

Chapter 4

Healing with Plants and Affection: José Craveiro, a Practitioner of Traditional Medicine in Portugal

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In May 2007, the director of *Memória Imaterial* met José Craveiro. The University of Minho organised the IX Story Days, in Braga. Craveiro was one of the invited storytellers and José Barbieri was presenting *MEMORIAMEDIA*, a project dedicated to the study and inventory of expressions of intangible cultural heritage. During the break for lunch when the two of them went together to the university canteen, Craveiro interrupted the conversation to identify the plants that spontaneously grew in the outer spaces of the campus. It was at this time that José Barbieri realized that Craveiro was not only one of the most influential storytellers of the traditional Portuguese tales but also a specialist and practitioner of traditional medicine. The desire to work together on this subject was born there, and they promised each other that this project would happen at a future date.

Over the following ten years, Craveiro, Barbieri and other members of *MEMORIAMEDIA* worked together on different initiatives, but the traditional medicine project was always postponed. They finally made true to this promise when they decided to write this article. Thus, for two days, a recording of seven hours of non-directive interview was made, in which Craveiro described his practices, identified dozens of medicinal plants, clarifying their use, and spoke about various topics of traditional medicine.

Craveiro is known for being a master of the arts of healing and treatment through plants. He lives in Tentúgal, is 62 years old and studied until the 11th year of schooling. However, at the age of six he was already working—riding a donkey he would go and buy eggs to make pastries. He later took over an establishment (grocery shop and tavern) and currently runs a family restaurant. He is a storyteller at local and national gatherings and actively participates in social, cultural and religious events in Tentúgal. He is married, and has two sons, one daughter and three grandchildren. Those who need his help, people from different classes, men and women of different ages, visit him at his home.

When talking about traditional medicine, José Craveiro identifies a specific theme and approaches it by telling a life story. He describes the plot and the characters - usually himself and his patients. He builds the narrative from the reason someone seeks his help, describes the treatment and its outcome, and, lastly, praises the reward that is never material but emotional - the gratitude of those who recover their health and the happiness he feels for having helped.

To situate Craveiro as a specialist in the healing arts in the different health care systems, we used Kleinman's categorization (1980) which differentiates the informal system from the folk system, and the professional system. The informal system generally includes unpaid therapies—such as self-medication and counselling by family members, friends or individuals who are considered the most knowledgeable in the community; the folk system refers to specialists in healing methods, usually called healers, who despite the diversity of practices, share a concept of health associated with the balance between man and his surroundings (social, natural and supernatural); the professional system corresponds to the network of official health care and assistance, both public and private.

Craveiro's practices place him in the informal and folk systems. However, Craveiro never refers to himself as a healer, replacing this type of classification with the descriptions of the services of the aid he gives to those who seek it, applying the knowledge of healing he once received. The treatments that he uses refer us to systems outside of biomedicine and



José Craveiro showing the team natural healing resources © Memoria Immaterial

that generally incorporate three aspects: a) the use of natural products (plants, animals, vitamins and minerals); b) spiritual therapies (the focus on the interaction and balance between mind, body and spirit) and c) manual techniques and exercises.

It is from this context, from the analysis of the interview and from the richness of the recorded narrative that we develop the themes that structure the discourse of Craveiro and that guided the writing of this article. When Craveiro spoke about his activity in the field of traditional medicine, he described how this knowledge was transmitted to him, he listed causes and treatments for certain diseases, he spoke of the importance of religiosity and related his practice with conventional medicine. He also contextualized his activity in the values of mutual aid and solidarity.

HOW KNOWLEDGE IS ACQUIRED AND TRANSMITTED

Traditional medicine and its practices depend on historical factors, culture, beliefs and religion. Its meaning is different from region to region, and the knowledge associated with it is considered as heritage that is built on local knowledge, the flow of goods and people, contact with other medicines and with other cultures. This knowledge is legitimized by the collective memory of populations that permits one to identify “those who are capable” to diagnose, treat and cure. It is a knowledge traditionally transmitted through demonstration and orality between generations, usually within the family, but also through

the neighbourhood networks and in the social environment (Halbwachs, 1990; Robison and Cooper, 2007; Walker, 2004).

It was through the generational transmission that Craveiro began in traditional medicine, through the teachings of Encarnaç o, his paternal grandmother. But the knowledge that he has gained throughout his life has several provenances. Craveiro's practice is not limited to patients in the central region of Portugal, but it is there that he develops it. It is among the inhabitants of the villages and towns that surround Tentugal that his practice is more visible and recognized. This is the territorial context that conditions his practices and influenced, more than a century ago, those from whom his grandmother learned.

Craveiro was very close to his grandmother, Encarnaç o. With her he learned a lot about plants and home remedies, but also about generosity, sharing and caring for people. He admired her and describes her as an affectionate woman, who experienced many difficulties but who was always available to help:

Traditional medicine came from the very great passion I had for my grandparents (...). Many times I had the privilege of sleeping at my grandmother's home, and that was wonderful! (...) And the medicine appears why? Because my grandmother was the mother and grandmother of many people. (...) I often came to see my grandmother and there were many people around her (...). A large clientele who sometimes ended up eating the broth she was going to eat (...). How many times did she go to bed with only a mouthful of cornbread and a little water and sugar in her belly (...). And one day I asked her:

Me: Grandmother, why do you continue, even though you are so tired?

Grandmother: Should I turn them away? If I do nothing, it would be worse, wouldn't it? Never mind. I'll rest later.

His grandmother's attitude is a life lesson and if Craveiro doubted the effectiveness of some of her treatments, he quickly "surrendered" to her knowledge. He recalls the episode in which his grandmother used a ritual to cure the donkey that he used to go and buy eggs, when he was six years old:

[After treatment], the donkey was like never before. That's when I said to myself, "This dog in this bush will make do. Let's see. This bush has rabbits (popular expression meaning he had found a bounty!) Let's seize this opportunity [he says, rubbing his hands]. And I became much more attached to her. Then I saw things that I could never have imagined seeing."

Craveiro says that people began to seek him after his grandmother died, in an attempt to replace her. Faced with these requests he did what he had learned, but was convinced that he did not have the skills of his grandmother:

It's funny that sometimes people came to me saying, "Your grandmother is not here, you know." I replied, "That's my problem. It's just that she was very good at it and I am not. I'm a really big fake."

Craveiro also talks about the teachings of neighbours and customers of the tavern. He refers several times to aunt, Ana Rebola, a neighbour who knows many *resposos* (ancient prayers to solve problems), old religious celebrations and the recipe of wine boiled with cinnamon and honey to cure viruses of various origins. He also attributes much of his knowledge to the elders who spent much time in his tavern:

I had good masters there (...). I had this luck (...). They had no one to listen to them... so they would come to my house.

The treatments that José Craveiro performs, although inherited from his grandmother and other people who he listened to and whose practices he watched, have been tested, amplified and reinforced by other sources of knowledge. There are several references to other specialists in traditional medicine, as well as professionals in conventional medicine. Today Craveiro uses other methods of learning that are not only oral, he researches and reads books that he considers relevant. He referred to various compendiums of medicinal herbs and books on therapies developed by religious figures, in particular the book of Saint Hildegard and the book of Sebastian Kneipp.

When asked about how his grandmother learned traditional medicine, Craveiro said he believes in the influence of his great-great-grandmother and stresses the importance of the nun apothecaries of the Convent of Our Lady of Carmo of Tentúgal (1573-1898), of the maids and service providers to the Convent who collected the plants for the nuns and who acquired knowledge about the medicinal uses of these plants:

The Convent always had two excellent apothecaries. By the way, the Hospital of Tentúgal was next to the Convent and the laboratory that provided the Hospital was the Convent (...). And [there were] country people who knew the plants well, picked them and took them there. When the hospital finished... there were already people who were very well prepared. I think my grandmother would have had access to a lot of information because in the way she spoke, it must have been from someone who had actually passed by. (...) The servants of the Convent (...) were also knowledgeable on the subject.

Craveiro also refers to Mister Brandão, an apothecary from Tentúgal, from whom his grandmother got supplies when she lacked some products and with whom she shared knowledge, "an extraordinary man... with a degree... a master."

As for the way he currently transmits his knowledge, Craveiro says he is passing on some knowledge to his oldest grandson, who is fifteen years old (and who he would like to pursue medicine). He also says that "so it does not get lost" he is writing what he thinks is essential. In addition,



José Craveiro being interviewed by the Memoria Immaterial team on location © Memoria Immaterial

he says that he does not hide anyone's recipes and treatments, he shares with those who are interested, especially with his patients.

CAUSES AND DISEASES

The causes attributed to diseases by traditional medicine are categorized by several authors into four groups:

1. **diseases that occur on “natural” grounds** the action of climatic elements usually, such as cold, heat, rain, or wind
2. **psychological causes** linked to emotions, such as feelings of guilt, depression and sadness
3. **social and conflictual causes** by human influence (family, neighbours or others), such as theft or loss of objects, misfortune or envy
4. **spiritual or supernatural causes** by influence of something non-human (as pained souls and evil spirits) or supernatural (God or other powerful beings) (Dominguez, 2010 referencing Foster, 1976 and Nunes, 1997).

In Craveiro's work, a central theme stands out in his practice: accidents. In particular, burns caused by spillage of water or other boiling liquids, welds, flammable materials or other accidents. Craveiro is visited by many people in distress, who need help in the severe cases of these burns, for which, often, hospitals are not considered or cannot find an effective solution. As the main treatment he uses an ointment, already known in the region for having been the solution for many cases. The recipe for this ointment was taught to him by his grandmother, Encarnação, and is made from local products—beeswax, virgin olive oil, turnip and rosemary.

A gentleman appeared once. Oh my God! With a diesel torch or whatever it was... it burst... he was burnt all over. He shows up at my house taking off bits [he imitates, as if he were taking bits of skin from his face].

And the man says to me: "I have no salvation, do I?"

And I said, "But who said that?"

And a month later [after the application of the ointment], the man was made all new."

In light of the above-described categories, in addition to this "specialization", Craveiro is sought out for many other physical-body ailments such as digestive, pulmonary, cardiac, hair loss, varicose ulcers, skin problems and others. He describes as treatments the use of infusions, poultices, inhalations, medicinal baths, massage, prayers, requests and devotion to religious figures and the referral to other men or women with the gift of healing, as *endireitas* (bone-setters).

Considering, for example, the psychological causes, Craveiro speaks to us of problems that he describes as states of sadness or of solitude. The treatments suggested in these cases depend very much on his assessment of the situation, being able to use colours and aromas of certain plants, talk about the meaning and values of life, or simply stimulate affection. He refers, among other examples, to the cure of sadness by aromatherapy, by smelling vanilla flowers:

There was a group of people in the restaurant... and there was a lady who was crying a lot. And I said to her: "Look, I'm sorry, it's like this, but you cry so much, is there nothing one can do?"

Woman: No, not today. You do not know the sadness that I have inside. Look, just let me cry (...).

Me: Of course I let you.

I went in the garden to a vanilla plant I have there... it had six flowers. I tied them with a small herb that was there and I went up to the lady

Me: Look I'm sorry, but I would really like you to do me the favour.

Woman: Oh, if I can...

Me: Can you identify the aroma of these flowers?

The lady sniffed and sniffed and sniffed and sniffed...

Woman: This reminds me of a smell, an aroma, but I cannot (...).

Me: Is it not similar to vanilla?

Woman: That's it!

Me: And by chance has this little plant not already done a good deed?"

Woman: How?

Me: You are no longer crying.

Woman: Oh, how true!

In relation to social and conflictual causes, Craveiro refers, for example, to the possibility of recovering something stolen by saying a short prayer to Saint Anthony:

High mountains I climbed.
The Good Lord I have met and
Two things I asked of him:
That the lost be found;

The stolen returned. To draw on
 Saint Anthony of Lisbon, answer my request. [The request is made]
 Amen.

In relation to the spiritual or supernatural causes Craveiro does not describe diseases that he thinks were caused by the influence of supernatural beings, but in several cases he prescribes as treatment the request of intervention of superior, religious entities - like Saint Padre Pio, Saint Filomena or Jesus Christ crucified - and, for Craveiro, the very belief in the treatment has healing power.

There was a person who came to me completely unbalanced (...). [I] said to her, "Do you practice any religion?"

Woman: No, out of sympathy, I'm Catholic. I was baptised when I was a girl.

Me: Then look, if it is only out of sympathy, it may continue to be your sympathy. But take advantage of it, enter a church, go up to a cross, think, meditate. Say it like this: Is it worth continuing just as I am? Do I have to make any changes? Think for yourself (...). And then walk, walk, walk, and then say, "I want to get better! I want to get better."

Craveiro's prescriptions are applied as a single measure or complementary to each other (for example, to apply a poultice at the same time as saying a blessing) or are complementary to conventional medicine.

In Craveiro's discourse, the relation of his practice to conventional medicine is a recurring theme and refers to several circumstances:

- when people seek him because they do not find an effective response in conventional medicine
- when people seek him because, economically, they cannot afford to use conventional medicine;
- when people seek him because they do not trust the treatments of conventional medicine
- when medical professionals (mainly nurses) seek him informally and "clandestinely" to practice or learn a particular treatment
- when he uses doctors and nurses to confirm certain therapeutic actions
- when he criticizes the use of chemicals that attenuate the symptoms, but do not eliminate the causes:

There is one thing here that is very important... the cause. We are a very well designed machine, very well made and it often... well, the effects have disappeared (...). But (...) sometimes it [the disease] even evolves. And sooner or later or we go... back to traditional medicine or people often become dependent [on chemicals] for the rest of their lives.

Asked about the future of traditional medicine, Craveiro again refers to its relationship with conventional medicine, believing that the fact that traditional medicine still exists today only foresees a long future. He also thinks that conventional medicine would have much to gain if it were open to consulting the popular experts.

I'll tell you what I feel. If after what I've seen up to now, it has the place it has, it'll never lose it. Because I do not care to compete with any doctor. I think... that if

we ever got to have a health service where [traditional medicine specialists] could give their opinion, the State would have much to gain.

THERAPY AS A GIFT OF NATURE, CARE AND AFFECTION

While we were with Craveiro, he shared his vast knowledge of native plants and regional products (such as wine, olive oil or honey, which he also uses in his therapies). Just like what happened 10 years ago in Braga, at every step he points to a plant, names it, refers to its possible uses and tells a story. He told us about dozens of plants, of which we mention only a few examples, since they will be the subject of a future, deeper analysis—the *arruda (ruta)* that repels “vipers” and is good for bones and muscles; the *urtiga (urtica)* as medicine for memory, for the heart and for the liver and the wild *serpão (thymus serpyllum)* good for the treatment of the skin, among many others. For Craveiro all the plants he uses in therapy are “a true wonder of nature”, a gift that must be observed and used. Plants are everywhere and, along with affection, are a cheap and effective resource for healing:

People sometimes imagine there “you have to spend [money on the treatments].”(…) No, no. Nature gives us a good part, the rest sometimes we have here at hand. A tight hug is often worth a lot more than who knows what.

Associated with the potential of the plants, Craveiro also speaks of community-ritual cultural manifestations, religious celebrations (such as worship of Our Lady of the Olive groves) and oral expressions (for example, to promote the use of “good radiance” of the rosemary through its’ aroma, it is said: “Who by the rosemary passed and did not smell, its’ love did not remember” or “Who by the rosemary passed and did not smell, of God did not remember”).

Community value and ties of mutual aid and solidarity have long been associated with the development of traditional healing practices, which have in large part replaced and continue to replace socio-economic needs and access to other health care and technologies. In this sense, the exchange relationships established between patients and the specialists of traditional medicine are rarely economic, being mainly symbolic or emotional.

Craveiro tackles this dimension of exchange and personal reward, emphasizing that just as with his grandmother, with whom he learned the arts of treating and healing, it is not the payment in cash that gives him the reward of his care. However, the reward always happens in other forms such as a hug, the happiness or laughter of others, being presented with a plant or even sharing by those who were treated/healed of other knowledge unknown to him.

It is evident both in the remedy for burns and in other, longer treatments that Craveiro’s care has been carried out with a careful prescription of the methods of application and the quantities to be used. He advocates that prescription and other instructions should be shared between those who need help and those who care for them. Only then will the treatment be well done and have results:

We do what we can, but often people at home can make or ruin everything.

Regarding the importance of religiosity in therapeutics, it is worth remembering that until modernity the religious sphere regulated health and disease, invested it with norms and moral precepts that, within the culture of each age, constituted what today we can call disease prevention (Rosa, 2013, Basaglia and Bignami, 1994). Even after the 18th century, with the improvements in living conditions and the tremendous progress of biomedicine, religion—both through its beliefs and through its institutions - continued to play an important role in the therapeutic care and healing of patients. It is not surprising, therefore, that the narratives of Craveiro include references to religious figures that now symbolize the gift and divine protection of the treatments he performs, and now appear as sources of legitimation for his practices, in which Saint Hildegard (1098–1179), whose knowledge was compiled in a book and recently published in Portuguese (2014) reinforces the validation of much of the knowledge that he learned since childhood with his grandmother.

It's funny that Saint Hildegard was silenced for many years around here. Now a little book of medicine by Saint Hildegard appeared (...) and in some things it even seems as if my grandmother had actually spoken to her...

Therapy emerges in Craveiro's discourse as an act of care, of help, of affection, understood to be almost an obligation to practice the "goodness" and share the knowledge that has already been offered by others with whom he has learned. This arises in his speech in a context of valuing social cohesion, solidarity and sustainability and as an inheritance of the various people with whom he learned and to whom he attributes his knowledge—the nun apothecaries of the Convent of Carmelo who "swore on the book of gospels to never use the knowledge for evil, nor did they ever refuse to do good" and, always, his grandmother Encarnação:

Funny, my grandmother never charged anyone anything and she died happy. I also want to die like her.

RÉSUMÉ

José Craveiro est connu pour être un maître du traitement et de la guérison par les plantes. Il a 62 ans et vit à Tentúgal, au Portugal. En parlant de la médecine traditionnelle, Craveiro identifie un thème spécifique et l'aborde en racontant une histoire de vie. Il décrit l'intrigue et les personnages - habituellement lui-même et ses patients. Il construit le récit expliquant pourquoi quelqu'un cherche son aide, décrit le traitement et son résultat et, enfin, fait l'éloge de la récompense qui n'est jamais matérielle mais émotive - la reconnaissance de ceux qui recouvrent la santé et le bonheur qu'il ressent de les avoir aidé.

Ceux qui ont besoin de son aide, des personnes de différentes classes, des hommes et des femmes de tous âges, lui rendent visite chez lui. En particulier ceux qui ont subi des brûlures causées par le déversement d'eau ou d'autres liquides bouillants, des soudures, des matériaux

inflammables ou d'autres accidents. Il utilise, comme principal traitement, un onguent déjà connu dans la région pour avoir résorbé de nombreux cas. La recette de cette pommade lui a été enseignée par sa grand-mère, Encarnação, et elle est fabriquée à partir de produits locaux : la cire d'abeille, l'huile d'olive vierge, le navet et le romarin.

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