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Forgotten Borders:

How Barrancos Reveals the Tensions Between Human Rights, Local Traditions, and Democratic Inclusion in the Portuguese Spanish Borderland.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the historical and contemporary challenges in border regions, specifically Barrancos, reveal tensions between human rights, local traditions, and the promises of democratic inclusion in the Portuguese Spanish borderland. Some scholarships address geopolitical or economic aspects of borderlands. Still, this study, by focusing on this Portuguese village, examines how cultural hybridity, the particularism of a minority language, and legal exceptionalism shape how border communities navigate state-imposed regulations while preserving their distinct local identities.

The controversy over the *touros de morte* tradition is central to this research, since it disputes national debates about animals' rights, regional autonomy, and national legal uniformity.

Through a historical contextualization, ethnographic fieldwork, policy analysis, and a review of media discourse, this dissertation examines how this unique border context serves as a contested space of negotiation, where the interaction between cultural heritage, legal frameworks, and ethical paradoxes unfolds.

The findings show that Barrancos exemplifies how peripheral communities can serve as arenas for identity formation, negotiation, and resistance, challenging legal and cultural hegemonization. The case lifts broader discussions on legal pluralism, minority cultural and linguistic rights, and the place of animal ethics within democratic societies.

Keywords: *Borderlands, Bullfighting, Legal Pluralism, Cultural Heritage, Democratic Inclusion*

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The choice of this topic for my dissertation is due to the love I have for two very special persons: my maternal grandparents, “Lhalho” and “Lhalha”. I dedicate this research to them as a way of honouring the stories they passed on to me. Both from Barrancos, I experienced my childhood through their eyes, understanding and feeling this little hidden place in Portugal as they did. I grew up listening to my grandfather's adventures from his youth in the village, stories that he always told with great love and enthusiasm. I used to spend my school holidays at their house, where my grandmother would teach me the essence of Barrancos through songs and popular sayings, especially when we would bake typical local meals together. I've had the chance to spend several summers in Barrancos, in our family home, absorbing every detail of this place, getting to know my ancestors, and experiencing the uniqueness of this town. Despite having left at an early age in search of better living conditions, my grandparents have always cherished their homeland with great affection and nostalgia. They are proud of their roots as Barranquinhos. This thesis is not only a reflection of this love, but also an attempt to immortalize a part of the history of this small piece of Portuguese land, which is sometimes forgotten and deserves to be better known.

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CEBAL - Centro de Biotecnologia Agrícola e Agro-Alimentar do Alentejo (Alentejo Agricultural and Agro-Food Biotechnology Centre)

CDU - Coligação Democrática Unitária (Unitary Democratic Coalition)

DOP - Denominação de Origem Protegida (Protected Designation of Origin)

G.E.B - Grupo de Estudo do Barranquenho (Barranquenho Study Group)

GF - Guarda Fiscal (Fiscal Guard)

LGP - Língua Gestual Portuguesa (Portuguese Sign Language)

LPDA - Liga Portuguesa dos Direitos do Animal (Portuguese League for Animal Rights)

MPB - Mubimêntu du Pobu Barranquenu di Barrancô (Movement of the Barranquenho People of Barrancos)

PAN - Pessoas-Animais-Natureza (People, Animals, Nature Party)

PCP - Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party)

PRODER - Programa de Desenvolvimento Rural (Rural Development Programme)

PS - Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)

PSP - Polícia de Segurança Pública (Public Security Police)

PVDE - Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado (Police of Surveillance and Defense)

S.P.A. - Sociedade Protectora dos Animais (Animal Protection Society)

UNESCO – Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, Ciência e Cultura (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

Introduction

*“To survive the Borderlands
you must live ‘sin fronteras’
be a crossroads”*

- Gloria Anzaldúa

At the heart of every border lies a question of belonging: who are *“we”* and who are *“they”*? The concept of *“nós e os outros”* - *“us and the others”* - is a fundamental dichotomy around which borderland identities are constructed. In border regions like Barrancos, this distinction is neither fixed nor absolute, but rather performed and negotiated through everyday interactions, historical memory, and political tension. The frontier is more than a territorial boundary; it is a lived and symbolic space where identities are shaped in contrast and proximity.

As Miguel Luís Vieira Rego suggests, borderlands almost always refer to a *“space of conflict and guerrilla warfare between the inhabitants of either side of the dividing line of a so-called distinct space”*¹, in which the dividing line *“functions as a buffer, as a sign and a slogan: This is my homeland! This is my nation.”*² Yet, Barrancos, along specially with its Spanish twin town Encinasola, by sharing throughout history the same lived realities - *“smuggling, the Spanish Civil War, the wheat campaigns, caciquism, the heavy hand of police violence under the Franco and Salazar regimes”*³ - demonstrates that borders are not simply political or administrative constructs that impose and define geographic limits. Instead, they act as meeting points where people from different communities interact and transcend the barriers that divide them. In this way, they become interconnected, forming a paradoxical identity that is distinct from both Portugal and Spain, yet also deeply entangled with both.

Following this idea, José Lindomar Albuquerque observes how borderlands, specifically the Luso-Spanish frontier, are central to the way we view and construct national identities. For the author, identity is *“something relational and dynamic defined in contrast to the other”*⁴ in which stereotypes and

¹ Miguel Luís Vieira Rego, “Barrancos, Encinasola, um território de fronteira” (Edições Colibri 2003) <https://www.frontespo.org/index.php/pt-pt/autores/nombres-normalizados/rego-miguel-luis-vieira> accessed 11 May 2025, 65.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 67

⁴ José Lindomar Albuquerque, “Identidades nacionais na fronteira entre Portugal e Espanha” (Edições Universitárias Lusófonas 2004) <https://e-revista.unioeste.br/index.php/tempodaciencia/article/view/16149> accessed 11 May, 2025, 134.

daily narratives are embedded. This relational identity framework helps us understand how borders are physical and symbolic divisions that reflect and reinforce ideas of national difference. Therefore, the national identity in border zones can be understood as the outcome of how people view themselves through the mirror of the *"other"*. This mirror can be seen in adjectival dichotomies, such as: *"Portuguese more pessimistic"* versus *"Spanish more cheerful"*, *"Portuguese disorganised"* versus *"Spanish organized"*, *"Portuguese live at home"* versus *"Spanish on the streets, in bars and restaurants."*⁵ Albuquerque explains that these narratives are sustained by an historic tension between *Iberism* (the defense of cultural and political unity between the two countries), and a distinctly Portuguese nationalism, which is often imagined through an *Anti-Espanholismo (anti-spanishism)*, rooted in the conflicts and wars that defined Portugal's emergence and preservation as an autonomous political entity⁶.

However, Barrancos challenges this duality. Situated on the Portuguese Spanish border, this Alentejan village is characterised by cultural hybridity, due to its strong historical and ongoing ties with Spain. The community has long maintained close familial, economic, and cultural relations with neighbouring Spanish towns, complicating conventional notions of national belonging. Being simultaneously *"us"* and the *"others"*, the village mirrors the contradictions of nationalism while weakening its boundaries. Additionally, it is possible to consider that Barrancos, as an interior and isolated region, was once described by local authorities as having *"almost not been acknowledged by the Portuguese administration"*⁷ and having *"been forgotten until the 25th of April"*⁸, which reveals a persistent perception of neglect by the central government. In this context, Portugal itself can come to represent the *"other"*. Simultaneously, Spain might not always be seen as the *"other"* either. Through a collective history, language, and traditions, Spain may also be portrayed as part of *"us"*. The case of Barrancos thus invites us to reconsider how national identity can be both inclusive and exclusive, particularly in territories that intersect historical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Ultimately, this village, given its complexity, prompts us to question the predefined and widely accepted notions of national boundaries, urging us to reconsider where a border truly lies.

⁵ Ibid. 137.

⁶ Ibid. 136.

⁷ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez and Maria Filomena Gonçalves, "Caracterização e problemas atuais do barranquenho: contribuições para uma política de revitalização" (2020) 12 *Estudos de Lingüística Galega* 179 <https://doi.org/10.15304/elg.12.6040> accessed 11 May 2025, 181.

⁸ Ibid.

Barrancos also offers important lessons for the present. In times when refugee crises and humanitarian responses dominate global debate, the memory of Barrancos' solidarity during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) gains renewed relevance. Despite living under authoritarian regimes, the people of this poor, isolated village received Spanish refugees fleeing violence in nearby Andalusia with the little they had, an act of humanity and courage that still resonates today. In response to the arrival of Spanish republicans, the community spontaneously organized aid and support, and two refugee camps, Coitadinha and Russianas⁹, were established to accommodate those in need. As noted by Dulce Simões, “*on the banks of the river Ardila the refugees lay with their lives hanging in the balance*”¹⁰, their presence transformed the border from a line of exclusion into one of refuge and opportunity, underscoring “*the importance of this ‘imaginary line’, marking the boundary between life and death for thousands of people.*”¹¹ These actions highlight the community's humanitarian commitment and reinforce the shared cultural and emotional ties between Portuguese and Spanish people. This further supports the idea that, in moments of solidarity, Spain is not necessarily framed as the ‘*other*’, but rather as part of the same collective identity.

“*The border between Spain and Portugal is one of the oldest in the world, and it is also one of the most stable because it has remained practically unchanged since the Treaty of Alcanizes (1297).*”¹² This historical persistence cannot be explained merely by geographical details; it is better explained by enduring political and territorial imaginaries that have shaped how people live, perceive, and interact on both sides of the border. The Treaty of Lisbon of 1864 reaffirmed this boundary through detailed cartographic and diplomatic efforts that sought to modernise the ancient concept of the *raia*. The term refers to what has been described as “*this entire wide broader strip*”¹³, whose inhabitants are known as *Raianos*. It is “*mainly made up of small villages and small towns*”¹⁴ and is considered “*the last*

⁹ Maria Fernanda Sande Candeias, “O outro lado da fronteira – memória de espaços, imagens e diálogos: a propósito da Guerra Civil Espanhola” (2020) *O Pelourinho: Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas*, EUROACE, <https://www.euro-ace.eu/pt/documentos/o-outro-lado-da-fronteira-memoria-de-espacos-imagens-e-dialogos> accessed 12 May 2015, 72.

¹⁰ Dulce Simões, *Os refugiados republicanos em Portugal e o caso de Barrancos: silêncios da história e lutas pela memória* (EUROACE, 2022) https://euro-ace.eu/sites/default/files/attached_documents/Os%20refugiados%20republicanos%20em%20Portugal%20e%20o%20caso%20de%20Barrancos%20silencios%20da%20História%20e%20lutas%20pela%20Memória.pdf accessed 12 May 2025, 12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Xosé A Álvarez-Pérez, “Património Cultural Imaterial da Fronteira Portugal-Espanha: uma contribuição da documentação linguística” (ResearchGate, 2018) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326998509_Intangible_cultural_heritage_of_the_Portugal-Spain_border_a_contribution_from_language_documentation accessed 12 May 2025, 1

¹³ J L Albuquerque, “Identidades nacionais na fronteira entre Portugal e Espanha” (2000) 23(46) *Tempo da Ciência* 132–143 <https://e-revista.unioeste.br/index.php/tempodaciencia/article/view/16149> accessed 12 May 2025, 133.

¹⁴ Ibid.

economically developed region of both Iberian countries.”¹⁵ Yet, despite this legal stability, the border has often functioned less as a line of division and more as a zone of interaction.

Xosé A. Álvarez-Pérez in his work on intangible cultural heritage, highlights the *Raia* as a linguistic and cultural continuum, where dialects, customs, and oral traditions flourish across artificial state boundaries. The border, in this sense, stands as living proof of “*specific feelings of identity*”¹⁶ that contribute to a shared Iberian memory. An example of this blending is the *barranquenho*, described as “*a variation of Portuguese with a strong influence from southern Spanish dialects.*”¹⁷ It illustrates Álvarez-Pérez’s observation that “*linguistic boundaries do not often coincide with political borders*”¹⁸ making *Barranquenho* an audible manifestation of how border identities resist homogenisation.

Cultural practices also play an important role when discussing the cultural construction of the border and local identity. We can observe this dynamic in towns like *Barrancos* and *Encinasola* through festivities, kinship networks, and forms of everyday sociability, reinforcing the idea that the *Raia* is experienced as a lived cultural field rather than being confined to the fixed political boundary. For instance, historical parish records suggest a notable presence of cross-border marriages in *Barrancos* during the 18th century, particularly with individuals from nearby Spanish towns such as *Encinasola*, *Jerez de los Caballeros*, and *Oliva*.¹⁹

In this historical and cultural landscape, the Castle of *Noudar* also stands as a guardian of the frontier. Described in 1642 as “*one of the keys of this Kingdom*”²⁰, it was once a fortified military base of strategic importance. Today, it serves as a symbolic marker of continuity and coexistence. As historians note, *Noudar* was less a town with a castle, and more “*a castle with a town to support it.*”²¹ Its

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Xosé A Álvarez-Pérez, “Património Cultural Imaterial da Fronteira Portugal-Espanha: uma contribuição da documentação linguística” (ResearchGate, 2018)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326998509_Intangible_cultural_heritage_of_the_Portugal-Spain_border_a_contribution_from_language_documentation 12 May 2025. 1

¹⁶ Ibid. 2

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 1

¹⁹ João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025. 135

²⁰ João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) citing ANTT, Cortes, mc 12, nº 9, fl 3, as published in João Cosme, *Elementos...*, 248–88.) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025, 87

²¹ João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025, 36.

enduring presence evokes the layered history of conflict and collaboration in the region, embodying centuries of negotiation between isolation and exchange.

The contrast between how central perceptions view the border and how locals experience it, makes Barrancos a key example for understanding what borders mean in real life and to whom.

Border regions often stand out as spaces where the friction between legal uniformity, cultural specificity, and democratic ideals becomes particularly evident, and Barrancos is no exception. Geographically located “*on the edge of everything*”²², it is described as a “*borderland where one only goes deliberately*”²³, a place that challenges not only state-centred assumptions but also its legal frameworks.

This tension became more evident in the case of *touros de morte*, a controversial bullfighting tradition in Barrancos that received widespread media attention between 1997 and 2001. This form of bullfighting, practiced in August during the annual village's festivities in honour of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, clashed with Portugal's legal prohibition of animal death in the arena - *Decree No. 15355 of 14 April 1928*. The repercussions unfolded in multiple arenas: a complex negotiation involving local protest, national media campaigns, legal petitions, and parliamentary debate, engaging with a diverse range of actors, including “*animal welfare associations to political parties, from everyday conversations to opinions made public by more or less notorious people.*”²⁴ The result was what Luis Capucha described as a “*total social phenomenon*”²⁵ in which Barrancos served as an excuse to discuss other social, legal, cultural, political, and symbolic dimensions of Portuguese life as well.

In 2002, a legal exception was granted, allowing the practice to continue in Barrancos - Law No. 19/2002, of July 31. However, this exception did not address the deeper conflict. Rather, it revealed the fragility of democratic inclusion when it is tested by marginal traditions, and the capacity that culturally distinct communities can exert on central governments. The public controversy surrounding *touros de*

²² Miguel Luís Vieira Rego, “Barrancos, Encinasola, um território de fronteira” (Edições Colibri 2003) <https://www.frontespo.org/index.php/pt-pt/autores/nombres-normalizados/rego-miguel-luis-vieira> accessed 12 June 2025, 67.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bruno Machado, “Para cá da Raia, Para lá da Homogeneidade: Barrancos – entre a tradição e o direito à identidade cultural. Pensamento e Imaginação Geográfica” in *Actas do XII Colóquio Ibérico de Geografia* (Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto 2010) 6–9 October, Porto. <https://www.academia.edu/17006582> accessed 1 June 2025, 12.

²⁵ Luís Capucha, “Barrancos na ribalta, ou a metáfora de um país em mudança” in A C Ribeiro (ed), *Portugal de Perto: Retratos Municipais com Perspectiva Longitudinal* (CIES–ISCTE 2002) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262496657> accessed 1 June 2025, 10.

morte invites us to reflect more deeply on broader implications: What is the place of tradition in a democracy? Can cultural differences be accommodated without fragmenting legal coherence? Who gets to decide what counts as legitimate culture?

That said, this practice, which has lasted “*more than a century ago*”²⁶ became not only a political breaking point, but also a marker of cultural affirmation, deeply representative of local identity, while simultaneously “*opening a debate around its legitimacy and legality, (...) notions of tradition, civilization, reason, and culture.*”²⁷

Though geographically isolated, Barrancos defies this reductive view. It can be said that it is a microcosm, a symbolic borderland where questions of identity, law, memory, and sovereignty intersect. Barrancos is more than a village; it serves as a case study in legal pluralism, resistance, and the dynamic relationship between periphery and centre. After considering all the features that make this village so distinct, its linguistic uniqueness, historical role in cross-border solidarity, and legal-cultural exceptions, Barrancos emerges as an ideal case to explore how borders are experienced, shaped, and challenged.

To investigate these dynamics, this thesis is structured into five chapters. The first section provides a historical overview of the Portuguese Spanish borderlands, examining the symbolic and geopolitical aspects of the border's formation, the socio-economic significance of frontier towns, the development of transnational cultural ties, and the persistent marginality and neglect faced by Barrancos under national governance.

Following this, the second chapter focuses on the Barrancos bullfighting controversy, analysing the *toros de morte* tradition, the legal and media debates it provoked, as well as the role of the village in national discussions on law, tradition, and cultural identity.

The next chapter expands the scope of analysis to broader questions of legal conflict and cultural practice. This includes the clash between urban and rural imaginaries, as well as the ethical paradoxes

²⁶ Assembleia da República, “Projecto de Lei No 41/VIII: Altera o Decreto No 15.355 (Proibição de Touros de Morte em Portugal)” <https://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063446f764c324679626d56304c334e706447567a4c315a4a53556c4d5a5763765247396a6457316c626e527663306c7561574e7059585270646d45765a6d55774e5445775a4455744d444a6a597930305a5455774c546c6b4d5745744e6d5578595455334e6d59345954566d4c6d527659773d3d&fich=fe0510d5-02cc-4e50-9d1a-6e1a576f8a5f.doc&Inline=true> accessed 1 June 2025.

²⁷ Fernando Ampudia de Haro, “O processo civilizacional da tourada: guerreiros, cortesãos, profissionais... e bárbaros?” (Imprensa de História Contemporânea 2019). <https://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/Portugal/ihc/20201116043730/O-processo-civilizacional.pdf> accessed 1 June 2025, 33.

that arise when legal frameworks confront culturally embedded practices. It also considers the tension between cultural rights and animal rights, the limits of democratic tolerance, and the state's role in regulating minority traditions.

The fourth chapter explores the Barranquenho language, recognised as a minority linguistic group and an important marker of identity. Through its history, shaped by its borderland context, the chapter analyses how the three spoken languages - Portuguese, Spanish, and Barranquenho - coexist and influence one another. It also examines how attitudes toward the language have evolved over time, shifting from neglect to a growing sense of pride and the desire to protect it, which began locally and eventually gained national recognition. Finally, it considers how the language has been protected and, more importantly, revitalised in a globalised world increasingly shaped by tourism.

The fifth and final chapter brings the study into the present, examining Barrancos today. It reflects, through a local perspective of the Barrancos Mayor, the current local perceptions linked to cultural heritage, generational change, migration, and the influence of tourism in the region.

Finally, the conclusion draws together the central themes of the thesis, positioning Barrancos as a case study in the democratic inconsistency of borderlands. It also makes us think about broader reflections on inclusion, cultural rights, and the challenges of legal diversity, questions that matter not only to Portugal, but across Europe and beyond.

Barrancos illustrates that the most revealing tensions between identity, law, and tradition are often found in places where the national narrative tends to overlook them. The tensions over rights, belonging, and recognition in this village reveal how national identity is not simply inherited or imposed, but constantly negotiated at the edges. Between “*us*” and the “*others*”, these struggles unfold, reminding us that it is at the nation's borders that the limits of inclusion and the contradictions of democracy can become most visible and urgent.

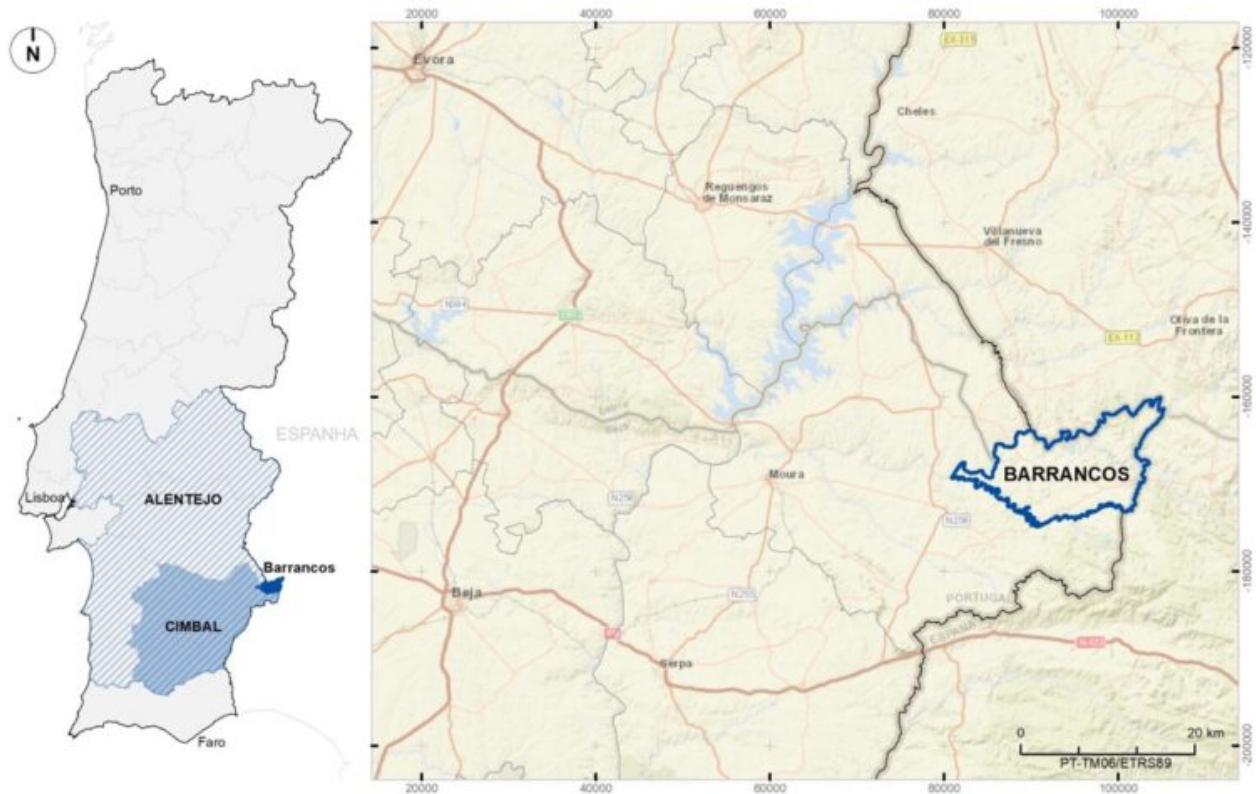


Figure 1 – Geographical Context of Barrancos. Map by the Junta de Freguesia de Barrancos, published on its official website. Image cited from <https://jfbarrancos.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Imagem1.jpg>, accessed 17 May 2025.

Chapter 1: The Portuguese Spanish Borderlands – A Historical Perspective

- **Formation and symbolism of the Portugal Spain border**

Before emerging as an independent kingdom, Portugal, formerly Condado Portucalense, was part of the kingdom of León and Castile. In the early 8th century, the Iberian Peninsula had come under Muslim control following the 711 invasions, giving rise to *Al-Andalus*²⁸. In response, Christian forces retreated to the northern highlands, initiating what became known as the *Reconquista*: a centuries-long military and spiritual campaign to reclaim Christian territory.

There was an emergence of Portugal as a kingdom, which was defined by an internal dynastic conflict. Afonso Henriques, son of Teresa of León and a man with great aspirations, broke from his

²⁸ “Al-Andalus” refers to name given to the parts of the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule.

mother's attempts to maintain fidelity to her native kingdom. The Battle of São Mamede, immortalized this rupture as the "*victory of young D. Afonso over his mother*"²⁹ effectively "*granted him control over the country.*"³⁰ In 1139, following the legendary Battle of Ourique, Afonso Henriques proclaimed himself king, initiating the political consolidation of the Portuguese territory. Only in 1143, with the Treaty of Zamora, "*Portugal's political separation take effect through this recognition*"³¹ by Afonso VII of León "*on whom the Condado Portucalense had previously depended.*"³²

As historian Fernando Ampudia de Haro explains, Afonso Henriques was able to assert Portugal's autonomy by allying with local noble factions (*infações*), who supported the kingdom's separation from Galicia and León. This alignment between military leadership and emerging noble interests laid the groundwork for political independence and began to shape the early contours of what would become a distinct frontier, both symbolic and administrative.³³

Thus, the genesis of Portugal's medieval frontier is, according to several authors, deeply embedded in the "*interrelationship between temporal power and spiritual authority.*"³⁴ The Portuguese border was "*drawn both in contrast to the nearest Christian kingdom on the peninsula (the Kingdom of Castile and León) and in opposition to the Saracen power.*"³⁵ In this context, the very notion of frontier in the Iberian Peninsula emerged, as Carlos de Ayala Martínez describes, "*not only from a conflictual and militarized reality, but also from the need to emphasize the ideological and cultural antagonism between two opposing religious traditions: Christianity and Islam.*"³⁶

However, the establishment of the border was a long and gradual process. Prior to the Treaty of Alcanizes, there was an earlier agreement, the Treaty of Badajoz (1267), which "*guaranteed Portugal*

²⁹ Margarida Garcez Ventura, "1096–1297: A Definição das Fronteiras" (Academia Portuguesa da História/Expresso 2012), 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Fernando Ampudia de Haro, "O processo civilizacional da tourada: guerreiros, cortesãos, profissionais... e bárbaros?" (Imprensa de História Contemporânea 2019), 48.

³⁴ João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, "Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime" (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025, 53.

³⁵ Margarida Garcez Ventura, "1096–1297: A Definição das Fronteiras" (Academia Portuguesa da História/Expresso 2012), 53

³⁶ Carlos de Ayala Martínez, "*Frontera y órdenes militares en la Edad Media castellano-leonesa (siglos XII–XIII)*" (2009) 206 *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 29, 88 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/41105078> accessed 6 June 2025, 88.

control over the Algarve.”³⁷ Yet it was only in 1297, with the Treaty of Alcanizes, that the border between the two kingdoms was definitively fixed.

This treaty, signed between D. Dinis of Portugal and D. Fernando IV of Castile, resolved ongoing disputes and legally recognized Portugal’s possession of key frontier territories, including Moura, Serpa, and Noudar.

The case of Noudar is particularly interesting to better understand the village of Barrancos, as both spaces reflect the layered dynamics of frontier construction, settlement, and symbolic meaning.



Figure 2 - View of the Castle of Noudar.

Photograph by Fernando Peres Rodrigues, “Castelo de Noudar”, published on Olhares: fotografia online. Image cited in Minerva Magazine, ‘Ten Centuries of History: The Castle of Noudar’ <https://www.revistaminerva.pt/dez-seculos-de-historia-o-castelo-de-noudar/#post-14565-footnote-ref-15> accessed 17 May 2025.

³⁷ João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025, 59.



Figure 3 - Entrance to the Castle of Noudar. The signs on the wall read “Património Municipal” (*Municipal Heritage*). Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.



Figure 4 - Stairway leading to the main entrance of the Castle of Noudar. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.



Figure 5 – Inside of the Castle of Noudar. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.



Figure 6 - View of the Church of Noudar from above, surrounded by ruins and the rural Alentejo landscape. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.

During D. Dinis' reign, Noudar was incorporated into a broader strategy of frontier consolidation. In the pursuit of sovereignty, this process involved a combination of military defense, legal structure, and demographic settlement. The settlement of people in this area was seen as a “*sine qua non condition of any defensive system*”³⁸ since only “*the maintenance of control gave meaning to the conquest.*”³⁹

In order to guarantee its economic and strategic function, in 1308, the first *Couto de Homiziados* in the kingdom was created. By following certain rules, namely, remaining in the location for five years, the *homiziados* - people convicted of crimes - had the opportunity to live in safety. Noudar thus fulfilled a dual role, military and demographic, intended to reinforce state control over a geographically and politically unstable space. João Ramos succinctly puts it: “*The greater the wealth generated, the stronger the power of attraction; the larger the population, the greater the capacity to defend the territory, and therefore, the more stability. The more stability, the better the conditions for resource production.*”⁴⁰

However, despite these efforts, given the “*distance from population centers, the inhospitable territory, and the constant territorial changes*”⁴¹, Noudar did not establish itself as a captivating place. The very factors that made it symbolically relevant - isolation, vulnerability, and marginality - also prevented it from becoming a sustainable settlement.

This frontier logic was also reflected in the region's physical geography. In places like Noudar, the Ardila and Múrtega rivers served as natural boundaries. But where such features were absent, as in the stretch of land between Noudar and the Castilian town of Encinasola, the border was marked with *malhões*: stone markers that could be contested or physically moved. It was precisely in this undefined, malleable terrain that “*the village of Barrancos emerged and itself became a marker of separation from the mid-14th century onwards.*”⁴²

According to Manuel González Jiménez, Barrancos was founded by Castilian migrants in search of “*better legal conditions than those available in their own kingdom.*”⁴³ From this inception, Barrancos

³⁸ Ibid. 17

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 18

⁴¹ Rafael Romão Mira, “Dez Séculos de História: o Castelo de Noudar” (Minerva, 12 February 2024) <https://www.revistaminerva.pt/dez-seculos-de-historia-o-castelo-de-noudar/> accessed 6 June 2025.

⁴² João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 12 June 2025. 61

⁴³ Ibid. 61

embodied the duality of frontier existence: it was simultaneously the limit of administrative reach and a visible symbol of identity shaped by geography and governance.

While Noudar saw its decline, Barrancos experienced a “*positive demographic development.*”⁴⁴ The two shared the seat of the municipality until 1774, but eventually, Noudar was administratively dissolved in 1836. Its possession oscillated between Portugal and Castile throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Only with the Treaty of Utrecht (1715) did both the castle and its surroundings definitively return to the Portuguese Crown.

This way, Noudar and Barrancos show that the Portugal–Spain border, even though it was diplomatically set in 1297, kept being socially constructed and reinterpreted long after its legal consolidation, a reality eloquently captured in a local verse still sung in Barrancos:

<p><i>Castelo de Noudar És o nosso encanto O Rei D. Dinis Foi assim que quis Coroar Barrancos Coroar Barrancos És a nossa terra De mato cercado No alto da serra Em frente de Espanha Sozinho, isolado Sem ser admirado Virado para Espanha</i></p>	<p><i>Castle of <u>Noudar</u> You are our pride King D. Dinis So wished it to be To crown Barrancos To crown Barrancos You are our land Surrounded by brushwood Atop the mountain Facing Spain Alone, isolated Unadmired Turned toward Spain</i></p>
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Figure 7 – Folklore about Castle of Noudar in Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 109-110.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 21

- **Smuggling and Survival: Socio-Economic Life in Border Communities**

For the communities living alongside the *Raia*, specifically Barrancos and Encinasola, the border line was a place of interaction, resilience, and companionship. In this context, we witness the duality of the border. As Maria Dulce Simões puts it, in the face of a “*political border, closed and surveilled*”⁴⁵, what persisted was an “*everyday border, marked by material and symbolic exchanges*”⁴⁶. Through these informal exchange networks, people on both sides of the frontier challenged the “*national differences imposed by the Iberian states*”⁴⁷, while simultaneously ensuring their subsistence in times of economic hardship and political repression.

Among other economic practices, such as pastoralism and agriculture, smuggling established itself “*as a way of life and a survival strategy.*”⁴⁸ Becoming a gradually viable economic alternative, it was perceived locally almost as a profession, one that, in Cavaco’s words, was both “*liberating*”⁴⁹ and associated with a certain “*prestige*” in the harsh reality of the borderland. Historical records confirm that smuggling was already present in this region as early as the 17th century. This passage from *Fronteira e Relações de Poder*, referring to “*the existence of organized groups of smugglers in this part of the border until the second half of the 18th century*”⁵⁰, reinforces the notion that by this time, smuggling had evolved into an organized and persistent activity.

It intensified and became normalized, especially during the 20th century. The authoritarian regimes that came to power in Portugal under Salazar and in Spain under Franco were marked by extreme hardship, scarcity, and repression. In this precarious wartime which extended until its end, around a hundred people — both men and women — engaged in smuggling through acts of boldness and courage, facing “*dangers, persecutions and imprisonments, fines and losses, gains and miseries, defeats and new*

⁴⁵ Maria Dulce Simões, “‘Não fomos contrabandistas, trabalhámos no contrabando’: Práticas de resistência e estratégias de sobrevivência’ (2020) LXXVI(II) *Revista de Estudos Extremeños* 99. 125

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Carmina Cavaco, “Fronteira Portugal – Espanha e individualidade territorial” (1997)

XXXII(63) *Finisterra* 159 <https://revistas.rcaap.pt/finisterra/article/view/1782> accessed 7 June 2025.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Eusébio Medina García, “Orígenes, características y transformación del contrabando tradicional en la frontera de Extremadura con Portugal” in Dulce Freire, Eduarda Rovisco and Inês Fonseca (eds), *Contrabando na Fronteira Luso-Espanhola. Práticas, memórias e patrimónios* (Edições Nelson de Matos 2009) 148, cited in João Augusto Espadeiro Ramos, “Fronteira e Relações de Poder. Noudar e Barrancos no Antigo Regime” (MA dissertation, Universidade de Évora 2012) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/14964> accessed 7 June 2025. 168

*beginnings*⁵¹ as means of survival and informal economic stability. For many, particularly rural workers and those affected by the destruction caused by war, smuggling became a practical form of resistance. Not only did it provide subsistence, but it also offered a way to participate in an alternative economy that bypassed exclusion from the formal labour market.

Bread, flour, chickpeas, rice, sugar, potatoes, and soap were some of the basic goods that were traded with Spain during this time. Due to its vitality, it came to be known locally as “*smuggling of hunger*”⁵² reflecting its essential role in the border economy and in the collective memory of those who lived through it.

With increased flows of people and goods, as well as new economic opportunities centred on specific high-demand products such as coffee, the border became a more dynamic space. This period left a lasting imprint on border communities as they were forced to adapt their economic strategies in the face of mass unemployment and an unequal social structure, a reality that is evident in places like Barrancos.

Nonetheless, being a clandestine practice, smuggling became a deeply rooted social institution, which shaped the relationships with neighbouring populations and their local identities. Functioning as a “*network of relations based on the exchange of goods and values*”⁵³, curiously, this activity was supported by feelings of “*loyalty, trust, and integrity*”⁵⁴ between the two peoples. Thus, through systems of cooperation, these informal networks helped both communities to overcome and resist more difficult and critical moments. It can, therefore, be said that this activity was a “*unifying myth of the community*”⁵⁵, capable of crossing “*social inequalities*”⁵⁶, uniting individuals through the sharing of hardships and benefits.

Over time, as national economies opened and state borders became less rigid, with both Portugal and Spain joining the European Economic Community in 1986 and the Schengen Area in the 1990s, smuggling gradually lost its functional relevance. However, for communities like Barrancos and

⁵¹ Carmina Cavaco, “Fronteira Portugal – Espanha e individualidade territorial” (1997) XXXII(63) *Finisterra* 159 <https://revistas.rcaap.pt/finisterra/article/view/1782> accessed 7 June 2025.

⁵² Maria Dulce Simões, “‘Não fomos contrabandistas, trabalhámos no contrabando’: Práticas de resistência e estratégias de sobrevivência’ (2020) LXXVI(II) *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 99, 99.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 124

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Encinasola, the shared memory of smuggling personifies their cultural heritage that reinforces their collective identity.

In a time marked by post-rural decline and widespread rural exodus, societies face the effects of an increasingly industrialised, interconnected, and interdependent world. Within this context, the revitalisation of the past becomes essential to restoring a sense of continuity, cohesion, and meaning around historically significant practices, such as smuggling. This idea is clearly expressed by Luís Silva, who writes that “*the forces of globalization are, from this perspective, seen as inducing a form of decline and a threat to the stability, security, and identity of individuals, leading to the preservation of the past as a way to ensure the continuity of symbols and meanings.*”⁵⁷

There is, therefore, a growing urgency to construct a symbolic anchor capable of narrating a shared past in a timeless way that is accessible across generations and social backgrounds. In recent years, this effort has been formalised and commodified through processes of patrimonialisation and touristification. Since 2001, Barrancos has hosted smuggling walking routes, including the two-day trail between Barrancos and Encinasola, promoted by the *Clube de Actividades de Ar Livre*, which retraces paths historically used by smugglers⁵⁸. Another initiative, this time promoted by Spain, is the *El Camino de los Contrabandistas*, launched in 2005 by the *Club de Senderismo Los Mochileros*, which recreates the trail route passing through “*places that were part of the smuggling route with Barrancos' neighbour.*”⁵⁹ These initiatives are part of broader efforts to musealise and market the memory of smuggling, as noted in studies on “*smuggling routes*”⁶⁰ and their incorporation into tourism circuits.

However, it is worth reflecting on whether these initiatives fully achieve their intended goals. On the one hand, they offer opportunities for economic revitalisation and cultural visibility. On the other hand, there is a risk that such initiatives may simplify and commodify a complex and conflictual reality, adapting it to the expectations of cultural tourism.

⁵⁷ Luís Silva, “A patrimonialização e a turistificação do contrabando” in Eduarda Rovisco, Inês Fonseca and Dulce Freire (eds), “Contrabando na Fronteira Luso-Espanhola: Práticas, Memórias e Património” (Edições Nelson de Matos 2009) 255–278. 4

⁵⁸ Ibid. 12

⁵⁹ Maria Dulce Simões, “‘Não fomos contrabandistas, trabalhámos no contrabando’: Práticas de resistência e estratégias de sobrevivência” (2020) LXXVI(II) *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 99. 125

⁶⁰ Luís Silva, “A patrimonialização e a turistificação do contrabando” in Eduarda Rovisco, Inês Fonseca and Dulce Freire (eds), *Contrabando na Fronteira Luso-Espanhola: Práticas, Memórias e Património* (Edições Nelson de Matos 2009) 255–278. 2

The article A Patrimonialização e a Turistificação do Contrabando offers a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, highlighting insights from various authors that help frame the case of Barrancos. As noted, the integration of heritage into the tourist economy reflects a “*productivist conception, within which heritage is understood as a resource for cultural tourism and other economic activities*”⁶¹ — a form of market-oriented storytelling shaped to meet what Prats calls “*motivations of entertainment or hedonistic-recreational purpose*”⁶².

In this vision, what is sold is not hardship or repression, but the fantasy of an adventurous past, sanitised of its conflicts, or as Rodríguez puts it, “*the memory of a happy Arcadia.*”⁶³ Tourists seek “*to see and experience good things*”⁶⁴, not misery or social tension. As such, these initiatives tend to selectively activate heritage, often reducing the history of smuggling to a romanticised trail, even though contrabandists historically used irregular and shifting routes, constantly adapting to escape “*the fiscal guards and the carabinieri, whose function was to control and even prevent the flow of people and goods across the demarcation line.*”⁶⁵

Still, this does not mean such initiatives should be dismissed. On the contrary, what deserves careful consideration is how these representations of the past are constructed and whose perspectives they reflect. Before these practices are commercialised, it is essential to provide a historical and social context that allows visitors to understand that the experience they are engaging with may not fully correspond to the reality it represents. This disconnect is natural, given that smuggling is no longer practiced and the socio-economic conditions that once sustained it have changed significantly.

What should be prioritised, above all, is the voice of civil society, especially from the generations who lived through these times. Their testimonies are fundamental in building narratives and experiences that honour the realities they endured, narratives that can offer not only tribute but also valuable lessons for present and future generations, ensuring that this memory is not lost.

⁶¹ Pereiro (2003) 234, cited in Luís Silva, “A patrimonialização e a turistificação do contrabando” in Eduarda Rovisco, Inês Fonseca and Dulce Freire (eds), *Contrabando na Fronteira Luso-Espanhola: Práticas, Memórias e Património* (Edições Nelson de Matos 2009) 255–278. 5

⁶² Luís Silva, “A patrimonialização e a turistificação do contrabando” in Eduarda Rovisco, Inês Fonseca and Dulce Freire (eds), *Contrabando na Fronteira Luso-Espanhola: Práticas, Memórias e Património* (Edições Nelson de Matos 2009) 255–278. 13

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 1

As Maria Dulce Simões argues, “*the past thus becomes an ‘artifact of the present’, with attributes shaped by today’s tastes, and its peculiarities are domesticated by the very preservation of selected traces.*”⁶⁶ For the present to truly benefit from this cultural inheritance, “*it is necessary for memory to be articulated and revisited, with the aim construct a history and, in this way, making use of the ‘lost treasure.’*”⁶⁷ By rooting the interpretation of smuggling in lived experience and local knowledge, rather than only in tourism-oriented reinterpretation, such efforts can ensure that the past is not just consumed, but truly understood and meaningfully preserved.

- **Historical marginality and State neglect**

During the early phase of the Portuguese Restoration War⁶⁸, in 1641, Barrancos was targeted by the Portuguese forces that burned the whole village, leaving only the parish church and part of the manor of the Count of Linhares standing. This act was justified by the alleged disloyalty of the Barranquenhos. Due to their geographical and cultural proximity to Castille, the suspicions pointed to the belief that they might side with the Spanish Crown, and for that, they should be punished.⁶⁹

Barranco’s geographic position, in the words of Noberto Franco, “*a wedge projecting into enemy territory, making its defense and preservation difficult*”⁷⁰, reinforced its vulnerability and symbolic isolation. Moreover, the linguistic ambivalence was also the motive of hesitation. Speaking a hybrid dialect, they were accused of having “*abandoned the Portuguese language for Castilian*”⁷¹, and as a result, labelled as “*Janízaros*”⁷² and “*bad vassals.*”⁷³

This episode represents what Noberto Franco called “*the first major blow*”⁷⁴ of state suspicion, exclusion, and abandonment. Portugal did not see its frontier populations as something to be protected.

⁶⁶ Maria Dulce Simões, “‘Não fomos contrabandistas, trabalhámos no contrabando’: Práticas de resistência e estratégias de sobrevivência” (2020) LXXVI(II) *Revista de Estudos Extremeños* 99. 126

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “*Portuguese Restoration War*” refers to the conflict between Portugal and Spain that led to the end of the Iberian Union and the reestablishment of Portuguese independence.

⁶⁹ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000). 161

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 162

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 163

Instead, it saw them as a problem to be disciplined or even erased. A pattern that would persist into the 19th, 20th, and even 21st centuries. From this moment onward, Barrancos became a symbol of a forgotten border.

Barrancos suffers from what Noberto Franco designates as a “*double interiority*”⁷⁵ — being distant from both the maritime coast and the political centre. Due to its geographical position and historical trajectory, this small village in the district of Beja and the sub-region of Baixo Alentejo has always been “*distant, isolated and forgotten. Even despised*”⁷⁶ by national governments. This lack of connectivity has left Barrancos invisible to national planning and state presence, leading the author to state that “*over the centuries, Portugal treated Barrancos more like a stepdaughter than a daughter.*”⁷⁷

This structural neglect is particularly visible in Barrancos’ deficient infrastructure network. The deteriorating condition of national roads, such as the EN386 (linking Amareleja and Barrancos) and the EN258 (between Vidigueira and Moura), has led to repeated public demands from residents and political voices. As one parliamentary document by the Portuguese Communist Party puts it, “*the need for safe travel between inland territories must be a concern for government authorities, from the perspective of promoting social and territorial cohesion.*”⁷⁸

These infrastructural deficiencies have direct consequences on the daily lives of local inhabitants, particularly regarding access to essential services like healthcare. Although recent efforts were made to construct a health centre⁷⁹ in Barrancos, these alone have not resolved the community’s deeper needs. With no guaranteed medical assistance during weekends and considering the poor road conditions that delay or even prevent access to reference hospitals in Beja and Évora, the situation remains critical⁸⁰. The situation is aggravated by the aging population, with many elderly patients having to endure long

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 12

⁷⁷ Ibid. 15

⁷⁸ Partido Comunista Português, “Intervenção nas estradas EN 258 e EN 386” (PCP, 21 February 2023) <https://www.pcp.pt/intervencao-nas-estradas-en-258-en-386> accessed 12 June 2025.

⁷⁹ *Diário do Alentejo*, “Autarca de Barrancos quer equipa médica a funcionar 24 horas que rode por vários concelhos” (22 March 2024) <https://diariodoalentejo.pt/pt/noticias/20090/autarca-de-barrancos-quer-equipa-medica-a-funcionar-24-horas-que-rode-por-varios-concelhos.aspx> accessed 12 June 2025.

⁸⁰ *Sul Informação*, “Barrancos procura, em Portugal e Espanha, alternativas ao centro de saúde local” (12 February 2025) <https://www.sulinformacao.pt/2025/02/barrancos-procura-em-portugal-e-espanha-alternativas-ao-centro-de-saude-local/> accessed 12 June 2025.

journeys for care. One illustrative case is that of D. Remédios, an 80-year-old woman who, “travels three times a week between Barrancos and Beja to undergo dialysis treatment.”⁸¹

Given these circumstances, many Barranquinhos are forced to cross the border in search of care, with the clinics in Encinasola and Aroche in Spain becoming the go-to health services, especially when urgent assistance is needed.

It is no surprise that the interior regions of Portugal - including those across the *Raia* - are among the country's most socioeconomically vulnerable areas. Characterised by being “poorly accessible, isolated and marginal, rural, sparsely populated, ageing and impoverished”⁸², they have been compared to “true human deserts.”⁸³

This is precisely the reality observed in Barrancos. According to CENSOS 2021, the village registered the highest population loss of any Portuguese municipality, with a decrease of over 21%⁸⁴ in just a decade. These are alarming data: with only 1.430 inhabitants, Barrancos is undergoing a profound demographic erosion, which in turn has a direct negative impact on its economy. With a largely elderly population and consequently limited labour force, the village faces serious constraints on local productivity, remaining unattractive to external investment.

Therefore, “the economic base of the village has been progressively tertiarised”⁸⁵, with the municipality itself becoming the main employer. Local elites have also focused on drawing external funding to promote development in areas such as vocational training, rural tourism, and the production of traditional foods like olive oil and pork products. Despite the creation of small-scale industries in meat processing and civil construction, which have offered some economic relief, these efforts have not guaranteed long-term stability.

⁸¹ *Diário de Notícias*, “Remédios tem 80 anos e faz 4 horas de viagem por dia para ir ao tratamento” (24 March 2018) <https://www.dn.pt/arquivo/diario-de-noticias/destaque-beja-remedios-tem-80-anos-e-faz-4-horas-de-viagem-por-dia-para-ir-ao-tratamento-9378603.html> accessed 12 June 2025.

⁸² Carmina Cavaco, “Fronteira Portugal – Espanha e individualidade territorial” (1997) XXXII(63) *Finisterra* 159 <https://revistas.rcaap.pt/finisterra/article/view/1782> accessed 12 June 2025

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ SIC Notícias, “Censos 2021. Barrancos é o concelho do país que perdeu mais população” (29 July 2021) <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2021-07-29-Censos-2021.-Barrancos-e-o-concelho-do-pais-que-perdeu-mais-populacao-a17b93d4> accessed 12 June 2025.

⁸⁵ Ema Pires, ‘«Nós, os Outros»: Sobre Identidade e Alteridade na Fronteira de Portugal’ in *Questões Sociais Contemporâneas: Actas das VIII Jornadas do Departamento de Sociologia* (Universidade de Évora) http://www.cisaas.uevora.pt/download/publicacoes/livro_jornadas_VIII_VersaoFinal.pdf accessed 12 June 2025, 130.

This reality is observed with concern by Miguel Rego: “*Little by little, we are left with the elderly; some returning after 20, 30, or 40 years away. They come back in search of a different land; a richer one.*”⁸⁶ However, when returning, the reality they encounter fails to meet those expectations, and in some cases, the village appears worse than when they left. Rego links this to the “*egocentrism of the urban coastline*”⁸⁷ - the self-centred development of urban coastlines - where major cities become synonymous with opportunity, drawing young people away and leaving peripheral areas like Barrancos behind. Cities such as “*Madrid, Porto, Lisbon or Barcelona*”⁸⁸ are thus seen as the only possible destinations for those who no longer find, in their homeland, any meaningful path to “*prosperity and wealth.*”⁸⁹

Even with its rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes, these features are not enough to guarantee employment diversification or intersectoral mobility. In the absence of meaningful economic alternatives, Barrancos has become as Carmina Cavaco defines, a “*ghost village*”⁹⁰, marked by a persistent cycle of youth exodus, population ageing, and residual agricultural labour, carried mainly by the elderly and women, surviving in a space long forgotten by the state.

The educational sphere is also hostage to this marginalisation. CENSOS 2021 provides no data for Barrancos regarding secondary education, which translates into the absence of secondary schools within the municipality. The education provided is only available from pre-school (around age 3) up to the end of basic education (around age 15). Students are compelled to continue their studies, often traveling to neighbouring municipalities, which further reinforces the town’s peripheral status and its daily dependence on other regions for basic services.

In the face of all this, Luís Capucha poses a pertinent question: “*What happens when the ‘outsiders’ are an entire country?*”⁹¹ Despite the passing of time, Barrancos remains suspended in a kind of temporal marginality. Excluded from the national community, it stands as evidence of a political and institutional failure to invest in a long-term viability.

⁸⁶ Miguel Luís Vieira Rego, “Barrancos, Encinasola, um território de fronteira” (Edições Colibri 2003) 67

⁸⁷ Ibid. 66

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Carmina Cavaco, “Fronteira Portugal – Espanha e individualidade territorial” (1997) XXXII(63) *Finisterra* 159 <https://revistas.rcaap.pt/finisterra/article/view/1782> accessed 12 June 2025.

⁹¹ Luís Capucha, “Barrancos na ribalta, ou a metáfora de um país em mudança” in A C Ribeiro (ed), *Portugal de Perto: Retratos Municipais com Perspectiva Longitudinal* (CIES–ISCTE 2002) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262496657> accessed 12 June 2025. 25

Returning to the earlier reflection on the history of Noudar, it can draw a powerful metaphor for the present. Noudar emerged as a physical and historical symbol of marginality and rootedness, since, beyond its military role, it also served as a refuge for those whom society sought to exclude. Ironically, this same feeling of isolation and abandonment continues to shape the region today. Barrancos now faces the same fundamental challenge that once defined Noudar: the urgent need to settle and sustain its population.

- **Civil War-era dynamics: refugees, silence, and trauma**

From the 1920s onwards, and with greater intensity in the 1930s, Europe was haunted by the spread of authoritarian regimes. Founded on nationalist, conservative, and repressive ideas, these regimes inevitably became internalized and established themselves in the Iberian Peninsula. Studying the Spanish Civil War (1936–1937) thus becomes an important task to understand how this conflict extended beyond Spanish soil, and how it was perceived from the Portuguese side, as “*a unique opportunity to radicalize the Estado Novo.*”⁹²

In addition to its international projection - often considered a catalyst for World War II - the war was felt directly by the populations living along the Portuguese Spanish border. In a setting marked by opposites, “*persecution and support, vengeance and solidarity, justice and injustice*”⁹³, Barrancos emerges as the stage of a complex everyday history.

“*Silenced and omitted from the history of both countries during the Iberian dictatorships*”⁹⁴, this Alentejan village was a place of passage, danger, but also salvation for many republicans fleeing the clutches of Francoism. At a time when the very concept of refugee was still far from being fully defined in the international legal framework, Barrancos proved to be innovative, for even in an improvised way and despite the fear of potential consequences, it was feelings of solidarity that prevailed.

⁹² Rui Serém, “Portugal e a Guerra Civil de Espanha (1936–1939): Uma introdução” (2014) 21(32) *Esboços: histórias em contextos globais* 204 <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2014v21n32p204> accessed 12 June 2025. 205

⁹³ Luís Cunha, ‘A guerra também foi nossa: Memórias raianas da Guerra Civil Espanhola’ (2020) 24(2ª época) *O Pelourinho: Boletim de Relaciones Transfronterizas*. 107.

⁹⁴ Dulce Simões, “Os refugiados republicanos em Portugal e o caso de Barrancos: silêncios da história e lutas pela memória” (2020) *EUROACE: Sanidad y Servicios Sociales*. 12

The year was 1933. On one side, a deeply conservative Spain was emerging. This “*Black Spain*”⁹⁵ was represented by an alliance of cardinals, generals, large landowners, and a “*fascistized*”⁹⁶ nationalist youth. Motivated by the growing social and political demands of different sectors of society, this bloc feared the implementation of these claims into structural changes in the country. Their political project aimed to restore order, grounded in authority, Catholic tradition, and property, in order to halt the spread of this growing progressive threat.

On the other side stood a revolutionary Spain, led by “*increasingly politicized and autonomously organized industrial workers and miners*”⁹⁷, who were divided between socialists and Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. The general discontent with the “*old schemes of rural domination*”⁹⁸ led “*Andalusian or Aragonese peasants*”⁹⁹ to increasingly challenge the previously established powers, seeking agrarian reform and economic dignity. Adding to this discontent, republican bourgeois, liberals, and anticlericals also joined, seeking to build a secular and rationalist state. These tensions revealed a divided Spain, which quickly exploded into war after the failure of the military coup of July 17, 1936, which aimed to overthrow the Popular Front government - “*a centre-left political coalition that came to power through democratic elections.*”¹⁰⁰ Contrary to a traditional coup d'état, the country fell into a military war that lasted for three years, paving the way for the consolidation of Francoism, whose projection led to the endurance of dictatorship for decades in both Spain and Portugal.

But what led Salazar to so actively support the Francoist cause? What were the risks and the gains the Portuguese regime faced by becoming involved in a conflict that was not its own?

The answer lies, fundamentally, in the intersection between political strategies, ideological affinities, and a survival instinct. António de Oliveira Salazar began his position as Minister of Finance in 1928, managing to positively alter the State's budget, which had just come out of a coup d'état. However, as he himself stated: “*I know very well what I want and where I'm going*”¹⁰¹, and his influence

⁹⁵ Manuel Loff, “A memória da Guerra de Espanha em Portugal através da historiografia portuguesa” (2006) 51 *Ler História* 109 <https://journals.openedition.org/lerhistoria/2593> accessed 12 June 2025, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 2

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “Memórias e Testemunhos, 1936”, 2nd edn (Câmara Municipal de Barrancos and Edições Colibri 2007), with contributions by Gentil Valadares and Francisco Espinosa Maestre, 123.

¹⁰¹ António de Oliveira Salazar, “Discurso proferido na sessão de abertura da VIII Legislatura da Assembleia Nacional” (27 April 1928) <https://www.arqnet.pt/portal/discursos/abril01.html> accessed 12 June 2025.

in Portugal was far from over. From the Military Dictatorship, he found fertile ground to establish the Estado Novo: “*a peculiar marriage of nationalist values of integralist and conservative Catholic origin with the radical and fascistizing influences received from the Spanish Civil War and the triumphant rise of fascism and Hitlerism in Europe.*”¹⁰²

In this sense, the foundations of this regime aligned with those of Francisco Franco Bahamonde, and so protecting Francoism in Spain was simultaneously protecting Salazarism in Portugal. According to Miguel Rego, they were “*two totalitarian states clothed in a cacique pride with a common slogan: God, Homeland, Authority.*”¹⁰³

Accordingly, Salazar quickly demonstrated his support for the nationalist force, which manifested in different ways. Firstly, since “*the Portuguese know that their freedom and that of peoples is linked to the fate of the war in Spain*”¹⁰⁴, Portuguese soldiers were sent to Spanish territory to fight for the nationalist cause. Their participation was praised by the Head of State, whose speech after the end of the war was marked by an exacerbated patriotism, associating Franco's victory with a victory of Salazarism itself: “*I am proud that they died well and that all - living and dead - have written, with their bravery, one more heroic page of our History. We have nothing to ask for, nor accounts to settle. We won, that's all!*”¹⁰⁵

Propaganda campaigns during the Civil War also played a key role in the consolidation of both the Estado Novo and Francoism. Salazar 's regime knew how to strategically use the different media outlets to exalt Portugal and how its State ensured the stability of the Iberian Peninsula. As Alberto Pena Rodríguez recalls, the Estado Novo's propaganda claimed that “*the political and economic strength that Salazar had achieved for Portugal before July 1936 made Spain's transformation (...) possible thanks to the Portuguese dictator*”¹⁰⁶, presented as the “*true architect and guarantee of success for the military triumph over the Spanish 'communists'.*”¹⁰⁷ The author also cites the following excerpt from the Diário

¹⁰² Fernando Rosas, “O salazarismo e o homem novo: ensaio sobre o Estado Novo e a questão do totalitarismo” (2001) XXXV(157) *Análise Social* 1031 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41011481> accessed 12 June 2025, 1033.

¹⁰³ Miguel Luís Vieira Rego, “Barrancos, Encinasola, um território de fronteira” (Edições Colibri 2003), 66.

¹⁰⁴ Pedro Sobral de Sousa, “A vizinhança perturbadora: o papel fulcral de Portugal e a correspondência diplomática portuguesa na Guerra Civil Espanhola” (*PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid 2022*), 234.

¹⁰⁵ Rui Serém, “Portugal e a Guerra Civil de Espanha (1936–1939): Uma introdução” (2014) 21(32) *Esboços: Histórias em Contextos Globais* 204 <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2014v21n32p204> accessed 12 June 2025, 216.

¹⁰⁶ Alberto Pena-Rodríguez, “La creación de la imagen del franquismo en el Portugal salazarista” in Manuel Loff and Pedro Aires Oliveira (eds), *Salazar, o Estado Novo e os media* (Coimbra University Press 2022)

157 <https://books.uc.pt/chapter?chapter=72854> accessed 12 June 2025, 190.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

da Manhã, which captures well the inevitable link between the “*military and social successes of Francoism*”¹⁰⁸ and the supposed merits of the Portuguese dictatorship:

*“As Portuguese, let us not forget that if the true and noble Spain was able to rise and move forward, it is due to the existence in this western corner of the Peninsula of a peaceful and firm Portugal, a sure guarantee that the blaze could not spread, a worthy example to follow, capable of encouraging and inspiring. Only thus will we be fair to ourselves, only thus will we show the World, which admires us, that we are grateful to the Chief who leads and commands us, that we are, as a People, truly worthy of such a Chief. Proud of our strength, which offends no one, and of our prestige, cheerfully earned with small but well-compensated sacrifices, we shall be in a better position to praise all those who have stood out through their admirable and heroic efforts in the defense of Civilization.”*¹⁰⁹

Similarly, Franco publicly expressed his appreciation for Portuguese collaboration in the Spanish Civil War:

*“Portugal and Spain are and will be brothers by destiny and by history. Relations between the two must be the best possible, since it also suits Spain that Portugal continues to be strong, progressive and prestigious in order to continue providing us with its moral strength, as it has done until now.”*¹¹⁰

From the “*Army, the Fiscal Guard (GF), the Public Security Police (PSP), the Police of Surveillance and Defense (PVDE), and the Republican Guard*”¹¹¹, a “*web of surveillance and control on the Portuguese border*”¹¹² was created. In this context, the Portuguese-Spanish border becomes an ambiguous space between hospitality and betrayal, shifting between a “*lifeline*”¹¹³ or a “*trap for*

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 189.

¹⁰⁹ “Projecção de Salazar no estrangeiro (1928–1948)” (União Nacional do Porto 1949), cited in Alberto Pena-Rodríguez, “La creación de la imagen del franquismo en el Portugal salazarista” in Manuel Loff and Pedro Aires Oliveira (eds), *Salazar, o Estado Novo e os media* (Coimbra University Press 2022) 157 <https://books.uc.pt/chapter?chapter=72854> accessed 12 June 2025, 192.

¹¹⁰ Pedro Sobral de Sousa, “A vizinhança perturbadora: o papel fulcral de Portugal e a correspondência diplomática portuguesa na Guerra Civil Espanhola” (*PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid 2022*), 276.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 256

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Moisés Cayetano Rosado, “Estragos da guerra. Refugiados espanhóis em Portugal durante a Guerra Civil Espanhola e pós-guerra imediato. Solidariedade e vida na Raia” (2020) 24(2ª época) O Pelourinho: Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas <https://www.euro-ace.eu/pt/documentos/estragos-da-guerra-refugiados-espanhois-em-portugal-durante-guerra-civil-espanhola-e-pos> accessed 12 June 2025, 9.

*immediate handover to the rebel military and the dreaded falangists, who sought them through neighbouring lands, ignoring borders or international refugee treaties.*¹¹⁴ Even knowing that being handed over to Francoist forces was a real possibility, they saw in the neighbouring country a hope of eventually returning to the republican zone or the possibility of exile.¹¹⁵

However, this hope was frequently crushed. The Portuguese regime, in tacit alliance with the Francoist authorities, participated in the detention and forced handover of Republican refugees. This practice openly violated the emerging principles of international humanitarian law. As historiography points out, *“the procedure of the Portuguese authorities forced the Republican government to present a complaint against Portugal to the Non-Intervention Committee in London, denouncing the handover of refugees at the border for summary executions, with the ‘Badajoz massacre’¹¹⁶ being the most publicized case at the time”¹¹⁷*

The violence was such that, in many cases, it constituted public rituals of humiliation and domination. Dulce Simões describes that the so-called *“cleansing operations”¹¹⁸* were based on a methodical process of extermination of men and women connected to the Republican cause, where torture and the rape of women were integrated into a ritual of *“sacrifice”¹¹⁹* and *“purification.”¹²⁰* These were social spectacles, where *“executions were also used as social events attended by local elites as a show”¹²¹*, and it was *“common for women of high social status to bring their young daughters to watch, as if it were a kind of medieval morality play.”¹²²*

With its mountainous terrain and proximity to the country where the conflict unfolded, Barrancos became one of these strategic points, serving as both a place of escape and a source of tension. Those

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “Badajoz massacre” refers to the mass execution of civilians and Republican fighters following the capture of the city by Francoist troops in August 1936, during the Spanish Civil War. See Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “A construção da memória pública dos refugiados da guerra civil espanhola” (2020) 24 *O Pelourinho: Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas* 79 <https://novaresearch.unl.pt/en/publications/7386c4dd-7df5-4534-b756-3dfefda36c2a> accessed 12 June 2025, 87.

¹¹⁷ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “A construção da memória pública dos refugiados da guerra civil espanhola” (2020) 24 *O Pelourinho: Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas* 79 <https://novaresearch.unl.pt/en/publications/7386c4dd-7df5-4534-b756-3dfefda36c2a> accessed 12 June 2025, 87.

¹¹⁸ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “Memórias e Testemunhos, 1936”, 2nd edn (Câmara Municipal de Barrancos and Edições Colibri 2007), with contributions by Gentil Valadares and Francisco Espinosa Maestro, 232.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. 208

¹²² Ibid.

who sought it were motivated, according to Dulce Simões, by various reasons: armed confrontations between rebel and republican forces, the brutal purges carried out by the nationalists, evasion of mandatory enlistment into Franco's ranks, and clandestine entry in search of work and survival, sustained by solidarity and political resistance networks¹²³

It is estimated that between 5.000 and 6.000 republicans crossed into Portuguese territory, with 1.020 from the Barrancos area alone, many eventually concentrating temporarily at the Santa Apolónia pier in Lisbon.¹²⁴

Considering that Portugal was, at the time, a state indifferent and hostile to the plight of those fleeing war, the communal response in Barrancos - given its contrast with this official stance - takes on greater significance. In the article Refugiados em Portugal: fronteira e vigilância no tempo da Guerra Civil de Espanha, it is pointed out how the term “*refuge*”¹²⁵, in the 1823 dictionary of António de Morais Silva, appears as “*a shelter sought by those who flee or are persecuted*”¹²⁶, a definition which, although still devoid of international legal framing, aligned with what occurred on the border with the Spanish Civil War refugees.

The Convention on the International Status of Refugees was formulated at the international level by the League of Nations on 28 October 1933, the same year in which the Estado Novo was institutionalised. Although the convention aimed to address issues such as access to work, assistance, and education, as well as the legal rights of refugees, Portugal appeared to be largely uninterested in developing specific legislation for refugees. The government believed that if refugees had entered the country legally and possessed valid identification documents, they should be treated like any other foreigner.¹²⁷ Rather than creating protection mechanisms, the Estado Novo opted for a policy of exclusion and surveillance, preventing the entry of anyone considered dangerous to internal order: These categories

¹²³ Pedro Sobral de Sousa, “A vizinhança perturbadora: o papel fulcral de Portugal e a correspondência diplomática portuguesa na Guerra Civil Espanhola” (*PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid 2022*), 259.

¹²⁴ Ibid 260

¹²⁵ Fábio Alexandre Faria, “Refugiados em Portugal: fronteira e vigilância no tempo da Guerra Civil de Espanha (1936–1939)” (Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra) https://doi.org/10.14195/0870-4147_48_3 accessed 12 June 2025. 65

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 67

included 'communist refugee', 'undocumented and communist', 'Spanish refugee', 'political fugitive', 'suspected of belonging to the Popular Front', and 'suspected of belonging to communist militias.'¹²⁸

Despite the imposed surveillance, not all responses followed this restrictive order. As a repressive structure took hold, figures emerged who, within the scope of their duties, deviated from this norm in favour of ethical values. Their story is little known and, consequently, little recognized. Their decisions and orders, often marked by feelings of fear, were so humanistic that those they saved, those who had the opportunity to know them, or the few who knew their story, could compare them to a “*Schindler of the Raia.*”¹²⁹

Initially stationed at the fiscal post of Safara, Lieutenant Augusto Seixas became, from August 1936 onward, “*the central figure in border surveillance operations in the Barrancos sector.*”¹³⁰ It was during this same period, between August and the end of October 1936, that “*the population of Barrancos shared daily life with the presence of military forces, quartered in the Primary School building and in Monte da Coitadinha.*”¹³¹ The PVDE improvised a prison in a private house in the village, owned by a young man who had joined the Falange of Encinasola.

Thus, upon arriving in the village, the so-called “*reds*” had distinct fates: luckily, some “*were helped by the local populations*”¹³², while others “*were captured by the GNR and the GF, who sent them back to nationalist Spanish territory, where death by firing squad was certain, or directed them to improvised concentration camps, such as that of Herdade da Coitadinha, near Barrancos, or the one at Russianas.*”¹³³

When faced with the growing influx of Spanish refugees, including men, women, and children, and aware of the deplorable conditions awaiting them, Seixas refused to comply with the order for their immediate handover to the Spanish authorities. He viewed the area of Monte da Coitadinha as an alternative location to move the refugees out of reach of the Francoists. Thus, two improvised camps

¹²⁸ Pedro Sobral de Sousa, “A vizinhança perturbadora: o papel fulcral de Portugal e a correspondência diplomática portuguesa na Guerra Civil Espanhola” (*PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid 2022*), 258.

¹²⁹ RTP Ensina, “Barrancos, terra de refugiados espanhóis” <https://ensina.rtp.pt/artigo/barrancos-terra-de-refugiados-espanhois/> accessed 13 June 2025.

¹³⁰ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “Memórias e Testemunhos, 1936”, 2nd edn (Câmara Municipal de Barrancos and Edições Colibri 2007), with contributions by Gentil Valadares and Francisco Espinosa Maestre, 209.

¹³¹ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “Os refugiados republicanos em Portugal e o caso de Barrancos: silêncios da história e lutas pela memória” (2020) *EUROACE: Sanidad y Servicios Sociales*, 8.

¹³² Pedro Sobral de Sousa, “A vizinhança perturbadora: o papel fulcral de Portugal e a correspondência diplomática portuguesa na Guerra Civil Espanhola” (*PhD thesis, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid 2022*), 267.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

were established, namely: “*Malhada das Queimadas (...) ten kilometers from Barrancos*” and the “*Choça do Sardinheiro, very close to the Russianas post, around the Almofadinha area.*”¹³⁴ As expected, such actions were “*viewed unfavorably by the military, who questioned his authority.*”¹³⁵

His philanthropy did not end there, with some even considering him “*too tolerant.*”¹³⁶ Convinced that “*what they wanted was a ‘bloodbath’*”¹³⁷, the Lieutenant withheld information from higher authorities and manipulated official data to delay PVDE actions. Some of these deliberate efforts at containment are detailed in the book Barrancos na Encruzilhada da Guerra Civil de Espanha: Memórias e Testemunhos, 1936. It is described that “*without informing higher authorities and organizing, out of sight of the government, a kind of refugee concentration camp*”¹³⁸, Seixas was later accused of concealing the existence of the camp, created on September 21, “*based on evasions and incomplete and inaccurate information.*”¹³⁹ He even managed to prevent an officer, who was preparing to expel the refugees from Choça do Sardinheiro, from going through with the plan, “*by making him believe that its existence was already known to the PVDE.*”¹⁴⁰ Only on October 7, “*when he could no longer hide the facts, did he report the presence of 180 Spaniards, when in reality there were many more.*”¹⁴¹

There were blacklists, handed over by the Francoist authorities to the Portuguese, which contained the names of refugees to be captured and returned. According to Gentil de Valadares, son of the Lieutenant, “*none were handed over.*”¹⁴² Furthermore, Gentil recalls his father’s solidarity, stating that “*food from his own home was taken (...) to the refugees and distributed among them.*”¹⁴³ Another episode mentioned took place in the early days of October, when the transport of refugees to Moura was ordered, from where they would be taken on a special train to Lisbon, with their final destination being the port of Tarragona. To avoid public alarm, “*everything was done at night*”¹⁴⁴, and such was the number of people that trucks had to be borrowed from neighbours - one of them driven by Seixas himself. Many heroic actions and decisions were taken by Lieutenant Seixas, but the ones already described are

¹³⁴ Maria Dulce Antunes Simões, “Memórias e Testemunhos, 1936”, 2nd edn (Câmara Municipal de Barrancos and Edições Colibri 2007), with contributions by Gentil Valadares and Francisco Espinosa Maestre, 137.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 132

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid. 138

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 139

sufficient to portray a man who, in the face of repression imposed by his country, showed compassion and courage toward a people who were not his own.

However, the repercussions were eventually felt negatively in both his personal and professional life. This situation worsened when “*a Catalan broadcaster produced a great tribute to Lieutenant Seixas and his sons, thanking them for everything they had done for those people.*”¹⁴⁵ When the broadcast reached Portugal, the episode, which should have been a reason for public recognition, had the opposite effect, as it reinforced the already widespread perception that Seixas was “*just another communist*”¹⁴⁶, contributing to the discrediting of all the humanitarian action he had carried out. Reflecting the political climate of suspicion and repression, “*an investigation into his conduct was opened, and he was sentenced to 60 days in prison at the Forte da Graça, in Elvas*”¹⁴⁷, a decision that ultimately led to his “*compulsory retirement.*”¹⁴⁸

“*As a result of his actions, as commander of the technical border surveillance operations*”¹⁴⁹, Lieutenant Seixas became “*the subject of an inquiry to determine responsibility for the large number of Spanish refugees concentrated along the Portuguese border.*”¹⁵⁰ In November 1936, he was thus formally penalized by direct order of Salazar. Following this decision, the consequences were also felt within the lieutenant’s family circle. His reputation, tainted by political suspicion, had repercussions for his sons, making it difficult for them to access the job market: “*the indirect consequences of Lieutenant Seixas’s ‘case’ also bring to light the difficulties his sons faced when applying for jobs in the public administration.*”¹⁵¹ What saved them were the networks of social ties built over time by Seixas himself, which “*enabled his reintegration into the Fiscal Guard, as well as the placement of both sons in public administration positions.*”¹⁵²

This official repression of Seixas also had lasting effects within the community of Barrancos, which had itself shown acts of humanity toward the refugees, since the very escape of the Republicans was made possible thanks to a dense support network: “*an escape route from hell (...), drawing on ties within a social network that extends beyond the politically conventional limits of each country, (...) which*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 140

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 165

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 166

¹⁵² Ibid. 167

*become activatable at well-defined moments of urgent need.*¹⁵³ The Estado Novo instilled fear in the population not only during the Spanish Civil War but also in the way this conflict is remembered by communities. The silence often chosen by the people of Barrancos does not mean the horrors they witnessed, or even endured, have been forgotten, but rather represents a form of collective survival.

Decades later, in 1994, when a group of female students from a Cultural Heritage course held in Barrancos decided to collect testimonies about the war, the responses they received clearly illustrated the persistence of trauma and institutional intimidation: *“If I speak, will they take away my pension?” “If I tell what I know and the police find out, will they come arrest me?”*¹⁵⁴ or even *“I can’t talk because the sons of many men who were involved are still alive...”*¹⁵⁵ It becomes evident, through the way the people of Barrancos responded to these questions, that even after the end of this conflict, a trauma remains; a secret that cannot be revealed for fear that penalties might still be imposed on those who were involved and are still alive today.

Even so, these stories endure. As Luís Cunha states, *“the other faces of the past - those that the victors’ version of the truth seeks to erase or make forgotten - survive despite efforts to suppress them, resisting in multiple ways, hidden in every home and passed on incessantly to children and grandchildren.”*¹⁵⁶

It is, therefore, crucial to give voice to this silent resistance. The case of Barrancos, which was omitted for decades, must be restored and revitalized, not only to ensure justice through historical reconstruction but also to affirm a collective memory that still lives in the present. By honouring acts of courage that were never formally recognized whether by figures like Lieutenant Seixas or by so many anonymous individuals, the duty of memory is fulfilled, *“in the sense that these memories shape and teach us, hoping that we do our part, that we may help them endure as a sign for the future.”*¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Manuel Loff, “A memória da Guerra de Espanha em Portugal através da historiografia portuguesa” (2006) 51 *Ler História* 109 <https://journals.openedition.org/lerhistoria/2593> accessed 13 June 2025, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 22

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 22

¹⁵⁶ Luís Cunha, “A guerra também foi nossa: Memórias raianas da Guerra Civil Espanhola” (2020) 24(2ª época) *O Pelourinho: Boletín de Relaciones Transfronterizas*. 117.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 2: The Bullfighting Controversy in Barrancos – Identity on Trial

- **Origins of the “*touros de morte*” tradition**

Even before its formalization as an Iberian practice, the image of the bull traversed multiple civilizations—from Ancient Egypt to the fall of the Roman Empire, from Paganism to Christian liturgies—reflecting a symbolic complexity rooted in the transition from the sacred to the profane.¹⁵⁸ The bullfighting culture is therefore not an isolated phenomenon in time or space, but a deeply rooted tradition, whose persistence reinforces its role in identity formation.

It is difficult to determine the exact origin of bullfighting, but there is a general consensus that the “*custom of running bulls (...) is very old, over 500 years old, and has always enjoyed the recognition of princes, councils, and courts.*”¹⁵⁹ Since medieval times, these practices were legitimized not only for their recreational value but also for their central social and political functions. According to Ampudia de Haro, bullfights “*respond to the need to create occasions for the people's entertainment, which fosters loyalty and affection toward their lords and governors.*”¹⁶⁰ They also served as a privileged stage for the nobility to demonstrate their moral and military superiority: “*lancing a bull is an extremely relevant activity for the nobility*”¹⁶¹ as “*through it, the importance of the nobles' social role and their preeminence in the community hierarchy is demonstrated.*”¹⁶²

However, this tradition has long faced resistance, with repeated attempts to regulate or even suppress it. The Church was among the first to try to put an end to these festivities, considering them practices contrary to Christian morality and associating them with “*public disorder, pagan manifestations, or the moral unruliness of the population.*”¹⁶³ To this end, in 1567, Pope Pius V issued the bull *De Salutis Gregis*. In his view, bullfighting “*resembled too closely the beast combats practiced in the past by non-Christian peoples*”¹⁶⁴ and “*instilled sin and wickedness in the hearts of both*

¹⁵⁸ Bruno Machado, “Para cá da Raia, Para lá da Homogeneidade: Barrancos – entre a tradição e o direito à identidade cultural. Pensamento e Imaginação Geográfica” in *Actas do XII Colóquio Ibérico de Geografia* (Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto 2010) 6–9 October, Porto. <https://www.academia.edu/17006582> accessed 14 June 2025.10

¹⁵⁹ Fernando Ampudia de Haro, “O processo civilizacional da tourada: guerreiros, cortesãos, profissionais... e bárbaros?” (Imprensa de História Contemporânea 2019), 58.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 59

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 43

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 55

participants and spectators."¹⁶⁵ As a result, the Pope imposed excommunication on anyone who promoted or took part in bullfights or similar spectacles.¹⁶⁶

Subsequently, and in line with this attempt to enforce Catholic orthodoxy, Pope Gregory XIII issued the bull *Exponi Nobis*. This time, with two notable differences, "*excommunication was applied only to members of the clergy who participated in or attended bullfights*"¹⁶⁷, and it was demanded that "*they not be held during religious holidays and that every precaution be taken to prevent accidents and deaths.*"¹⁶⁸

It is worth noting that, just as the papal bulls were not effectively respected, the case of Barrancos, as will be further analysed, also reflects a resistance to normative hegemony, this time on the part of the Portuguese State. Considering the political context of the late 16th century, it is concluded that "*papal authority lacked the capacity to impose itself on monarchs during a historical moment in which multiple centers of power were in competition.*"¹⁶⁹ The weakness of normative enforcement becomes even clearer when we recognize that "*any norm competed with others emanating from different sources of authority*"¹⁷⁰, revealing "*the precariousness of central power.*"¹⁷¹ In this line of reasoning, despite the Church's attempts to suspend the practice, the persistence of bullfighting proved imperative.

As the treatises of the time indicate, these modalities came to follow specific procedures, tools, and rules, requiring from participants not only physical strength and courage but also technique and skill in confronting the animal.¹⁷²

Currently, according to Lady Selma Albernaz, there are "*spectacles as well as varied and comprehensive forms of ritual events.*"¹⁷³ Among them, the bullfight or *corrida de touros* stands out, held in arenas under official regulation and with the presence of a *corrida* director, where *cavaleiros* or *matadores* confront the bull. In Portugal, it is distinguished by the *forcados*, who symbolically subdue

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 56

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 57

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 55

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid. 76

¹⁷³ Lady Selma Albernaz, "Festa brava portuguesa: pessoas humanas e pessoas animais" (2016) 27(1) *Revista Antropológica* 107 <https://periodicos.ufpe.br/revistas/index.php/revistaantropologicas/article/view/23794> accessed 15 June 2025, 185-187.

the animal, as its public killing is prohibited. The *novilhada*, also held in arenas, features *novilheiros* and practicing *cavaleiros* with three-year-old bulls. The *garraiada* involves amateurs, often students, and allows the public to challenge young bulls and cows at the end of the event. *Largadas* and *esperas* take place in the streets of towns and cities, where bulls are released into enclosed corridors and challenged without traditional instruments, relying on bodily movements and improvised objects.

Special attention should be given, however, to the most controversial modality: the *touros de morte*. Unlike the traditional Portuguese bullfight, which prohibits the public killing of the bull, this modality aligns more closely with the Spanish model, in which the bull is sacrificed in the arena, in front of the public, as the climax of the ritual. Different authors, cited by José Rodrigues dos Santos, share the same fundamental idea: the death of the bull is the necessary and expected outcome of the ritual¹⁷⁴. José Bergamín summarizes this notion, stating that “*the entire bullfight is conducted to prepare for the death of the bull*”¹⁷⁵ and that “*the purpose of the fight, its supreme moment, is the death of the bull by the sword.*”¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Francis Wolff supports this idea by emphasizing that, in the Andalusian bullfighting ritual, the bull “*must die in the arena, that is, in public, after a strictly regulated combat, limited in time and form and directed toward that outcome.*”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, symbolically, death is already inscribed from the moment the bull is selected: “*the bull is indeed condemned to die in the ring, and this fate is sealed long before it enters the arena - perhaps from birth, but especially from the moment it is chosen, in the field, to be part of a bullfight.*”¹⁷⁸

Emotions also play an important role in this practice, sparking curiosity and provoking contradictory feelings in those who observe it. “*The emotions experienced by participants manifest in complex ways*”¹⁷⁹, varying between individuals, moments, and events. These emotions can be unstable and ambivalent in tone, mixing fascination and repulsion, ecstasy and fear, in volatile combinations that unfold at a rapid pace. According to the different key moments of the Andalusian bullfights, it becomes evident how the audience partakes in a “*collective effervescence*”¹⁸⁰ in which the ritual of death becomes

¹⁷⁴ José Rodrigues dos Santos, “A força da emoção: inquérito sobre a eficácia ritual na corrida de touros andaluza” (Universidade de Évora

2017) <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/bitstream/10174/22751/1/Inqu%C3%A9rito%20sobre%20a%20efic%C3%A1cia%20ritual%20na%20corrida%20de%20touro%20andaluza-09-2017.pdf> accessed 15 June 2025. 3

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 11

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 1.

a mirror of the symbolic and affective tensions of a culture that glorifies bravery but also seeks to exorcise fear.

Due to its geographical location and proximity to Spain, Barrancos constitutes an exception in the national bullfighting panorama, distinguishing itself from the other modalities practiced throughout Portuguese territory. In this regard, the village, situated on the Alentejo border and almost surrounded by Andalusia, presents a “*greater permeability in relation to neighbouring Spain*”¹⁸¹, manifested in cultural practices such as bullfighting. Thus, one can witness a Spanish cultural presence in Barrancos that has acquired a unique symbolic density, transcending the “*vicinal character*”¹⁸² of the border and inscribing itself into the local identity practices, as seen in the preservation of bullfights with *touros de morte*, closely resembling the Andalusian model.

From August 28 to 31, this same uniqueness can be experienced. Each morning, between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m., two bulls run through the village streets in a ritual known as the *encierro*, in which the animals are challenged by young people, mostly men, who provoke them until they are led into the *curros*, where they remain until the time of the bullfight. In a wooden structure known as the *tabuados*, “*the enthusiastic crowd gathers*”¹⁸³ to watch the bullfight, which archaeologist Cláudio Torres has proposed for classification as movable heritage by UNESCO.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Bruno Machado, “Para cá da Raia, Para lá da Homogeneidade: Barrancos – entre a tradição e o direito à identidade cultural. Pensamento e Imaginação Geográfica” in *Actas do XII Colóquio Ibérico de Geografia* (Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto 2010) 6–9 October, Porto. <https://www.academia.edu/17006582> accessed 15 June 2025, 11.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ António Firmino da Costa, “Identidades culturais urbanas em época de globalização” (2002) 17(48) *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 15 <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69092002000100003> accessed 15 June 2025, 19.

¹⁸⁴ Paula Godinho, “Media e festas de Barrancos: ciclo festivo, férias e um logro” (Colibri 2000) <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/8037> accessed 17 June 2025, 37.

Luís Capucha outlines the various characteristics that give meaning to the festivity, emphasizing that it is not solely about the bullfight. He begins by highlighting its religious character, symbolically expressed through the procession, which marks the beginning of the fair, as people walk through the village streets in a sacred and festive manner. Beyond “*paying tribute to the devotion to the patron saint*”¹⁸⁵, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, this ceremony intends to draw a dividing line between the norms of daily life—“*of social order, of rules, of work, of family life, of hierarchies*”¹⁸⁶—and those of the festival—“*fun, the suspension of rules that govern the everyday, the inversion of social status.*”¹⁸⁷ It is, therefore, a significant moment, during which the community temporarily suspends routine and prevailing social structures. This symbolic rupture is also inscribed in gendered dynamics. As noted, “*women, who are the great majority among the believers, wear new dresses. Fireworks are launched in front of the procession; behind, the band plays. Further behind, coming and going, are the men—always in smaller numbers.*”¹⁸⁸ This spatial and ritual arrangement reveals how the festive structure itself reproduces, but also subtly challenges, gender norms entrenched in daily life.



Figure 8 - Procession of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, leaving the church in Barrancos. Photo by Bárbara Seara, August 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Luís Capucha, “Barrancos na ribalta, ou a metáfora de um país em mudança” in A C Ribeiro (ed), *Portugal de Perto: Retratos Municipais com Perspectiva Longitudinal* (CIES–ISCTE 2002) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262496657> accessed 1 June 2025, 19.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Luís Capucha, “Barrancos, pura festa” (2003) 16 *Papers d’Antropologia* 95 <https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/handle/10071/14908> accessed 15 June 2025, 96.



Figure 9 - Religious procession led by the local priest, with women walking at the front and along the sides. Photo by Bárbara Seara, August 2011.

The bullfight in Barrancos is set within a context of deep social inequalities, rooted in a dominant latifundium-based model in the region. This was evident in the construction of the *tabuados*, as they were erected by the landowners' wage labourers. In a symbolic gesture of compensation, the seats "*beneath the stands*"¹⁸⁹ were distributed among rural workers and their relatives, who watched the spectacle from there. Even if only momentarily, during the festive days, the everyday hierarchy is suspended, and a "*tumultuous and chaotic*"¹⁹⁰ world is established where "*everyone becomes more equal.*"¹⁹¹

Another aspect is the bullfight as a ritual of symbolic redistribution. Beef was, in the Alentejo, a scarce good, accessible only on exceptional occasions. Thus, the consumption of this luxury good, "*almost a waste of such an important animal*"¹⁹², required a ritual to mark its exceptional and collective nature.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 21

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid. 22



Figure 10 - Sculpture of a bull at the entrance of Barrancos. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.



Figure 11 - Close-up of a bull during the “*tourada de morte*” in Barrancos. Photo by Bárbara Seara, August 2011.



Figure 7 - Praça da Liberdade (Liberty Square) in Barrancos, the central square where local bullfights traditionally take place during the August festivities. The square is framed by the Church. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.



Figure 13 - Praça da Liberdade during the annual August festivities in Barrancos, temporarily transformed into a bullring. Photo by Bárbara Seara, August 2011.

- **Between Law and Tradition: Identity, Legality and Media Pressure**

“No one is capable of ending the bullfights in Barrancos, that belongs to them alone.”; “If one day they tried to end the bullfight, there would be a revolution. The police wouldn’t be enough, only the army.”¹⁹³ (Norberto Franco, 2000)

These two statements are among the comments heard from the inhabitants of Barrancos and nearby localities, illustrating how the bullfighting tradition carries, throughout time, a symbolic and emotional power whose role in identity affirmation is non-negotiable.

During the Estado Novo regime, Salazar, in response to what was happening in Spain, used bullfighting as a tool within his ideological project. While Franco built “*Spanishness*”¹⁹⁴- centered on the death of the bull and the heroic image of the *matador*, in Portugal, Salazar focused on constructing “*Portuguese-ness*”¹⁹⁵, an ideal of national identity marked by “*gentle customs*”¹⁹⁶, symbolic containment of violence, and Catholic morality. In this version of the bullfight, now referred to as the “*Portuguese-style bullfighting*”¹⁹⁷, the bull is not killed in the arena, and the spectacle ends with the *pega* performed by the *forcados*.

This model was legally reinforced by Decree No. 15,355 of April 14, 1928, which expressly prohibited bullfights involving the killing of bulls throughout the national territory, establishing penalties for all those who violated the regulation.

At the time of its implementation, the law encountered opposition from Barrancos. In response to the attempt to impose this uniform model, the village maintained the practice of *touros de morte*. According to testimonies from the time, guards sent by the regime to stop the festivities were disarmed by the population in an act of collective disobedience, revealing the symbolic strength of tradition in

¹⁹³ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 26.

¹⁹⁴ *Rádio Renascença*, ‘Entre afición e atrocidade: as touradas’ (24 November 2021) <https://rr.pt/especial/pais/2021/11/24/entre-aficion-e-atrocidade-as-touradas/261258/> accessed 15 June 2025.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

contrast to state legality. The episode became symbolically marked by the phrase allegedly proclaimed by Salazar: “*Forget Barrancos.*”¹⁹⁸

Barrancos returned to national attention when the bullfighter Manuel dos Santos was prosecuted for killing a bull in Lisbon’s Campo Pequeno. The defense argued that “*there was a land in Portugal - Barrancos - where the death of bulls was not sanctioned.*”¹⁹⁹ The exception, it was claimed, derived from the fact that in Barrancos the bullfights were held “*in an open arena*”²⁰⁰ and that the law only applied to closed arenas.

The 1990s marked a turning point in Barrancos’ trajectory. In 1996, through televised images of *touros de morte* broadcast by a national channel, the village gained “*extraordinary centrality.*”²⁰¹ This same report had a double effect. The people of Barrancos initially received the attention “*with the euphoria of those who saw, at last, their uniqueness recognized and publicized*”²⁰²; yet their continued media exposure would go on to trigger legal proceedings and increased state surveillance, turning this pride into a sense of threat over the continuity of their tradition.

A year later, the Animal Protection Society denounced the practice, invoking the enforcement of the 1928 law.²⁰³ As the situation escalated, a judge in Porto issued a “*precautionary measure to prohibit the bullfights, thereby forcing the national government to act.*”²⁰⁴ The population of Barrancos reacted in a unified manner to the attempts to impose the law, arguing that the State had never shown concern for their problems, “*in roads, schools, infrastructure, jobs*”²⁰⁵, and now only remembered the village to deny them “*their way of celebrating, their traditions, their dignity.*”²⁰⁶ Rejecting any intention of cultural proselytism, they also argued that it was a popular, annual festivity that should not be persecuted, especially when other forms of animal suffering, “*industrial, sporting, domestic, and others*”²⁰⁷, persisted

¹⁹⁸ Bruno Machado, “Para cá da Raia, Para lá da Homogeneidade: Barrancos – entre a tradição e o direito à identidade cultural. Pensamento e Imaginação Geográfica” in *Actas do XII Colóquio Ibérico de Geografia* (Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto 2010) 6–9 October, Porto. <https://www.academia.edu/17006582> accessed 15 June 2025. 12

¹⁹⁹ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000).27

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Bruno Machado, “Para cá da Raia, Para lá da Homogeneidade: Barrancos – entre a tradição e o direito à identidade cultural. Pensamento e Imaginação Geográfica” in *Actas do XII Colóquio Ibérico de Geografia* (Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto 2010) 6–9 October, Porto. <https://www.academia.edu/17006582> accessed 15 June 2025. 12

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Luís Capucha, “Festas de touros” (2013) 24(1) *Revista Antropológicas* 17, 171.

²⁰⁵ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000). 20

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

unchecked. They further stressed the need to update a piece of legislation inherited from a dictatorial regime, advocating instead for a legal framework that respected and recognized “*cases of cultural specificity*.”²⁰⁸

With the issuance of “*new precautionary measures*”²⁰⁹ and even a “*protest at the gates of the village*”²¹⁰, the case of Barrancos quickly became a “*matter of State*.”²¹¹ It sparked divergent views among political parties, as opposition parties criticized the government for failing to enforce the law across the national territory, while others advocated for the creation of a new law to permit the celebration. The growing visibility, though it attracted visitors and, to some extent, benefited the people of Barrancos, also led many locals to wish for a return to their “*previous anonymity*.”²¹² In 2001, a judge from Porto compared Spanish-style bullfights to a “*barbaric amusement unfit for civilized nations*.”²¹³ The mounting criticism eventually escalated to involve Spanish authorities, who, indignant, threatened to “*turn the case into an international diplomatic conflict*.”²¹⁴

Amid this climate of tension, a significant portion of the media, particularly the more sensationalist outlets, “*helped spread throughout the country the image of a village in a permanent state of insurrection, obeying no one and nothing*”²¹⁵, portraying it as “*capable, at any moment, of disturbing public order, resorting to all sorts of measures, including raising the Spanish flag and detaching itself from Portuguese sovereignty*.”²¹⁶ These narratives, often distorted, falsely suggested that the people of Barrancos were deliberately promoting defiance of the law and making an “*apology for Spanish citizenship*.”²¹⁷ In reality, such interpretations are unfounded. As Father Agostinho dos Santos recalled, there does exist a “*Barrancos–Spain umbilical cord*”²¹⁸, rooted in centuries of coexistence, exchange, and cultural sharing. However, to generalize that the population, in response to the controversy, wished to sever ties with Portuguese nationality and align with Spain is clearly an exaggerated construction - a

²⁰⁸ António Firmino da Costa, “Identidades culturais urbanas em época de globalização” (2002) 17(48) *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 15 <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69092002000100003> accessed 15 June 2025, 20.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 21

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2009), 245.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 246

²¹⁸ Ibid. 263

“less ethical”²¹⁹ media strategy that ignored the complexity of Barrancos’ identity and instrumentalized local exceptionalism for political and journalistic gain.

- **The 2002 legal exception: a challenge to national law**

Faced with the growing legal, media, and political tension surrounding the bullfights in Barrancos, the local community saw no other strategy but to mobilize in search of a solution through institutional channels.

Their strategy began that same year with the creation of a petition. Addressed to the political authorities, it was seen as “*the first step toward achieving a regime of exception, in order to preserve the legacy of the ancestors, from the perspective of the people of Barrancos integrated into the national whole that was Portugal.*”²²⁰ Its introductory note, “*later submitted to the Assembly of the Republic*”²²¹ stated the following:

*“The population of Barrancos and other national and foreign citizens, lovers of the Rights, Freedoms, and Guarantees that the People of Barrancos have always enjoyed, and standing in solidarity with their traditions - including the ‘Spanish-style bullfight’ - come to repudiate the persecutory and defamatory actions being carried out by the Sociedade Protectora dos Animais (S.P.A.) and others, appealing to the competent authorities to legalize such customs.”*²²²

On December 16, the exception was put to a vote. Despite all efforts, “*once again, the country turned its back on them: the exception, short by just ten votes, did not pass - all the proposals were rejected.*”²²³

The Municipal Council, far from accepting this outcome, proceeded with a proposal for a local consultation, submitting it to the Municipal Assembly, grounded in the “*specific legislation regarding the process of local identity.*”²²⁴ The Assembly approved the referendum, contrary to the Constitutional

²¹⁹ Ibid. 245

²²⁰ Ibid. 249

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid. 392-393

²²⁴ Ibid. 395

Court, which rejected it, stating that the questions presented “*were not sufficiently explicit and were imprecise.*”²²⁵ This was followed, in April, by the approval of the draft law by the Council of Ministers. However, fines were to be paid, amounts which, even if shared among everyone, would be impossible to cover.²²⁶

As the Portuguese saying goes - *third time's the charm* - the same happened in the case of Barrancos. After failed attempts, a proposal was finally approved at the specialty stage, allowing the Government to later determine the amount of the fines, thus removing them from the original text. The proposal by Deputy António Saleiro foresaw a “*zero fine*”²²⁷, which effectively led to the legal consecration of the exception. Even the Minister, Fernando Gomes, who had previously maintained a strict stance on the uniform application of the law, recognised in May the need to accept Barrancos’ specificity, delegating the decision to Parliament.²²⁸

Nonetheless, the content of this proposal proved legally ambiguous, as it foresaw the publication of a decree-law that would allow the decriminalization of the practice, but without setting a minimum threshold for the fines. The text itself admitted the possibility that Civil Governors could freely decide the amount to be applied, which, in certain cases, “*could foresee a ‘zero fine’.*”²²⁹

Constructed by Fernando Gomes and the Socialist Party (PS), this “*ingenious juridical-political architecture*”²³⁰ aimed to legitimise the exception granted to Barrancos without explicitly declaring it, thereby avoiding direct confrontation with the opposition and with more critical factions within the PS itself. Even so, it was received with considerable confusion by the media, which “*had difficulty in communicating it clearly*”²³¹, at times falling into contradictions. In parliamentary debate, Maria do Céu Sampaio warned that the country “*would cease to have just one Barrancos and would start to have many ‘Barrancos’ scattered throughout the country.*”²³² For the LPDA, this represented a “*setback*” since,

²²⁵ Ibid. 396

²²⁶ Ibid. 398

²²⁷ Ibid. 400

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid. 401

²³⁰ Ibid. 402

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

according to Orlando Soares, the law was not humanitarian, as it allowed “*bulls to be killed across the country*”²³³ and to “*fill the State’s coffers.*”²³⁴

Despite the criticism and political deadlock, “*it was Barrancos that triggered the law that established the exception applied to it.*”²³⁵ On July 31, 2002, Law No. 19/2002 legally marked the end of the conflict surrounding bullfighting in Barrancos. The new legislation allowed the performance of bullfights involving the death of the bull, provided it could be demonstrated that this traditional cultural practice had been maintained “*uninterruptedly for fifty years prior to 2002.*”²³⁶

For the Municipal Council, this outcome was not interpreted in terms of winners or losers, but as the preservation of a legacy: “*there were no winners or losers — cultural identity was preserved, since the controversy was never framed in terms of confrontation and victories or defeats against the State.*”²³⁷

Chapter 3: Law, Tradition, and the Limits of Democracy

- **Urban vs. rural imaginaries and media discourse**

As previously observed, the controversy surrounding Barrancos was not solely about legal or ethical matters. Beyond animal rights, the debate revealed a deeper clash between urban and rural imaginaries, particularly as shaped and amplified by the media. It opened the discussion about who defines what is “*civilized*”²³⁸, “*cultural*”²³⁹, or “*acceptable*”²⁴⁰ in a modern democratic society. For many urban commentators, Barrancos came to symbolize a place “*without culture*”²⁴¹, reduced to “*illegal traditions and cultural backwardness*”²⁴² with calls for the village to “*import rapidly Lisbon’s culture quickly and forcefully.*”²⁴³ But can such representations truly capture the reality and complexity

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Luís Filipe Marques Pereira, “Tauromaquia: Identidade cultural, enquadramento legal e desenvolvimento” (MA dissertation, ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa 2010) <http://hdl.handle.net/10071/5226> accessed 16 June 2025, 48.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 402.

²³⁸ Ibid. 289

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

of a village's cultural identity? Or are these portrayals merely projections of urban prejudice onto communities perceived as peripheral or outdated? These are some of the questions that revolve around this matter and that this chapter seeks to explore.

With the process of globalization, the division between countryside and city has also become more pronounced, one that “*goes well beyond demographic and economic aspects.*”²⁴⁴ What emerges from this phenomenon is the reinforcement of a diffuse sense of abandonment and cultural devaluation felt by rural populations. This process of “*territorial satellitization*”²⁴⁵ has contributed to the consolidation of what Rubén García del Horno, Guillem Rico, and Enrique Hernández, drawing from existing literature, define as “*left-behind places*”²⁴⁶ or “*places that don't matter*’.”²⁴⁷

Until the media attention surrounding the tradition of bullfighting with the death of the bull, Barrancos was practically invisible to the rest of the country. The village, marked by a distinct cultural identity, reflected in its unique Barranquenho language, its gastronomy, its festive calendar that includes, in addition to the August Fair, the Day of Flowers, the Quintos, Christmas, and Carnival, as well as its surrounding natural richness, had never been the subject of significant media coverage. Thus, its sudden visibility did not lead to a positive appreciation of its uniqueness, but rather to a partial and magnifying exposure orchestrated by urban media.

As António Firmino da Costa suggests, “*the case of Barrancos was not so much about a local custom in itself. The local custom was already there. It became a controversial issue when it was featured in a television report, which selected it among many others, highlighted certain aspects, removed it from its usual context of existence, and transported it into realms of public visibility on a scale completely different from its original context of production.*”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ R García del Horno, G Rico and E Hernández, “Do they feel like they don't matter? The rural–urban divide in external political efficacy” (2023) 47(7) *West European Politics* 1447 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2261085> accessed 17 June 2025, 1447.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ulrich-Schad and Duncan (2018, as cited in R García del Horno, G Rico and E Hernández, “Do they feel like they don't matter? The rural–urban divide in external political efficacy” (2023) 47(7) *West European Politics* 1447 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2261085> accessed 17 June 2025, 1448.

²⁴⁷ Rodríguez-Pose (2018, as cited in R García del Horno, G Rico and E Hernández, “Do they feel like they don't matter? The rural–urban divide in external political efficacy” (2023) 47(7) *West European Politics* 1447 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2261085> accessed 17 June 2025, 1448.

²⁴⁸ António Firmino da Costa, “Identidades culturais urbanas em época de globalização” (2002) 17(48) *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 15 <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69092002000100003> accessed 17 June 2025, 20

Paula Godinho offers valuable contributions to this debate. She begins by questioning how the case of Barrancos was strategically instrumentalized, highlighting that August - traditionally marked by a “*news latency phase*”²⁴⁹ turned the village fair into a “*favourite subject for the media.*”²⁵⁰ Held in the final days of the month, the festival emerged “*from the anonymity and quietness of an Alentejan village to occupy newspaper headlines and open television news segments.*”²⁵¹ The author goes on to question whether what we witnessed was not “*a new form of an old struggle*”²⁵², one that sets the “*local*”²⁵³ against the “*translocal.*”²⁵⁴ The arguments of those defending the festival and those defending animal rights are thus split along an old dichotomy: Tradition and Culture, seen as expressions that resist homogenisation; Reason and Civilization, centred on universal values, considered superior for adopting a unified worldview that tends to absorb the particular into the whole.

There is also a symbolic division between urban elites and local communities, which fragments the country into a “*profound country*”²⁵⁵, associated with the interior territories, marked by neglect, and a “*superficial country*”²⁵⁶, represented by urban centres and universal norms. According to this logic, the case of Barrancos reveals a symbiosis between these two worlds. The media attention, along with the public debate it sparked, led this “*profound country*”²⁵⁷ to now confront the centre directly, with the rural demanding recognition of its tradition. Its peripheral cultural practice thus becomes a bridge through which different social actors legitimize discourses around the models of democracy, representation, and the civilisation that we wish to preserve or transform.

This symbiosis, markedly tense, is observed by Paula Godinho, who recalls the words of Cláudio Torres to illustrate the political dimension of the conflict: “*(...) its identity strength, reinforced by this whole stupid campaign, will allow the people of Barrancos to consolidate their cultural resistance against the levelling desires of urban groups who abide only by the models of American political correctness.*”²⁵⁸ He also emphasises that bullfighting in Barrancos is distinct from the traditional known,

²⁴⁹ Paula Godinho, “Media e festas de Barrancos: ciclo festivo, férias e um logro” (Colibri 2005) <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/8037> accessed 17 June 2025, 33.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 34

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 41

which are marked by “*gentlemen on horseback, stiff in ballroom jackets and aristocratic tricorne hats, who savagely provoke and wound the bull for the delight and thrill of an urban audience that seeks blood and emotion.*”²⁵⁹

The practice in Barrancos does not follow the logic of spectacle. It spans four days that stand in stark contrast to the remaining 361 days, which the media chose to highlight without, however, acknowledging the symbolic depth of the festival. It is in August that the village transforms into a space of reunion and belonging. It is the moment, timed to coincide with the return of families living away, to come together again “*under the same roof and at the same table.*”²⁶⁰ It is also a time of friendship and conviviality, where men gather and share “*uma copa e uma tapa*”²⁶¹, and women lay out their finest tablecloths on the windowsills in a gesture of devotion to the village’s patron saint, who is carried through the streets in a collective effort during the procession. In these final days of the month, the “*Quintos*”²⁶² - “*a group of young men called up for military service in the same year and who often left the village at the same time*”²⁶³ - also reunite, restoring bonds and reviving old memories that, at times, had been broken “*by the dispersal caused by migration.*”²⁶⁴

The people of Barrancos were forced to “*argue and counter-argue*”²⁶⁵ the meaning of their festivity. What had been lived naturally within the community became the object of public justification. The “*Barrancos festival was over-semantised*”²⁶⁶, imbued with meanings that clashed with the consensual values of “*modern nations*”²⁶⁷. Much like smuggling in the past, the Barrancos festival came to be interpreted through a legalist and homogenising lens that failed to recognise the local logic of survival and solidarity. As Godinho recalls, “*the smuggler was not seen as someone committing a crime, but rather as a neighbour managing to make a living.*”²⁶⁸ Yet in the eyes of the central authorities, or of those who choose not to see, there was no attempt to understand the specificity of this practice. To the State, the smuggler was nothing more than a criminal; it did not see them as someone who was responding

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 41

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 46

²⁶¹ Ibid. “*Uma copa e uma tapa*” refers to a typical Spanish social custom, in which a *copa* (a small alcoholic drink, such as wine or beer) is served alongside a *tapa* (a small snack or appetizer).

²⁶² Ibid. 47

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 45

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 44

²⁶⁷ Ibid. 45

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

to “a precarious family economy, with agricultural labour crises stemming from a landholding system that aimed not at employment but at the profit of landowners.”²⁶⁹

If we return to the questions raised at the beginning of this subchapter, we can draw some relevant conclusions. In Portugal, there is still a tendency for the centre to define what is modern, acceptable, and civilized, often overlooking the lived experiences of those outside urban centres. It is important to make clear that this is not about questioning the importance of the media, as they are fundamental to democratic functioning. It is particularly noteworthy, and deeply ironic, that in the case of Barrancos, the very media expected to uphold principles of transparency, rigor, and openness have instead contributed to a distorted narrative.

What is truly at stake is not a simple choice between animal rights and the defence of a tradition, as if it were a linear moral dilemma. Instead, it is about recognizing that in a pluralist democracy, such debates are both fundamental and necessary, but always with the understanding that they involve complex issues, which cannot be resolved immediately and for which consensus, if achievable, requires time, listening, and commitment.

As João Manuel Silva writes, “authoritarianism, coupled with a sense of cultural and civilizational superiority on the part of an elite that simply ignores and looks down upon the ‘interior’ or what is considered ‘popular,’ can only end in conflict and rebellion.”²⁷⁰ Before classifying certain practices as symbols of backwardness, we should, at the very least, follow the democratic principle of recognition: “to meet with these people, hear their reasons, and try to understand why they attach such meaning to bullfighting.”²⁷¹ As the same author rightly concludes, “that could be the task of our parliamentarians, many of whom are elected by constituencies they do not even know.”²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ João Manuel Silva SJ, “Civilização, Autoritarismo e Democracia” (Ponto SJ, 29 November 2018) <https://pontosj.pt/opiniao/civilizacao-autoritarismo-e-democracia/> accessed 17 June 2025

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

- **Cultural rights vs. animal rights: ethical paradoxes**

As expected, bullfighting, by directly involving animals, particularly the bull, has become a matter of concern for animal protection associations. It is in this context that the Feira de Barrancos acquires a new meaning: it becomes the stage where cultural rights, which defend the preservation of traditional bullfighting involving the killing of the bull, clash with animal rights, which demand the protection of sentient beings from suffering. This confrontation reveals a paradox that is both ethical and legal, compelling a rethinking of the relationship between humans and animals in the construction of contemporary democratic and cultural values.

It is at the international level that the first steps are taken toward the recognition that animals are also subjects of rights. In 1977, in London, the first formal discussions on this issue took place, culminating the following year in the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights in 1978. With the approval of both UNESCO and the United Nations, this declaration was signed by Portugal. Among its articles, several stand out for their direct implications for bullfighting practices:

Article 2:

- a) *“Every animal has the right to respect.”*
- b) *“Man, as an animal species, shall not arrogate to himself the right to exterminate other animals or to exploit them in violation of this right. He has the duty to put his knowledge to the service of animals.”*

Article 10:

“No animal shall be exploited for the amusement of man. Exhibitions of animals and shows using animals are incompatible with the dignity of the animal.”

Despite the existence of these international legal mechanisms for the recognition of animal rights, their implementation does not always lead to concrete outcomes. As such, an atmosphere of tension and exceptions exists, especially when discussing well-established cultural practices. It is within this very context that Barrancos serves as a case study for the conflict between these two realities. The killing of the bull is an integral part of the Feira de Agosto, and this practice has been contested multiple times, as it defies national legislation that prohibits the killing of animals in bullfighting shows. The opposition of the people of Barrancos to claim a tradition that is deeply tied to their identity and local heritage led to

the creation of a legal exception in 2002, allowing bullfighting with the killing of the bull exclusively in this locality. This decision by the Portuguese State highlights a central dilemma: to what extent can, or should, the universal rights of animals be relativized in the name of preserving specific cultural practices?

The exception granted to Barrancos does not stem merely from a legislative concession. It is, above all, the result of broad and determined collective mobilization, which finds precedent in various moments of the town's history: from smuggling as a means of subsistence, to the sheltering of refugees during the Spanish Civil War, and the struggle for the recognition of the Barranquenho language. In this context, the inhabitants of Barrancos mobilized a set of strategies and arguments that deserve attention. One of the most frequently cited relates to the geographical isolation to which the town has always been subjected, not only due to the natural characteristics of the territory, but above all because of its political and symbolic distance from national decision-making centres. Added to this is the constant contact with the other side of the border, where bullfighting practices involving the death of the bull are legally accepted, a factor that has reinforced the continuity of this tradition and is often invoked to justify its cultural singularity.

Bullfighting in Barrancos, unlike in other Portuguese contexts, is not perceived as a mere spectacle of entertainment and profit. It is deeply rooted in symbolic values: it represents a moment of gathering and social cohesion, where generations, social classes, and memories intertwine. It is a space of belonging, of identity reinforcement, and of historical continuity. For this reason, its elimination would be, for many people in Barrancos, equivalent to losing an essential part of their collective identity. The Feira goes far beyond the act of bullfighting itself; it involves preparations, rituals, networks of affection, and ways of being that sustain community life. It is therefore not surprising that attempts to prohibit it have generated a strong response, marked by resistance and an active effort of cultural and political defense.

The defense of bullfighting as a form of local cultural identity is also reflected in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, which, in Article 78, paragraph 1, states that “*everyone has the right to enjoy and create culture, as well as the duty to preserve, defend and valorize cultural heritage.*”²⁷³ Additionally, Article 73, paragraph 3, affirms that it is the State's responsibility to “*promote the*

²⁷³ Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, art 78(1).

*democratization of culture*²⁷⁴ in “*collaboration with the media, cultural associations, collectives, and other cultural agents.*”²⁷⁵ Even though bullfighting is not, in itself, explicitly protected by these articles, many people in Barrancos can interpret this constitutional framework as a reinforcement of their collective right to preserve and experience a cultural expression they consider deeply rooted. It is based on this understanding that they justify the exception, claiming that their tradition deserves recognition and space within the democratic debate.

In parallel, just as the people of Barrancos present their arguments in defense of their cultural rights, animal rights advocates present their own. The bull is now recognized, both by science and by international legal instruments, as a sentient being, that is, a being endowed with consciousness, capable of experiencing pain, fear, and suffering. The recognition of animal welfare, and the ethical obligations that stem from it regarding how human beings should relate to animals, must also be taken into account, even in the context of cultural practices.

However, if we look at the European context, we can see that even at the supranational level, this ethical progress is complex and, at times, contradictory. Regulation (EC) No. 1099/2009, which sets the rules on the protection of animals at the time of killing, acknowledges in its recital (15) the need to respect the legislative, administrative, and customary provisions of Member States, including those related to religious rites, cultural traditions, and regional heritage. Based on this, the regulation allows certain cultural events to be excluded from its application whenever compliance with animal welfare rules “*would adversely affect the very nature of the event.*”²⁷⁶ This idea is reinforced in recital (16), which highlights the importance of cultural traditions as inherited practices that contribute to social cohesion²⁷⁷. In this light, bullfighting in Barrancos may, within the context of this regulation, constitute an exception.

But how can we draw the line that separates a legitimate cultural tradition from a practice that ought to be ethically questioned? This is a question that divides public opinion in the debate over the legitimacy of bullfighting as a tradition. As an example, a large-scale survey, titled An Evaluation of Portuguese Societal Opinion towards the Practice of Bullfighting conducted in 2020 gathered the opinion of 8.248

²⁷⁴ Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, art 73(3).

²⁷⁵ Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, art 73(3).

²⁷⁶ Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, OJ L303/1, recital 15.

²⁷⁷ Reg 1099/2009, recital 16.

participants. The study showed that “most respondents had a negative opinion about bullfighting”²⁷⁸ and that they “perceived that bullfighting had no positive impact on the country.”²⁷⁹, this is common among women, with high education levels and living in urban areas. The expression of support for its continuation, was mainly concentrated among “men, >65 years old, of Roman Catholic faith, of low- or high-income levels, and from more rural areas.”²⁸⁰ It can be concluded that support for this practice has been declining, marked by significant generational, geographical, and cultural divisions.

The opinions analyzed have as their antecedent some of the ideals promoted by animalist organizations, which were especially consolidated following the controversy in Barrancos. In addition to the already mentioned Sociedade Protetora dos Animais (1875) and the Liga Portuguesa dos Direitos do Animal (1981), the political party Pessoas–Animais–Natureza (PAN) stands out. Founded in 2009 and with parliamentary representation since 2015, over the years PAN has launched several initiatives related to bullfighting. The most recent, in 2025, includes the proposal of a national referendum on the end of bullfighting, defending that “public support for tauromachic spectacles in the country should be redirected towards the creation of a National Animal Health Service.”²⁸¹ It can be said that bullfighting, which has fuelled public debate, has also contributed to the emergence of fundamental entities in a democracy, as well as the entrance of new political actors.

Nevertheless, despite these findings, it is important to examine the concept of animal welfare and to recognize that it is not universal; it is shaped by cultural frameworks. In the article Rethinking Animal Welfare in a Globalised World: Cultural Perspectives, Challenges, and Future Directions, the authors state that “beliefs about what the needs of a species, or an individual, entail and what constitutes good practice can vary greatly.”²⁸² Thus, since this concept is culturally constructed, “An understanding of different cultural perspectives is especially pertinent for researchers and animal advocates concerned

²⁷⁸ Francisco Javier Diéguez (eds), “An Evaluation of Portuguese Societal Opinion, towards the Practice of Bullfighting” (2020) 10(11) *Animals* 2065 <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/11/2065> accessed 20 June 2025, 1.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 13

²⁸¹ PAN, “PAN insiste na proposta de um referendo nacional sobre o fim das touradas” *SIC Notícias* (13 May 2025) <https://sicnoticias.pt/especiais/eleicoes-legislativas/2025-05-13-video-pan-insiste-na-proposta-de-um-referendo-nacional-sobre-o-fim-das-touradas-5daf2bea> accessed 20 June 2025.

²⁸² Sarah Oxley Heaney (eds), “Rethinking Animal Welfare in a Globalised World: Cultural Perspectives, Challenges, and Future Directions” (2025) 15(6) *Animals* 891 <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/15/6/891> accessed 20 June 2025, 1.

with the welfare of animals situated in touristic, foreign (relative to the researcher), or culturally diverse contexts.”²⁸³

Continuing along this line of thought and drawing on different real-world contexts where this tension arises, the authors highlight how uniform models, in a globalized era, must be revisited. The “*one-size-fits-all*”²⁸⁴ approach can only be effective if it is culturally sensitive and built upon genuinely negotiated policies that work side by side with local communities and partnerships: “*Effective governance and policy frameworks when renegotiating a one-size-fits-all approach are shown as being crucial for advancing animal welfare.*”²⁸⁵

In sum, the case of Barrancos prompts us to rethink what we understand as cultural rights and animal rights, while also encouraging us to move beyond simplistic dichotomies between tradition and progress. It is undeniable that the growing international debates around animal welfare and sentience lead to a critical analysis of practices that cause harm to these beings, even when those practices are carried out in the name of cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, any future decision regarding bullfighting in Barrancos - whether it be maintenance, transition, or eradication - must be carefully and deliberately considered. In this Alentejan village, it is worth asking: if this tradition were ever abolished, what would happen in the month of August? What new forms of celebration, belonging, and community gathering could replace the Feira as it is lived today? How would a population that, to a large extent, still supports the practice, including many young people who see it as a marker of identity, feel in its absence?

Thinking about the future of Barrancos therefore requires commitment. A commitment to the people, to the connection they have with their land, so that it becomes possible, through democratic means, to build a shared vision that respects both the rights of animals and the life of this community.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 3

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 4: Language and Identity

- **The Barranquenho: Origin and Linguistic Identity**

*“The people of Barrancos are neither Portuguese nor Spanish. They are a mixture”; “The Barranquenhos are Portuguese in the morning and Spanish at night”*²⁸⁶ (Norberto Franco, 2000)

Since the 12th century, Castilian has been considered a prestigious language. As Azevedo Maia explains, “with the definitive union of the kingdoms of Castile and León [in 1230], and with the expansion of Castilian, which had long been a prestigious language in the Leonese kingdom, a gradual Castilianisation took place.”²⁸⁷ The centrality of Castilian was consolidated over time, accompanying the political, economic, and military growth of Castile. In the specific context of the Iberian Peninsula, and particularly in the relationship between Portugal and Spain, it is relevant to recall that Portugal was under Spanish rule between 1580 and 1640, a period that coincided with the decline of its colonial influence. Although Spain also later experienced this decline, it was slower, sustained by its larger size and political power. As Clements, Amaral, and Luís affirm, “the prestige of a language usually follows social, economic, and military power”²⁸⁸, which made Castilian the most prestigious language on the peninsula, and gradually, the dominant national language.

As already noted, the location of Barrancos, situated in the former territory of Noudar and near the Spanish border, had a direct impact on its population composition and, consequently, on the village’s linguistic configuration. Castilian influence was particularly strong: “In the late 17th century (1674–1704), 20% of the population was Spanish. Data from 1877–1894 reveal that one third of the population of Barrancos was Spanish and, of the remaining two-thirds, 80% was of Spanish ancestry.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 22.

²⁸⁷ Azevedo Maia (2001) 2, cited in J Clancy Clements, Patricia Amaral and Ana R Luís, “Spanish in Contact with Portuguese: The Case of Barranquenho” in Manuel Díaz-Campos (ed), *The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011) 395 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393446.ch19> accessed 18 June 2025, 398.

²⁸⁸ J Clancy Clements, Patricia Amaral and Ana R Luís, “Spanish in Contact with Portuguese: The Case of Barranquenho” in Manuel Díaz-Campos (ed), *The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011) 395 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393446.ch19> accessed 18 June 2025, 399.

²⁸⁹ María Victoria Navas, “El barranqueño: una variedad lingüística de frontera” (2008) 4 *Estudos Linguísticos/Linguistic Studies* 535 <https://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/EL/article/view/2705> accessed 18 June 2025, 256.

Only with the passage of time and “*through political influence at the local level*”²⁹⁰ did linguistic supremacy begin to be attributed to Portuguese. Nevertheless, the Barranquenhos maintained “*deep ties with friends, relatives, the language, and the culture of Spain.*”²⁹¹ Although Portuguese became the language of instruction and the church, “*Barranquenhos have also developed a separate, unique identity*”²⁹², and for that reason, they continue to maintain three active linguistic varieties: “*Barranquenho, their local variety; Spanish, the variety that historically they have ties with; and Portuguese, the language of the nation in which they live.*”²⁹³

Barranquenho, a “*minority variety*”²⁹⁴, has existed since at least the early 19th century²⁹⁵, possibly earlier. It is situated between the Alentejan variety of Portuguese and the Extremaduran and Andalusian dialects of Castilian, being considered a “*southern peninsular dialect.*”²⁹⁶ Even though it shows affinities with the central-southern dialects of inland Portuguese, it also presents “*highly archaic traits and clear marks of Spanish influence*”²⁹⁷, features that are explained by the “*region’s geographic and historical specificity*”²⁹⁸, that is, its remoteness and the continued presence of Spanish occupation.

According to Clara Ramos, isolation was decisive for the preservation of the dialect. The author explains that transport links were deficient in all directions, especially toward inland Portugal, and that the connection to Moura (50 km away) and other Portuguese towns only occurred more recently. In contrast, social and cultural interactions with Spain, located just 9 km away, remained very active. This explains the strong presence of Spanish cultural elements, such as “*bullfights to the death, Andalusian folklore, pilgrimages, and Christmas festivities with Spanish songs.*”²⁹⁹ As the author states, “*isolation*

²⁹⁰ J Clancy Clements, Patricia Amaral and Ana R Luís, “Spanish in Contact with Portuguese: The Case of Barranquenho” in Manuel Díaz-Campos (ed), *The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011)

395 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393446.ch19> accessed 18 June 2025, 400.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Diogo Correia V M, “O barranquenho: urgência de uma política linguística?” (2019) 36 *Revista de Filologia Românica* 169, 170 <https://doi.org/10.5209/RFRM.63511> accessed 18 June 2025, 170.

²⁹⁵ J Clancy Clements, Patricia Amaral and Ana R Luís, “Spanish in Contact with Portuguese: The Case of Barranquenho” in Manuel Díaz-Campos (ed), *The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011)

395 <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393446.ch19> accessed 18 June 2025, 395.

²⁹⁶ Clara Araújo Barros, “Maria Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez. *El barranquenho. Un modelo de lenguas en contacto.* Madrid: Editorial Complutense. 2011. 319 pp, ISBN: 978-84-9938-099-5” (2013) *Estudios Lingüísticos/Linguistic Studies* <https://ojs.lettras.up.pt/index.php/EL/article/view/2705> accessed 18 June 2025, 256.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 257

*favoured the conservation of archaic traits, and the great proximity to Spanish*³⁰⁰ further reinforced the hybrid characteristics of Barranquenho.

This proximity, however, must be understood not only in geographic terms, but also in historical and demographic ones. As Norberto Franco emphasizes, the connection with the neighbouring country's language is not due merely *“to the fact that Barrancos is located three or four hundred meters from the border”*³⁰¹, but rather because the people of Barrancos *“mostly originated in the neighbouring country”*³⁰². The border line, when officially defined, created *“a kind of no man's land, with consequent fluidity reflected in population mobility and economic activities.”*³⁰³

To address the Barranquenho, it is essential to mention the figure of Leite de Vasconcelos. In 1955, the Portuguese linguist dedicated himself to studying the speech that distinguishes the village located in the Alentejo region, publishing the book Filologia Barranquenha: Apontamentos para o seu estudo. As one of the *“distinctive features of this land”*³⁰⁴, the Barranquenhos, at least in oral terms, master three languages — Portuguese, Barranquenho, and Castilian — making them trilingual. In terms of writing, however, this may vary, as it depends on the *“level of education and literacy of each individual.”*³⁰⁵

More generally, Vasconcelos observed that, during the 19th century, professions such as doctor, veterinarian, teacher, and doctors in Barrancos were performed exclusively by Spaniards. In addition, *“many others were barbers, shoemakers, carpenters, and merchants”*³⁰⁶. The pattern that emerges from this historical and sociolinguistic analysis is that, from an early stage, Spanish held greater prestige than Portuguese in the region.

Nevertheless, speakers switch codes depending on the origin of the interlocutor, a linguistic practice that, according to him, is strongly associated with the Barranquenho identity. As the author notes, this distinct cultural identity is also reflected in their moral stance and attitude toward outsiders: *“From*

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 30.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 29

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ J Clancy Clements, Patricia Amaral and Ana R Luís, “Spanish in Contact with Portuguese: The Case of Barranquenho” in Manuel Díaz-Campos (ed), *The Handbook of Hispanic Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011)

³⁹⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393446.ch19> accessed 18 June 2025, 400.

Barrancos' geographical situation, due to the mixing of the village's inhabitants and the language they speak, they have acquired a certain character of traditional moral independence. When a villager from another (Portuguese) town such as Moura, Beja, etc. arrives (in Barrancos), the Barranquenhos say: 'He's Portuguese, there comes a Portuguese,' as if they were not Portuguese! But they also say about someone coming from Spain, 'there comes a Spaniard!'"³⁰⁷

This symbolic and practical connection to Spain is reinforced through culture, for instance, in various festivities, “*poetry and songs*”³⁰⁸ and “*ironic situations, anecdotes, tales, proverbs, and riddles*”³⁰⁹ are often expressed in Spanish.

Despite this blending with Spanish, visible across multiple dimensions of daily life, both culturally and linguistically, the Barranquenhos have never renounced their nationality. As illustrated by a community member, cited by Cristina Bastos: “*Barrancos is part of Portugal. It is wrong, it is a mistake to think that we are not; we are Portuguese. However, we live right on the edge of Spain, and its language and traditions influence our ways: but... we are Portuguese.*”³¹⁰

- **From Local Efforts to National Recognition**

It is wrong to fall into the belief that Portugal is a country with only one language: Portuguese. Despite the “*persistence of the myth of monolingualism in Portuguese society*”³¹¹, there has been growing interest and concern among researchers in the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity in the country. In addition to the official language, Portuguese Sign Language (LGP), Mirandese, and Barranquenho are officially recognized and protected languages.

This growing awareness aligns with an international focus on recognizing linguistic diversity as a fundamental human right. For instance, the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992) is a legally binding instrument that calls upon its Member States to affirm “*the cultural value and*

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Norberto Franco, “O Porquê de Barrancos: a cultura, a história, os touros, o direito” (Município de Barrancos 2000), 30.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid. 25

³¹¹ Samuel Figueira-Cardoso, Weronika Grzegorzczuk and Maria João Marçalo, “Línguas e direitos linguísticos em Portugal: um panorama da legislação vigente” (2023)

2(64) *Confluência* 163 <https://www.revistaconfluencia.org.br/rc/article/view/1434> accessed 18 June 2025, 11.

necessity of protecting and promoting regional and minority languages as inalienable elements of the identity of communities.”³¹² Similarly, the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*, initiated by International PEN and signed in Barcelona in 1996, outlines the contemporary factors that threaten the survival of minority languages. Among these are: (1) the age-old tendency of nation-states to promote cultural and linguistic homogenization in the name of a false sense of national cohesion; (2) the expansion of a globalized economy and a worldwide market of information, communication, and culture, which disrupts the internal bonds and forms of sociability that sustain linguistic communities; and (3) an economicist development model driven by competitive individualism and deregulation, which exacerbates economic, social, cultural, and linguistic inequalities.³¹³ In response, the Declaration affirms that “*all languages are expressions of collective identities and must be given the conditions necessary for their development in all domains.*”³¹⁴

In the case of Barranquenho, the process of recognition can be said to have been slow. Even if only at a local level, the Municipal Council of Barrancos has been making efforts through different initiatives and projects to protect and promote Barranquenho. For better understanding, a chronological map will be created with the respective dates.

Firstly, in 1999, the Grupo de Estudo do Barranquenho (G.E.B) was established for “*the creation of a grammar easily usable by any audience and which also serves as an aid for the teaching of Barranquenho.*”³¹⁵

Then, in 2002, the Mubimêntu du Pobu Barranquenu di Barrancû (MPB) was created “*so that this cultural legacy, which is the Barranquenho language, is not lost forever.*”³¹⁶ Later, in 2005, the project Estudo do Barranquenho began with the collaboration of the Social-Cultural Action Division of the Municipality of Barrancos and specialists.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ UNESCO, “Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights” (1996) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000104267> accessed 19 June 2025, 3.

³¹⁴ Samuel Figueira-Cardoso, Weronika Grzegorzczuk and Maria João Marçalo, “Línguas e direitos linguísticos em Portugal: um panorama da legislação vigente” (2023) 2(64) *Confluência* 163 <https://www.revistaconfluencia.org.br/rc/article/view/1434> accessed 18 June 2025. 11

³¹⁵ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez, “El barranqueño, lengua amenazada y minoritaria” in Lurdes de Castro Moutinho et al (eds), *Estudos em variação linguística nas línguas românicas* (UA Editora 2019) https://ria.ua.pt/handle/10773/26311?locale=pt_PT accessed 19 June 2025, 87.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 88

Three years later, on June 24, the Municipal Council made a symbolic and strategic decision by recognizing Barranquenho as “*Intangible Cultural Heritage of Municipal Interest*.”³¹⁷ This act is part of a line of cultural policies aimed at valuing local identity and reinforcing community self-esteem, while also seeking to raise awareness among residents about “*the preservation of their oral tradition*.”³¹⁸ This initiative resulted from the “*Jornadas de Falaes Fronteiriços*”³¹⁹, held on February 22, 2008, at the University of Évora, whose program “*focused precisely on Barranquenho*”³²⁰ and counted with the participation of the speakers themselves. As a result of this meeting, a protocol was signed between the University of Évora, the Linguistics Center of the University of Lisbon, and the Municipal Council, giving rise to the project “*Património Linguístico na Raia (Alentejo and Extremadura)*”³²¹

As a result of this classification, different projects followed that marked a new boost in the policy of valuing this language. In 2009, within the framework of the Alentejo Operational Program 2007–2013, the digital volume *Do saber ao contar* was published, “*gathering information and documents related to topics such as smuggling, tales, legends, traditional trades, or aromatic and medicinal plants*.”³²² At the same time, the Municipal Council applied, in coordination with higher education institutions, to a regional funding program with the project *Preservação e Valorização do Barranquenho – Um caminho para a sustentabilidade local*, which aimed to “*study and safeguard one of the greatest riches of the Barranquenho community*”³²³, although it was ultimately not implemented.

Even with some initial setbacks, such as the rejection of the project *Conservação e Valorização do Património Rural* as a candidate for the PRODER program in 2011, the work did not cease. As part of this effort in 2013, the I Seminário Internacional História e Língua: Interfaces was held at the University of Évora, an event that “*once again focused on the case of Barranquenho*.” In December 2016, a proposal was made to the Municipal Council of Barrancos for the joint organization of a congress dedicated to the promotion of local intangible heritage. This proposal materialized in the holding, on June 2, 2017, of the *Congresso Internacional O Barranquenho: ponte entre línguas e culturas. Passado*,

³¹⁷ Ibid. 89

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez and Maria Filomena Gonçalves, “Caracterização e problemas atuais do barranquenho: contribuições para uma política de revitalização” (2020) *12 Estudos de Lingüística Galega* 179 <https://doi.org/10.15304/elg.12.6040> accessed 19 June 2025, 190.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid. 191

³²³ Ibid.

presente e futuro, considered a historic milestone for being “*the first time in history, in general, and particularly in that of this community*”³²⁴ that internationally renowned researchers in the areas of mixed, contact, and endangered languages gathered in Barrancos.

Among the conclusions of the congress, the following stood out: “*the urgency of recording the language, under penalty of the oldest generations of speakers disappearing and the intergenerational links being broken*”³²⁵, with the proposal to create a “*local archive*”³²⁶ of linguistic and cultural memory. Also discussed was “*the need for Barranquenho to undergo a normalization and codification process (orthography, grammar, and dictionary)*”³²⁷ and to implement “*a coordinated plan of linguistic and heritage policy among various entities.*”³²⁸

These actions fall under what is known as “*prestige planning*”³²⁹, defined as a set of measures aimed at “*developing positive attitudes (linguistic awareness, self-esteem) around the mother tongue.*”³³⁰ In fact, it became evident that many speakers “*very often hid*”³³¹ the use of Barranquenho, attributing to it “*an inferior status*”³³² compared to Portuguese. However, the realization of the congress brought to light a shared perception that “*this language deserves to be spoken, preserved, and recognized.*”³³³

As a symbolic gesture of public appreciation, in May 2018, the company Delta Cafés promoted the printing of phrases in Barranquenho on their sugar packets, distributed in the districts of Beja and Évora, an initiative that gave greater visibility to the language in regional daily life.³³⁴

According to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, “*intangible heritage encompasses the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and*

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid. 192

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid. 193

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ María Victoria Navas, Maria Filomena Gonçalves and Filipe Themudo Barata, “Notícia sobre o Barranquenho, língua ameaçada: processos de formalização e preservação” (2021) 43 *Estudis Romànics* 341 <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/29253> accessed 19 June 2025, 349.

skills (...) that communities (...) recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”³³⁵ In this line, preserving Barranquenho means recognizing its function as an “*ancestral practice and cultural tradition*”³³⁶, being a direct reflection of a “*political situation related to the equality of rights of the citizens of the Portuguese Republic.*”³³⁷

Therefore, in 2020 the *Programa de Preservação e Valorização do Património Cultural Barranquenho* was signed, with funding of around 50.000 euros from the Municipal Council, to be carried out between 2020 and 2022. Among the planned activities are: “*documenting (linguistically and culturally) Barranquenho*”³³⁸, “*creating an archive of linguistic and cultural memory*”³³⁹, “*developing a web portal*”³⁴⁰, and “*introducing Barranquenho in schools*”³⁴¹, in addition to drafting an orthographic convention, a grammar, and a trilingual dictionary (Barranquenho–Portuguese–Spanish). These actions are part of a “*safeguarding strategy for the language and culture as inseparable facts*”³⁴², with the goal of fostering within the community “*an awareness of defending what is theirs*”³⁴³, and simultaneously, “*the formalization of Barranquenho as National Intangible Heritage and, later, as Intangible Heritage of Humanity.*”³⁴⁴

At the parliamentary level, the role of two political parties stands out - the Portuguese Communist Party and the Socialist Party, which in 2021 presented draft laws aiming at the legal enshrinement of Barranquenho as a heritage to be protected and valued. The PCP proposed the bill “*Recognition and protection of Barranquenho and its cultural identity*”³⁴⁵, and the PS put forward the initiative “*Protection and valorization of Barranquenho.*”³⁴⁶ Both had the common objective of guaranteeing the official recognition of this linguistic variety as an expression of the cultural identity of the village of Barrancos.

³³⁵ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez and Maria Filomena Gonçalves, “Caracterização e problemas atuais do barranquenho: contribuições para uma política de revitalização” (2020) 12 *Estudos de Linguística Galega* 179 <https://doi.org/10.15304/elg.12.6040> accessed 19 June 2025.,193.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid. 194

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid. 193

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 194

³⁴⁵ *Partido Comunista Português*, “Reconhecimento e proteção do Barranquenho e da sua identidade cultural” (22 June 2021) <https://www.pcp.pt/reconhecimento-protECAo-do-barranquenho-da-sua-identidade-cultural> accessed 19 June 2025.

³⁴⁶ *Correio Alentejo*, ‘PS quer proteção e valorização do barranquenho’ (7 March 2020) <https://correioalentejo.com/ps-quer-protECAo-e-valorizacaO-do-barranquenho/> accessed 19 June 2025.

All these efforts, articulated over time and supported by various local, academic, and parliamentary initiatives, culminated in a decisive milestone: Law no. 97/2021 of December 30, 2021. Finally, Barranquenho achieved its national recognition and protection, enshrining a set of fundamental rights and measures for its safeguarding. Among these are the right to teach Barranquenho in schools, the possibility of using the language in official documents issued by local institutions, and scientific and educational support for linguistic research, including the creation of study and documentation centers, the development of an orthographic convention, and the training of specialized teachers.

- **Linguistic Awareness and the Challenge of Revitalization**

Alongside this milestone, a sense of linguistic awareness also began to emerge within the community. As well documented by Sánchez-Élez and Gonçalves, for decades the people of Barrancos have seen themselves “*neither as Portuguese nor as Spanish*”³⁴⁷, but as speakers of “*something different*.”³⁴⁸ However, the attitude of some Barranquenhos towards their way of speaking has not always been positive, often accompanied by phenomena such as “*self-discrimination*”³⁴⁹ or the tendency to “*minimize*”³⁵⁰ their local speech.

According to Correia, even in the 2000s, there were teachers who reprimanded students with phrases such as: “*What is that you are speaking?*”³⁵¹ or “*Try to speak like proper people.*”³⁵² The symbolic hegemony of Portuguese and the continuous contact with Spanish, for years the only language available on local television, intensified this linguistic and identity tension.

The banning of bullfighting in Barrancos also served as a catalyst not only for the defence of local culture and traditions but also for a collective affirmation of linguistic roots. As described by Sánchez-Élez and Gonçalves, this event led to a strong mobilization of the population, which, to respond, used written expressions in Barranquenho, “*posters, T-shirts, and slogans*”³⁵³, thus initiating a process of

³⁴⁷ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez and Maria Filomena Gonçalves, “Caracterização e problemas atuais do barranquenho: contribuições para uma política de revitalização” (2020) 12 *Estudos de Lingüística Galega* 179 <https://doi.org/10.15304/elg.12.6040> accessed 19 June 2025, 187.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 188

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid, 189

“*grammatization of the language*”³⁵⁴ and the emergence of linguistic self-esteem also reflected in written form.

This awakening was confirmed in the 2018 study *O barranquenho: urgência de uma política linguística?*, based on a survey conducted among speakers of different ages in Barrancos. In response to the question “*Do you think Barranquenho should be officially protected at the national level, just like Mirandese?*”³⁵⁵, the overwhelming majority answered affirmatively, expressing the desire to see their language granted the same status as other officially recognized languages. When asked “*Protecting Barranquenho officially at the national level is culturally...*”³⁵⁶, respondents associated the measure with “*preserving local identity*”³⁵⁷ and “*preventing linguistic forgetting.*”³⁵⁸ Finally, regarding “*Writing in Barranquenho will be more useful for...*”³⁵⁹, answers pointed to “*intergenerational transmission*” and the “*educational and cultural valorisation*”³⁶⁰ of the language.

These data reveal that, beyond institutional and academic measures, there is an internal, community-based, and affective recognition of the need for an active linguistic policy, one that ensures both the documentary recording and the daily and symbolic use of Barranquenho. Linguistic self-esteem, that was once fragile, now appears to be emerging as a pillar of local identity and cultural citizenship.

Not devaluing the political progress and the shift in attitude among the Barranquenhos regarding their language, it still faces serious threats. Currently spoken by fewer than 2.000 people, mostly elderly, Barranquenho falls within the critical range of endangered languages. According to UNESCO, “*any language spoken by fewer than 5.000 people is endangered*”³⁶¹, and the *UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger* Barranquenho can be placed among those languages that “*will always have fewer than 10.000 speakers.*”³⁶²

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Diogo Correia V M, “O barranquenho: urgência de uma política linguística?” (2019) 36 *Revista de Filologia Românica* 169, 170 <https://doi.org/10.5209/RFRM.63511> accessed 18 June 2025, 174.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid. 176

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez and Maria Filomena Gonçalves, “Caracterização e problemas atuais do barranquenho: contribuições para uma política de revitalização” (2020) 12 *Estudos de Linguística Galega* 179 <https://doi.org/10.15304/elg.12.6040> accessed 19 June 2025, 186.

³⁶² María Victoria Navas, Maria Filomena Gonçalves and Filipe Themudo Barata, “Notícia sobre o Barranquenho, língua ameaçada: processos de formalização e preservação” (2021) 43 *Estudis Romànics* 341 <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/29253> accessed 19 June 2025, 344.

This demographic fragility is intensified by other interconnected factors. As explained in Notícia sobre o Barranquenho, Língua Ameaçada: Processos de Formalização e Preservação, the main risks stem from a convergence of dynamics, such as the population aging, the influence of Portuguese as the standard language, the effects of standardized schooling, constant media exposure, and the cultural homogenization imposed by globalization.³⁶³

The study further points out that *“it would be an illusion to think that the mere decision to protect a language is sufficient to guarantee its survival.”*³⁶⁴ In other words, languages do not simply disappear; they gradually fade when they are no longer integrated into key domains of daily life, such as schools, public services, media, or the job market. As it synthesizes, *“the general causes of language and dialect extinction (...) fall into three main categories: because the last users are disappearing; because cultures are dissolving into others; or because those languages are no longer used in the school environment, in the marketplace, or on television.”*³⁶⁵ These phenomena, escalated by *“increasing urbanization and urban concentration”*³⁶⁶, make a coordinated and continuous effort all the more urgent to ensure the revitalization of Barranquenho.

Chapter 5: Voices from Barrancos

- **Interview with Barrancos Mayor**

In the course of my research, and given the limited documentation available on Barrancos, most of which is already somewhat outdated, there was a need to bring a more up-to-date perspective on the various topics addressed throughout this work. This necessity stems from the importance of providing the most current contextualization possible, allowing for a comparison with the information already analysed and helping to understand what has changed in recent years, whether there have been advances, setbacks, or a continuation of existing conditions.

In this context, I had the opportunity to interview the current Mayor of Barrancos, Leonel Caçador Rodrigues. An independent candidate supported by the CDU, he began his mandate in 2021 and is now

³⁶³ Ibid. 341

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 346

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 345

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

nearing the end of it. The interview was conducted online on June 6, 2025. In this chapter, it will be presented excerpts from the questions asked and the corresponding answers, accompanied by a brief critical analysis in light of the themes developed throughout this dissertation.

Among the themes explored, the issue of Barrancos's cultural and linguistic identity occupies a central place. Considering that Barranquenho is a singular expression of this identity, and given the academic debates surrounding it, the first question posed, which interestingly coincides with the last topic addressed in the previous chapter, focused on the current status of this language in the daily life of the village and its preservation:

“Is Barranquenho still something one hears in the streets, in schools, or during the local festivities? Are there currently any active policies in place for its preservation?”

The Mayor's response was clear in affirming that the language remains alive and present:

“People still speak Barranquenho, I speak it myself (...) it is very much alive, as a village, as a municipality, and as a dialect.”

This perspective contrasts with the view of several academic studies, which highlight the risks currently faced by Barranquenho. Moreover, the local population's attitude toward the language has not always been marked by pride or appreciation, which compromises its long-term vitality. However, considering this statement, it is possible to observe that a shift has been taking place within the Barrancos community.

Despite this, the Municipal Council maintained its commitment: to preserve the language, particularly in terms of its written form and formalization. The Mayor highlights the ongoing collaboration with the University of Évora and linguist María Vitória Navas, the development of an orthographic agreement, and the creation of a *Centro Interpretativo do Barranquenho* (Interpretive Centre for Barranquenho):

“There will be a Barranquenho congress, which will present, not a full orthography, but rather a preliminary orthographic agreement, so that we can begin to transcribe it in a way that doesn't cause complications (...) we thought it would be appropriate for everyone to start writing Barranquenho according to an agreement (...) We will then move forward with

the musealization of the Centro Interpretativo do Barranquenho, with a classroom where, at a touristic level (...) we can teach Barranquenho over the course of an hour or two.”

The Mayor also acknowledges that the language already holds legal status as a second national language, as established under Law no. 97/2021:

“It is already a national language, because it was already approved in regulatory terms (...) it is a language alongside Portuguese, clearly a minority one, and one to be preserved.”

Still, the Mayor adopts a cautious stance regarding the official use of the language, as he reflects his personal view on this matter:

“We will never use both Portuguese and Barranquenho mandatorily, in official terms, at least for now (...) it is beautiful, it is something to be preserved, but we must never place it on the same level as our national language, which is Portuguese.”

This position reflects a pragmatic balance between symbolic recognition and political restraint. The desire “*not to turn a minority into a struggle,*” as the Mayor put it, reveals a legitimate concern for local cohesion, but it also exposes the limitations of linguistic inclusion in peripheral contexts. The case of Barranquenho thus illustrates a certain ambivalence between resistance and risk, between identity celebration and hesitation toward political affirmation.

One of the major themes that serves as an identity marker for the Barranquenho community is the Feira de Agosto and the bullfight that takes place during it, a topic addressed during the interview:

“The Barrancos festivities are seen, from the outside, as an identity symbol of the village. But for those who live in the village, what do they represent? Are they a space of belonging, affection, resistance?”

In response, the Mayor described the festivities as a moment of strong community cohesion and emotional reunion, an aspect already highlighted by various authors and one that, to this day, carries the same meaning and importance.

“It’s community, it’s socializing, it’s seeing friends again, it’s sharing memories, it’s living unique and non-transferable moments (...) above all, it’s the identity of those who know us,

who are from here, who love being here, who have already been here. All of them share a deep admiration for this way of life — cultural, rooted in identity.”

He also emphasized the value of cultural freedom within a democratic society:

“Democracy also brings freedom, and freedom must prevail in the sense that we cannot stop someone from doing something just because we don’t like it.”

While recognizing that the celebration is also part of a logic of cultural resistance, the Mayor shows openness to critique and reflection on tradition. His response aligns with the idea that the image of the Barrancos festivities often does not correspond to the lived experience of the local population. According to him, those who directly engage with these cultural moments often deconstruct many of the prejudices and distorted ideas shaped from the outside, that when one gets to know and visit the village, they become, in a way, connected to it.

“A large part of those who visit us come away with a different understanding from what was proclaimed or said about the Barrancos festivities - those who live them know that.”

“Because, in the end, it was neither what they thought nor what they saw on television - it was a way of living that completely transforms something that is culture, identity, and that is transferable. Regardless of whether one likes it or not, there is much more beyond the bulls; it is a unique way of experiencing what we live.”

Still on the topic of the festivities, but shifting to a more contemporary perspective, the conversation focused on whether the Feira de Agosto is increasingly consumed as a tourist product and whether this might be a source of concern or an opportunity for Barrancos:

In the Mayor’s view, the touristic dimension of the fair is not new:

“Just look at the visitors, and that alone shows the attractiveness it already has for visitors and tourists. So it has always been a tourist product, whether or not it was called a tourist product.”

However, he also highlighted an important nuance:

“It doesn’t worry me, as long as it retains its traits and what lies at the heart of its identity - both in the celebrations and the culture, which are clearly and manifestly expressed throughout those four days. (...) If we know how to treat these things with care and also how to present them with care and with everyone’s freedom, then we also know that it will always be respected. (...) What could worry me is someone treating it solely, exclusively, as a tourist product (...) and in doing so, its essence would be lost.”

The Mayor makes it clear that there is no opposition to tourism; on the contrary, he acknowledges that the festivities have always attracted visitors and that this dimension is part of their history. That said, he emphasizes that the traits and essence of the celebration must be preserved, and that such preservation depends on respecting tradition and the way the community experiences the festivity. According to the Mayor, the real risk lies in reducing the festivities to a mere tourist product, stripped of meaning, especially when those who visit do so without seeking to understand their deeper cultural significance. This idea can be linked to moments when Barrancos received media attention, during which such simplifications became particularly evident.

As for its history, the following question was posed:

“Historically, Barrancos welcomed refugees during the Spanish Civil War and endured decades of smuggling as a means of survival and autonomy. Do you feel that this history has been properly acknowledged, or has it been forgotten by the country?”

Maintaining the same tone of clarity and firmness, the Mayor responded:

“By Portugal, it was possibly forgotten - I’ll tell you that straight away - but it was never forgotten by the Raia, more specifically by Extremadura, which awarded a medal to Barrancos for that genuine and heroic act. (...) As for Portugal, I think that forgot this matter, I don’t know whether out of interest, disinterest, or some other reason.”

His response confirms what has long been discussed throughout this thesis: the forgetfulness or disinterest on the part of the Portuguese state, for which no clear explanation can be found. In contrast, from the Spanish side, a greater level of recognition is evident, particularly from Extremadura and from Andalusia, which has increasingly included Barrancos in cultural and historical tourism routes.

At the local level, “Barrancos also held a tribute to Lieutenant Seixas, with the placement of a statue in his name, and his family was present.”



Figure 14 - Commemorative tile in Barrancos renaming the former Largo da Adua to Largo Tenente António Augusto de Seixas (1891–1958), in honour of his humanitarian actions during the Spanish Civil War (1936). The inscription recognises him as an “*example of humanity and solidarity*”. Photo by Constança Seara, June 2025.

This symbolic gesture demonstrates that despite not being acknowledged by the country itself, Barrancos, as an integral part of Portugal, has taken on the responsibility of preserving this memory. There is, therefore, a clear effort to keep the past alive and passed on, mainly through historical-touristic valorisation, which has helped maintain the connection to the generations who welcomed refugees and acted with courage in a critical moment of history.

The interview progressed to the meaning of living on the border today, to which the Mayor rejected the idea of isolation or marginalisation. On the contrary, he advocated for a vision in which Barrancos is seen as an “*open door to Europe*,” asserting that, although small and distant from the centres of national decision-making, the municipality represents an active and relevant point of connection within the European space.

“We have always understood this to be the interior, but it is the lived interior - the interior of each person - not the geographical interior.”

This statement challenges the traditional view of the border as a forgotten periphery and instead proposes a model in which interiority is subjective, lived, and not defined solely by geography. If the lines dividing countries can, in the European context, be physically and symbolically transcended, then why shouldn't the very notion of interiority also be reconsidered?

Within the European Union, where borders are increasingly blurred and mobility is a core principle, a reductive view of the *Raia* as a “dead end” or synonym for isolation becomes inadequate. The Mayor offers precisely the opposite: an “interior” that is not a forgotten margin, but a bridge. A space of transition, of movement, and of belonging to something greater — to Europe.

“If we are Europeans, then we are not in the interior - and that's what I told you at the beginning, quite the opposite. It's true that, because we are so small, Portugal has always looked at its Raia in that way, but today, with borders that no longer really exist, it makes no sense because they should treat us more as an important link to the rest, rather than a little corner.”

When asked about the challenges that lead young people away from Barrancos today, the Mayor offered a nuanced view, avoiding simplistic answers and acknowledging the impact of structural, cultural, and economic factors. His personal experience - as someone who studied abroad - *“I studied in Madrid, also in Huelva, I did my doctorate there”* - serves as a starting point for a broader reflection on mobility, life choices, and quality of life.

The main obstacle he identifies is not so much the lack of opportunities, but a deeply rooted perception of distance and the fading of a sense of belonging:

“The sense of belonging to the land has faded with the opening up to a more global world (...) it's a consequence of globalisation, of university exchange programmes, of exposure to other cultures and languages - and that's a very good thing, we can't stop that.”

However, he presented several arguments to counter this trend, focusing on the opportunities that Barrancos offers as a place to stay, opportunities that challenge the idea that real prospects exist only in urban centres.

“Any child here can go outside, play, do sports in the open air, learn online.”

He also pointed to signs of change, such as the recent return of families with children, which contradicts the alarmist narrative often based on relative statistical data:

“Recently, many people have returned, especially families. I can give the example of four families with children - and that is very good. (...) We were assessed in the context of the CENSUS more in relative terms (...) in very small proportions; if one person is missing, it represents much more. (...) For me, it’s just statistics and mathematics, but it’s not at all representative.”

Although he recognises that the loss of young population is a “*global problem*”, the Mayor challenges alarmist interpretations based solely on statistical data. His view does not ignore the difficulties; he acknowledges that it is a difficult challenge and that it “*will take a long time*” to address. Still, he insists on the importance of working to attract young people who, at a certain point in their lives, might see the interior as a viable and desirable option, making the most of what it has to offer: “*It’s important to make them understand, and for them to realise it - so it’s necessary that they come here, and that we create the opportunity.*”

To conclude the interview, the final question focused on the future of Barrancos:

“If you could shape the future of Barrancos, how would you imagine it in 10 or 15 years?”

The Mayor’s answer centred on four main pillars: technological innovation, tourism and heritage, agriculture and local products, and culture and identity. Rejecting any notion of stagnation, he emphasised that Barrancos has “*always had a future, never stood still*”, and that each administration has “*fought for this, each in their own way.*”

One of the key elements in his response was a clear attention to technology. He highlighted partnerships with the University of Évora and CEBAL, the creation of a business innovation centre, creative and agri-food laboratories, as well as the funding of doctoral research grants:

“It’s a very clear investment in what will be technologies (...) We created a programme, opportunities, which will also include support - in fact, scholarships for doctoral students -

to carry out that research component, so that they can get to know the place and possibly stay.”

Without disregarding traditional sectors such as certified agri-food production (ham, cheese, honey), the Mayor advocates for a development model that combines ancestral knowledge with innovation. This vision is also closely tied to the appreciation of the region’s natural and cultural heritage, including the Noudar Nature Park, local festivals, and the Barranquenho dialect:

“We will move forward through tourism, through innovation and technology, and also by improving the efficiency of our agriculture - our flagship products like the DOP³⁶⁷. (...) When I talk about tourism, I’m talking about heritage, about culture, about Barranquenho, and of course, the festivities.”

He also highlighted structural improvements, such as the construction of the Barrancos–Noudar road, which will significantly reduce travel time to one of the village’s emblematic landmarks, which is expected to have a direct impact on tourism and local mobility.

Although tempered by an awareness of how long these transformations may take, his confidence in the future came through clearly:

“I hope that within - I won’t say 10 years, because 10 goes by very quickly - but I can guarantee that in 20 years, for sure, (...) we’ll reach a good place.”

Finally, on a personal note, he stated that he will not be running for re-election, but expressed his desire to see the civic commitment to Barrancos continue:

“It was a very beautiful experience (...) I only hope there’s the same ability to love this place, so that regardless of what our future path may be, we’re still here, defending Barrancos.”

Overall, the interview with Mayor Leonel Caçador Rodrigues was a particularly important moment for this dissertation. In a short period of time, it was possible to explore a wide range of topics that offered a vivid and up-to-date perspective on the reality of Barrancos, from the challenges it faces,

³⁶⁷ “DOP” stands for *Denominação de Origem Protegida* (Protected Designation of Origin), a certification indicating that a product is locally grown and produced according to traditional methods in a specific geographical region.

to the active and resilient way in which both the Mayor and the local community respond to the needs that arise.

The conversation allowed for a critical re-evaluation of key concepts developed throughout this work, such as the very notions of interiority and border, highlighting their subjective and political dimensions. The interview also brought to light how forgetting can, paradoxically, become a force that activates memory, and how statistical data, particularly the CENSUS, do not always faithfully reflect the lived reality of the village.

This interview clearly demonstrated how essential it is to seek out, visit, and establish direct contact with local populations to more deeply understand their experiences, dynamics, and narratives that are so often absent, distorted, or silenced in institutional discourses. In this sense, the dialogue enriched the empirical foundation of the research and deepened the critical reflection on the tensions between invisibility, identity, and belonging within the context of a border community.

Conclusion

Coming to the end of this dissertation, it is inevitable to return to the question that gave rise to it: *How do historical and contemporary challenges in border regions like Barrancos reveal the tensions between human rights, local traditions, and democratic inclusion in the Portuguese Spanish borderland?* From the outset, it was clear that reaching a definitive answer would be challenging. The complexity of the topic, involving emotionally charged and politically sensitive issues, demanded, above all, a sustained effort toward impartiality and openness to multiple interpretations.

The truth is that even for those with no prior connection to Barrancos, or perhaps who had never even heard of the village, being confronted with its long and unique history quickly reveals how topics such as bullfighting, legality, or linguistic rights, which may initially seem straightforward and easily judged, are, indeed, deeply complex. Throughout the research and writing process, it became crucial to confront this ambivalence; to detach myself from assumptions, stereotypes, and value judgments that are often unconsciously taken for granted. This process required the capacity to see through the eyes of

others, to listen to the voices of the place, and to deconstruct narratives that are often incomplete or misunderstood when it comes to a community as singular as Barrancos.

Through a multidisciplinary methodology that combines legal analysis, historical research, sociolinguistics, and ethnographic observation, there was an attempt to grasp the complex reality of a border territory, exposing how the history that is known, or poorly understood, is not always the same as the history that is lived in daily life.

Each chapter of this dissertation can be interpreted differently by each reader, but certain conclusions stand out. In Chapter 1, it was essential to construct a historical framework to understand how the past continues to shape the present and project itself into the future. The long-standing relationship between Portugal and Spain - marked by fluid sovereignty and shifting borders, such as in the case of the Castle of Noudar, once a physical marker of national boundary and today a protected heritage site layered with memory - had direct implications on the construction of Barrancos's identity.

History also shows how, in critical moments, it was often the neighbouring Spanish communities that Barrancos could count on and vice versa. From smuggling as a means of economic survival to the solidarity demonstrated during the Spanish Civil War, the border proved more permeable to cooperation than to separation. The Barranquenho language - a unique hybrid in which Portuguese and Spanish coexist, embodies this symbiosis between two worlds that, although divided by a line on a map, recognize each other constantly.

This hybridization is present not only in language but also in cultural traditions: in the bullfights, whose roots are Spanish, as well as in the songs and celebrations. In Barrancos, it is rare to find a family lineage that does not cross the border, with at least one relative tracing their ancestry back to Spain. The history of this village, therefore, challenges static conceptions of national identity and invites us to re-examine what it means to "be Portuguese" or "be Spanish" in a border context.

It is also essential to highlight the condition of marginality: the historical neglect to which Barrancos has been subjected is still felt today, as evidenced by the delay in responding to local requests for basic infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other essential services.

Chapter 2, in turn, analyses the Feira de Agosto, with special attention to the controversial tradition of bullfighting, in which the bull is killed in public. What for many is seen as an aberration, for others, especially the people of Barrancos, constitutes a fundamental part of their identity, a tradition inherited

from their ancestors and which, for that very reason, must be preserved. Considering the national legislation that prohibits the killing of the bull in the arena, this chapter examined how the local community fought to the limit, exhausting all the resources at its disposal, to ensure that their cultural and identity rights would not be suppressed. In this effort, the enactment of the 2002 Law was viewed by the people of Barrancos as an act of justice. Whether interpreted as a recognition by the State of the intrinsic importance of the tradition, or as a way of putting an end to constant demands, since if the prohibition persisted, the people of Barrancos would hardly cease their protest. It can be said that the law served, possibly, as an institutional patch which, had it not been addressed at that time, would sooner or later have inevitably burst.

In an attempt to confront the different arguments raised by this issue, Chapter 3 first proposes a confrontation between two worlds: the urban and the rural, in which the ideas and values spread from the first world often seek to impose themselves with a certain tone of superiority over the second, to reconfigure its realities and beliefs. In this scenario, the media, with its power of mass dissemination and ability to influence various sectors of society, seemed to take a side, the urban side. They opted for a narrative focused on what shocks and creates controversy, instead of offering the public a broad understanding of reality. They ignored the essential fact that this time of the year is a moment of reunion, of communion, and of identity affirmation. This reductionist approach led the national public opinion to automatically associate Barrancos with terms such as *"bloodthirsty"*, *"barbaric"*, or *"civilizational backwardness."* This image has become deeply ingrained and remains, to this day, difficult to disentangle. The media were, therefore, expected to take an impartial stance. Nonetheless, this reality is not merely a phenomenon of the past. Today, in an era where access to information is instantaneous and vast, the need for responsible communication becomes even more pressing - one that includes and values the diversity of voices, while rejecting fundamentalist and sensationalist discourse.

The chapter then explores the ethical paradoxes between cultural rights and animal rights, presenting an overview of the legal and argumentative foundations from both sides, based on national laws and conventions that extend to the international level. These same arguments, however, prove to be limited in practice. The very difficulty that international frameworks face in harmonizing these two categories of rights reveals the complexity of the issue. These matters should not, therefore, be approached simplistically; on the contrary, they require greater sensitivity when being addressed. It is imperative to abandon standardized models and instead approach each case with its own particularities, its history, and its meaning for the population involved. In a future where animal rights will increasingly be on the

agenda, it will be necessary to reflect on what could replace local traditions, what resources and areas of society are at stake, and what consequences, including wounds and scars, such transformations may leave within the community. This principle should likewise apply to the future of Barrancos, not to see tradition as a threat, but to find models of coexistence that recognize plurality as richness, and where exceptionality might hold the opportunity to rethink the very idea of justice and democracy.

Chapter 4 presents the evolution of Barranquenho, beginning with a historical contextualization of the presence of Castilian in the border region, both due to the long Spanish occupation of Portuguese territory and the geographical proximity between the two countries, and the way in which, for a long time, greater prestige was attributed to the Spanish language. As a result, for decades, many Barranquenho speakers felt ashamed to use their own language. This complex relationship is still reflected today in the coexistence of three languages: Portuguese, Spanish, and barranquenho. However, this was never an obstacle to the close relationship with their Spanish neighbours, which has always been marked by proximity.

What we see today is a paradigm shift in the relationship between Barranquenho and its speakers. Through collective efforts and local activism, they have begun to actively fight for the preservation of a trait so valuable from both historical and linguistic perspectives. In a context marked by population ageing, the absence of standardized orthography, and intense pressure from globalization and cultural standardization, which further complicates an already complex space, the need for protective measures has become urgent.

Although the process was long, results were achieved with the official recognition of Barranquenho as a language in Portugal and the acknowledgment of its linguistic rights. Yet, recognition alone is not enough. A genuine revitalization is necessary, and here lies a new challenge. One of the strategies has involved the touristification of the language. Yet, as already seen in the case of the smuggling routes, it is crucial to question the potential risks of romanticization and symbolic appropriation that may equally affect Barranquenho. Therefore, although this is a strategy with potential, particularly in terms of visibility and funding, it must be applied with sensitivity and care. There is, thus, a need to find a balanced strategy that is led, first and foremost, by the community and built from within.

Finally, through an interview, Chapter 5 offers an updated view of Barrancos, presented by its highest local authority, the Mayor. In this conversation, several themes addressed throughout the dissertation are

revisited, which complicates a singular reading of the town. Therefore, new perspectives emerge on issues such as isolation, borders, rurality, and the reliability of statistical data. This demonstrates that the local population has been engaging with these issues in a reflective and self-aware manner, going beyond the position of merely resisting and surviving unconsciously, and alternatively engaging critically with their condition through strategies that promote and value their community and heritage. Therefore, by giving direct voice to a local agent, this chapter underscores the importance of listening to those who experience the territory firsthand, highlighting how local knowledge challenges external perceptions and reveals nuances that are often absent from national narratives and public policy frameworks.

Overall, this dissertation concludes that Barrancos is a village with lessons to offer that unfold on multiple levels. On a personal level, Barrancos teaches the value of humanism. This value is increasingly scarce in a world that grows more dehumanized each day, where wars and humanitarian crises erupt at an alarming speed. The solidarity demonstrated by the people of Barrancos during the Spanish Civil War is a testament to this. At a pivotal moment when both Portugal and Spain were under dictatorships, this community, itself struggling, risked what little it had to help others. It did not look only inward but saw an equal in its neighbour.

At the local level, Barrancos can be defined by the union of two interconnected notions: resistance and community. These are the words that best describe this place. In the face of historical and structural adversity, the village found within itself the strength and resources to endure. Its small scale fosters a culture of mutual aid - from the exchange of food between neighbours without expectation of return, to collective activism grounded in the conviction that “unity is strength.” A place seen as small, tucked away in a corner of the country, yet when something threatened what was theirs, Barrancos mobilized with all its might to defend what it believed to be essential to its existence.

At the national level, Barrancos is a call to Portugal, a reminder that there are voices and stories across the country that are systematically forgotten. From the burning of the village to the long delays in addressing basic needs, and the absence of institutional recognition for heroic figures such as Lieutenant Seixas and many other unnamed Barranquinhos, the State failed. The fact that the neighbouring country offered more recognition than Portugal itself should serve as a mirror for introspection. It is a matter of honouring an imperative of historical justice, which is also pedagogical, a way of spreading values of solidarity and courage, showing that those who help are worthy of recognition.

It is true that, at certain moments, there have been signs of recognition, such as the legal exception granted to bullfights with the killing of the bull, and the official recognition of Barranquenho as a minority language. However, it is entirely legitimate to question the extent to which these decisions were truly motivated by respect for the cultural and identity values they represent, or whether they were, instead, strategies to contain local contestation and temporarily silence uncomfortable conflicts for the central state. Why, in some respects, was there a decision to "look the other way", while in others, silence or indifference was maintained?

It is incomprehensible that, to this day, Portugal has turned its back on events and people who should be a source of pride for any nation. In a country relatively small in territorial size, it still behaves as though its territory were homogeneous, forgetting that it contains great internal diversity, with multiple realities coexisting, each with its own specificities. These differences must be acknowledged, protected, and, above all, recognized at the national level so they do not disappear over time.

At the international level, the story of Barrancos is a notable example of global relevance. There are many "Barrancos" around the world, like borderland or minority communities, overlooked by central structures, yet rich in dignity, memory, and resistance. It is an invitation to look toward the margins and to recognize that, often, it is precisely there that the most essential lessons about humanity, justice, and coexistence are found.

Between "us" and "others" between the "periphery" and the "centre", between the "rural" and the "urban", between the "civilized" and the "uncivilized", Barrancos is, in fact, much more than a point on the map, but a microcosm that allows us to understand better the contradictions at the heart of national belonging, legal pluralism, and the democratic promise. Barrancos shows us that the notions of nation, culture, and even human rights are not fixed categories, nor do they exist in a vacuum; they are lived, contested, and constantly redefined in concrete spaces, marked by specific histories and memories. In this sense, Barrancos, which may be seen as an isolated, interior region or as a bridge to Europe, challenges both the physical borders that delineate territories and the invisible borders within our thinking.

Reiterating the words of António Manuel: "*What can be amputated from you to stop you from being you? A finger? A hand? A leg? A heart? A body organ? Which one? The only part that can be taken away from you to stop you from being you is the memory.*" What remains, in the end, is memory, a

memory that lives on in people, in their speech, in their practices, in their affections, and in their quiet resistance. This thesis was born from a desire to listen closely and to recognise those who, even when history tries to forget them, will never be erased.

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