



# CONNECTING SEEMINGLY SEPARATE WORLDS

An ethnographic account of the perceptions and  
practices of the inhabitants of eco community  
O Fôjo Permaculture in central Portugal

TESSA BRANDES



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An ethnographic account of the perceptions and practices  
of the inhabitants of eco community O Fojo Permaculture in central Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

With this thesis I aim to address two issues, of which the first is societal and the second is scientific. The social system of modern neoliberal capitalism has become dominant in most societies around the world, shaping the way we perceive ourselves as individuals in relation to society and nature. Its dominant discourse has created a fragmented culture that is both ecologically and socially unsustainable, yet one that we collectively maintain. This thesis provides an ethnographic account of what alternatives to this system could look like by focusing on the ecovillage movement. More specifically, this thesis is a case study of eco community O Fojo Permaculture in central Portugal, whose inhabitants manifest a radically alternative holistic culture. In analysing their perceptions and practices by making use of the three permaculture ethics of care, I illustrate how they are shaping and implementing this alternative culture on a daily basis. In ethnographically accounting for such alternatives I aim to address a scientific issue: I believe that as citizen-anthropologists living at this moment in time we have a responsibility to contribute to what I call a future-oriented anthropology, that goes beyond merely analysing problems and instead has a focus on solutions.

**Keywords:** eco community, alternatives, permaculture, care

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Introduction	7
CHAPTER 1 Contextualising O Fojo	
1.1 O Fojo as an eco community	13
1.2 Permaculture: moving from philosophy to practice	16
CHAPTER 2 Earth care	
2.1 Care beyond sustainability	19
2.2 Towards resilience and regeneration as alternatives to sustainability	21
2.3 Practicing earth care, practicing people care	24
CHAPTER 3 People care	
3.1 From isolation to collaboration	27
3.2 From passive denizens to active ecological citizens	30
CHAPTER 4 Future Care	
4.1 From a rusted logic to alternatives: O Fojo as part of a transition discourse	34
4.2 Changing awareness through experience	37
Conclusions and discussion	42
Bibliography	46
Appendix I Introducing the inhabitants of O Fojo	50
Appendix II A typical day in the community..	53
Appendix III Engaged anthropology	54
Appendix IV My position in the community	56

## FOREWORD

On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> of February I meet Maurício at the small train station of Pombal in central Portugal. After speeding home in the car over small unlit country roads, I finally arrive after a long period of anticipation at my new home for the next three months: O Fojo Permaculture. It is around 9 p.m. and it is already dark, but the light of the almost full moon lights up the sky. After getting out of the car I take a moment to absorb the fresh air, the brightness of the moon and the incredible amount of stars. From the parking there are wooden logs that function as stairs leading all the way down into the moonlit valley where I see three garden beds, where cabbages and lettuces are growing. Halfway down, Maurício points out the outside shower, and the little wooden shelter where he lived years ago when the rest of the terrain was still an impermeable bramble forest. At the bottom of the valley the gravel path- carefully marked with white stones on the sides- goes up again, showing some unfinished small constructions in clay, covered with plastic. Then, further up, we reach the big house. We sit down in front on some small logs to smoke a cigarette, looking over a second smaller valley and the moonlight reveals a small pond and a beautiful large oak tree that reminds me of a fairytale. On the left there is a chicken house and on the right an outside sink covered in dishes. The two dogs- that I would later get to know as Feijão and Picike- form the only energetic disturbance of the quietude and silence. Although it is only around four degrees outside on this February evening, the air feels comfortably soft. Inside the house, constructed out of natural materials, we light a candle and sit down on the large couch that is covered in pillows. Maurício grabs a blanket, covers me in it and softly massages my feet while we speak. I enjoy the conversation and feel like being reunited with a long lost friend. And suddenly, in a moment of consciousness, I smile to myself. 'How lucky am I to be here, as an anthropologist!' I am intensely grateful for the warm welcome from Maurício and the moon, and the stunning beauty and smells of the natural world that surround us.

Over the next three months I have become grateful for many more things that I could not have imagined by the time I arrived. For the sharing, the trust, the inclusion, the love, the productivity, the fun and the difficulties that we have encountered, observed and dealt with together. I have not only found answers to my research questions, but also to many questions of life. Thank you dear Maurício, Filipa, Marcelo, Matheus, Török and Júlia. And thank you to all the others that have come by, and have been a valuable part of the experience at O Fojo to which we gave meaning together every day. I feel proud to be able to share your insights and ideas, which I believe convey an important message for humanity.

Next to the people of O Fojo, I am also grateful to my supervisor Nienke, who has had faith in

this project from the start and who has always motivated me with her positive approach. Finally, I would like to thank Hadassa, my close friend who has connected me to O Fojo and who has created the beautiful cover of this thesis.

Tessa Brandes, 2017



Picture 1: welcome sign at the entrance of O Fojo Permaculture. Personal picture.

## INTRODUCTION

We love to fly first class  
Someone else paid the ticket  
We love our juicy fruit  
As long as we don't have to pick it  
We love our fast food  
Don't care about heart attacks  
We love to gossip  
Don't care about the facts  
We want the gold

Long as we don't have to mine it  
Don't care who suffers  
Or who's behind it  
We want the cool running shoes  
Don't care who made them  
Don't care if they go to school  
Or what the company paid them  
We don't care, we don't care, we don't care  
We want the cheap gasoline

Jump in the car and go  
Don't care what the world agreed upon  
In Kyoto  
We heard to all save water  
But we don't even try  
Take thirty minute showers  
While the well runs dry  
We don't care, we don't care, we don't care

The gap is growing wider  
Between the rich and the poor  
We've got everything we need  
But we still want more  
We don't care, we don't care, we don't care

– Lyrics of the song we don't care by Habib Koité and Eric Bibb<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics retrieved from: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/we-dont-care-lyrics-eric-bibb.html>. Page visited at 03/05/2017.

The first time I heard this song it left me with many questions, and in the period previous to my fieldwork I have listened to it many times. Is it really true we don't care? Or could it be argued we are so caught up in the capitalist logic of modernity, promoting “[i]ndividualism, human exemptionalism<sup>2</sup>, linear systems of production/disposal, and unquestion[ed] allegiance to the goal of economic growth” (van Schyndel Kasper 2008: 21), that we have become blind to the faith of others- both human and nonhuman? (Dobson 2000: 8). This thesis is grounded in the premise that it is exactly the subjectivity that capitalistic modernism produces- our way of being in and relating to the world- that has allowed for our current global interrelated ecological and social crises to happen. And as these crises are progressing- viable solutions are demanded. Yet- as has increasingly been acknowledged- technology fails to offer these solutions (Parra and Walsh 2016: 229). Therefore, I argue, we have to look for solutions in radically different directions. As Albert Einstein once famously said: 'no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew'.

This thesis provides an example of what such a radically different mode of consciousness could look like by focusing on the ecovillage movement, a global movement experimenting with “(...) alternatives to modern industrial agriculture- alternatives to monocropping, to pesticides, to dependence on fossil fuels, and to a system that wastes fantastic amounts of fuel, water, and food in a world where over a billion people are hungry” (Anderson 2013: XII). More specifically, this thesis is a case study of one particular eco community: O Fojo Permaculture<sup>3</sup> in central Portugal, whose inhabitants<sup>4</sup> use permaculture, a design system created by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, that is elsewhere called “a revolution disguised as organic gardening<sup>5</sup>”. In this thesis I will give an ethnographic account of how these ecovillagers are “actively and consciously transform[ing] our social, ecological and economical paradigm through personal transformation”<sup>6</sup>. I will analyze how they are continuously putting their perceptions of an alternative paradigm into practice, whereby “heal[ing] the fragmented aspect of the prevailing culture (...)” (Jackson and Svensson 2002: 106). The alternative paradigm they manifest, as I will show, is one of interconnectedness and personal responsibility to care. The reason I believe it is important to shift attention to such alternatives is twofold, as I will explain in the following section.

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2 'Human exemptionalism' is elsewhere explained as an “ontological separat[ion] of humans from nature” (Veteto and Lockyer 2013: 1).

3 Hereafter mostly referred to as 'O Fojo'.

4 Of which some were temporary inhabitants and some (semi)permanent inhabitants. All of them are introduced in appendix I.

5 Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/a-revolution-disguised-as-organic-gardening-in-memory-of-bill-mollison-66137>. Page visited on 26/07/2017.

6 Retrieved from: <http://www.ofojo-permaculture.org/faq/about-o-fojo/>. Page visited on 28/12/2016.



## Theoretical framework

The first reason why I believe it is important to look at alternatives to our current modern capitalist system is because it has a high *societal* relevance at this moment in time. According to LeVasseur, neoliberal capitalism “(...) has come to define the reality of many humans living in the twenty-first century” (2013: 254). Many scholars emphasize the incommensurability of the capitalistic discourse and healthy functioning natural and cultural systems, exactly because the capitalist discourse creates a fragmented culture: “[i]f the logic and requirement of capitalism is perpetual growth, then the obvious conclusion, given a finite planet with limited resources, is that such a system is unsustainable” (Baker 2013: 287). Furthermore, such a model is socially unsustainable: “[o]n deeper levels, the question of whether economic growth is good for humanity is tangled up in the unequal exchanges that are instrumental to accumulation and growth in current economies, and that produce grossly uneven distributions of their benefits and burdens” (Paulson 2017: 428). Within the social system of capitalism, that does not only define our economy but our society (Latouche 2009), a pattern is created that González and Stryker call “organized irresponsibility” (2014: 3). Many of us know we are facing environmental limits and the gap between rich and poor is growing, yet at the same time there is an “apathy of the many people who feel powerless to effect meaningful change in the world around them” (ibid.). It is exactly in this moment, as Gibson-Graham argues, that “(...) it is possible to ask what is possible—besides economic victimhood and social incivility. Can we find other ways to be?” (2003: 49). Yes, I argue. And this thesis provides an example of what such an alternative way of being could look like.

The second reason why I believe it is important to look at alternatives to our current modern capitalist system is because it has a high *scientific* relevance at this moment in time. The general focus of anthropology has been to study the 'victims' of such systems- the powerless or voiceless- the “people without history” (Wolf 1982). Yet I believe that in a time where “endemic [social and ecological] crises [are] affecting billions of people” (González and Stryker 2014: 3), we have to shift our focus. Rather than analyzing past or present problems, I feel that as citizens and social scientists living at this moment in time we have a responsibility to look ahead, and to focus on solutions for the future<sup>7</sup>. In engaging with this approach, this thesis is grounded in a form of ecological anthropology, in which “the relationship[s] between human beings and their environments [are] an explicit and central focus” (Milton 1996: 24). This form of anthropology can help to construct viable alternatives to the current fragmented culture, by “(...) us[ing] empirical research to develop both theoretical and practical approaches to addressing the sustainability

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<sup>7</sup> In appendix III I have included a section on engaged anthropology.

challenge” (Veteto and Lockyer 2008: 47). I would like to call this a future-oriented anthropology. I aim to focus on solutions, in ethnographically accounting for what ordinary-and yet quite extraordinary citizens in my eyes- can achieve by manifesting an ontological change of living *with*, rather than living *on* the earth (Haraway 2008). And how they, in doing so, offer viable alternatives to our currently ecologically and socially unfeasible system.

### **Methodology**<sup>8</sup>

In order to find answers- and generate many new questions- about the perceptions and practices of the inhabitants of eco community O Fojo, I have conducted three consecutive months of combined fieldwork and voluntary work from February until April 2017, during which I was almost permanently present in the community. Most of my material has been collected through the method of participant observation. I would say that in the four subsequent degrees of participation, ranging from non- to moderate- to active- to complete participation, as distinguished by a model of DeWalt and DeWalt (2002: 263) I was in the last category, where “the ethnographer is or becomes a [temporary] member of the group that is being studied” (ibid.). In the community we slept, ate and did activities together, we saw each other every day and in all kinds of emotional states and there were high levels of sharing and inclusion. This membership was also verbalized when I fell ill in one of my first weeks. Maurício sat by my bed and said: “If you need anything, just let us know. We are your family now.”<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, some of the most interesting observations or insights were obtained just by being present during informal conversations at the dinner table or during 'work'. I usually left my notebook in the common room in order to be able to take 'jot notes' or 'scratch notes' (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002: 144). I also kept a personal diary from the start in which I wrote every day, which proved to be unexpectedly useful upon return to remember specific insights and events. Next to using the method of participant observation, I also conducted ten semi-structured interviews, “[that] are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006: 315). All of the interviews were conducted in a very informal setting. Because the most convenient time for interviews was after dinner and the only common space would be busy, I conducted almost all of the interviews in my room, sitting on cross-legged position on my bed opposite to each other. The advantage of this slightly inconvenient situation was that the

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<sup>8</sup> Some paragraphs of this section are based on a text retrieved from the original research proposal of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> In appendix IV I have included a section on my position as a researcher in the community.



atmosphere was very intimate and personal, which most likely has helped in generating genuine and honest answers. In order to finally write up my thesis, I made use of the method of data triangulation- combining insights from observations, interviews and participation- in order to enhance the reliability of data (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 127).

Because of the qualitative nature of the research project, it is important to also consider the process of data analysis. I have used an iterative method of analysis, where I constantly reviewed my notes, the literature and my own reasoning. This has been important in order to remain critical of the questions and theories I prepared before going into the field, as the process of data analysis is cyclical. In this cyclical process, the field and my theories were interacting, and constantly shaping each other. Therefore, being in the field has made me review many of my original concepts<sup>10</sup> and questions and has also generated many new questions and matters to take into account. The first two weeks of being present at my research location, where I was asked to merely be present and observe have been especially valuable in this respect, because it allowed me to let go of some preconceived assumptions of the field. I will now turn to explain the concrete content of this thesis.

### **This thesis**

As explained previously in this introduction, ecovillagers can be considered to experiment with the implementation of viable solutions to the unfeasible legacy of modernity. This thesis is a case study of one particular eco community: O Fojo Permaculture in central Portugal. In looking at the alternatives they propose and implement, the leading question addressed in this thesis is: *what are perceptions of inhabitants of eco community O Fojo Permaculture regarding local solutions to interrelated global ecological and social challenges and how do they envision themselves as part of these solutions through their practices?* I believe that looking at both perceptions and practices is relevant in this case, as they are mutually influencing each other and therefore both relevant in manifesting an alternative culture. Furthermore, emphasizing how the inhabitants of O Fojo embody the solutions they envision is important to illustrate that an alternative culture is not necessarily utopian<sup>11</sup> but instead a lived reality, although “a work in practice (...) where much is yet to be learned” (Jackson 2004: 26).

In answering my main question I focus on three different subquestions, that in turn structure my three ethnographic chapters (which are chapter two, three and four). I base these three

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<sup>10</sup> For example the concept 'sustainability', see the second chapter for an elaboration.

<sup>11</sup> See for a discussion on utopia's for example Parra and Walsh (2016), Bossy (2014), Andreas (2013) and Cojocaru (2012). I would like to emphasize that due to the limited scope of this thesis I do not focus at the possibility of implementing the 'ecovillage paradigm' on a larger scale. I will just focus on a thorough analysis of it- whereby I take O Fojo as a case study.

subquestions on the three permaculture ethics of care, which are respectively earth care, people care and future care<sup>12</sup>. It is important to emphasize that these ethics are not *emic* terms but chosen instead as a frame of analysis to explain my interlocutors'<sup>13</sup> perceptions and practices. I have chosen to use the three permaculture ethics as a frame of analysis because they are centered around care, and my interlocutors perceive care to be central in envisioning and practicing solutions. The three ethics will be explained in the context of permaculture in the first chapter, in which I will also contextualize O Fojo as an eco community. In the second chapter, then, I will address the following question: *how do the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive and practice earth care?*<sup>14</sup> The third and fourth chapter, answer the same question for the second and third permaculture ethic, respectively people care and future care. In the second chapter, I will illustrate that the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive caring for the earth to be the first step towards creating a different world. They see caring for the earth is highly interrelated with caring for themselves, and earth care therefore as primarily anthropocentric. My interlocutors propose active observation and collaboration with the earth in order to create human systems, based upon the natural resilience and regeneration of ecosystems. They practice earth care by actively reducing their dependency on the earth on a daily basis. I will explain these practices by making use of three permaculture principles. In the third chapter, I will illustrate that the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive caring for others to be the second step in transitioning towards a different world. From a base of caring for themselves, they practice people care by extending their care for others both in the local community and on a global scale, both to human- and nonhuman species and both to those living now and in the future. Finally, in the last chapter, I will illustrate how the inhabitants of O Fojo are constantly aware of how their present actions can influence (the course of the) future. By critically looking at their own consumption patterns and redefining what their needs are, they can be considered to be part of a larger transition discourse. Also, in this chapter I will illustrate what the role is of bodily experience in becoming aware of oneself as a part of a larger functioning system. I will end with a conclusion and discussion, in which I will refer back to the societal and scientific issues addressed in this introduction and answer my leading question.

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12 Please be aware that 'future care' is not the original description of the third permaculture ethic. This is explained in the first chapter.

13 I prefer to use the word 'interlocutor' rather than the more common term 'informant', because interlocutor can be defined as 'a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue' and thus does not imply a unilinear extraction of information. However, this description still does not fully capture my relationship with the inhabitants of O Fojo, that did not just 'take part in conversation or dialogue' but moreover became close friends and a temporary family. Definition retrieved from: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/interlocutor>. Page visited on 22/07/2017.

14 Although I have separated the three permaculture ethics in this thesis for the sake of clarity (based Bill Mollison's work of 1889), throughout my text their interrelatedness will repeatedly be highlighted.



## CHAPTER 1 CONTEXTUALISING O FOJO

### 1.1 O Fojo as an eco community

This first chapter serves as an introductory chapter, to discover how O Fojo is subjectively explained by its members, and how it can be described according to the existing literature. In this thesis, I have decided to use the term 'eco community' rather than 'ecovillage' in order to accurately describe O Fojo. This contextualizing chapter accounts for how this decision has been the result of conscious consideration. Furthermore, in the second section of this chapter, I will provide a context of how permaculture can be accurately defined within the scope of this thesis. I will mainly focus on explaining the three permaculture ethics that form the frame of analysis of this thesis.

The small community O Fojo Permaculture is located in central Portugal, between Porto and Lisbon. Maurício started the community with his ex-partner in 2009. Since the start the aim of the place has been to create “practical experiences in permaculture, natural building, agriculture and community living offering innovative and high quality education for planetary citizens.”<sup>15</sup> Maurício, who is born in Brazil, decided to start O Fojo in central Portugal because he was already living there and it was the only place he could afford to buy land in a central place. Furthermore, the land is in the poorest council in Portugal and he saw starting O Fojo there “as a possibility to bring more awareness and evolution to the area.”<sup>16</sup> In this line of reasoning, Maurício initially focused more on Portuguese citizens and all the courses were taught in Portuguese. However, since a few years he translated the website into English and offers most courses in English and Portuguese, which has shifted the attention he receives to a more foreign public. Maurício emphasized that he and his partner were welcomed into the region but “as the people [in the area] are mainly older the interaction for more awareness and change could be more effective.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in order to connect more with the local environment, they are now “building the foundations to make it happen in a more effective way”<sup>18</sup>.

During the period of my stay at O Fojo, Maurício was the only permanent inhabitant, and me and five others were present with varying degrees of permanence. However, the plan for the near future is to expand the project further and becoming an ecovillage, and finally also become part of GEN, the Global Ecovillage Network. One practical step that has recently been taken towards

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15 Retrieved from: <http://www.ofojo-permaculture.org/>. Page visited on 23/01/2017.

16 Personal communication through email: January 2017.

17 Personal communication through email, January 2017.

18 Personal communication through email, January 2017.

this goal is the acquisition of a piece of land next to O Fojo, in order to be able to welcome permanent newcomers. I have reflected a lot upon how to accurately define O Fojo as a community. Although it is, in its vision and mission, very similar to how ecovillages are defined in the literature, practically, in size, it cannot be defined as one. In quoting Bang (2005), van Schyndel Kasper gives the following definition of an ecovillage: “(...) a human-scale settlement (usually between 50 and 500 members, though there are exceptions) that is intended to be full-featured — providing food, manufacturing, leisure, social opportunities, and commerce — the goal of which is the harmless integration of human activities into the environment in a way that supports healthy human development in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual ways, and is able to continue into the indefinite future (2008: 13). Except for the size, this corresponds to the way in which O Fojo presents itself. The plan with the integral education center, that the community wants to realize in the course of the next five year, is to become a place for “integral regenerative leadership education and for the self realization of human beings.”<sup>19</sup> Maurício wants to teach classes in “permaculture, agriculture, natural building, bio-climatic and organic architecture, alternative technologies, personal coaching, practical skills, community and ecovillage design, circular processes, non violent communication, conflict transformation and decision making- and group work technics.”<sup>20</sup> Next to this goal, in the same time frame he also has the mission to realize the construction of an eco-lodge, healing center, retreat center and the creation of O Fojo Gourmet, a brand to offer O Fojo’s land’s and region’s products to the general public and visitors' (ibid.). Although van Schyndel Kasper emphasizes that her definition is an “*ideal type* ecovillage” (2008: 13, emphasis in original), a community where just one person is living on a permanent basis can by no means be called a village. Therefore, it would be more useful to define O Fojo within the context of this research as an intentional eco community. Bill Metcalf defines an intentional community as follows:

“[f]ive or more people, drawn from more than one family or kinship group, who have voluntarily come together for the purpose of ameliorating perceived social problems and inadequacies. They seek to live beyond the bounds of mainstream society by adopting a consciously devised and usually well thought-out social and cultural alternative. In the pursuit of their goals, they share significant aspects of their lives together” (2004: 9).

This definition of intentional communities is very useful for the purposes of this thesis, because it contains both the side of perceptions – of what drives people to seek a different lifestyle – and that of practices – of living the social and cultural alternative they envision.

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19 Retrieved from: <http://www.ofojo-permaculture.org/about-us-2/vision/>. Page visited on 26/01/2017.

20 Retrieved from: <http://www.ofojo-permaculture.org/about-us-2/vision/>. Page visited on 26/01/2017.





Picture 2. The main solar-passive house at O Fojo. This picture is taken towards the end of my stay- with some of the construction work visible on the left. Picture by Matheus.

Finally, it is important to stress why I consider O Fojo to be distinctive as an *eco* community from other kinds of intentional communities that can for example also have religious or socialist purposes (Meijering, Huigen and van Hoven, 2007: 42). As Christina Ergas explains: “the prefix “eco” implies that ecovillages are created with an intent toward sustainable, environmental living. They may use green building techniques, for example, constructing buildings that are made from earthen materials, and situate housing units around green space for subsistence gardening” (2010: 34). O Fojo is also in this respect similar to an ecovillage, an “intentional community for which the ecological concern is central: its members search to reduce as much as possible their environmental footprint” (Bang 2005; Dawson 2006 in Bossy 2014: 9). Although O Fojo's goals are social as well as ecological, the ecological goals are leading for its existence in its current form. The natural buildings, large emphasis on the conscious reduction of consumption and recycling, the conscious lack of an electrical grid, the use of dry compost toilets and seed saving practices that form an important foundation for the existence of O Fojo, would all have been superfluous if the community would have existed just for social purposes. However, as I will show throughout this thesis, the social and ecological always go together. This is also underscored by Litfin, who argues that “[w]hat unites the [global ecovillage] network as a knowledge community is its members' commitment to a supportive social environment *and* a low-impact way of life (Litfin 2009: 125, emphasis added). Although I will from now on use the term eco community to describe O Fojo, it is thus important to bear in mind that the social aspect is always included. Furthermore, I will be using literature on ecovillages in order to explain O Fojo throughout this thesis, because I believe the matching goals and aims to be more important than the exact size of inhabitants in this case. In appendix II I have described a 'typical day' in the community, to give an impression of our daily community tasks and life. I will now turn to an explanation of permaculture and its use.

## 1.2 Permaculture: moving from philosophy to practice

When I started my fieldwork period, I only had a limited idea of what permaculture exactly entailed. Therefore, it initially disappointed me that we did not have that much time to work in the vegetable gardens, where I expected to learn more about it. However, and it took me a while to find out- permaculture is not just taking place in the garden. Quite the opposite: it is so interwoven with daily life- both on an abstract and a concrete level- that I just had not noticed it in the first place. What is permaculture, then, and how can it be described according to the inhabitants of O Fojo and by the literature? This is important because I structure my three ethnographic chapters following the three permaculture principles of care, and also go into detail about three of the permaculture principles in the second chapter.

Toby Hemenway explains how Bill Mollison's original idea of permaculture came to him when he was observing Tasmanian rainforests in 1959 (2009: 5) and “inspired by the life-giving and abundance and rich interconnectedness of this ecosystem, he jotted in his diary: “I believe that we could build systems that would function as well as this one does” (ibid.). Fundamentally, permaculture is thus inspired by the functioning of natural systems, and the design principles that Mollison and Holmgren created in the 70's are derived from it. My interlocutors perceived permaculture to be a practical tool in that sense. “But”, as Maurício explained, “it is much more than that” (II). According to Veteto and Lockyer, it is the “ethical philosophy and the design principles that together comprise the permaculture rubric” (2008: 50). The ethical philosophy consists of the three ethics that structure my three ethnographic chapters: respectively earth care, people care and future care. I will explain them shortly.

According to Rhodes, “[e]arth care is the first of the three permaculture ethics, “(...) because without a healthy earth, humans cannot flourish” (Rhodes 2012: 122). Interestingly, although this first ethic revolves around nature, its focus is thus primarily anthropocentric. According to Mollison, a “[c]onsideration of rules of necessitous and conservative use of resources may lead us, step by step, to the basic realization of our interconnectedness with nature; that we depend on good health in all systems for our survival (...) Our fates are intertwined” (1988: 3). Therefore, as Hathaway explains, “care for [the] earth [i]nclud[es] the nurture of soil, forests, and water; working with nature; and preventing damage to ecosystems” (2015: 16).

Secondly the ethic people care. Hathaway explains this ethic as “looking after one’s self, kin, and community; working with others; assisting those without to access healthy food and clean water; and designing sustainable systems that produce life’s necessities” (2015: 17). Brawner adds to this that people care “(...) involves [a] focus on healthy, holistic societies [and is] often

interpreted through both social and ecological lenses” (2015: 431). This is because, as explained above in the ethic earth care, the social and ecological are 'intertwined'. Mollison explains that “although initially we can see how helping our family and friends assists us in our own survival, we may evolve the mature ethic that sees all human kind as family, and all life as allied associations. Thus, we extend *people care* to *species care*, for all life has common origins” (1988: 3).

The third permaculture ethic is less well defined by its designers, and interpreted in various ways by different authors. Mollison called it “setting limits to population and consumption” (1988: 2) whereas Holmgren defined it as “fair share: set limits and redistribute surplus”<sup>21</sup>. However, I argue, inspired by a blog of writer Starhawk, this ethic can best be summarized as 'future care'<sup>22</sup>, deriving from the logic that: “[p]eople are dependent on the earth; they are a subset of our planet, not independent from it. Without the earth (earth care) or people (people care) there will be no future (...) So holarchically<sup>23</sup> speaking, caring for the future rests on the first two permaculture ethics, which allows us to more clearly see the relationship between these three elements.”<sup>24</sup> Following Rhodes, in order to take care for our common future, we need to realize that “[r]esources are limited and only by curbing our consumption and population will there be enough for all, now and in the future” (2012: 122) and we “[n]eed to become reconnected with the natural world” which requires “a shift in thinking and being” (ibid.).

Then the twelve permaculture principles. According to Mollison: “having evolved ethics, we can then devise ways to apply them to our lives, economies, gardens, land, and nature” (1988: 3). These ways are summarized into twelve permaculture principles of design. “The overall aim of these design principles”, according to Veteto and Lockyer, “is to develop closed-loop, symbiotic, self-sustaining human habitats and production systems that do not result in ecological degradation or social injustice (2008: 51). “In this light”, Ferguson and Lovell add, “the practical stratum of permaculture might be more productively regarded as a conceptual framework for the evaluation and adoption of practices, rather than a bundle of techniques (2014: 264). In this thesis I will only outline three of the twelve design principles in the following chapter<sup>25</sup>, that I found most illustrative to show how the inhabitants of O Fojo move back and forth between perceptions and practices.

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21 Retrieved from: <https://permacultureprinciples.com/ethics/fair-share/>. Page visited on 12-06-2017. This website is designed by David Holmgren, and contains the same information as in his work *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability* (2002).

22 Retrieved from: [http://realitysandwich.com/165219/2012\\_climate\\_change\\_and\\_permaculture/](http://realitysandwich.com/165219/2012_climate_change_and_permaculture/). Page visited on 23-06-2017.

23 A holon can be described as a part of the whole and a manifestation of the whole itself.

24 Retrieved from: <https://permacultureproductions.com/2014/01/future-care/>. Page visited on 31/07/2017.

25 See for an exhaustive enumeration of all the permaculture principles for example Veteto and Lockyer (2008), Hemingway (2009), Rhodes (2012) and Hathaway (2015).

From this contextualizing chapter I will now move on to the first ethnographic chapter of this thesis, in which analyze how the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive and practice earth care.



## CHAPTER 2 EARTH CARE

In this ethnographic chapter I will analyze what my interlocutors perceive to be at the core of the most ecological challenges of modern society. According to them, a disconnectedness of humans from nature have caused most of these challenges. They propose an alternative model in which we actively work with, rather than against natural systems, and where we base human design upon the functioning systems of nature. According to my interlocutors, sustainable systems are in this sense not profound enough and they argue we have to change our patterns beyond sustainability and create resilient and regenerative systems instead. What these alternative systems look like are analyzed in the second section of this chapter. Resilient and regenerative systems, as I will show, call upon an active and cooperative collaboration between human and non-human systems. Finally, the third section of this chapter explains what earth care in practice can look like - taking the case of O Fojo as an illustrative example. In this chapter, I will also highlight how the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive earth care and people care to be highly interrelated.

### **2.1 Care beyond sustainability**

“We should not try to sustain the unsustainable” (Bluhdorn 2007).

From the first moment I arrived at O Fojo, I realized that the mission of caring for the earth ultimately implies to take care of oneself and that, reversely, taking care of oneself by creating human systems based upon natural systems implies taking care of the earth. Earth care is thus perceived as primarily anthropocentric. I will start this section by explaining how the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive the earth and nature and, logically following from this, what they perceive earth care to imply. I will show that, in caring for the earth, my interlocutors argue we have to move beyond sustainability.

According to social anthropologist Vassos Argyrou, the way humans have become to view nature changed radically in the nineteenth century. He describes a “historical trajectory” (2005: 5) where humans and nature have become regarded as opposites, rather than as both part of a one functioning system. He bases his theory on that of Collingwood, who he quotes in arguing that “the idea of nature [came] into the focus of thought, [became] the subject of intense and protracted reflection” and eventually produced a new version of reality” (1945: 1 in Argyrou 2005: 1). Argyrou describes this new version of reality as the “modern view” of nature. In this modern view,

“nature [became to represent] an intractable domain of danger and, above all, utility to be mastered by 'man' and brought under his control” (ibid.: 4). From here, Argyrou's argument follows, “[m]astery of nature came to be seen as the unmistakable mark of civilization” (ibid.), which has allowed for European domination and an uneven distribution of worldwide power relations. The inhabitants of O Fojo manifest alternatives to this modern view by perceiving our survival as human species as depending not on domination of, but rather on collaboration with natural systems. This is explained by Maurício as follows: “all the actions depart from ourselves, but we are also doing it for ourselves. And in doing so we are working with nature, not against it. We understand that without the mother I cannot feed myself” (II). Also Marcelo explains: “[f]or me the earth is our 'home', or 'house' (...). I would say that as everything, she has her [functioning], and we should know [this functioning] and work with [it].” According to Brawner, this perception of knowing and working with nature rather than against it can be called a redefinition of human consciousness (2015). She argues that an awareness with which we “presumed the ability to manipulate the land, select for the most efficient crops, and produce an unprecedented amount of food (...) have made us conscious of our own role in ecological “destruction and ensuing environmental crisis” (ibid.: 439). Yet, according to Maurício, most of humanity is still in what he calls denial mode:

“(…) it is amazing how ignorant we can be in a way to use the amazing things that we have, and the ability to invent and to create, to destroy. And keeping on going down this self-destructive pathway that most of humanity is on now. And this is amazing. This is amazing how clear it is for the people that are conscious about it, and it is amazing that most people can not even see this.” (III)

The redefinition of consciousness that the inhabitants of O Fojo manifest can be explained as an awareness to collaborate with and mimic natural systems in order to live constructively *with* rather than destructively *on* the earth in order to allow for humanity to flourish. Filipa explains: “[i]t is important to see that a lot of people in permaculture have this thing that they want to plant trees and regenerate, and to save the world. But indeed, it is not the world that we want to save, it is our place in the world. Because the earth will always be there, she will survive.” (II) This is what Maurico calls “an anthropocentric view” (II). What does this redefinition of human consciousness that is manifested by the inhabitants of O Fojo imply for their perception of earth care?

Interestingly, when I went into the field to conduct my research, sustainability was initially my main frameworks for analysis. My masters for which I designed this thesis is called *sustainable citizenship* and I thought of sustainability as *the* key driver of eco communities. However, while

being present in the field I have come to see sustainability in a different light. Sustainability, that can be explained as “the quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance”<sup>26</sup> is according to my interlocutors not enough in a time where the ecological balance has already been severely disturbed. As Bluhdorn (2007) argues in the quote with which I have opened this section: “we should not try to sustain the unsustainable.” Maurício explains this as follows:

“First I would like to come back to the term sustainability. Because how can that be a good term if what you want to sustain is not sustainable? The life that we have in the world in this moment is not sustainable. Dot. So if you want to be sustainable now, this is not enough. What permaculture is doing, or actually what people applying permaculture are doing, is to create a possibility for us to have a sustainable future. So in that sense it is a tool that can be used now, a really practical tool, to work now to create a future possibility of sustainability. It is a different way of looking. It would be a mistake to sustain what we have” (II).

Following this line of reasoning, my interlocutors argued that as inhabitants of an earth that has already been wounded, they feel the responsibility not just to sustain ecological systems, but instead to regenerate them through their everyday personal practices. Maurício explains this as follows: “we are manifesting (...) a different way of living, so that we can heal the wounds that we have been inflicting to nature, and to ourselves.”<sup>27</sup> This is also underscored in the thesis of Judith Kuiken on urban permaculture. She quotes one of her informants, saying his aim with permaculture is to: “(...) not just sustain things as they are so that they can just replicate, but to make [them] actually better over time” (2015: 8). In the next section I will turn to an analysis of how earth care beyond sustainability is perceived.

## **2. 2 Towards resilience and regeneration as alternatives to sustainability**

“We need to regenerate the soil itself to produce food, but also for the mind. So that new seeds can be planted in this soil, to adapt to new times” - Maurício (III).

As explained in the previous section, my interlocutors perceive observation of and collaboration with natural systems crucial to care for the earth and to care for ourselves. Human systems should be adapted to the functioning of natural systems not just to sustain them, but to improve them over

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26 Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sustainability>. Page visited at 18/06/2017.

27 Text transcribed from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOChODBQmrA>. Page visited at 11/01/2017.

time. The inhabitants of O Fojo perceive two features of natural systems to be crucial in the implementation of human design: resilience and regeneration. In this section I will analyze why the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive these two features to be important.

First of all resilience. In the previous section I quoted Filipa, saying that “the earth will always be there, she will survive” (II). Resilience is thus perceived to be a quality of natural systems, that we should mimic in order to create a “permanent agriculture that allows the possibility of a stable social order” (Mollison 1979: 3). Creating socially resilient systems is important according to my interlocutors because they see the world as constantly evolving. As Török explains: because of “the idea that there is always progress, you are never going to find one way, that is the perfect way of living. As the world changes (...) what we need is to be able to adapt to change and to new challenges. So whatever system we find will become obsolete at one point in time (...) The system that we have is not flexible enough to adapt to changes, I think.” This is also underscored by Maurício, who emphasizes that “the only thing that exists is change (I).” He explains how he perceives resilience: “in my point of view, resilience is exactly this. Being on the cutting edge of solution-finding, to see how we are going to live the life that we don't know what it will going to be like. We don't know because we have never lived it before. If the banking system goes down, how is it going to be? Seeds, for instance, will be the most important things, not money” (II).

This theory is radically different from that of sustainability, that assumes sustainment within a constantly evolving world as Török and Maurício describe. According to Ahern, it is exactly this perception of sustainability as “static, as durable and stable” (2011: 2) that is not relevant in our current world characterized by “unpredictable disturbance and change” (ibid.). He calls this mismatch of perception and reality “the paradox of sustainability” (ibid.). Yet, he argues, “[r]esilience theory offers a new perspective, or possibly a solution to this paradox of sustainability” (ibid.), by proposing change as inherent to all systems. A resilient system can be defined as follows by critical author Chip Ward:

“A resilient system is adaptable and diverse. It has some redundancy built in. A resilient perspective acknowledges that change is constant and prediction difficult in a world that is complex and dynamic (...) Resilience thinking is a new lens for looking at the natural world we are embedded in and the man-made world we have imposed upon it” (2007 in Hopkins 2008: 54).

What Ward calls 'resilience thinking' is exactly what the inhabitants perceive to be crucial in the design of human systems. Maurício describes:



“Resilience is not a capability only for nature. We are just destroying what is the base of life, nature (...) But for nature itself it is not a problem. If we disappear, nature will be able to regenerate itself without people. What we can do now, with knowledge and observation [of nature] is to regenerate faster than nature itself” (II).

Regeneration is the second feature of nature that the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive to be crucial in the implementation of human design. The process of ecological regeneration is explained by Maurício as follows:

“Regeneration is about creating diversity, functional diversity, to different elements working together to accomplish the functioning of the system. With this functional diversity you start to create different possibilities for the soil to regenerate. And if the soil regenerates, if you don't kill it with chemicals but improve the quality of the soil, you are creating conditions for many animals and bacteria to live in that soil, and when it rains it will be able to capture more water, and so it will be more fertile. And this fertility will bring more diversity to the soil. And this diversity brings productivity. And if you have this productivity, people can live from it. You have created an economy. So just by regenerating the soil you regenerate the whole system, now and in the future (...)” (II).

In the way Maurício explains, “(...) regeneration is [thus] focused on creating an ecologically driven local (...) economy that primarily functions as a provisioning mechanism of livelihood and food security, and instrumentally also empowers people through the creation of local (...) communities” (Natarajan 2005: 409). This emphasizes again how people care is perceived to be essentially dependent upon earth care. Maurício explains this as follows: “[r]egeneration, for sure, is focused on nature. Because it is nature that provides us the meaning of life. And when you are thinking about regenerating the process from soil to economy, we have to start thinking about regenerating nature” (II). According to Scharper, in engaging in the process of regeneration “humans and the larger environment [become] mutually constitutive” (1997: 188 in Hathaway 2015: 6). This mutually constitutive relationship between humans and the earth is what he calls “anthropoharmonism” (ibid.). This ethic, according to Hathaway, “does not imply passivity, or simply “going with the flow,” in an epoch were human interventions are often undermining the stability of entire ecosystems; nor is it simply the idea of “living harmoniously with nature” in a world undergoing rapid – and often destructive – change” (ibid.). “Rather”, he argues,

“anthropoharmonism calls humans to work both actively and cooperatively with the wider biotic community to preserve, regenerate, and adapt healthy, functional, and resilient ecosystems” (ibid.).

In this section I have shown that rather than seeing nature as a utility to be brought under control (Argyrou 2005), the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive nature to be the base of our human existence. Therefore, they believe it should not be controlled or dominated, but rather be able to manifest itself in all its diversity and complexity. The inhabitants of O Fojo perceive our role as human beings to observe and learn from these natural systems, and collaborate with the earth in designing human systems. How this perception of earth care is put into practice on a daily basis at O Fojo is illustrated in the next section.

### **2.3 Practicing earth care, practicing people care**

“How to engage with care of earth without idealising nature or de-responsibilizing human agency by seeing it as either inevitable destructive or paternalistic stewardship?” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010: 8).

According to Veteto and Lockyer, “permaculture’s ethical philosophy and material design principles provide the tools for translating the ecovillage concept from idealism into practice” (2008: 48). In this section, I will illustrate how the inhabitants of O Fojo engage with the ethic earth care through putting three design principles, respectively 'catch and store energy', 'produce no waste' and 'integrate rather than segregate' into practice.

Firstly, at O Fojo, 'catch and store energy' is mostly practiced through making use of renewable energy. This is first of all implemented in building. At the site, there are two relatively small buildings that are both built in a solar-passive way, designed to catch, store and spread solar energy. Both houses have been designed and co-built by Maurício, and almost entirely made out of natural and local materials, such as clay, straw and wood. One of the places is the main house that consists of a kitchen and combined dining-and living room and the second building consists of a combined but separated toolshed and bedroom, where Maurício slept upstairs and I slept downstairs. Upon my arrival at the beginning of February the evenings could be very cold, and I was often pleasantly surprised to find my room comfortably warm. Furthermore, the 'green roof' covered with grass and different plants functioned as a natural form of insulation. The principle 'catch and store energy' was also implemented in efficient energy management. To heat the bigger house, that functioned as a common space, we made fires from gathered pines and wood from the

terrain and our paper 'waste'. On top of the larger house there is one small solar panel, generating enough energy to use a light in the kitchen or living room when needed, because there is no electrical grid. We therefore always ate and meditated by candlelight. When we had to use energy for construction, for example for the cement mixer or drill, we made use of a generator, that was also used occasionally- and only after conscious consideration- for other purposes such as mixing soup.



Picture 3<sup>28</sup>. Júlia and Marcelo are using the generator to mix soup in front of the small solar-passive house that is divided into a toolshed (left side) and two superimposed bedrooms (right side). Photo by Matheus.

Secondly, the principle 'produce no waste' is mainly realized at O Fojo through recycling products that are normally considered to be waste. First of all, we used the leftover sawdust from a local lumberyard to cover our human 'waste' in the dry compost toilet. These human products were again composted to be used later as a fertilizer for the land, so that no energy is lost and the cycle is closed. Secondly, we recycled several food packages, such as jars, rice milk-packs and cans. These latter two were for example re-used to seed new seedlings before putting them in the soil. We also saved seeds, both from our own vegetable- and fruit trees from the garden and from for example the pumpkins from the local market. Thirdly, we went to a local bakery every week to buy the old bread that would otherwise be thrown away for a reduced price- in order to fry and eat at home. Finally, we had four chickens who would happily recycle our natural waste every day- and that provided us with daily fresh eggs that formed a welcome addition to our otherwise predominantly vegan diet.

Thirdly, the principle 'integrate rather than segregate', is at O Fojo mostly implemented regarding the food provisioning. At O Fojo we aimed to (re-)connected food production and consumption. For lunch and dinner we used as many vegetables from the three garden beds as possible, and sometimes also non-cultivated 'weeds' for a salad. In the gardens we used multi- crops instead of mono-crops and let productive weeds such as clovers grow, in order to stimulate natural

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28 All the pictures included in this thesis are used with permission from the depicted people.

diversity and regenerate the soil. Towards the end of my fieldwork period, in spring, we could eat our vegetables almost solely from the garden, but at the end of winter we went to the local market every week. At the market, that felt to me like it came from another age- with old couples talking unintelligible Portuguese to me, the smell of fresh fish all around and rabbits and chickens being sold from wooden baskets- we bought vegetables from a lady from whom we knew she did not use chemicals. These vegetables were homegrown and thus both local and seasonal. Finally, the design of an edible food forest was being implemented at O Fojo, bringing natural and agricultural systems together.

In this chapter I have analyzed how the inhabitants of O Fojo give meaning to the ethic earth care by healing the relationship between humans and the earth. They perceive caring for the earth to be crucial in caring for humanity and thus, ultimately, in caring for themselves. In order to care for the earth, my interlocutors propose active observation of natural systems and collaboration with these systems, rather than forms of oppression or domination. By observing ecosystems, they argue, we could get to know its functioning and adjust our human design to it. In this way, we can create human systems that do not harm ecosystems, but instead improve their natural diversity and complexity. In the last section of this chapter I have illustrated how they design and implement these systems on a daily basis. By acts of composting, growing food, recycling and using renewable energy, the inhabitants of O Fojo are simultaneously taking care of themselves and of the earth, by reducing their dependency upon it. From this base they then extend care to others, both on a local and on a global level. This is what I will turn to in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 3 PEOPLE CARE

In the previous chapter I have analyzed how the inhabitants of O Fojo take care of themselves by creating consciously designed resilient and regenerative ecological systems. In creating these systems, they are actively and collaboratively taking care of the earth. In this ethnographic chapter I will analyze how they extend these principles to social systems. In the first section of this chapter I will illustrate how the inhabitants of O Fojo give meaning to the ethic people care by actively creating relations with the local community. I will show how they, in doing so, refute the so called 'island-discourse' (Andreas 2013), that characterizes ecovillages as usually operating in isolation from their local surroundings. Alternatively, they create social systems that are inspired by the functioning of ecosystems. I will illustrate in the second section of this chapter how the inhabitants of O Fojo practice people care by extending their care for local people to those far away in time and space and to a broader *species care* (Mollison 1988: 3). I will explain how, in doing so, they are actively constructing a form of ecological citizenship. This form of citizenship, introduced by Dobson (2000), can be explained as “a political vocabulary that captures the transformation of the relationship between society and nature (Smith 1998: 99 in Dobson 2000: 4).

### 3.1 From isolation to collaboration

“What sense is there just to change my life? It has to be though an act of inspiration that we change others. We need to touch as many people as we can in a deep way, to inspire as many people as we can” - Mauricio (I).

Interestingly, contrary to the permaculture ethic of people care that emphasizes that “the place to start change is (...) second in one's region or neighbourhood” (Mollison 1988: 509), in the literature ecovillages are sometimes characterized as isolated 'islands' within their local surroundings. In this section I will first outline this criticism and then consider O Fojo's position in relation to these theories. I will show that the inhabitants of O Fojo don't perceive the community to be functioning as an island within the local surroundings, because they explicitly aim to connect with others to create local resilience, based upon patterns of nature.

A literature review reveals the supposed 'island position' of ecovillages comes from two sides, both from the inhabitants of the community and from the surrounding neighbourhood. On the community side, as Marcus Andreas articulates: “(...) ecovillages have developed impressive, well-

connected sites that offer a counterpart to the general trend for globalization. But in so doing, they have often ignored the regional level” (2013: 16). On the other side, “members of ecological communities are pursuing their alternative lifestyles in the countryside (Woods 2005). They can be part of the ruralities constructed both by locals and incomers. However, locals and incomers see them as ‘Others’ who do not fit into their own, dominant, notion of the rural idyll, and therefore exclude them from it” (Cloke & Little 1997 in Meijering et al 2007: 49). Maurício disproves these theories by emphasizing the local connectedness of O Fojo:

“Usually in ecovillages people live that come from the cities to the countryside to live a different life. And as they don't know people from the countryside, and they don't know that they don't know everything, or they think they know everything, there is no connection with people. But here it is different, we really connected with the neighbours and with the people around. And since the beginning it was really one of our strongest points, because we have lots of friends around. And people that.. you know when someone talks bad about us, because they don't know so they judge, these people that know us, and who have been here with us and sat at this table, they say that O Fojo is nice, they defend us” (IV).

Picture 4. One of the 'Let's Grow' open permaculture weekends at O Fojo, where both locals and internationals are invited and introduced to permaculture and community living. In this picture we are collectively mulching one of the garden beds.

Picture by Maurício.



The connection that Maurício describes was also clearly visible. Always when we were with Maurício in a local cafe, market or restaurant there were people coming over to greet him, we were invited by a local farmer to come over with the whole community to learn how to prune olive trees and sometimes neighbours (with their families) came over to O Fojo. Filipa also describes: “you need to start small. Then you can get bigger and bigger, for sure. But especially by giving the example and once again, not being a closed community... we live here as a community but we are open to the public, in general, but also we are open to the local community.” (II).

The case of O Fojo thus doesn't stroke with the literature, for example with how Andreas describes that at German ecovillage Sieben Linden there is “(...) an “ocean between” the ecovillage and the rest of society (2013:10). Alternatively, they give meaning to the ethic people care by creating a locally embedded position. From this embedded position, they are inspiring the local environment to change its generally unsustainable lifestyle. The inhabitants of O Fojo do so by organizing events focused around ecological and social sustainability (such as natural building, permaculture and regeneration, vegan cooking, sociocracy, dragon dreaming, and tantra), and by organizing open permaculture weekends such as depicted in picture 3. About this, Maurício said: “what we are doing here [at O Fojo], we do it at the borders of the rest the structure, our structure somehow” (I).

In the beginning of my fieldwork period, I perceived the active outreach of O Fojo to be a stressful process. Maurício often felt reluctant to answer the enormous amount of messages in his inbox and Filipa often verbalized she would prefer to stay and work in the community when she had to go out for the day in order to set up and promote events. Therefore, after my two weeks of initial observation, I asked Maurício if he would not prefer to have a small community without all the events and volunteers, where he could just live a simple and quiet life. His answer was the quote with which I have opened this section: “what sense is there just to change my life?” Later on, he emphasized: “connecting to others is about giving meaning, based on the patterns of nature. Trees also grow beyond themselves by connecting underground and supporting each other” (I). This is inspired by Mollison's vision, who argues that when we “turn to our relationships with others (...) we observe a general rule of nature: that cooperative species and associations of self-supporting species (...) make healthy communities” (Mollison 1988: 3). Therefore, as Brawner argues, “[m]utually beneficial relationships fostered in the [permaculture] garden [should be] replicated in the social realm (...) It is this network of relationships, this connectivity—rather than the things they constitute—that defines (...) adaptability and systemic resilience (2015: 434). This was explained by Filipa as follows: I think [being self-sufficient] would never be possible because we are interdependent, we are social beings” (II). Maurício added:

“if you are self-sufficient you are going to create other kinds of problems. We are going to have a lack of diversity...yes, we would have other problems if we would not relate. In this way, it is not just an ecological pathway. And ecological means the logic of the house, that is not just composed by one individual but a system” (II).

This is explained by Capra as follows: “[t]he word ecology (...) comes from the Greek *oikos*

(“household”). Ecology is the study of how the Earth Household works” (1999: 2). This study, Capra continues, is about “understand[ing] the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life” (ibid.: 1). This understanding is what he calls: “*ecological literacy*” (ibid.). According to King, this ecological literacy can then be “us[ed] (...) for creating sustainable human communities” (2008: 123). Perceiving people care in this way, according to Maurício, makes O Fojo “like the flower of life: is a closed cycle that enters in contact with other closing cycles” (IV). In this way, O Fojo can be described as by Latouche: as “(...) not [being] a closed microcosm, but a linkage in a network of horizontal, virtuous and solidarity relations, aiming to experiment with practices of democratic reinforcement capable to [transform] the liberal domination” (2007: n.n.). What does this mean for the way people care is practiced?

In summary, in this section I have shown how the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive people care to be at the base of creating resilient and healthy human societies, based upon the patterns of nature. Importantly, however, the inhabitants of O Fojo do not just care for people, but extended care to “distant strangers both human and non-human, in space and time” (Dobson 2000: 8), whereby manifesting a form of ecological citizenship. I will turn to illustrate this in the next section.

### **3.2 From passive denizens to active ecological citizens**

“Caring is, of course, a gendered activity, and the task of ecological citizenship would be to take that activity and degender it: to reclaim it as a citizenly, rather than a gendered, virtue” (Dobson 2000: 9).

Following Mollison's insight that “(...) the place to start change is first with the individual (oneself)” (1988: 509) I have mainly focused this thesis on the personal level. This section, however, will show that “personal *acts*, that might seem insignificant in isolation, have a cumulative potential to be of revolutionary import[ance]” (Alexander 2013: 299), and that following “the feminist insight that ‘the personal is political, personal ethico-political practices of change need to be also thought as collective” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010: 6). I will consider these 'personal ethico-political' actions of the inhabitants of O Fojo in the light of ecological citizenship, a notion that “disrupts the standard vocabulary- or discourse more generally- of citizenship (...)” (Dobson 2000: 10) by emphasizing the private instead of the public realm, responsibilities instead of rights, active instead of passive citizenship, and by adding non-territorial and temporal

dimensions to it (ibid.). In this section I will outline all of these features, and show how the inhabitants of O Fojo actively engage with them in manifesting a form of ecological citizenship.

The first feature of ecological citizenship that challenges conventional notions of citizenship is its emphasis on the private instead of the public realm. Interestingly, in line with permaculture thinking, ecological citizenship considers the individual and its household to be the starting point of action. Dobson argues: “[f]ar from being a lesser realm from the public (...) the private sphere of the household is a crucial site of ecological citizenship activity” (Dobson 2000: 11). This is logically true when private actions are undertaken with a public goal in mind as Puig de la Bellacasa explains: “(...) we have to interrupt further the association of ‘personal’ ethical engagement with the ‘individual’ and the ‘private’ (...) By this I refer to situations when people are changing their ways of doing at the level of personal everyday life, not individually but in connection to a collective” (2010: 6). This 'connection to a collective' is further explained by Dobson's insight that “private actions can have public implications” (2000: 11). A practical example of how the inhabitants of O Fojo engage with this feature of ecological citizenship is by taking care of most of their own 'waste'<sup>29</sup>, for example by recycling 'human waste' as illustrated in the second chapter. Filipa explains:

“And I remember the first time I did my PDC I went home and I was discussing with my ex partner who would flush the toilet. Just the responsibility of .. you know now, and one you know you cannot close your eyes again. Now we poo, and this goes into a water treatment and.. I just never thought about it in this way before, about all the systems before the cycle closes. And nowadays I have this.. I am always thinking about how to close the cycle and how to do things in a way so that we don't lose energy” (I).

In Filipa's perception the private is thus intrinsically linked with the public, because “the individual and the community are always embedded in larger ecological and human systems” (Litfin 2009: 135). Dobson calls this “connecting of the global and the local one of the signal features of ecological citizenship” (2000: 23) and says that “[a]t one end of the spectrum lies the private arena (...) at the other end the world, or the earth” (ibid.). This also relates to the second feature.

The second feature of ecological citizenship is a focus on responsibilities and on active citizenship. Dobson explains how the conventional notion of citizenship, as an exchange between

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<sup>29</sup> I am putting the word waste here between brackets because I have shown in the last chapter that much of what we consider to be waste products in mainstream society actually prove to be recyclable and useful products at eco community O Fojo.



rights and duties in a reciprocal relationship, has shifted towards one of “citizen duties and responsibilities” (2000: 5). Related to the first feature, Dobson argues that “[t]o the extent that activity and passivity are useful categories at all, ecological citizenship disrupts their normal usage by asserting that active ecological citizenship can be carried out in the private arena” (ibid.: 14). Following Berglund and Matti (2006), Fournier exemplifies this point by emphasizing that “[e]nvironmental degradation is not a problem to be solved exclusively by government policy but through the everyday decisions and actions of all of us (2008: 539). Therefore, she continues to argue, following Dobson: we “(...) are all drawn in as citizens, called to act and participate in the fair distribution of limited natural resources; we are all in relations of obligations, in a position of owing or being owed ecological space (Dobson 2006 in Fournier 2008: 539). How the inhabitants of O Fojo engage with this feature of ecological citizenship is by taking up active personal responsibility, as will be further explained in the fourth chapter. When I asked Júlia if she feels a sense of responsibility to be part of solutions she answered:

“Always. If I see something that could be done better, than it is my responsibility to help others to see it too. Like these cooking classes [a series of vegan cooking classes planned to take place at O Fojo] are a good example, my aim is not just to give [the participants] a vegan recipe, but also to explain them why it is good. Why is it good not to eat white sugar, or to consume dairy products, or meat.”

Júlia's quote illustrates that she perceives it to be her personal responsibility to live consciously herself, but also her duty to actively share her knowledge in order to spread awareness and reach other people to take up their responsibility too. What Júlia's quote also illustrates is that she realizes she has “obligations towards future generations and other species” (Dobson 2000: 6), which relates to the third feature.

The third feature of ecological citizenship is that it expands the conventional notion of citizenship with both a non-territorial and a temporal dimension. Dobson defines this as “act[ing] with care and compassion towards distant strangers, human and non-human, in space and time” (Dobson 2000: 8). Similar to how Benedict Anderson defines imagined communities – they are imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991: 6-7) – ecological citizenship thus demands a certain level of imagination. Filipa explains how she extends this imagination to include non-human species as follows:

“When I became vegetarian it was first because of environmental ethics, so I stopped because it was industrial. I stopped to feed this industry. Then somehow I started realizing also about health, this was when I stopped eating fish because of the antibiotics and again, by the way they were fishing and everything. And it wasn't so hard for me because of their energies, you know they are living beings, so it was quite easy for me, not to eat them.” (I).

Also the importance of caring for future generations was very present at O Fojo. Maurício once expressed “we are taking lives from the next generations to keep on living the way we are doing right now” (II). Later on, when I asked him if he is trying to be part of solutions to the challenges he perceives in the world, he responded: “sure. This is what my life is for. I am here to serve. And to live a happy life, a meaningful life. I am here to serve the next generations and the people that are here now, to help me to serve the next generations.” (III). This vision is also underscored by Filipa, who adds: “I think we are not preparing our path, because we will probably not be here anymore, but we are preparing the path for the next generations” (I). From these quotes, it becomes clear that Maurício and Filipa perceive care as “an obligation they owe to strangers”, as defined by Dobson (2000: 6).

In this chapter I have analyzed how the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive care for other people to be part of taking care of themselves. In the previous chapter I have illustrated how they build local resilient and regenerative systems in order to reduce their dependence upon natural systems and to support their natural processes. In this chapter I have shown how they perceive sharing knowledge and extending connections to be at the heart of people care. Connecting with others, according to the inhabitants of O Fojo, is to create meaning. Contrary to what the so called 'island-discourse' proposes, O Fojo should thus rather be considered a hub in a network, rather than an isolated entity. The way my interlocutors practice people care is through active outreach in their local environment, where they invite other people to become part of the solutions. Furthermore, they extend care to what can be perceived to be an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of people and other species living now or in the future. In recognition of the damaging effects of their private actions for others that are part of the imagined community, they are adjusting their personal patterns of behavior and consumption. In this sense, the inhabitants of O Fojo can be regarded to be ecological citizens, by making care a civil value, enacted from the private realm. In the following chapter I will analyze this process in more detail, and explore how acting in the local present with the global future in mind is one of the core values of the ethic future care.

## CHAPTER 4 FUTURE CARE

This final ethnographic chapter consists of two different, yet complementary sections. In the first section I will show what the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive to be necessary to care for the future: a break with conditioned patterns of consumption. I will illustrate how they imagine a future with different values and how they, in doing so, can be seen as part of a larger transition discourse, a movement proposing “(...) a transition to an altogether different world” (Escobar 2015: 453). In the second section of this chapter, I will then illustrate how the inhabitants of O Fojo practice future care through what Rhodes calls “reconnect[ing] with the natural world” (2012: 122). However, although Rhodes argues this process “requires a shift in thinking and being” (2012: 122), I will illustrate that, reversely, it can be the actual *doing* of reconnecting that can inspire a shift in thinking and being to happen. As the future is logically built upon current practices of earth care and people care, in this final chapter it will also become clear how all three components are interrelated.

### **4.1 From a rusted logic to alternatives: O Fojo as part of a transition discourse**

“When the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then will we realize that one cannot eat money” - Osage saying (Wasserman 1983)

In the last chapter on people care I have explained how the inhabitants of O Fojo consciously change their consumption patterns in favour of other people and species who can be both distant in time and space. In this section, I will show what they perceive to be most important in order to care for the future: a conscious pattern of degrowth. I will illustrate how they perceive and practice degrowth and how they, in doing so, can be seen as part of a larger transition discourse. Relating the individual perceptions and practices to a larger movement is important, because all my interlocutors emphasized they considered O Fojo to be a place where alternatives were being manifested, but not necessarily created. I will start with explaining this notion.

During the period of my fieldwork at O Fojo it became clear to me that the conscious societal transformations that my interlocutors proposed was not necessarily originating in ecovillages, but rather a place a place where they could be manifested. This is explained as follows by Matheus, when I asked him if he perceived what we were doing at O Fojo as establishing a new paradigm:

“I think it is (...) just another manifestation of the emergence of a new paradigm. Because a paradigm is... it is an interesting question. It is kind of a way, a lens of which we see the world right? So like capitalism, it is not just a mode of production but it is also a way of interpreting the world, of seeing... of understanding how people relate to each other, and to define how to put value to certain things and to work. Is it social cohesion or economy, it has a scale of value, it has a lot to do with values and principles. And I think there is a shift happening, mostly in my perception through a recognition of the environmental limits of the planet, and also by the social chaos in which we live (...). Poverty, corruption, people taking antidepressants like crazy.. something is very wrong and we need to change something... I think there is a new paradigm, and.. yeah ecovillages are not the place where it is being created, but another place in which it is evolving.”

The shift that Matheus mentions is in the literature often called a “paradigm shift” (Escobar 2015: 453), characterizing “most contemporary transition discourses” that propose “a radical cultural and institutional transformation – a transition to an altogether different world” (ibid.). According to Maurício, making this shift requires adjusting our imagination: “[w]e need to be able to imagine a different world. Because as I told you in the beginning it is not possible to continue to live the way we are living now, you and me. Simple.” (I). Degrowth is a movement within the broader transition discourse that- according to Demaria et al. “often intersect[s]” with ecovillages (2013: 202). Central within degrowth is a critique of “not growth itself but the ideology of growth, a system of representation that translates everything into a reified and autonomous economic reality inhabited by self-interested consumers” (Fournier 2008: 529). Júlia explains how she perceives this ideology of growth as a cause of cultural segregation: “I see greediness as one of the main challenges in the world. It is both about the mentality and the behavior, there is no consciousness. If there would not be this greediness, we would think about not polluting the water, and caring about the plants and the earth and everything.”

I found that at O Fojo one of the main aims of its inhabitants is to create awareness of the continuous conditioning in our current society to desire consumption, and to break with this pattern. Filipa explains this hegemonic character of growth as follows:

“Once again the comfort zone, understanding that we don't need so much to live comfortable. That we just need shelter, food, water.. and other people to socialize with because we are social beings. And the challenge is the consumption that we are doing, we need to understand that we

don't need so much. So we need to accept or... how should I explain this? When someone is subordinated to something, and we are starting to be like this, like goats that just follow..." (I).

Matheus also explained: "it is difficult to give up on some things that everyone else does.. things that you have been conditioned to do as well." Yet, by the inhabitants of O Fojo this hegemony of growth was largely deconstructed. Marcelo explains this as follows:

"[I realized that] actually everything outside of you can be random, you can feel joy or sadness with everything, and it happens, everything from outside can make you feel all kinds of things, the same outside thing. And this is what really matters for me. It is about getting conscious about this, that the outside is not so important as the inside. What I have or construct inside is more important than what I have outside. I would say that because of the change in every single part of my day, if I am waking up at noon or waking up every day at 6 a.m., eat cookies before going to sleep to a vegan diet, and I am saying this because I am feeling much better, all these changes of seeing what is happening in the world and at the same time being completely isolated from the world, kind of. Or at least what the media feeds you... It gives you a really huge different perspective of what is important to you and what your needs are."

'Understanding that we don't need so much', as Filipa describes, or 'understanding what is important to you and what your needs are, as Marcelo describe, can be explained according to Fournier as "(...) a paradigmatic re-ordering of values, in particular the (re)affirmation of social and ecological values (...)" (2008: 532), characterizing degrowth. In his sense, degrowth is thus more about philosophically redefining our position as interconnected humans in the larger world than about literally decreasing our levels of consumption. Therefore, the degrowth movement has been described as "a political imaginary" (Escobar 2015: 456), "philosophical" (ibid.), a "conceptual and ideological weapon" (Fournier 2008: 532) and "a symbolic challenge" (ibid.).

Yet, Maurício explained to me how a paradigmatic re-ordering of values inherently also has a practical component. He gave me a description of how he engages with changing his life in order to become part of the solutions he sees to current challenges in the world. His description, that shows also how all-encompassing this change really is, moved me to tears during the interview because I could feel the message came straight out of his heart:

"First of all I changed my life, my consumption patterns, my point of view, my direction in life, my profession, my lifestyle, the way I eat, the way I relate, the way I communicate, I changed the way.. I changed my way (...) And what I do is I design the way I want to live and I design



what I want to do with my life and I live near nature and I am connected with the rhythms of nature somehow, I invest my resources, all of them, in the creation of this educational centre. And I work every day for free to do that. So I have no income because money is not my drive, it is a byproduct of what I do. And I use resources the best way I can. And I choose where I spend my energy in a way where it is most usable. I reduced my needs, I am happy. I am mindful, I am focussed and I freed myself from everything at least in my level of consciousness, that is unnecessary. And doing so I can focus on what is important. I get informed, I choose, I refuse, yeah.. I... I think most of all I act according to what I see. And what I see is not nice. I cannot be different again. It is not possible to keep on being different. I create community, and I help other people to do that. I changed my life and I help other people to change theirs. I challenge people, I challenge society, I challenge laws, I challenge myself. I challenge everything of which I think it is not correct. I do what has to be done... I do what has to be done.” (I).

In this section I have shown how the inhabitants of O Fojo actively question what I have called the rusted logic of the mainstream discourse of growth. On a daily basis, they reconsider what their actual needs are, and how they can construct an alternative imaginary to the hegemonic imaginary of growth. In doing so, they can be considered to be part of a degrowth movement- that suggests, with the larger transition discourse- a fundamental cultural shift of values. In this way, they give meaning to the ethic future care by constantly questioning what base it is we are creating now for future generations to come. They constantly philosophically redefine themselves as humans and as consumers living in and relating to the world. Although the awareness of the inhabitants of O Fojo described in this section is thus primarily cognitive, in the next and final section I will show how awareness can also be fostered through bodily experience.

#### **4.2 Changing awareness through experience**

“My prayer is that we ‘center down,’ for the sake of all the relations, for all of us. To be perfectly honest - and there can be nothing less - my prayer is that we get down, that we get down and dirty. I pray that we lose ourselves while lovemaking with dirt, with the rocks and streams, the salmon who swim there, the coyotes and ’coons, the water bugs and snakes - with the fertile ground of wherever we may be.” (Sewall 1999: 274).

At O Fojo we were living surrounded by nature, and without the facilities of the city. This created awareness about my 'waste' products, since we were not connected to a sewage system and there was no truck coming to collect our trash. Closing my own cycles through reduction of consumption

and recycling confronted me with how much 'waste' we produce and what we could do with it. Furthermore, growing our own vegetables connected me with the earth. I became aware of planting- and harvest seasons, of the weeds and the little insects in the ground. Building by hand instead of with machines connected me with the soil. I became aware of the variety of different layers in the soil, of which some were soft and like clay, and other parts were hard like stone. Living outside more than inside connected me to the sounds and cycles of nature, of the frogs and the crickets that started singing every night around the same time and the moon that would wax and wane. Collecting the eggs of the chickens every day- that were sometimes still warm in the early morning- would increasingly connect me to their moods and individual characters. And this list is by far not exhaustive. Living at O Fojo made me progressively aware that, as Ingold strikingly captures: “[I]ike all other creatures, human beings do not exist on the 'other side' of materiality, but swim in an ocean of materials” (2011: 24). In the previous two chapters I have explained how the inhabitants of O Fojo constantly engage in relations of care - both with humans and other species and both in the present and in the future- from a holistic perspective on life where all systems are interrelated. In this final section I will focus on O Fojo as a place from where this consciousness was fostered, not from a cognitive level but rather from an emotional level. Furthermore, I will explain how this emotional awareness of being interconnected was perceived by my interlocutors as a process of gaining 'response-ability'.

I found that living at O Fojo did not just affect my point of view, but also gradually transformed the perspective of some of my interlocutors. They emphasized that much of this transformation was in the actual experience of alternative living. Júlia for example describes:

“So [Török and me] came here [at O Fojo] from Budapest, from the city. And we came here and it was silent, and there were no people. (...) There was so much less input. The air is more clear, even the vision is much more clear and nature itself is just hitting me in the face. And I started to see, that was almost scary (...) It was clear that I became more clear from the inside (...) I really encountered my ego here. And just being here, in this environment, helped a lot to see this (...) That is I think the most obvious change, a change in awareness.”

Van Schyndel- Kasper explains the role of ecovillages in this process in the following way:

“[e]covillagers (...) tend to convey an acute awareness of their sources of energy and water, the practical importance of solar aspect for lighting, heating, and powering their homes, and the ecological implications of daily processes like eating, bathing, and disposing of waste (human and

otherwise). Planning, building, and living in such an ecologically conscious home *tends to reinforce certain ecological principles* in everyday life in ways that conventional housing does not” (2008: 18, emphasis added). Matheus describes how he experiences this process:

“We live a very alienated life in big cities for example. Most people don't know how to produce anything, they have no idea what happens with the things they throw away.. they are separated from so much of the physical world... it is alienating, although it might be comfortable. I think it is mostly a fake sensation of comfort. Being in more direct contact with the (...) world around you is a beautiful thing. So I feel in a way privileged to have the experience [here at O Fojo] of connecting more with the cycles that pass through me, things that come to me and I do something with them and then I give back. Now I have more influence over this process (...)

Also Júlia describes how living at O Fojo changed her awareness regarding her position in the world: “(...) because [at O Fojo] you are already pulled out of the ... of that environment of consuming, rushing.. and here [at O Fojo] it is easier [to align my actions with my level of consciousness]. I think also that my actions are [more] aligned when the brain understanding comes to heart understanding.” What Júlia calls heart understanding can according to Hathaway be called a form of “ecological wisdom” (2015: 7), that he describes as “wisdom encompassing a form of consciousness – rooted in a deep, *experiential* knowledge – that enables one to perceive reality *relationally* (as interconnected and intersubjective – with humans as members of, not separate from, the greater Earth community and the wider cosmos)” (ibid., emphasis added). Puig de la Bellacasa describes the role of feeling in what Hathaway calls ecological wisdom and what she labels as an ecological perception. She argues:

The ecological perception of being part of the earth (...) requires that the earth is not reduced to a spiritual or visionary image (...) but is also *felt*: earth as ‘real dirt under our fingernails’ (Starhawk 2004: 6); our bodies responding to the needs of water because we are water (Lohan 2008); our energy being living material processed by other forms of life. Permaculture ethical principles can indeed be seen as ideas that we became able of doing, but it is more appropriate to say that *it is the doing that transforms* the way we feel, think, engage, with the principles” (2010: 9, original emphasis removed and own emphasis added).

This is explained in a similar way by Maurício: “[s]ome people think they have to change themselves first in order for things to happen, but no. At the same time you are planting and digging, you are changing” (II).

Finally, I found that it is in the realization of being part of, rather than living on the earth, that the inhabitants of O Fojo emphasized their personal responsibility to care. As Török explains: “I feel responsible (...) not to abuse nature and other beings. (...) This is kind of my mantra, but it all starts with me. So I am not responsible for others but I am responsible in my belief for nature and all the resources and other beings. Not to use or abuse others.” This can be explained according to Litfin as follows: “[w]hile holism represents a real challenge to the atomistic ontology of modernity, the eco-village movement does not do away with individualism; rather, it puts a primary emphasis on individual responsibility while conceiving of the individual as inextricably embedded in larger living systems” (2009: 127). Interestingly, this responsibility was mostly explained by my interlocutors not as a heavy burden, but rather as a liberating and empowering process that enabled them to “(...) act in accordance with the ecological principles that enable life (...)” (Hathaway 2015: 7). In this sense, they often explained responsibility as gaining response-ability: the ability to respond. Maurício for example said: “I have the ability to give response to what I see (...) because I am conscious about that. And if I am conscious and not egocentric, for sure I have the response-ability (...) I am just a piece of the bigger whole... so I am just a manifestation of the whole” (III). In this sense, ecological wisdom or an ecological perception “enable one to (...) *consciously* participate in evolution” (Hathaway 2015: 7, emphasis added). Such a process is also described by Marcelo:

“(...) I realized the world was not as well treated as it should be. Then I got this explosion of trying to change the world, and trying to shake people like: “come on, don't you see this?” But with time and with a lot of expended energy I started to take responsibility just onto myself and my area of action (...) This responsibility became my ability to give response to the moment, in each moment (...) like individually consciously acting as part of a whole.”

In line with Hathaway, according to social and environmental scientist Atlee 'acting consciously as part of a whole' as Marcelo describes, can be explained as “conscious evolution” (2010: 284). He explains: “[w]e are all participants in life and society, no matter what we do or don't do, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we intend to be or not. Participation is intrinsic. Both action and not-doing are actual contributions to what happens next, for better and/or worse” (2010: 284). Yet, he argues: “conscious evolution means becoming an *aware*, intentional participant in that evolutionary process. Conscious evolution means seeking to be aware of what is involved in that process in specific domains and situations and seeking to be aware, too, of who we are and who we might be in relation to that. It involves making choices and taking action—or not—with as much awareness

as we can of our evolutionary role as we seek to serve and manifest the best of what life is and seeks to be” (ibid., emphasis added).

In this final chapter I have shown that essentially, the inhabitants of O Fojo are constantly challenging themselves to become “*aware, intentional participant[s]*” (ibid.) in the course of life. They recognize that the future is not something abstract from which we are detached, but instead something to which we are directly connected. My interlocutors perceive their current lifestyle and consumption patterns to directly influence the course of the future. They act upon this perception of future care by constantly challenging themselves to create alternative definitions of wellbeing, that are detached from consumption. Also, I have shown that what Hathaway calls “*experiential knowledge*” (2015: 7) can play a role in fostering the awareness of being part of a larger whole. By directly engaging with natural processes the earth becomes less abstract and more tangible. This perception of being part of the earth, called “*ecological wisdom*” (Hathaway, ibid.) or “*an ecological perception*” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010: 9), influences the perception of the inhabitants of O Fojo on their personal ability to respond to the challenges they see in life. Challenges to which they are not detached, but directly connected. They emphasize that as part of a larger functioning whole, they can act upon the future by personally giving response to what they perceive as unjust in the present. From this analysis of perceptions and practices of future care, I will now turn to the conclusion, in which I will connect all my observations and analyses in order to answer my main question.



## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the introduction I have stated that my aim with this thesis is twofold: I want to address both a societal and a scientific issue. The societal issue I have described is one of “organized irresponsibility” (González and Stryker 2014: 3) within the modern capitalist discourse. We have become so caught up in the logic of modern capitalism promoting “[i]ndividualism, human exemptionalism, linear systems of production/disposal, and unquestion[ed] allegiance to the goal of economic growth” (van Schyndel Kasper 2008: 21), that we have created a collective apathy for the world. This has led to a fragmented culture, where everyone is chasing their own interest. Especially in a time where we are facing serious and far-reaching ecological and social issues, it seems we are stuck in a collective 'we don't care mentality'. Firstly, in answering my research question, I illustrate how my research results can contribute to alternative ways of being in- and relating to our world. Secondly, I will turn to a discussion, in which I will discuss the scientific relevance of my research results. In the introduction I have argued we have to shift our focus in social sciences from merely analyzing the problems with existing structures to analyzing what alternatives could look like, whereby focusing on the future. In this section I will explain how my research results can contribute to the field of an ecological and future-oriented anthropology. Finally, I will reflect upon my research process and end with a personal note.

Firstly, I will outline an answer to my main question: *what are perceptions of inhabitants of eco community O Fojo Permaculture regarding local solutions to interrelated global ecological and social challenges and how do they envision themselves as part of these solutions through their practices?* I have found that the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive an awareness of interdependence to be at the core of solutions to the current challenges of our world. They realize they are not independent from- but profoundly dependent on both ecological and social systems. This perception entails a radical shift in defining care. Within the dominant capitalist discourse, caring for oneself has become separated from caring for other people and for the world. We have become to see ourselves within this system as atomic individuals, using society and ecosystems as mere means to be used to our end. However, as the inhabitants of O Fojo show, when we realize that caring for the 'other' ultimately *is* caring for ourselves, ecological and social challenges become much less abstract. Rather than seeing ecological and social crises as problems unrelated to ourselves, the inhabitants of O Fojo perceive all of us to be part of the problem, which allows us to start thinking in solutions. How can we not change the world, but how can we change ourselves? Practical solutions within this perception become practices of care: of “act[ing] in accordance with the ecological principles that enable life” (Hathaway 2015: 7). In order to act in accordance with these

principles, the inhabitants of O Fojo constantly observe and interact (with) the earth. In doing so, they manifest a form of “anthropoharmonism” (Scharper 1997: 188 in Hathaway 2015: 6), a form of active cooperation with the earth, where “humans and the larger environment [become] mutually constitutive” (ibid.). Furthermore, my interlocutors perceive this same active collaboration to be part of caring for people. Caring for the earth is in this sense anthropocentric. They envision themselves of part of solutions through applying “ecological literacy” (Capra 1999: 1), an understanding of “the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life” (Capra 1999: 1) to social relations. Within this perception, my interlocutors recognize that the personal or private realm can be a domain for political action. This is because from a perception where caring for the 'other' ultimately *is* caring for ourselves, reversely taking care of ourselves not as atomic individuals but as individuals “radically embedded in larger systems” (Litfin 2009: 132) also implies to take care of these larger systems. Taking care of ourselves in this sense ultimately implies to act in favour of, rather than at the expense of larger natural and cultural systems. These personal acts of care can be very concrete as I have shown, ranging from composting to reducing and recycling 'waste' to stop consuming animal products. By engaging with these personal and yet collective acts of care, the inhabitants of O Fojo can be considered to be ecological citizens (Dobson 2000), explained as “a political vocabulary that captures the transformation of the relationship between society and nature (Smith 1998: 99 in Dobson 2000: 4). In critically looking at what the influence of their own actions and consumption patterns could be for others in the future, the inhabitants of O Fojo can be considered to be part of a larger degrowth movement, proposing “a paradigmatic re-ordering of values, in particular the (re)affirmation of social and ecological values (...)” (Fournier 2008: 532). Finally, I have found that it is not just the alternative perceptions of the inhabitants of O Fojo that create alternative practices of care, it is also their practices that reversely can influence the way they envision themselves in relation the world. In the holistic perception on reality I found with the inhabitants of O Fojo, a perception of “(...) reality [as] relationally (as interconnected and intersubjective – with humans as members of, not separate from, the greater Earth community and the wider cosmos)” (Hathaway 2015: 7), “experiential knowledge” (ibid.) play an important role. This is because it is experience that allows my interlocutors to feel that the earth is not (...) a spiritual or visionary image (...)” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010: 9) but rather an organic mechanism through which we breathe and with which we exist. This awareness, I believe, could offer solutions to what González and Stryker have called the “apathy of the many people who feel powerless to effect meaningful change in the world around them” (2014: 3). What I have shown in this thesis is that personal transformation can bring about societal transformation and that personal actions can create a different culture. Personally becoming “an *aware*, intentional

participant in [the] evolutionary process (Atlee 2010: 284, emphasis added) may not directly change the world. However, it does directly change the way we relate to and act in the world as interconnected individual on a daily basis, whereby planting both figurative and physical seeds for an alternative future. A future in which we may be able to connect seemingly separate worlds.

## Discussion

As explained in the third appendix of this thesis, I believe that anthropological research should not be detached or dispassionate, but rather engaged and heart-driven. It is in this same respect that I believe anthropology as a discipline should move beyond mere analysis of what *is*, towards ethnographically accounting for what *could be*. It is from a personal indignation about the current ecological and social crises in the world- and the system that allows them to happen- that I have decided to start my search for what alternatives could look like. With Laura Nader, I believe that this indignation could be an “energizing factor, something not to be snuffed out or repressed but rather harnessed as an engine” (in González and Stryker 2014: 7). My personal indignation has been the incentive to deploy my anthropological knowledge and skills in order to “(...) work, learn, and move toward positive social change together” (Wali 2006 in Lassiter 2008: 73). In what sense could my research results contribute to such an aim?

I believe my research results are important in helping to construct a positive and future-oriented ecological anthropology. This is because my ethnographic account of ecovillagers' perceptions and practices indicate not only that viable alternatives to our current ecologically and socially unfeasible system are *possible*, but also that they are already being *implemented*, although on a small scale and in a constant process of experimentation. Like the inhabitants of O Fojo that I studied *with* (Ingold 2011) perceive a personal transformation to be at the root of inspiring a larger cultural change to happen, I believe it is important to describe and scientifically explain what such a transformation could look like to inspire the academic- and non academic world alike. This is not to say that critically analyzing the pitfalls of unfeasible structures is unimportant, but rather to stress that looking at alternatives in times of interrelated crises is equally essential.

I do realize that, as indicated above, the ecovillage movement I have decided to study is relatively small and in a phase of constant experimentation with solutions. Moreover, the eco community O Fojo that is my case study within this thesis just consists of a few members. Has this potentially influenced the reliability of my research results? I do not believe so. Possibly, research in a larger community or comparative research between several communities could have added additional layers to my story, but the main message would have remained the same. Yes, another

more holistic culture beyond modern capitalism is possible and viable alternatives already exist. Yet how people give meaning to these alternatives likely differs from place to place. In order to capture these different meanings, further research on ecovillages and the possibility to expand the scope of their achievements could be interesting.

Finally, I would like to end with a personal note. Even though I have been present at O Fojo Permaculture for only three months, I have observed an ongoing transformation within myself. How an alternative perception of the world can actually create an alternative reality became only really clear to me after returning back home. What I had become to see as valuable compost at O Fojo- such as and fruit and vegetable scraps- had become waste again. And where I had learned to see solar power as a valuable resource, I did not have any means at home to use this energy. Yet, I have become aware of existing alternatives. Initially, I thought this thesis would simply be about sustainable practices. However, in the process of researching, reading and writing, I found out that the actual underlying question is much more philosophical and profound: who *are* we in life and who *can* we be? I have both looked outside and inside myself in search for answers and I would like to invite you with this thesis to do the same. Who would you like to be, and to continuously become in this world?

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## APPENDIX I THE INHABITANTS OF O FOJO

### **Maurício**

I will start with Maurício, the founder of O Fojo. Maurício used to be a business man in the industrial design and architecture area in Lisbon and completed his first PDC in Spain in 2005. He and his ex-partner founded O Fojo in 2009. When they separated Maurício moved to his birth country, Brazil, where he stayed for a couple of years. When he returned to the land in Portugal, most of what they had carefully built up had disappeared and he had to start all over again in making the land inhabitable. I got to know Maurício as extremely dedicated and ambitious in a few years he has largely rebuilt the community, where he now gives and hosts different eco-sociological workshops. During my fieldwork period, Maurício has fulfilled a lot of different roles to me. He was a strong and serious group leader, a funny and intelligent friend, and sometimes a caring father to me.

### **Filipa**

The second person present was Filipa, who is Portuguese. She did her first PDC in 2015 in Tenerife and since then specialized in food forests with several courses in Greece, Italy and Switzerland. In 2016 she completed her permaculture teachers training and in the summer of 2016 she participated in the PDC at O Fojo. After this experience, she decided to stay and dedicate her time and attention fully to the place for one full year. Filipa has a background in social communication in the field of public relationships and she decided to take on the responsibility for everything that needs to be accomplished online. Filipa is very passionate about O Fojo and has a great energy to accomplish whatever needs to be done, although she often mentioned she did not like to leave O Fojo in order to work online in the local library. As a community member, I got to know Filipa as very caring, passionate and conscious.

### **Marcelo**

The third person present was Marcelo, who is also Portuguese. After volunteering at different permaculture places in Portugal for one year, Marcelo came to volunteer at O Fojo and decided to stay and participate in the PDC of the summer of 2016. After completing the PDC, he returned for another couple of months, until the end of April. Next to permaculture, he has obtained a lot of

knowledge on tantra and the occult throughout his life, on which he gave a workshop at O Fojo before leaving the community. Once, his role in the community was described by Maurico as 'the shaman', because he is very sensitive to other people's moods and often functioned as a mediator or keeper of a good atmosphere. I got to know Marcelo as a very conscious and honest person, someone who I soon grew to love as a close friend and with whom I could be completely myself.

### **Matheus**

The fourth person present was Matheus, who is from Brazil. Matheus was living in Germany for his masters in environmental governance and decided to come to O Fojo for one month within a university break- from mid-March until mid-April. He felt a desire to connect on a more practical level with the theoretical issues he had been studying and to find a meaningful way of spending his holidays. He did not have any specific relation to O Fojo, but someone had recommended the community to him and he was very pleased to be welcomed so enthusiastically by Maurício. Matheus very easily blended in with the group dynamics, to which he added an energy that I perceived as very dedicated, joking and enthusiastic.

### **Török and Júlia**

The fifth and sixth people present were Török and Júlia, a couple from Hungary. They had come to O Fojo around January 2017, in order to explore different options for living a sustainable life away from the city in a small community. When I arrived at O Fojo, Török was in Guadeloupe and Júlia in India, and they both returned separately, not long after each other and not long after I had arrived. They both had a passion for vegan cooking and often cooked together when there were events at O Fojo. They also organized some vegan cooking workshops themselves at the community, but eventually decided to leave before they took place, about two weeks before the end of my stay. The main reason for them to leave the community was that they realized they did not find the time at O Fojo to develop themselves to their fullest potential. Therefore, they left the community but wanted to stay in Portugal to explore other places with different dynamics. I got to know Török as very serious and balanced, and Júlia as very sweet and conscious.

### **Interview dates**

I have interviewed Maurício four times, of which one was a combined interview with Filipa. The

first time was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. I will refer to this interview as (I). The second interview was a combined interview with Filipa on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, which I will refer to for both of them as (II). The third interview took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, that I refer to as (III). The fourth interview took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May and is referred to as (IV). The second interview with Filipa took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April and will be referred to as (I). I interviewed Marcelo on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, Matheus on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, Török on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April and Júlia on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April.



## APPENDIX II A TYPICAL DAY IN THE COMMUNITY...

On a 'typical' day in the community during my fieldwork period, we started the day with a 1 hour morning meditation at 6 a.m – after which I fed the chickens and dogs- and then had breakfast. After breakfast we did a morning circle, a community practice where everybody shares what is alive inside them, to keep the energy in the community light and free of conflicts. I perceived this daily check-in to be a very thorough-going practice, that made us share intimate feelings from the start and thus soon create intimate and empathic relations. Sometimes, we were all crying at the morning table together, but afterwards the atmosphere would always be more light. Around 9 a.m we started working. Mauricio had the overview of what needed to happen and divided the different tasks every day. During my fieldwork period, the main focus was on construction. In order to extend the community to be able to receive more people, both community members and visitors, we have worked especially to extend the main house (which consists of a combined living- and dining room and a kitchen) by digging out sand and clay from a natural wall next to the house to create space for two extra bedrooms and an inside bathroom. Although the main work had previously been accomplished by a machine, taking sand from the wall with pick-axes and shovels was a time consuming, daily task. We often counted the wheelbarrows and sometimes filled up and moved around 50 per day. During the fine-tuning of the wall, we were also preparing the ground for the bricklayer- and later assisting him in his work by making *massa* all day. Occasionally, we did some other things such as weeding, cleaning or gardening, mostly in preparation for workshops. At noon we had lunch, always a warm meal that one of us prepared. After lunch we had a one-hour break, that I often used to write out my notes, and then we continued the voluntary work until 6 p.m. From 6 to 7 p.m I had time to study, and from 7 to 7.30 p.m we meditated again. After that we had another warm dinner and we usually went to bed early after another long and physically tiring day under the hot Portuguese sun.

## APPENDIX III ENAGAGED ANTROPOLOGY

“Holistic and more heart-driven science is needed, science that is infused with spirit, compassion, and love” (Bekoff 2000 : 62).

As an anthropologist describing the stories of the inhabitants of O Fojo, I identify with what anthropologist Ruth Behar has called the struggle of the witnessing vulnerable observer, a position in which we as anthropologists are constantly challenged to combine proper degrees of participation and observation (2014: 6). In arguing that “in anthropology everything depends on the emotional and intellectual luggage the anthropologist takes on the voyage (...)” (ibid.: 8), she rejects any claim of objectivity in social science. I would add to this that a subjective personal engagement with the research topic is in this sense not only unavoidable but also positive, arguing in line with anthropologist Laura Nader that “particularly the indignation of anthropology students [possibly leading to what Bekoff in the opening quote calls heart-driven science] could be a powerful energizing factor, something not to be snuffed out or repressed but rather harnessed as an engine” (in González and Stryker 2014: 7). For a few years preceding the fieldwork period at O Fojo I have made various attempts to live a conscious life in the city. In this way, the research period has also served as a personal experiment to me, to discover if I would actually prefer to live in an eco community. This emotional involvement with the research subject, that I wish to make explicit rather than to suppress, is characteristic for what is called engaged anthropology<sup>30</sup>. Engaged anthropology can be distinguished by “working collaboratively rather than hierarchically with communities” (Low and Merry 2010: 203) and “address[ing] public issues” (ibid.) In writing this thesis, I aim to blend my position of a concerned citizen and an academic anthropologist together, and to deploy my anthropological knowledge and skills in order to contribute to a more harmonious and just society as to “(...) work, learn, and move toward positive social change together [with the researched group]” (Wali 2006 in Lassiter 2008: 73). This is in recognition that anthropology should in my opinion be- following Tim Ingold- “(...) not a study *of* at all, but a study *with* (...)” (2011: 238). How have I tried to accomplish this?

Firstly, I write this thesis not just to remain within the academic setting but hope to expand my “*outreach* to the [general] public so that the results of [my] research can become broadly disseminated” (Lamphere 2004: 432). Following Haluza-DeLay and Berezan's insight that “[a]cademic language can be (...) distancing” (2013: 131), I aim to “bring it in conversation with the praxis of permaculture practitioners” (ibid.). Secondly, I designed the research project to be

<sup>30</sup> Although it could be argued that anthropology is engaged by definition. See, for example: <http://anthropology.cornell.edu/engaged-anthropology>. Page visited on 27/07/2017.

collaborative and based on “equal partnership” (ibid.). Before going into the field I shared my research plan and aims with the inhabitants of O Fojo, I regularly shared my data with them during my period of fieldwork and I will return to Portugal shortly after writing this thesis to hand it over to them. Thirdly, I have not only been present in the field as a researcher, but as a combined position as a researcher and volunteer. In this way I was able to contribute to building the community (and thus, as Behar describes, to quite literally go down in the mud) in order to construct an anthropology of reciprocity rather than it being a unilinear extraction of information.

## APPENDIX IV MY POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY

My subject position in the community has been the result of constant negotiations. From the first moment I felt at home at O Fojo, which has both been an advantage and a pitfall. When I arrived my bed was made and everyone anticipated my arrival. But also the form of community living was not completely new to me, which made the integration easier. I was used to outside showers, using an outside dry toilet and high levels of sharing and contact because of previous experiences of community living. I felt at home from the first moment also in the natural environment, with the rhythm of waking up early and going to bed early and with being outside every day the whole day. Logically I had to grow in my role as a volunteer-researcher and take some time to land in this new place, but it was a very natural process. The advantages were that I experienced “a full immersion in fieldwork” (Roncoli et al. 2009: 88) and felt comfortable to ask personal questions from the start. Furthermore, according to DeWalt and DeWalt, “being actively engaged in the lives of people brings the ethnographer closer to understanding the participant's point of view” (2002: 261). However, on the other hand, it has made it hard at times to remain objective. At one point in the beginning of my research period I found myself wondering why my field notes looked like the notes of an ecologist, focused more on nature than on people's perception on it. It took me a while before re-reading my own research proposal made me realize ecological anthropologists study people's relationships with their environment and not the environment itself. I had become so absorbed in the perception of the people with whom I lived, that I forgot that it was their very perception I came to study! After having a good laugh at myself, I realized that my lens had been too open, and I decided to rephrase my research questions and aims in a more structured and succinct way. I realized how true it is that although “[p]articipation implies emotional involvement, observation requires detachment” (Paul 1953: 69 in DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002: 262) and how strange “the paradox of our intellectual mission” (2014: 5) is, as Behar calls it. The task of that “of 'getting the native point of view' but 'without actually going native' can be process of constant negotiations” (ibid.).