought on by the experience of temporality and selfhood.
[39] We are here pointing towards the social, shared experience of historical time (historicity), via Heidegger, which we have discussed in previous sections.

The second task of $mimesis_2$ is to provide internal cohesion to disparate events[40] – we can recognize these as parts of a unified whole. In narrative, thus, the *episodic distention* of time is brought, through participation in a plot, to have a *point*. Contingency and meaninglessness are eliminated through *configurative intentionality*[41], such that causation and signification become mutually inseparable.

While this inseparability may give the impression that events or their significance could not have been otherwise, a 'deterministic' reading is not the only available possibility. Granted, the success of the configuration of the productive imagination as a "persuasive discourse"[42] presupposes schematization according to a pre-given structure of meaning (m_1). However, it is not the case that the role of $mimesis_2$ is to set forth a narrative in which the concepts of $mimesis_1$, and the immediate significance of events through them, will be uncritically accepted. In addition to sense-making within this framework, it is, for Ricoeur, an "equally essential function [of narrative to project] (…) *new*[43] horizons of possibility"[44].

Mimesis$_3$

$Mimesis_3$ (m_3) "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader"[45]. Whereas $mimesis_2$ was what brought the narrator from an imperfect knowledge of her environment to its understanding in a whole story, $mimesis_3$ is the stage in which this will occur for the reader. This stage gains relevance not only for what it does for the reader's view of the story told, but for how it influences the reader's view on the world of human action. According to Ricoeur, emplotting (m_2) "depict[s] reality by augmenting it with meanings"[46], such that the act of reading narratives (m_3) will augment and alter the reader's perception of the world in which she performs actions.

This stage thus calls attention to the cyclical hermeneutic dynamic at the heart of storytelling. In Ricoeur's words, "what is resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human acting"[47]. This means that with every story [m_2] read [m_3], the reader will act on the world with a rearticulated understanding of its pre-narrative elements [m_1']**[48]**.

Again, we should direct our attention to the mutually informative relationship between fiction and fact at all stages in this process, in line with that which has been previously discussed[49]. We are also again

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[40] Fodor, "Narrative, Temporality, and the Productive Imagination.", p.193.
[41] Boven, "The Site of Initiative. Towards a Hermeneutic Framework for Analysing the Imagination of Future Threats.", p.109.
[42] Ritivoi, *Paul Ricoeur: Tradition and Innovation in Rhetorical Theory*, p.14. This has a distinctive parallel with the Aristotelian notion of *doxa*.
[43] My emphasis.
[44] Fodor, "Narrative, Temporality, and the Productive Imagination.", p.193.
[45] Fodor, "Narrative, Temporality, and the Productive Imagination", p.193.
[46] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.80.
[47] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.81.
[48] We shall use m_1' to denote m_1 resignified.
[49] Chapter I, Section II.

faced with the issue of determinism: in mimesis$_3$, looking back from a story after its narration has ended creates a near impossibility of *not* seeing reality in the way presented by the text[50]. In other words, there is a risk that one retroactively projects that the particular configuration of events, characters, symbols presented could not have resulted in any other outcome. With m_3's connection to not only the world of the text, but of action, appears the risk of creating self-fulfilling prophecies, whereby the interpretation proposed in m_2 and read in m_3 becomes reified and internalized as truth in m_1'.

To avoid this, it matters that new elements and new stories be taken in by the reader which challenge her narrative pre-conceptions, i.e., that arguments[51] advanced by multiple stories and storytellers aid each other in the construction of a hermeneutic spiral[52] which leads each to a more sophisticated understanding of the world.

Section III: Economic Narratives

Now that we have understood the *reasons for* and *functioning of* narratives *in general*, we can zoom in to the subcategory of *personal economic narratives*, which we will be addressing in this thesis. This section will first give a brief definition on economic narratives in a broad sense, before introducing that which makes an economic narrative *personal*. I will take care to supplement this with examples from youth brain-drain narratives that illustrate their fittingness into this category.

Addressing these forms of narrative in their particularity is relevant because it grants us the opportunity of seeing how the mimetic cycle in storytelling identified in the previous section will structure the world of action materially, in terms of resource availability, risk perception, among others[53]. This impact on material lived experience may help substantiate the ethical import of this project, as well as grant solid reasons for economic narratives to be taken up as a target of public scrutiny and informed debate.

I.III.I. What makes a narrative *economic?*

A narrative can be said to be economic when it has economic resources, conditions, or dynamics as the object of narration, or as its principal driving force. This does not exclude the possibility of it being a story primarily focused on individual human lives – in brain-drain narratives, for example, stories tend to

[50] Dowling, *Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et Récit*, p. 15.
[51] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p.76.
[52] I.e., not a closed circle of interpretations that reproduces itself, but a dynamic in which new meanings and possibilities are accounted for and tested.
[53] Considering a process of mutual causation between economic narratives and the economy is not only an idea sourced from Ricoeur, but one which has been studied in the field of Economics itself. I would like to point to the important quantitative work on economic narrative done by Nobel-Prize laureate Robert Schiller. For more information consult Shiller, Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events., with special attention to chapter 7, p.71.

be very personal in nature, but nonetheless pointed towards economic objects such as housing, labor, and income, and driven by economic forces such as scarcity and preference.

Secondly, the story must have structural similarities with the explanatory mechanisms of economics proper. Economics, as a discipline, tries to explain the agents' economic decisions *ceteris paribus*[54]. This allows economists to track the causal triggers in agents' chain of decisions – if we change X variable, *ceteris paribus*, how will the agent act differently? The same is demanded of the 'economic storyteller': if she is narrating the story of why a certain economic phenomenon (e.g., labor market demand shortage) causes her to take a certain economic action (e.g., emigrate), this must be true with all other factors remaining constant.

This does not mean that other economic and personal factors may not have interacted with the decision[55] – it simply means that, for the narrative to have economic import, the factors pointed out must have causal explanatory force. For instance, picture a story that aims to explain the actions of some characters with reference to others. For it to qualify as economic, it must be the case that the actions of characters can be explained by reference to *no other than* the fact that related actions are narrated to be taken by other characters[56]. In the case we will explore, it must mean that the youth's decision to emigrate can be explained by reference to *no other than* (perceived) actions taken by other characters (such as other youths, a complacent government, or exploitative companies).

This too means that actions of some economic agents *structure the field of action* of others and that the economic agent must tell her story *by reference to this alone.* Having one's field of action structured by other agents does not mean that the agent's freedom is necessarily withered, or that she, in Ricoeurian terminology, may only *suffer* that which happens to her. In a broad sense, it would merely mean that the set of meaningful choices which are available to her are always also structured around the decisions of other people – freedom is always *situated*. If a limitation to freedom is experienced, it shall be either *real* or *perceived.* If it is merely perceived, then we must critically assess the narrative constructions that are at the origin of this equivocal interpretation; if it is real, an ethical burden is placed upon the interacting agents such that they can negotiate, in democratic political debate, their mutual influence. Since the 'reality' of these perceptions is hard to disentangle up front, both exercises are always in order.

I.III.II. *Personal* economic narratives

An economic narrative is to be deemed personal when, through it, individuals harmonize their experience of time and selfhood, as addressed in Section I of this chapter, at the intersection of personal

[54] All else remaining constant.
[55] In fact, they may themselves be studied in isolation, *ceteris paribus*, or as combined variables.
[56] Shiller, Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events., p. 74.

livelihoods (e.g., life story, emotional attachments, traits, projects, and commitments) and a shared historical experience (e.g., as sufferers and agents in a broader economic and political conjecture).

Positioning personal economic narratives within this framework allows us to identify a few additional features to those outlined above. Firstly, the economic narrative serves a *self-referential* function for the narrator – economic information is processed in a manner which makes it significant to the narrator's "own self and personal experiences"[57]. The natural consequence of this crafts its second feature: personal economic narratives endow the story of material resources with *emotivity*. In this way, economic agents are authorized to be more than rational decision-makers, endowing the economic plot with moral, apperceptive and affective dimensions[58].

While one may argue that 'personalizing' features are to be neglected for the sake of just political discussion, I believe that such would signify a tremendous loss towards a complete understanding of the moral and material significance of the youth brain-drain. This is because emigration lacks the 'detached' nature of other, more purely economic choices, such as buying a house in one vicinity over another on grounds of availability. Although the weight and manifestation of these factors varies in degree depending on the individual, it can be generally said that a decision to emigrate is indissociable from its affective considerations – it may signify a distance from one's lifelong relations, a radical change in cultural surroundings, and a distance from a linguistic community, for the sake of an improved life elsewhere.

It is not case that the personal economic narrative – "*my* personal life-story", and why it was a *coherent*[59] part of its trajectory that "*I* moved abroad" – operates alone. Given that this "*I*" belongs to a multiplicity of social groups in interaction with a multiplicity of other characters, the personal economic narrative will intersect with other narrative constructions. This signifies that personal narratives will be seen as an iteration of the a "common narrative by which the members of a social group [e.g., "Portuguese qualified youths] (…) make significance of their (…) [political, economic, etc.] experiences and deeds"[60]. On the level of mimesis, this means that how we interpret our past and make projections for the future is always already (m_1) influenced by the stories of those who belong to our social group (m_2) and how we have hitherto read and interpreted them (m_3).

In addition to narration of the 'collective self' in a stricter sense, we will need to narrate the character of the space in which all agents, and the material, moral and cultural realms in which they interact, find themselves. For the specific economic problem addressed in our narratives of interest, the interaction of the affective, cultural, economic, moral, and political coalesces in the symbol of "*Portugal*". This will require,

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[57] Edson Escalas, J., "Self-Referencing and Persuasion: Narrative Transportation versus Analytical Elaboration.", p. 421.
[58] Shiller, Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events., pp. 79-80.
[59] Clarification: by *coherent* I do not mean necessary or correct; merely that it is a chapter of the plot that follows, in a way that is intelligible to the reader, from its previous episodes.
[60] Bottici, A Philosophy of Political Myth., p.201.

then, the narration of 'the story of *Portugal,'* and why it was a *coherent part of its trajectory that* 'the brain-drain would occur.'

Section IV: Collective Narratives: The Social Imaginary

To this narration of the collective self we shall give, following Charles Taylor, the name 'social imaginary'[61]. Simply stated, it is the way in which "people imagine their social existence"[62]. This follows from the previous section, in which it becomes clear that individuals will make sense of their boundedness with others in some social reality through representations of the bond itself[63].

In our case study, we will find the narration of this social imaginary in the symbol of "Portugal". Narrating such a symbol does not imply that people think it *exists* in an absolute sense[64]. Just like people, it exists in an *idem* sense to the extent that it is an internationally recognized state with sovereign borders. However, in narration, those participating in "Portugal" are interested in uncovering its *ipse* identity, seen most clearly in its apparently 'immutable' tendencies and dominant traits, that will allow its identification as 'Portugal' despite evolutions in projects, governance, and generations. This collective portrait will arise out of the amalgamation of other narrated identities and actions taken on by the set of characters, spaces and institutions that compose and participate in it over time. The fact that participation will not necessitate complete agreement (e.g., Portuguese youths admittedly participate in 'Portugal', yet openly disidentify with parts of character) implies that the social imaginary is necessarily open-ended and discordant, and thus prone to constant narrative reinterpretation and renegotiation[65].

The social imaginary can this be said to operate through symbols. These are those signifiers which contain within themselves reference to some meaning or value. However, what makes them symbolic *resources[66]* to be used in the construction of narratives is the fact that their meaning, which is not immediately given[67] in the meaning of the terms, is unlockable by those participating in the social bound.

Here we can draw conceptual affinity with the mimetic process: ability to create ($mimesis_1$) and to share ($mimesis_3$) a story of the social imaginary presupposes some shared understanding on who members

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[61] This idea is included in Ricoeur's interpretation of the term 'ideology', which I have decided not to include in my framework for the sake of clarity.
[62] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*., p.23.
[63] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology.", p.193.
[64] It cannot think itself and is not unified e.g., in mind. We can say it exists only to the extent that it is a collective construction which can be shared and reinterpreted through storytelling point at a perceived object (the bond), such that it gains the ability to be pre-understood by its participants.
[65] Although outside the scope of this essay, it is worth mentioning: the *actual* participation of those who are not immediately seen as being part of the bond (e.g., immigrants) also forces the renegotiation of the parts that compose it.
[66] Recall Cassirer's definition given in Section I.II.I.
[67] Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination*., p.75.

of the community are and how they stand in relation to each other[68]. Discursive recreation of the social imaginary through narrative ($mimesis_2$) presupposes that the "previous spoken word", and its interpretation ($mimesis_3$) structures the prospects of the "to-be-spoken word"[69], creating new symbolic grounds for collective narrative construction ($mimesis_{1'}$).

An important methodological question arises regarding the tenuity of the concept; how can we make use of it at all? It is my opinion that a sound approach would focus on finding established regularities in certain conceptual interpretations of the social bond. For example, if a characterization of Portugal as uncreative appears often and in a generalized fashion, it shall be useful to work with, even admitting outliers to this formulation.

Section V: Narrative Time and Space: Space of Experience, Site of Initiative, Horizon of Expectation

A conclusion that can be made about the social imaginary is that it is simultaneously concerned with the interpretation of *fact* and *normativity*. For such a social bound to be represented in narrative, it must come from an activity of *factual interpretation of the world as it is*, allowing for individuals to understand the fabric and history of the world they shall pour their abilities and goals into; for the social bound to make sense such that it can source meaning for individuals, it must be directed to some view of the world as it *ought to be*. This normative outlook has at its origin instrumental (we want the world to be fruitful for our projects) and identitarian (we want the symbolic resources provided by the social bond, which we use for part of our self-identification, to be as aligned with us as possible) considerations.

This constitutes a double dynamic of evaluation and projection along *utopic* (normative) and *predictive* (factual) lines that will be at the core of how Ricoeur theorizes[70] the social narration of three temporalities: the space of experience, site of initiative[71] and horizon of expectation. Let us look at them in order.

I.V.I. Space of Experience

The space of experience constitutes the "the gathering together of past events that we observe from the perspective of the present"[72]. Its delimitation and interpretation always occur from the perspective of the present, such that we may deem its characterization to arise from the narrative reproduction of past

[68] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*., p.26.
[69] Taylor., p.26.
[70] The terminology is borrowed from Reinhardt Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories."
[71] In reality, Ricoeur calls the moment of the present only "initiative". I owe its formulation as a "site" to the paper *The Site Of Initiative. Towards A Hermeneutic Framework For Analyzing The Imagination Of Future Threats*, by Martijn Boven, whose application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is central to the development of my thesis.
[72] Boven, "The Site of Initiative. Towards a Hermeneutic Framework for Analysing the Imagination of Future Threats", p.107.

events. The narration of the collective space of experience, which is our focus in this thesis, is formed through the junction of personal experience and collective histories. The former proves relevant because the narration of the space of experience is ultimately a personal matter. As such, understanding one's place in the social milieu will require an appeal to memory of past events and emotions hitherto experienced, and a knowledge of one's circumstances and abilities. The latter comprises the backward-looking part of the social imaginary. It is created through an interpretation of historical fact experienced by the bond (in this case, Portugal) that is arrived at through historiography, media, and broader discursive reaction in the public sphere.

The way in which the space of experience is narrated shall inevitably have normative connotations; however, the narrative function of the space of experience is to provide an understanding of the world as it has been (interpretation of fact) that can inform our actions towards the future. In this sense, it will serve a more predictive function.

I.V.II. Horizon of Expectation

The *horizon of expectation* is its future counterpart. In telling its story, we indicate "the hopes and fears, the wishes and desires that direct our actions towards futures that we want to realize or that we try to prevent"[73]. Its narration will be a predictive and a normative activity. Its predictive angle, as we have shown, will be fueled by the narratives surrounding the space of experience, and, as we will see later, the presentation of one's power to act in the site of initiative. Its normative function allows, on the one hand, to judge the desirability of these predicted outcomes; on the other hand, it constitutes its utopic dimension, which allows the idealization, in a less restricted manner, of normatively desirable (eutopic[74]) or undesirable (dystopic) futures.

I.V.III. Site of Initiative

This present moment, we shall call, following Martijn Boven, the *site of initiative*[75]. At a collective level, it is the site in which the space of experience and horizon of expectation sit at a tension, and in which collective narrative constructions about the present moment – based on an understanding of the past and a projection of the future – will be made. Yet it is not only a place where narratives are built – the word 'initiative' relates to the status of this site as a locus of creative action, which is, in the case of our economic narratives, an individual decision. Here, individuals (acting as economic agents) can disentangle acting and suffering, transforming events that happen to them into events they make happen freely[76].

[73] Boven, p.107.
[74] Boven, p.116.
[75] Boven.
[76] Boven, p.108.

The site of initiative is thus a location of intense mimetic activity. In a backward-looking sense, facts of the personal and collective path are observed (m_1) and narrated (m_2); stories of others about these same objects are read (m_3). These stories will structure one's pre-understanding of the facts one will take up in one's own evaluation (m_1), which will in turn be informative for a certain decision to be taken up by the actor in the site of initiative.

In being pointed towards a horizon of expectation, actions will be taken with a certain intention, so as to elicit a desired outcome. Because the story of the future lacks a frame of factual reference to be taken on by the first stage of mimetic activity, its construction will require a reinterpretation of factual evidence and stories told of the past and present (m_3), predicting what their outcomes will be.

Crucially, if we are speaking of economic action in the present, expectations will not only be formed by the opinion of the individual, but of others who one shares the horizon with. It seems to me, in this case, that this exercise of mutual formation of expectations is the most important one (since one, very determinate economic environment will be shared by all), with personal horizons of expectation giving more reasons for or against taking on certain actions today.

Section VI: Pronouncing Dystopia

This thesis demands focus on a negative formulation of the horizon of expectation – dystopia – "that formulates alternative versions of the present reality and are directed towards the (…) prevention of this alternative"[77].

On the one hand, this delimitation is made because the 'utopia abroad,' although in discursive existence (i.e., narrative shared on a collective level), could never be realized on a factual level. Reasons for this are to be found in the nature of emigration: in scattering a group's members towards different spaces and therefore different communities and political bodies, the ideal of "utopia" will become purely personal, with its realization a function of the territories of destination. We enter the realm of multiple utopias and multiple horizons of expectation, for which different actions in the site of initiative will be required, depending on the particularities of the spaces that the expats end up setting themselves in, and the people that they will then coexist in the social sphere with.

Given that dystopic views on the horizon of expectation are pointed towards the *prevention* of the dystopia, political discourse may frame preemptive action, which tries to prevent a phenomenon before it arises, as a matter of *necessity*, as an unavoidable fact, instead of a choice that is informed by a specific interpretation or political position; this is used to legitimate these collective initiatives[78]. The effect of this, in what concerns the site of initiative, is drastic. Instead of allowing for the full recognition of one's power

[77] Boven, p.116.
[78] Boven, pp.117-118.

of action, recognizing the possibilities of creativity and productive imagination, it frames members of the community as passive sufferers, who are endowed only *one* choice in their realization of will – it "eclipses the site of initiative"[79]. This logic of necessity, too, makes it so that the action is deemed imperative *regardless of the consequences* to individual lives or the community, a matter of concern if affective ties are present and valued by these agents.

It is important to be critical of this as a matter of caution. Such discourse, if resorted to, frames as certain a means-to-ends relationship which can never be so. It ignores that action oriented towards an undefined future is needfully unpredictable in its totality, and ripe with unintended consequences. Furthermore, in framing the agglomerate of individuals as sufferers *with a single choice* that allows them to regain agency, creative imagination of political alternatives is stifled.

[79] Boven, p.118.

Chapter II: Decoding Narratives – the framework applied

This chapter shall apply the theoretical hermeneutic framework hitherto described towards the *diagnosis* and *evaluation* of youth brain-drain narratives.

In a nutshell, platformed stories about the Portuguese brain-drain usually go as such: faced with precarious employment deterring their financial independence (i.e., to hold sufficient resources to make choices independent from one's parents) in an economy in which the basics (e.g., housing) prove increasingly expensive, Portuguese youth is brought, from rational necessity, to take the avenue of emigration.

As has been previously stated, this section will utilize first-hand accounts from Portuguese youth, which have been collected primarily from interviews and articles in national media. The reasoning behind this is that it is only in them that the activities of narration, which I will diagnose, and consequent action, which I will evaluate, will coincide in the site of initiative.

Before I commence, it is important to discuss two general objections that may risk the chapter if left unaddressed. Firstly, one might object to this method by stating that it forces me to *homogenize* these testimonies, serving confirmation bias in my diagnosis. I will first respond by stating that this paper is an initial attempt to test the potential of this hermeneutic framework for the analysis of this issue, an example of how it could be applied. If it comes to be that there are, for example, competing conceptions of the social imaginary of 'Portugal' that demand consideration, then it would be of prime importance integrate them within our study. However, it is a limitation of this framework that it works by identifying 'established regularities,' i.e., similar formulations of the space of experience and horizon of expectation and its composing elements, such that individual narratives will always be addressed in their similarity when establishing its relation to a mass economic trend in the site of initiative.

Secondly, it can be said that my media sources may not be widely representative of the framing of the brain-drain that even most youths espouse[1]. While this is a risk, it is also true that these are widely disseminated (m_3), and therefore acutely telling of the type of narrative that will have the power to broadly structure the pre-understanding of youths going forward (m_1'). In this context, the particularities in the content and orators of these stories may actually help reinforce their commonalities. For example, the fact that narrators present a variety of life stories (e.g., socio-economic backgrounds, educational trajectories) that seem to all be driven towards a shared inevitable result reinforces the feeling that no one is safe from the necessity of emigration; creativity and risk-taking, then, appear inconceivable for *all*.

[1] This would be an interesting task for future research.

Section I: Diagnosis

The diagnostic section of this chapter will apply the Ricoeurian hermeneutic framework to assess how a similar, widely disseminated youth narrations of the space of experience, site of initiative and horizon of expectation serve to frame emigration as an inevitable economic choice. To do justice to national particularities in the use of symbolic resources in telling the story of the shared socio-economic sphere, and intervening characters faced by these youths, I have decided to complement this framework with the observations on the Portuguese social imaginary by national philosophers Eduardo Lourenço (in *O Labirinto da Saudade: Psicanálise Mística do Destino Português)* and José Gil (in *Portugal: O Medo de Existir*).

Broadly, I shall diagnose that we are in the presence of a *dystopic* construction of the collective horizon of expectation of Portuguese youth. At its origin, I pinpoint a frustrated construction of the space of experience, whose key feature is its contrasting stance to an unattainable yet unfalsifiable utopia – 'lá fora' (*trans.* abroad, out there).

II.I.I. Dystopic Homeland, Redemptive Out-land.

The first step to comprehending the dynamics of a dystopic construction is to unpack it in its appropriate elements. To do this, I shall explore the symbolic resources and elemental categories that are present in the first mimetic stage (m_1) and effectively reflect youths' pre-understanding of the social bond and their standing within it. This requires answering the questions: *when* and *where* is the dystopia (spatio-temporal identification); *who* participates in the bringing about of the dystopia; *on whom* is this dystopia affected?

The dystopia in time

Remarks on the temporality of the dystopia will be brief, but necessary. It is important to avoid the erroneous conclusion that a dystopia is something that resides purely in the horizon of expectation. In this case study, we have significant evidence that the situation one wishes to avoid in the dystopia (e.g., lack of financial independence) is already a widespread material reality that constraints the choices of these economic actors; that some core material deficits are present and experienced is not up to contestation.

However, it is interesting to see how the narration of the dystopia affects its temporality. As we have discussed in the section on time, in a narrative that gives no power to the youth as agents and structures all surroundings as fully predictable, being enmeshed in the beginning stages of dystopia will mean that attempts at its avoidance will already come too late. The horizon of expectation bleeds into the space of experience, such that we are already swept in a deadly tide that can only get stronger.

The dystopia in space

The location of dystopia in the space of 'Portugal' is immediately recognizable, as it serves as background for the whole narrated temporal line. Its conceptualization in the social imaginary structures how economic agents will perceive the material (e.g., economy, institutional constraints) and immaterial (e.g., cultural traits, behaviors of other agents) fabric in which they will make their decisions. It is departing from its interpretation, then, that dystopic predictions will be made.

We will address the substantive elements that compose 'Portugal' shortly. In the first place, I would like to call attention to that which I found equally important for painting 'Portugal' in these narratives: what it is *not*. To the space which lies in dichotomic opposition to it, we shall call 'lá fora' (*lit.* 'out there'), observance of which I owe to Eduardo Lourenço[2]; it points broadly towards an 'abroad.'

The Portuguese language, however, grants richness to this expression, since the adverb 'there' can be subdivided into 'ali' (specific, pointed) and 'lá' (unspecific, general). This shows us that the abroad referred to in 'lá fora' is, in reality, completely general and ahistorical. It exists not in a definite present bound to a certain space, but rather as an aggregate construction that builds from impressions of multiple countries to construct *that-which-is-not-like-Portugal*.

For example: whereas in Portugal working overtime is almost an obligation, 'lá fora' it is not; whereas in Portugal a young person does not have prospects, 'lá fora,' he does. When, in a letter to the Prime-Minister, Portuguese university students confess hearing the following advice,

> Don't lose time: prepare your academic path in a way which allows you to leave your country as soon as possible. Living abroad certainly has its difficulties, but at least you'll earn more and will have more stability.[3]

it is this 'lá-fora' – the land of larger earnings and financial stability – that comes into play.

This is not to say that the comparison is never done with any level of specificity – in statements of those who have moved, 'lá fora' dissolves and coagulates into a specific idea, a '*cá* fora' (lit. 'out *here*'): Belgium, Macau, Denmark, among others. Yet, there is rarely a mention of specific policies taken on by the governments of the countries that house them; nor, is there reference made to any historical process by which the situation they benefit from in these countries abroad has arisen, so as to ascertain if the comparison with Portugal is a fair one[4]. Mention is merely made to the present (experienced or perceived) material conditions abroad, and how they symbolize a successful escape from a "motherland that does not rightly value [them]"[5].

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[2] in *O Labirinto Da Saudade: Psicanálise Mítica Do Destino Português*.
[3] "'Se nos querem cá, têm muito trabalho a fazer' — estes 7 jovens escreveram a António Costa, em resposta à sua mensagem otimista de Ano Novo.", my translation.
[4] A fair comparison would account for the specificities of current political and economic conditions as arising from a particular historical development, ensuring that it is one among 'equals'. For such an exploration, see Magone, "A Integração Europeia e a Construção Da Democracia Portuguesa" and Barreto, "Portugal, a Europa e a Democracia."
[5] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer.", my translation.

Setting up for the chapter "Emigration as myth and the myths of emigration"[6], Eduardo Lourenço explores the dynamics of this concept, which he coins the '*eterno* lá fora'[7]. Speaking from a national context, he conceives of this 'out there' as an *ever-present* phenomenon of Portuguese history, a consequence of a poor and peripheric historical experience.

This 'eternal' tendency, he claims, is present both in the centuries-long Portuguese engagement in colonialist enterprises ("Paupers, we leave home to be, or try to be, lords"[8]) and in the present moment of European integration ("Paupers, we leave home to serve peoples richer and more organized than us"[9]). In successfully elevating individuals from the condition of relative poverty imposed by the homeland (an "insufficiently developed" nation in relation to its more modernized and longer democratized European counterparts[10]), emigration is *exalted* as a liberating adventure. The reverse side of this widespread and eternal praise of emigration may very well be, for Lourenço, a negligent desistance to address the "misery-phenomenon"[11] from which it is inseparable.

A reflection can be made, then, on how the space of 'Portugal' manifests itself as dystopia by existing in opposition to a utopic 'lá fora.' In this 'lá fora,' one is promised earnings, stability, professional respect, allowed access to conditions to initiate one's adulthood. In opposition, 'Portugal,' on the horizon of expectation, appears grim and infertile: it is a space in which one would be denied all that which is promised abroad (or at least, one could attain very little at the cost of great hardship).

What is particularly relevant to note here is that this comparison can only be made at the cost of a great epistemic imbalance. When one utters 'Portugal', one means: the current government and its policies, as well as the legacy of those that came before; a specific cultural disposition, which is a product of history and manifests itself in the present in multiple areas such as policy deliberation and implementation, corporate culture, ways of thinking; it also points to the affective ties – family, artefacts, spaces – that connect one to one's country and make it a 'homeland'. In this sense, there is specificity to the concept, even if it is meant and felt differently by those who utter it. It can be traced, investigated, contested, and read about. The same, as we have seen, is not the case for 'lá fora' – as a symbolic artefact, it lacks the spatio-temporal character that would make it an object amenable to contestation and investigation.

To put it simply: 'Portugal' is spatiotemporally bound, material, measurable, imperfect, and finite; 'lá fora' is an abstract, almost ideal realm in which all shortcomings – for example, the fact that it is also indefinitely 'out' of one's roots, affinities, relationships – are compensated by the eternal promise of general

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[6] My translation.
[7] *Trans.* "eternal out there". In Lourenço, *O Labirinto Da Saudade: Psicanálise Mítica Do Destino Português*., p.51.
[8] Lourenço, p. 123.
[9] Lourenço, p.124.
[10] Lourenço, p.124.
[11] Lourenço, p.124.

salvation. This imbalance makes any attempt to creatively save 'Portugal' for its dystopic fate extremely difficult, if not impossible.

It is not a problem, *per se* that the symbol exists. It does serve an important function: it shows these youths that they may be getting the short end of the stick. If it were operationalized to show the potential of what Portugal *could* be for its youth, it would provide hope for a change in their own lives in which the sacrifice to one's constitutive attachments could be less severe.

However, for the purpose of a critical hermeneutics, it is important to disclose the way in which the symbol of 'lá fora' is perverted and engages in the eclipsing of creative thought and investigation of possibilities at home[12]. Work should be done, outside the scope of this thesis, to help recover its "genuine value"[13]. The epistemic imbalance is relevant, however, because for the sake of espousing aspirations that are attainable and not illusory, expectations on the horizon need to be finite, and grounded in some (negotiable) idea of the past, with its origin in an extensive knowledge of the shared space of experience.

It is not true that 'lá-fora,' in what concerns the testimonies of these youths in specific, comes from thin air. I believe we can find some evidence for its origin, not only, as is the assumption of this thesis, shared narratives concerning young emigration, but also in the idea of Europe. On a practical level, Europe defines the possible destinations to which one can migrate 'for free,' due to the lack of intra-communitarian barriers to entry. Furthermore, the existence of a shared political community, as well as other factors such as the digital space which grant this generation a "cosmopolitan"[14] nature, unite the youth of Portugal with that abroad.

As such, there seems to be a sense in which the possibilities granted to the youth of abroad serve as a *normative standard* through which the opportunities of national youth are judged. When a youth states that 'lá fora' their "qualifications will be justly brought into consideration"[15], it is implied that the qualifications abroad define the standard of just compensation, leading to the conclusion this is a good denied in the home nation. Interestingly, in little of my listed sources discussion took place that aimed to define the standards of just compensation (e.g., from the standpoint of affordability of housing, possibility of savings, etc.) and judging the opportunities given youth by the Portuguese economy in accordance with them. Most articles take a comparative route, where it is taken as given that the compensation abroad is dignified, and then argued that Portugal fails to achieve what others have[16], although some come close to defining values such

[12] For example, it is interesting to note that many interviewed youths confess to never having looked for work or worked in Portugal before deciding to move abroad.
[13] Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination*, p.73.
[14] Mendes da Silva, "Já não há paciência para a conversa provinciana sobre os jovens."
[15] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer.", my translation.
[16] A good example of this is the open letter by Cláudio Figueiredo Costa, "Carta aberta de um jovem emigrante a António Costa", which is essentially a comparative analysis of the cost of living between Portugal and Belgium. This letter makes claims such as "The reality is simple: at this moment, only emotional factors can retain qualified youth in Portugal" [my translation] without ever explaining why this is not the case for the youth living in Belgium, i.e., without

as "work-life balance" ("a job that adapts to one's necessities, not limit them" and that incentivizes taking time off daily to care for other aspects of life [17]) in accordance to which both countries are judged.

The victims of dystopia

Answering the question of *on whom* this dystopia is affected will be important for the understanding of Portugal as a dystopic place on the horizon of expectation. Far from only comparing themselves with foreign youth abroad, they do so at home. This is present in the framing of Portugal as a country to be "enjoyed by foreign millennials, or expats in a burnout"[18], which indicates a perceived injustice in who gets to enjoy Portugal: whilst this enjoyment is denied the Portuguese, it is granted to foreigners, out of desire or, as the second clause seems to indicate, therapeutic escapism. This happens despite the ultimate status of both groups as equals, giving way to the conclusion that emigration is necessary for the actualization of equality.

As the main characters of their own emigration narratives, it is important to look at how Portuguese youths narrate themselves. Since both accounts are quite difficult to disentangle, I will proceed to provide their self-identification both as sufferers of a dystopia and actors in the site of initiative.

As characters, Portuguese youth describe themselves "hard-working and creative"[19], "qualified and ambitious"[20]. According to the latest comprehensive statistical reports[21], which interviewed 2.2 million youths[22], the primary needs and positive motivations to be fulfilled mentioned by these characters are financial independence[23], housing, and escaping precarious labor[24]. It is these needs, fundamentally, that they perceive as unmet. 58% of respondents consider themselves as being "old enough" to leave their parents' house but cite financial instability as the motive behind not doing so[25]. Most youth consider that getting a job is either difficult or very difficult[26]. Interviewees in the media point out some reasons for this.

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explaining why this is not merely a comparative improvement that results from moving from a poorer country to a richer one, but rather a situation in which in one country just compensation for labor is achieved and not in the other.

[17] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."

[18] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."

[19] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."

[20] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."

[21] Sagnier and Morell, "Os Jovens Em Portugal, Hoje: Quem São, Que Hábitos Têm, o Que Pensam e o Que Sentem.".

[22] Youths residing in Portugal, between the ages of 15 and 34.

[23] Thought the most important factor by 43% of respondents, and cited among the top 3 by 77%, Sagnier and Morell, p.321.

[24] Santa-Bárbara, "Maioria dos jovens trabalha, admite emigrar e considera que o que ganha "dá para viver".

[25] Sagnier and Morell, "Os Jovens Em Portugal, Hoje: Quem São, Que Hábitos Têm, o Que Pensam e o Que Sentem.", p. 337.

[26] Sagnier and Morell., p.137.

Firstly, many mention that Portuguese companies create unrealistic barriers to entry by opening up positions that overwhelmingly require experience, which people entering the labor market do not possess[27]. In addition, the positions that in principle do not require experience – internships – are scarce and mostly unpaid[28]. Secondly, salaries[29] are of major concern: not only are they generally low, but disproportional to qualifications and insufficient to face mounting living costs[30]. Others state an inability to find work in their own field[31], because either industries do not exist or because "there are functions [abroad] that don't even have a name in Portugal"[32], implying the country lags behind not only in the quality but quantity of available opportunities. Finally, in what concerns employment, many mention that it is precarious in the sense that the working culture forces long working hours[33], favors unstable temporary work contracts[34] and provides overall unfavorable working conditions[35]. In the area of housing, central to the 'emancipation' and 'independence' that motivates these characters respondents mention either feeling unable to afford housing, or unwilling to pay, considering it places an unreasonable burden on their spending.

As such, the dystopia faced by these characters is one in which there is a mismatch between their perceived creative potential, as endowed by their basic descriptive characteristics (creativity, proactivity, technical competence) and the fulfilment of their basic needs (financial independence, quality housing, future savings) and further motivations (participating in professional projects that grant an opportunity to "make new things, create them and change them"[36], and balancing these projects out with family life, relationships, extra-professional desires, among others[37]). It is the prospect of these unfulfilled needs, in Portugal, that qualify the dystopia proper as a scenario whose prevention one must take action towards.

The culprits of dystopia

The previous testimonies already point to some accomplices in birthing the dystopia faced by the youth. However, I call them 'accomplices' because they do not seem to be the main actors to be held

[27] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[28] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[29] Out of higher-educated youths, 42% make (after tax) between €767 and €950 per month, 24% make between €951-€1159 and 26% make above the latter value. Only 8% earn below €766, and only 3% make above €1600. Sagnier and Morell, "Os Jovens Em Portugal, Hoje: Quem São, Que Hábitos Têm, o Que Pensam e o Que Sentem.", p.129.
[30] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[31] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."
[32] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."
[33] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[34] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."
[35] Monteiro, "Entre solidão e conquistas, o peso da emigração na saúde mental."
[36] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."
[37] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."

accountable for by the youths themselves. Characters such as "Portuguese companies"[38], the "corporate fabric"[39] or simply 'Portugal' as an animated collectivity of cultural habits and proclivities are framed mostly as passive accomplices – their way of being and taking advantage of the situation is seen as something to be overcome by the actions by those who are primarily responsible: the Portuguese government.

It is not clear whether the expression points only to the current legislature or the ones that preceded it. I believe, though, that the most precise sense of the word is as follows: in a present and forward-looking sense, it is only the current government[40] and potential successors[41]; in its backward orientation, this figure is aggregated with the preceding powers, of the same political party or otherwise, who are seen as either originators of or complicit with the arising of the current scenario.

A respondent in the article *"Se nos querem cá, têm muito trabalho a fazer"* gave an interesting description of this character. The political class appears much like Janus, the roman god of changes and transitions. It has two faces: one, focused on the successes of a triumphant past, such as considerable advancements in the education of its population, which, although fortunate, has also granted the brain-drain its magnitude; the other, turned towards the future, with optimism printed on its gaze.

This captures the sentiment I have observed in most declarations. Firstly, as a god, the politician hovers *above* the people and decides their fate. He is seen as holding more power and expected to wield it for the good of his subjects. This is why, I believe, many testimonies I was able to find take the form of an 'open letter' addressed to the government – faced with an unfavorable socio-economic situation, youth do not address each other, but rather the party assumed to have power in their hands. In this direction, it is also interesting to observe that the 'care' expected of the government is compared by some to the need for parental love[42], and the youth to children. The perception of the relation then, is one of great power imbalance, with the government framed as powerful actor and the youth as passive sufferers. It is important to note that the upshot of the latter's full denial of self-empowerment is the absolution from all responsibility.

Secondly, this 'hovering above' creates some distance between those who live 'in the real world', i.e., who powerlessly face their socioeconomic conditions, and those who have the privilege to be optimistic about the past and future. Whilst this respondent concretely mentions that the present is "given unsubstantial focus," this sentiment of purposeful ignorance on behalf of the country's leadership for the sake of optimism is prevalent in many texts. Others attach "vision and lack of prudence"[43] and "low

[38] "Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[39] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."
[40] Often addressed to by name in the figure of Prime-Minister António Costa.
[41] *Who* these are is largely irrelevant – the construction of the situation as dystopic provides evidence that youths don't think changes in political power will make much difference to their fate.
[42] "Just like a mother or father provide resources for the success of their child, congratulating them when things go right and hugging them when things go wrong, Portuguese youths need to be hugged by their country" [my translation],"Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer".
[43] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."

creativity"[44] to the culprits, positing their current world of action as one in which imagination is not privileged.

The perceived lack of response of the government to the concerns of youth also has as consequence making existing pro-youth policy seem like a distraction or a maneuver of manipulation[45]. This, unfortunately, helps further sediment the character of the government as being opposed to or purposefully ignorant of the youth rather than being an entity one can trust and direct one's claims towards. In the dystopia, one will not only have no opportunities, but no one to appeal to for their realization. One is left powerless, merely forced to take the dire conditions that have been imposed on them. This is a crucial point to note, as it has an immense effect on the youth's eclipsed perception of their site of initiative. We shall address this next.

II.I.II. Space of Experience and Social Imaginary

With the explorations in the previous section, we arrive at a better picture of the mutual constitution of the space of experience and the social imaginary. Specifically, we identify which characters stand out in these narratives, and how their characteristics deeply structure the perception of the present field of action of our youths.

The characteristics of the Portuguese government (powerful and optimistic but dismissive and uncreative) and its responsibilities are not a matter sedimented in its *idem* identity (e.g., being enshrined in mandate), but *expected* (e.g., providing parental-type care) of them. To the extent that, I venture to say, other expectations would be had, for example, by the Dutch youth about *their* government, I can confidently assert that a distinct historical and cultural process has built the image of the government, in the social imaginary, to be the one we have encountered in these testimonies.

Both national philosophers I have read for the purpose of this thesis – Eduardo Lourenço and José Gil – have suggested its potential origins. Lourenço sees the dynamic of optimism and dismissiveness as fulfilling a *need* particular to the Portuguese historical experience, which explains the success of the dictatorial regime of António Salazar[46] and has stretched itself into modern Portuguese politics. The need he is referring to is that of harmonizing the double dynamic of *archaicity* and *vanguardism* that has been an intricate part of the experience of Portugal as a country. The former refers to Portugal's modest and anachronistic position in relation to other historically influent European powers, the tides of which it is swept in, but

[44] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."
[45] Coutinho, "'Não vi nenhuma medida que pensasse "era mesmo isto que precisava."'"
[46] The "Portugal não é um país pequeno" (*trans.* Portugal is not a small country) motto for wars against colonial independence can be seen as exploiting this need.

always from a *naturally* (or so is perceived) peripherical[47], modest and diminished position[48]; the latter refers to the idea, fueled largely by our ground-breaking maritime 'discoveries'[49], that the Portuguese may have a calling towards being at the vanguard of big changes in the world. Gil claims that the sustainability of this dynamic is allowed by an analogous hierarchization of national citizens, with a *vanguardist elite* sitting atop its *naturally modest* subjects[50], a dynamic which is passively accepted by both parties, and bears strong resemblance to our 'parental', simultaneously daring and uncreative, interpretations of government above.

Of course, these are only suggestions that result from a particular interpretation of the collective "space of experience". However, opening up this debate can hopefully serve for us to have ideas of *why* members of a political community structure their expectations (horizon of expectation) and powers (site of initiative) in a certain way, and ideas of how we can reframe them in a way which still appeals to their lens of understanding.

II.I.III. A Logic of Necessity in the Site of Initiative

Gil claims this hierarchy of power and knowledge explains a sentiment of passivity in the face of political power[51]. I believe us to find great evidence for this malady in our youth testimonies. Most we have seen focus on how the youth is relegated towards a suffering – of precarious labor conditions, unavailable housing, lack of financial independence – which cannot be counteracted, since those heading the hierarchy will not take their grievances seriously. It is difficult to find, in our testimonies, any mention of action that may be taken on without dependence on this structure of power[52] – excluding, of course, emigration.

The route of emigration seems then to be the only possible action from agents entangled in a web of things been-suffered or to-be-suffered. It is here that we find readily apparent the logic of necessity which dictates that avoiding dystopia can only be achieved through emigration. Furthermore, the necessity gains traction *precisely because* "it would be *irrational* to stay here [Portugal]"[53].

This appeal to rational calculation makes the solution – and the eclipsing of the site of initiative – almost irrefutable. However, we must be attentive to the ways in which the weighing of alternatives is founded exclusively on what one *knows to be already available*. It excludes the opportunities that are available, but one does not know about, and those that are not yet available, but that one could bring about. The former is, in my view, one of the central matter of concern in this whole narrative question. If one reads, in

[47] For an economic exploration of this hypothesis see Santos and Reis, "Portugal: Uma Semiperiferia Reconfigurada."
[48] Lourenço, *O Labirinto Da Saudade: Psicanálise Mítica Do Destino Português*.
[49] I put this word between quotation marks as the 'discovery' was, of course, only seen as one through the eyes of Europeans.
[50] Gil, *Portugal, Hoje: O Medo de Existir, p.39*.
[51] Gil, p.39.
[52] E.g., protesting, company creation, cooperative action.
[53] Albuquerque, "Semanário | Licenciados Estão a Sair e a Triplicar o Salário Lá Fora."

the third stage of the mimetic process, a narrative of unavailability of national opportunities as putatively *true*, and this interpretation unfolds before the text[54] as others come to read it, it will structure the pre-understanding (m_1') of all that which, henceforth, will come their way. Upon entering the labor market, for example, many youths will not even think it *worthwhile* to search for employment in Portugal, or start their own projects – a tendency I widely identified in my source articles:

> To add to the difficulties, Portugal is also a country of limited creativity. Pedro [Portuguese 27 year-old chemical engineer living in the Netherlands] works for a company of semiconductors (…). In Portugal, he would have to resign to a job in programming (…). "**This is what I imagine, because I never worked in Portugal**[55], but I would now probably be working for a consulting firm, charged with carrying out a project for some other company". In Eindhoven, he has the opportunity to "make new things, create them and change them" from their origin, of being a creative agent and not just a passive one".[56]

This statement encompasses many of the tendencies we have been discussing hitherto. Firstly, we can see that it was Pedro's *pre-understanding* that he would *obviously* not have worthwhile opportunities in Portugal, so he did not even look for them; he "imagines" they would be unsatisfactory. Secondly, we can see the way in which the discourse is being framed as true: outside the quotation marks, the text that describes Portugal as a "limited creativity" country is written by a journalist, whose profession entails not the publication of opinion, but information. Thirdly, we again find evidence for the construction of Portugal, on the horizon of expectation, in opposition to 'lá fora.' Pedro's imagination of Portugal is not founded on an inquiry of the Portuguese conditions, but rather built on an opposition to that which he encountered in the Netherlands – a country of activity and creativity. Finally, we can also see, in the individual, the double dynamic of *vanguard* and *modesty*. On the side of vanguard, we find the youth, in their self-descriptions as innovative, creative, heard-working and cosmopolitan – traits that have been fostered in them, granted[57], by public investment in education and internationalization projects. On the other hand, Portugal is framed as too modest and archaic of a country to properly see the value of its youth: *"there are job functions here that don't even have a name in Portugal"*[58], Pedro proceeds to say, as if Eindhoven is located not only far off north but far off into the future.

The eclipse of the site of initiative, then, happens through taking as *fact* a narrative construction that conceives of Portugal as a space of passivity and 'lá fora' as a space of activity. As a result, it also becomes inconceivable to engage in creatively bringing about new opportunities, enlarging the possibilities of the

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[54] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1,* p.128.
[55] My emphasis.
[56] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal.", my translation.
[57] This is admitted by many respondents.
[58] Baltazar, "Pedro, Catarina e Maria João. Procuram No Mundo o Que Portugal Não Consegue Oferecer. Falta de Acesso à Habitação Foi Só Mais Um Motivo Para Partirem - CNN Portugal."

real. As such, the structuring of the field of action by other characters (the government, 'Portugal' as a social imaginary, the corporate fabric, etc.) makes it so that the only solution to regain agency is to quit the spatio-temporal realm of Portugal altogether, through emigration, no matter the consequences.

II.I.IV. The Consequences of Emigration

It is interesting to again note the interaction of the economic with the personal narrative. As individuals, these youths are naturally expectant for a bright future, which may be composed of, among other things, advantageous professional opportunities, prospects for housing and the formation of families. It is the prospect of having a dystopic *personal* narrative, then, where valued goods are not present, that places urgency on finding a solution for oneself despite the collective dystopia. Facing this conjecture, the immediate choice of emigration appears the most secure way of ensuring this.

However, it is the "no matter the consequences" element that makes it so important to question the necessity of the presented solution. The consequences (setting aside those towards the collective, the moral and economic import of which this thesis cannot adequately reflect on) will no doubt weigh on the individual.

As we have seen in the first chapter, the construction of self-constancy in and freedom for the individual occurs through a narrative which is not isolated from the world – it occurs dialogically with it. As such, 'Portugal' *will* be of foundational importance to the selfhood of the individual herself. Recalling the insights at the end of Chapter I, Section I.I., let us call this *rootedness*[59], and suggest consequences of this connection being lacerated (*uprootedness*[60]).

Rootedness, broadly, is the value that attributes non-negligible importance to one's roots for the purposes of the political and individual life of the human being. By roots, one may mean cultural artefacts and values, physical spaces, family relations, among others. This is not to say that valuing rootedness at the level of politics implies absolute protection of the roots in question, as they are. Valuing rootedness merely modestly contends that rootedness is relevant to freedom and selfhood and may be a legitimate source of political or moral claims. This would mean, for example, that youths' claims towards deserving a future in their *own* country instead of abroad would have moral weight in political discussion and place a burden upon relevant actors.

Although this value is never explicitly laid out, it can be extracted from the various statements we have hitherto been developing. One article, for example, describes the mental health consequences of the brain-drain, explaining that plucking oneself away from one's familial and cultural roots results in solitude

[59] Weil, *The Need for Roots : Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind*.
[60] Weil.

and social isolation[61]. The writer mentions not only the emotional pain of watching his family members age at a distance, but a feeling of *saudade*[62] for the "comforting sensation of belonging"[63]. This is interesting, because although respondents overwhelmingly express appreciation for being enveloped in culturally diverse environments abroad, there is some sense in which they experience their need for belonging in a collective and rooted source of being as a political good that is not being met, nor given its proper weight in political decision-making[64].

Giving it proper weight entails in the first stage the critical examination of brain-drain narratives, as I have hitherto proposed. We cannot accept the "no matter the consequences" call of a politics of dystopia at face value if we have not also started a serious conversation about the flip side of the coin of "salvation".

Whilst many have argued[65] that ties to nations or cultural communities should be made irrelevant in the procedures of politics, I am afraid this can be dangerously alienating. Following Ricoeur, I would propose that these ties may have a "positive, integrative"[66] function, creating a bridge between individual and collective identities and helping to preserve them. It is this dynamic that is missing when youths claim to miss the feeling of "belonging" – abroad, they may make more money, and have more positive material prospects on their individual horizons of expectation. However, until they manage to integrate in the political collectivity of their receiving countries, their existence and power to act will do little to transcend the contours of their personal lives: they will lack that collective horizon of expectation and space of experience, which connects them to others like them and is structuring of their self-identification as individuals.

At a second stage, however, it also seems vital to find ways of politically communicating these consequences to the relevant actors, such as the government. So long as the consequences of the brain-drain for Portugal in the future are framed as merely economic, government policy can be focused in making up for that which has been materially lost; however, consequences to mental health, affective ties, and individual and collective selfhoods, cannot. Gladly, these are interconnected – despite the approach of this thesis, it must not be forgotten that it is *real, material hardship* that drives a substantial number Portuguese citizens towards long-term emigration. Hopefully, in addressing its material origins, some of the affective problems fall to the ground. On the other hand, we must not forget the power of discourse in shaping the interpretations of economic dynamics; it might be the case that the narrative presented here gains such

[61] Monteiro, "Entre solidão e conquistas, o peso da emigração na saúde mental."
[62] Loosely, nostalgia or longing.
[63] Monteiro, "Entre solidão e conquistas, o peso da emigração na saúde mental."
[64] For exemple, this idea is to be found in"Se nos querem cá. têm muito trabalho a fazer."
[65] For example, Abizadeh, "Historical Truth, National Myths and Liberal Democracy: On the Coherence of Liberal Nationalism*."
[66] Boven, "Metaphor and Metamorphosis: Paul Ricoeur and Gilles Deleuze on the Emergence of Novelty", p.155.

strength that actors become simply insensitive to economic improvement or policy that would be conducive to their goals. It is imperative, then, that work on both occurs in tandem.

Section II: Evaluation

With a diagnostic picture of brain-drain narratives in mind, this section addresses specific evaluative criteria whereby we can assess the health of these stories going forward, as well as help propose more sober ones in the future. The basic question that these criteria help to answer is: are we in the presence of a self-aware narrative in which there is place for creative imagination of new possibilities, or in the presence of a mere reiteration of the prevailing social imaginary (mimesis as imitation)?

As has been the case, this will be an application in the framework explored in Martijn Boven's *The Site Of Initiative. Towards A Hermeneutic Framework For Analyzing The Imagination Of Future Threats*.

Framing the entanglement of acting and suffering

The first question relates to *how* the entanglement of acting and suffering is being framed. Firstly, it questions *how* people describe what they must suffer and what they can enact (e.g., suffer insufficient living conditions, *must* act through emigration) and *why* (e.g., because the *government* does not wield power to counteract the situation). A critical eye is essential to establish if the reasons for a particular framing of the site of initiative arises from a complete and scrutinous evaluation of one's knowledge and abilities (*qua* community, but also as individuals *qua* professionals, creatives, and political actors), or if this evaluation is an uncritical reproduction of past social narratives[67]. Only a dedicated consideration of the *full nature of all circumstances and abilities, along with full engagement with all creative possibilities for action*[68] will be successful in making proper evaluation of the true site of initiative.

Intention and appropriateness

The second question makes us consider if the proposed action is not only necessary, but *appropriate* for the satisfaction of one's intentions. In the case of youth emigration, my immediate answer would lean towards a negative. Judging from the mental health consequences that respondents may feel from long-term separation from friendship, families, and a sense of shared community, there is a sense in which the youth are *sacrificing* one side of their intentions (affective and identitarian) for the sake of satisfying another (material). In this case, the decision of *emigration can only be seen as fully appropriate if one ignores the full set of intentions* and needs held by these youth.

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[67] Lourenço would assent. In fact, he draws a parallel between all national emigration stories from colonial ventures to the present. For more see *O Labirinto Da Saudade: Psicanálise Mítica Do Destino Português,* Chapter "A emigração como mito e os mitos da emigração".

[68] Naturally, to the best of our individual and collective epistemic abilities.

The guiding questions for this test can be: "Does the intention justify the means?" if one wished to consider the causal relationship between a part of one's intentions (material wellbeing) and the proposed action (emigration); and "Is the intention in line with other intentions?", e.g., is the intention of 'material well-being' in line with others such as 'presence of strong affective ties'. If not, we sense misalignment[69] that requires correction; if so, we can proceed to ask the question "would the means proposed allow for the fulfilment of other, mutually conceivable intentions, and why (not)?", which will hopefully allow us to understand the sources of disharmony that call for the *necessity of sacrifice no matter the consequences*.

Credibility of dystopic imaginations

The third question relates to the *credibility* of the dystopic imagination of the future. In other words, is it framed as a general unavoidable nightmare from which one can only escape, or simply as a situation (composed of specific and tractable elements) which one wishes to avoid? The reverse can be asked, of course, for the projected utopias of 'lá fora.'

This step calls us to question how realistic the unavoidability of a particular dystopia is. If the dystopia is heavily composed of elements that are not verifiable, wariness is justified; part of it is bound to arise from fear, and not critical contemplation, such that reconsideration would be desirable. If the origins of and proposed track towards dystopia are largely verifiable, we may question the credibility of uniqueness of the proposed solution, asking: "is there not another set of conceivable discernible and distinct steps that we may take on to avoid the dystopic scenario?"

Responsibility

The last question relates to *responsibility for* the dystopic scenario and asks the question "What is the relation of the initiatives of the collective to the emergence of threats" and more specifically "are these threats suffered or caused by the collective?."

The youth testimonies analyzed seem to frame the Portuguese youth as powerless in the face of a threat which is caused by the inaction of others alone. However, is this the full picture? May we not also accuse these highly educated, 70% of which live in a situation of "comfort"[70], of the same lack of creativity that they attribute to their country, in seeing emigration as the *only* escape? May it not be plausible that their lack of political and civic participation[71], along with their focus on finding *hired* employment, overwhelmingly in the major urban centers of Lisbon and Porto, instead of considering alternative routes,

[69] Internally to individuals (as I believe applies to this case), or in the world that makes their coexistence inconceivable (as applies, for example, to war-fueled migration).
[70] Sagnier and Morell, "Os Jovens Em Portugal, Hoje: Quem São, Que Hábitos Têm, o Que Pensam e o Que Sentem", p. 419.
[71] Sagnier and Morell, p. 294.

represents a lack of creativity in the use of one's knowledge and employment of abilities? Can it not be hypothesized that such attitudes and solutions also hold responsibility for the creation of the dystopia they so seek to avoid?

A subsidiary question that may arise is whether people hold responsibility for the *perception* of a future scenario as a threat. For example, it might be the case that an uncritical acceptance of a socially imposed need for certain goods makes the lack of these goods seem like there is a dystopia. In this case, the perception of a dystopia on the horizon can be, in part, attributed to the unavailability of 'lucrative' full-time wage employment; if, perhaps, work was done to make other alternatives, such as the creation of microenterprises, seem desirable, the dystopic view could arise less strongly.

Conclusion

The central argument of this thesis is that Portuguese youths generally view their power to act limited to a single action, emigration, perceived as necessary for achieving desired economic and personal goals. The perception of necessity is brought about by a dystopian framing of the future, excluding the possibility of creative actions directed towards unrealized possibilities. The vision of dystopia is a consequence of the dissemination of a specific interpretation of the collective bond, the social imaginary of 'Portugal', and an imitation of the means required for personal and financial success, such as stable employment.

In the narratives discussed, Portugal is portrayed as a place where young people are not provided with the material and moral benefits that they believe they are owed. This includes financial independence and creative employment in line with their abilities. This perception is not only based on an understanding of past policy decisions and economic trends, but also on the attribution of certain characteristics, such as dismissiveness and a lack of creativity, to the people and governance of the country. These characteristics are attributed not only through an examination of past events, but also by comparing Portugal to the idealized concept of 'lá fora' or 'abroad.'

In particular, this economic narrative frames the inaction and indifference of political leaders as almost fully determinant of their reduced power of action and their inability to see a future for themselves in Portugal. By portraying the political leaders as uncaring and not recognizing space in the political arena to bring in their own transformative contributions, young people are relegated to passively accepting whatever happens to them, if they choose to stay in the country.

All in all, these narratives posit the decision of youths in the site of initiative as a dichotomy between, on the one hand, engaging with the avenues of meaning one has inherited (e.g., family, culture, etc.) but being fundamentally unfree; or, on the other hand, sacrificing these for the possibility of following a fully independent, free life, one constructs for oneself. Because efforts to make these work together are rendered impossible, emigration becomes the most freedom-enhancing solution.

Following this diagnosis, I have proposed some standards whereby we may judge whether narrative formations are well-rounded and productive (i.e., in which the mimetic process broadens the possibilities of understanding in the rearticulated m_1'), or partial and reproductive (i.e., in which a rearticulated m_1' reinforces a single interpretation the space of experience and horizon of expectation). My intention in doing so is not to discredit the narratives we have read; their origin and reflected preoccupations are genuine; it is to dispel the notion that, given the current scenario, youths are powerless in affecting change. In a country in which only 36% of youths confess in participating in more than one political action per year[1], I fear that

[1] The most popular of which is signing a petition. Sagnier and Morell., p.294.

a narrative of disenfranchisement prevents us from seeing the transformative power in our hands to change our material prospects without needing to minimize the value of the collective dimensions of our identity and mental health[2].

If we see this, we may also come to realize the transformative powers of emigration for social change. Learning from diverse cultures and ways of life can, if we believe in the power to affect changes in our own communities, deeply advance the social values whereby our less-than-ideal homelands operate – we can become more open, critical, and creative.

Furthermore, a narrative of necessity that applies transversally to all youths may prevent us from performing the exercise of critical self-examination of our unique characters and situations such as to productively examine the ways in which we could yield these, alongside other people within our communities and in our situation, towards the prevention of the dystopic scenario – it obfuscates our power to help one another.

An accusation that can be made towards this project is that I am shunning these cosmopolitan youths for simply following the opportunities provided to them, based on an almost nationalistic conception of the need for belonging, opening it up to the possibility of being highjacked by more extremist forces. Although I do argue that we have a constitutive attachment to our social surroundings and the values and characters that compose it, my framework resists monolithic and restrictive conceptions of the social bond that nationalism requires. By working through deconstruction and contestation of the symbol of 'Portugal', my approach does not discriminate personal variations in the relation to the symbol (e.g., the weight it carries, how one relates to its values, different identities) and recognizes them as powerful inputs towards an increasingly inclusive conception of the very bond, whilst being able to provide a reasoning as to why it is still important that the existence of this symbol persists – in open letters and interviews that invariably carry the tone of a heavy heart, we realize: home matters.

This fact examined, it is important to reinforce that the role of this thesis is essentially methodological. My goal was to provide a detailed framework whereby the functioning of narratives could be unpacked in its symbolisms and mimetic dynamics, furthering an understanding of why one's expectations for the future and perception of agential power are framed in a specific way. In doing so, I hope this framework can provide language through which this issue can be better articulated. It shall be a useful guide for: public political discussion, by granting youths language to express grievances in a self-critical and hence reinforced, way; journalists reporting on the matter, who can with it ask better questions and help disseminate more diverse narratives; social scientists; politicians; among others.

Naturally, this framework is only a first step – future research that applies it will need to include much more detailed empirical insights on the current economic situation of the country and policies which

[2] Naturally, this 'sacrifice' varies in degree depending on the individual, her values and goals.

the government has presented. From a philosophical perspective, it would also be interesting to analyze if the eclipsing of the site of initiative arises too from the interaction of this dystopia with others (e.g., climate collapse) and to establish of the diminished perception of one's agential power follows, for example, a wider contemporary global trend.

In general terms, this thesis serves as a testimony to the power held by words to influence the trajectories of our societies, and a reminder that the history of the future can always be rewritten, if only we know how.

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