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Temporal and Spatial Dimensions in *Saudade* and *Nostalgia*

Wymiary temporalności i przestrzenności
w *saudade* i *nostalgii*

Abstract

This paper endeavors an analysis of *saudade* and *nostalgia* from the perspective of space and time categories. While there undoubtedly exist certain similarities between these concepts, including both being rooted in the deeply human experience of loss, lack and transience, as well as being directly linked to the complex inner workings of memory, they are not synonymous. *Saudade*, one of the foundations of the Portuguese identity, is commonly translated as “yearning” and “nostalgia,” yet several scholars, such as Correia, have suggested that what distinguishes *saudade* from *nostalgia* is the specificity of its temporal dimension. Importantly, the emotion/state of *saudade* is not necessarily connected with a specific place since it is the complex – and somewhat ambiguous – timeframe that underpins it. *Nostalgia* (from: *nóstos* = homecoming and *álgos* = pain), on the other hand, is conceptually governed by space for, as proposed by Boym, it “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.” Hence, *nostalgia* is essentially intertwined with spatial, not only temporal, object of longing, which is further developed by Panico, who emphasizes the significance of the space–*nostalgia* relationship by

observing that spaces act as triggers, stages and “spatial consolation” for nostalgic returns.

Keywords: *saudade*, *nostalgia*, temporality, spatiality, cultural identity.

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu analizę *saudade* i nostalgii z perspektywy kategorii przestrzeni i czasu. Choć pojęcia te niewątpliwie wykazują szereg podobieństw – oba bowiem wyrastają z głęboko ludzkiego doświadczenia utraty, braku i przemijania oraz są ściśle związane ze złożonymi mechanizmami pamięci – nie mogą być traktowane jako całkowite synonimy. *Saudade*, stanowiące jeden z fundamentów portugalskiej tożsamości, jest często tłumaczone jako „tęsknota” lub „nostalgia”. Jak zauważają jednak badacze tego konstruktu, między innymi Correia, o odrębności *saudade* względem nostalgii decyduje przede wszystkim specyfika jej wymiaru temporalnego. Co ważne, doświadczenie *saudade* nie musi być związane z konkretnym miejscem, ponieważ jego istotę wyznacza złożona oraz niejednoznaczna relacja z czasem. Nostalgia (od gr. *nóstos* = powrót do domu oraz *álgos* = ból) pozostaje natomiast kategorią konceptualnie zakorzenioną przede wszystkim w przestrzeni. Jak pisze Boym, jest ona „tęsknotą za domem, który już nie istnieje albo nigdy nie istniał” (tłumaczenie własne). Przedmiot nostalgicznego pragnienia ma zatem charakter nie tylko temporalny, lecz również przestrzenny. Perspektywę tę rozwija Panico, podkreślając fundamentalne znaczenie relacji między przestrzenią a nostalgią. Badacz zwraca uwagę, że przestrzenie pełnią funkcję bodźców wyzwalających doświadczenie nostalgii, stają się sceną nostalgicznych powrotów, a wreszcie oferują swoiste „przestrzenne ukojenie”.

Słowa kluczowe: *saudade*, nostalgia, czasowość, przestrzenność, tożsamość kulturowa.

Time and space are socially produced collective representations fundamental to human cognition and culture. At the beginning of the last century, Emile Durkheim,¹ a principal founding father of modern soci-

1 In his seminal book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, published in 1912, the French thinker determines that time, similarly to space, cause and number, is a fundamental category of human thought: “The most primitive classification of things necessarily places them in time and space. Likewise, every social consciousness requires that all men have common notions of time, space, number, cause, personality [...]” See: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 9–10.

ology, proved that in their collective representations of time, sentient human beings do not passively reflect but, in reality, actively create time as an apprehended phenomenon.² For centuries, humans across cultures have used time and space to describe their existence and have systematically conceptualised time through spatial metaphors.³ Linguistically, time is also particularly closely tied to space for, in various languages, spatial terms (such as “ahead” and “behind” in English) are used to specify duration and order of events. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Yvan Schulz, an anthropologist, spatial and temporal dimensions are not universally given but form culturally constructed frameworks that shape human perception, structure language, as well as underlie culture-specific meanings and emotions.⁴

Given that both *saudade* and *nostalgia* are existential terms, both rooted in the profoundly human experiences of transience, loss and longing, the following paper will endeavor an analysis of the two notions from the perspective of space and time. As stated above, they are intertwined categories, with space and time being closely interconnected in human cognition, language, and cultural conceptualisation, frequently providing complementary frameworks through which human beings perceive and make sense of the world. Drawing on various findings, etymological, cultural and social reasons are furnished in order to explain why *saudade* and *nostalgia* are barely (perfectly) synonymous. Subsequently, the temporality of *saudade* will be discussed and brought into a relation with space and its centrality in the reflections on *nostalgia*. Finally, it is suggested that the two concepts in question differ significantly in the prominence and proportions of temporal-spatial dimensions which constitute their foundations.

2 More on this aspect of Durkheim's work can be found in: Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 2.

3 Asifa Majid, Alice Gaby, Lera Boroditsky, “Time in Terms of Space,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013): 1.

4 Yvan Schulz, “Time Representations in Social Science,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 14/4 (2012): 442–443.

Saudade as the Foundation of Portuguese Culture and Identity

Saudade expresses the very essence of the temperament and world-view of Lusophone communities.⁵ It is omnipresent in Portuguese language and constitutes by far the most frequently used word connoting emotion(s) among Portuguese laymen.⁶ The term is used in everyday social interactions, in expressions such as *Tenho saudades tuas* (Eng. “I miss you”⁷) or *Morrer de saudades* (Eng. “To miss someone terribly, so much it hurts”), to refer to the feeling of missing both people and other objects of longing. Moreover, it frequently relates to homesickness, that is a yearning for a past state of wellbeing, a time irrevocably gone, or even something completely unattainable. *Saudade* is also commonly associated with melancholy and fate (Port. *fado*), oftentimes carrying a sense of *fado*-influenced sadness. Indeed, it is through *fado*, Portugal’s most emblematic musical tradition, that *saudade* has become codified and is continually performed as the country’s national music.⁸ Yet *saudade* is by no means exclusively shaped by sorrow or fatalism. There actually exists a major ambivalence to the concept, various definitions emphasising its bitter-sweetness. As early as in the 16th century, a poet, Luís de Camões, explicated this multi-layered emotion as a “pure, sweet and painful torment,”⁹ while a 17th-century philosopher, Francisco de Melo, defined it as a “bad thing you like and [the] good thing you suffer from.”¹⁰ These ideas are further strengthened by a contemporary author,

5 The word *saudade* is widely used across Portuguese-speaking countries, including Brazil, Angola and Mozambique. Nevertheless, as a result of each of the nation’s respective historical and cultural developments, there exist differences in the ways in which the term is used within these regions (In Brazil, for instance, it usually refers to a tender longing for a person or people, oftentimes coupled with an optimistic undertone of the hope for reunion) and therefore, this paper will focus exclusively on *saudade* as understood, described and lived by in Portugal.

6 Patrick Farrell, “Portuguese Saudade and Other Emotions of Absence and Longing,” in *Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar: Empirical Evidence from the Romance Languages*, ed. Bert Peeters (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 235–237.

7 If not indicated otherwise, all translations from Portuguese are by the Author.

8 To experience the depth of *fado*, one should familiarise themselves with Portugal’s legendary singer and actress Amália Rodrigues, also known as the “Rainha do Fado” (Queen of Fado). One of her most iconic songs, *Estranha Forma de Vida*, expresses emotional inevitability and longing as a defining condition of human life.

9 António Borges de Castro, *Saudade (ensaio): Etimologia (árabe), significação, antologia* (Porto: Edição do autor, 1980), 18.

10 Maria Constança Vasconcelos, *A saudade portuguesa* (Lisboa: Guimarães Editors, 1996), 101.

Sergio Filippi, according to whom *saudade* is not a simple feeling, implying pure sadness, but a fundamentally ambiguous and paradoxical state where contrasting meanings coexist, such as victory and defeat, delight and grief.¹¹

Moreover, *saudade* may be considered a broader aesthetic sensibility extending far beyond Portuguese music into cinema¹² and other visual arts, including paintings of artists such as José Malhoa, whose works depicting rural life often evoke nostalgic longing for a disappearing Portugal. Significantly, in “Saudade – um mistério sem mistério,” Onésimo Teotónio Almeida argues that the concept acts as a powerful transversal code determining tone, pace and themes across the country’s multiple art and media forms. By showcasing “vast contexts” of *saudade*’s presence in heterogenous expressive situations, such as music or mourning, the theorist proves it to be continuously shaping expression across Portugal’s diverse discursive registers.

It needs to be emphasised that, apart from being a fundamental element of Portugal’s artistic expression, *saudade* has over centuries been pervasive in its literature, both as one of the main currents of Lusitanian lyricism and a central passion in discourses relating to the Portuguese identity. In early Galician-Portuguese lyric poetry (12th–14th cc.), particularly in the *cantigas de amigo*,¹³ where longing for an absent beloved constitutes a recurring theme, the concept later termed *saudade* emerges as a central emotional motif, albeit the word itself is not always explicitly used. As suggested by Susana Amante, “Although the term appears in varying forms in medieval lyric poetry, constellation of absence, desire, and expectation already defines the semantic field that subsequent thinkers would examine more explicitly.”¹⁴ Hence, the medieval female-voiced poetry of the Iberian Peninsula encodes a structure which later becomes conceptualised as *saudade* in (early) modern thought. In *Os Lusíadas*, a Portuguese epic poem first published in 1572, Luís Vaz de Camões transforms *saudade* understood as an intimate emotion into a broader reflection on exile, heroism, and imperial expansion. Thus, the subsequent accounts of the voyages performed by Vasco da Gama and his crew are marked not only by triumph but also a persistent undertone of

11 Sérgio Filippi, *A saudade* (Porto: Lello & Irmãos Editores, 1981), 36.

12 For instance, the 1997 film *Viagem ao Princípio do Mundo* exploring the themes of memory, aging, and return.

13 Literally “songs about a boyfriend” – a genre of medieval erotic lyric poetry, apparently rooted in a song tradition native to the northwest quadrant of the Iberian Peninsula.

14 Susana Amante, “Saudade as a Cultural Concept,” *Encyclopedia* 6/71 (2026): 4–5.

separation from their homeland and loved ones, with numerous collective scenes of farewell accentuating “the suffering of those who remain on land – particularly women, mothers, and spouses, as well as communities confronted with fear and the possibility of irreversible loss.”¹⁵ Indeed, it was as early as in *Os Lusíadas* that the experiences of departure and maritime expansion produced both individual and collective longing tied to the nation’s past. The theme of *saudade* remained present in the country’s literary tradition for the following centuries to acquire yet another layer of complexity in the works of a modernist writer, Fernando Pessoa. It becomes especially visible in his poetry collection, *Mensagem* (1934),¹⁶ and in *Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Disquiet*), the author’s lifetime project, first published posthumously in 1982. The fragmented reflections of the latter embody a constant yearning for the undefined, this is to say pure *saudade* in a textual form.

Importantly, in the early 20th century, the poet Teixeira de Pascoaes elevated *saudade* to a metaphysical principle of Portuguese identity in *Saudosismo* – a literary, socio-cultural and ontological movement centered on the melancholic longing for an idealized past, mythical future, or lost perfection. In its political dimension, the new conceptualisation promoted a conservative critique of modernity and industrialisation, contributing to the construction of an introspective Portuguese identity rooted in memory and destiny rather than progress. Within the movement, *saudade* was reframed as the defining expression of the “Portuguese soul” and its meaning reshaped from an individual emotion into a metaphysical foundation of national identity to eventually evolve into a history-based collective cultural construct.¹⁷

In its uniqueness, *saudade* thus emerged from Portugal’s long history of departure and loss. As remarked by Jethro Waters:

The Age of Discoveries and the circumnavigation of Africa, a failed constitutional monarchy followed by a failed First Republic, a fascist dictatorship that lasted 48 years, a military revolution in 1974, these are all major components of Portuguese history that affect *saudade*.¹⁸

15 *Ibidem*, 5.

16 *Mensagem* was, actually, the only of Pessoa’s works written in Portuguese to be published during his lifetime (1888–1935).

17 *Ibidem*, 1.

18 Jethro Waters, “Constructed Symbols and Adaptive Identities: The Evolution of Saudade and Portugueseness in 20th Century Portugal,” *Capstone: The UNC Asheville Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship* 26/2 (2013): 297.

The historical episodes identified by Waters reveal how repeated experiences of exploration, political instability, authoritarian rule, and social transformation have embedded narratives of absence, longing, and unfulfilled aspiration within Portuguese cultural memory. Consequently, *saudade* can be understood not merely as an individual emotional state but as a historically conditioned sensibility shaped by centuries of collective encounters with loss and discontinuity.

It seems legitimate to assume that, since in the past, separation and migration affected nearly every Portuguese family, *saudade* became a shared emotional language, an idea that lies at the very heart of *O labirinto da saudade: psicanálise mítica do destino português* (first published in 1978) by Eduardo Lourenço. The philosopher delves into the depths of his nation's collective imagination to decipher the tensions, myths and dreams that have shaped Portugal over centuries. In what is considered one of the most remarkable essays on Portuguese identity, he invites the readers to traverse the "labyrinth" of memory, melancholy, projections of grandeur, and modern anxieties, arguing that *saudade* has become a national myth rooted in the collective memory of loss and absence. The author describes this identity as a "permanent representation" driven by "inner fragility" which, in turn, leads to symbolic compensation taking form, among others, of national myth-making.¹⁹

***Saudade* as an Untranslatable Term**

In his much-quoted *quadra* discussing *saudade*,²⁰ Fernando Pessoa wrote: "*Saudades*, only Portuguese people are able to feel it well because they have a word to say that they feel it!"²¹ He plays with the idea that the Portuguese can feel *saudade(s)* properly because their language denotes it. However, as established before, *saudade* is a historically-rooted construct that has evolved for centuries and, as such, similar to numerous other cultural concepts characterised by high levels of uniqueness and/

19 Eduardo Lourenço, *O labirinto da saudade: psicanálise mítica do destino português* (Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1992), 76.

20 *Saudades, só portugueses / Conseguem senti-las bem. / Porque têm essa palavra / Para dizer que as têm.* The lines were published posthumously in the 1965 collection of popular-style quatrains titled *Quadras ao Gosto Popular*.

21 Translation by Barreto. See: Mascarenhas Barreto, *Fado, a canção portuguesa* (Lisboa: s.n., 1959), 490.

or complexity,²² it poses challenges in translation. As a matter of fact, *saudade* is quite often rendered into English as “longing for” or “yearning,” although in her 1978 lecture delivered in the United States, Natalia Correia – an acclaimed Portuguese writer and cultural icon – contended: “The English expression that comes closest to it is ‘longing for.’ But that expression gives but a pale idea of the real meaning of *saudade*.”²³ Some translators opt to approximate *saudade*’s meaning by translating it as “nostalgia,” which was, for example, a consistent choice on part of Margaret Jull Costa in her translation of Pessoa’s *Livro do Desassossego* into English. Nevertheless, other translators, as well as scholars, with amongst them Emily Apter, believe *saudade* to be a nationally-marked untranslatable that resists smooth transfer into other languages as it carries emotional density, cultural mythology and philosophical complexity.²⁴ In one of the chapters in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*,²⁵ devoted to *fado* and *saudade*, the author builds on Samuel Weber’s focus on how the German suffix *barkeit* (which Weber translates into English as “ability”) operates in Walter Benjamin’s “*barkeit* series”²⁶ to then propose her own addition: *unübersetz-barkeit* – the non-obvious ability of untranslatability to generate critical insight.²⁷ She also argues that “the two Portuguese Untranslatables” serve as adequate cases

22 Other examples of such culture-specific terms widely enumerated and researched include: *hygge*, *ikigai*, *dharma*, *toska*, etc. Compare: Lomas’s list of 216 ‘untranslatable’ words in: Tim Lomas, “Towards a Positive Cross-Cultural Lexicography: Enriching Our Emotional Landscape through 216 ‘Untranslatable’ Words Pertaining to Well-Being,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 11/5 (2016): 546–558.

23 George Monteiro, “Surrealism in Portuguese Poetry,” *Portuguese Studies* 31/1 (2015): 126. As observed by Richard Zenith, an applauded translator of Portuguese literature into English, the word *saudade* is often viewed as representing a feeling “fraught with more emotional weight and affective intensity than corresponding words from English and other languages convey.” See: Richard Zenith, “Teixeira de Pascoaes,” *Poetry International Rotterdam* (January 2006). Accessed April 27, 2026. https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-4658_Pascoes.

24 In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, Catford formulated the foundations of the theory of cultural untranslatability by differentiating between linguistic untranslatability and cultural – generally considered less “absolute” – untranslatability, and defining the latter as a subset of untranslatability where a situational feature, relevant to the source text (ST), is absent from the culture of the target language (TL). See: John Cunnison Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

25 A 2013 book focusing on the politics of language and untranslatability.

26 In Apter’s view, Benjamin’s pivotal concepts of *übersetz-barkeit* (translatability), *reproduzier-barkeit* (reproducibility), and *kritisier-barkeit* (criticizability), constitute a key framework for thinking about untranslatability. See: Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso Books, 2013), 138.

27 *Ibidem*, 138.

as they “exemplify the double function of mythmaking and critical distancing that distinguishes the Untranslatable’s abilities.”²⁸ One of Apter’s general theses, postulated especially in relation to culturally embedded terms, is that untranslatability is not a failure but a properly structural feature of language, as well as a productive force encouraging critical thinking in comparative literature. In her literary-philosophical reflections, she refers to Gregory Rabassa – a veteran translator of Spanish and Portuguese literature into English – as an example to illuminate her argument. In Rabassa’s translation into English of *Fado Alexandrino* (1983) by António Lobo Antunes, whose prose is widely considered as singularly dense and structurally sophisticated, the translator admits that he cannot fully grasp or render the layered meanings of *fado* and *saudade*:

The fado is the great popular song of Portugal. The word is said to come from the same root as fate and the songs, most especially when sung by the great Amália Rodrigues, inevitably invoke that longing or nostalgia or whatever that the Portuguese and Brazilians call *saudade* [...] I am still puzzled by the alexandrino. I can’t see where the iambic pentameter fits in, nor can I see any connection with Lawrence Durrell’s work. My best thought is that [...] ²⁹

The translator’s puzzlement over *alexandrino* and attempts to fully interpret it clearly show that translators must invent meanings and not merely transfer them.

Temporality of *Saudade*

The etymology of *saudade* reflects semantic developments related to solitude and absence. Most scholars derive it from vulgar Latin *solitātem* (“solitude,” accusative of *solitās*),³⁰ which, through phonetic evolution in early Galician-Portuguese, developed into forms such as *soidade* or *suidade* appearing in medieval lyric poetry from the 12th–13th centuries.³¹ Later, by the Renaissance and early modern period, the form *saudade* stabilised in Portuguese orthography. Interestingly, the following semantic shift moved from the notion of physical solitude to

28 *Ibidem*.

29 *Ibidem*, 140.

30 Compare, for example: Leo Pap, “On the Etymology of Portuguese SAUDADE: An Instance of Multiple Causation?,” *WORD* 43/1 (1992): 97.

31 Susana Amante, *Saudade as a Cultural Concept*, 1.

the emotional experience produced by certain lack, especially the longing for a distant person or lost time. Indeed, this indicates the distinctive temporality of *saudade* that has been highlighted in modern definitions and works as crucial for grasping the concept's complexity. It lies, for instance, at the heart of the explanation proposed by Mike Broida. The literary critic observes: "The Portuguese have a special word for this 'unaccountable' feeling or longing to reach back into the past and capture a moment lost to the stream of time: *saudade*."³² Yet, Natalia Correia seems to most re-focus the centrality of time in this cultural construct by shifting towards a certain simultaneity of time levels embraced within the notion. In her 1978 lecture, she proposed that what distinguishes *saudade* from *nostalgia* is the specificity of its temporal dimension. She asserts: "The fact is that *saudade* describes a psychological situation in which the divisions of time cease. There is no past, no present, no future, or, better still, these three divisions of time are melted into the absolute moment of a soul exasperated by *saudade*," suggesting a certain ahistoricity of the term.³³ Hence, the condition, as some suggest, of *saudade* is not necessarily connected with a specific place for it is the complex – and somewhat ambiguous – timeframe that underpins it.³⁴ This ambiguity is plainly visible in one of Correia's examples of what *saudade* may feel like: "When I miss something beautiful from the past, I do not exist in the presence for what makes me alive is in the past. I deeply hope for being able to materialize that perfect pattern from the past in the future."³⁵ While comparing *saudade* with two "nostalgic emotions" – Polish *tesknota* and Spanish *morriña* – a contemporary scholar, Zuzanna Bułat Silva, also demonstrates that *saudade* is time-oriented, whereas the other terms relate, primarily, to space.³⁶

32 Mike Broida, "The City of Lost Things: Rediscovering Fernando Pessoa's 'The Book of Disquiet,'" *The Millions*, September 23, 2015. Accessed May 10, 2026. <https://themillions.com/2015/09/the-city-of-lost-things-rediscovering-fernando-pessoas-the-book-of-disquiet.html>.

33 George Monteiro, *Surrealism in Portuguese Poetry*, 126.

34 Another scholar who highlights the importance of unique temporality of *saudade* is Vieira. In her words: "Unlike simple nostalgia, 'saudade' has resonance in the past, present, and future. As such, it is not only a complex cultural construction but also speaks of unique psychological facets." See: Estela Vieira, "Saudades e Soledad: Fernando Pessoa and António Machado on Nostalgia and Loneliness," *Romance Notes* 48 (2007): 125–133.

35 George Monteiro, *Surrealism in Portuguese Poetry*, 126.

36 Zuzanna Bułat-Silva, "TIME in Portuguese Saudade and Other Words of Longing," in *Meaning, Life and Culture: In Conversation with Anna Wierzbicka*, ed. Helen Bromhead and Zhengdao Ye (Canberra: ANU Press, 2020), 211–227.

Importantly, several authors demonstrate that the aspect of time is, generally, one of the cornerstones of the Portuguese national identity embedded within the history of the country. Sebastián Moreno Barreneche, for example, claims that in the case of Portugal, there exists the past–present–future triad equivalent to the triad of glory–decadence–redemption.³⁷ In the past, understood as the “golden period” (between the 13th and 16th cc.), the Portuguese gloriously travelled the seas and made breakthrough discoveries. However, in 1578, with the disappearance of young King Sebastião I at the Battle of Alcácer-Quibir, the country fell into a phase of decadence. As he had no heirs, a severe dynastic crisis followed and Portugal entered under the rule of King Philip II of Spain (1580–1640), inspiring the messianic “Sebastianism.” The myth, initiated in the 17th century by priest António Vieira, was based on a profound romantic-religious belief that King Sebastian would return on a misty morning to restore the country’s independence and glory. As noted by Correia, “the Saudade King” embodies the hidden, promising part and it is to him that appeal those frustrated with “the bad side” of the reality.³⁸ However, despite the long-lasting belief in that the Portuguese are providentially meant to be a grand nation, the present, as viewed by some authors, does not look very bright. António dos Santos Pereira, in particular, argues that Portuguese culture is underlined by “a myth of sad present compared to the long, glorious and festive past of a people, the result of the heroic acts of conquerors, saints and navigators.”³⁹

Such conceived temporality seems to connote the legacy of a Portugal’s mystic poet de Pascoaes, whose prose was predominantly spiritual and thus did not get impregnated with the nationalist program of *Saudosismo*. In his 1913 article devoted to the movement, he claimed that “[...] saudade is creation, a perpetual and fruitful marriage of Remembrance with Desire, of Evil with God, of Life with Death.”⁴⁰ The interpretation of one of his famous poems titled “Poet” allows to sense *saudade*’s atemporality, along with the transcendence of the title character’s body, its

37 Sebastián Moreno Barreneche, *Saudade: A Central Passion in the Discursive Construction of Portuguese National Identity* (June 2023). Accessed April 24, 2026. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372447835-Saudade_A_Central_Passion_in_the_Discursive_Construction_of_Portuguese_National_Identity/citations.

38 George Monteiro, *Surrealism in Portuguese Poetry*, 127.

39 Sebastián Moreno Barreneche, *Saudade: A Central Passion in the Discursive Construction of Portuguese National Identity*.

40 Richard Zenith, “Teixeira de Pascoaes,” *Poetry International Rotterdam* (January 2006). Accessed April 27, 2026. https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-4658_Pascoaes.

connectedness with the rest of reality and “transformation” into its other manifestations:

I am, in the future, time past” – the embodiment, in effect, of *saudade*. He claims to be “a mountain cliff”, “an astral mist”, “a living mystery”, “God’s delirium”, and so on, which is why he also says, “I’m man fleeing from himself.”⁴¹

Etymology and Emotional Scope of *Nostalgia*

The online Oxford English Dictionary defines *nostalgia* as “acute longing for familiar surroundings” or “sentimental longing for a period of the past,” whereas online Merriam-Webster Dictionary labels one of its meanings as “the state of being homesick.” The modern significance of this English word draws on ancient associations and has deep resonance with Greek epic, particularly *The Odyssey*. Etymologically, *nostalgia*, derives from the Greek νόστος, *nóstos*⁴² – the Homeric word for “homecoming” – and *álgos* denoting pain or grief. In classical Greek *nóstos* specifically signified a journey back to one’s homeland (especially the dangerous return home of warriors after their victory in the Trojan War), often carrying connotations of “salvation” from death. As suggested by Douglas Frame, in early Greek poetry, the term also meant “return to light and life,” while in later Greek, it retained much of its original meaning but also acquired a strong sense of γλυκασμός, i.e., “sweetness.”⁴³ That semantic shift, explained by the Byzantine lexicography, developed through an emotional association of homecoming perceived as the sweetest experience.⁴⁴ Indeed, in common usage *nóstos* came to imply “sweetness” for “nothing is sweeter than one’s fatherland.”⁴⁵

41 *Ibidem*.

42 This Greek noun is principally reconstructed as a reflex of a verbal root *neomai* meaning “to come or go.” See: Robert Stephen Paul Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1024, *sub voce* νόστος.

43 Douglas Frame, *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

44 Actually, the famous Homeric phrase νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ (“the day of return”) already carries this emotional coloring: the return home is not merely successful, but deeply desired and sweet. Compare: Anna Bonifazi, “Inquiring into Nostos and Its Cognates,” *American Journal of Philology* 130/4 (2009): 481–510.

45 Sententiae Antiquae, *Greek Nostos and English Nostalgia*. Accessed May 2, 2026. <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2020/12/08/greek-nostos-and-english-nostalgia-2/>.

As far as the affective side of *nostalgia* is concerned, it is widely recognised as an ambivalent, but predominantly positive, construct.⁴⁶ Sedikides and Wildschut even advocate reevaluation of *nostalgia*, challenging its historically negative reputation and presenting it as a psychologically beneficial, forward-looking emotion. Based on experimental research, they show that *nostalgia* functions as “a dynamic, motivational force that enables the individual to look ahead and take proactive action,” thus enhancing optimism and creativity. Far from being a frail escape from the present, it has the potential to become “a source of strength, enabling the individual to face the future.”⁴⁷ Additionally, there is a significant body of research, mainly in psychology and cognitive sciences, demonstrating that *nostalgia* can alleviate spatial anxiety which “undermines one’s confidence in their navigational ability, resulting in impaired navigation performance.”⁴⁸ In a recent cross-disciplinary article, “Nostalgia Assuages Spatial Anxiety,” the authors prove that spatial disorientation triggers *nostalgia* and that nostalgic recollection reduces spatial anxiety. By restoring a sense of mental continuity and social connectedness, the emotion serves as a “homeostatic corrective,” counteracting the uncertainty and loss of control caused by spatial disorientation.⁴⁹ Familiar memories and a stable sense of self are reactivated, helping individuals feel more grounded even in unfamiliar psychological or environmental environments. In the scholars’ words: “An adverse event will have a negative influence on one’s current state but will also trigger nostalgia. Nostalgia, in turn, will have a positive influence on one’s current state.”⁵⁰ Other scholars also point out a therapeutic value of *nostalgia* as a coping mechanism in face of adversity. Contemporary experiments have shown that inducing loneliness elicits lack of social support as well as *nostalgia*. *Nostalgia*, in turn, acts to replenish one’s reservoir of social support and,

46 Joost M. Leunissen, Marius van Dijke, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, “Organizational Nostalgia: The Construct, the Scale and its Implications for Organizational Functioning,” *British Journal of Management* 35/2 (2023): 816–838.; Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, “Past Forward: Nostalgia as a Motivational Force,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20/5 (2016): 319–321.

47 *Ibidem*, 320–321.

48 Alycia M. Hund, Jennifer L. Minarik, “Getting from Here to There: Spatial Anxiety, Wayfinding Strategies, Direction Type, and Wayfinding Efficiency,” *Spatial Cognition and Computation* 6/3 (2006): 179–201.

49 Alice Oliver, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, Matthew O. Parker, Antony P. Wood, and Edward S. Redhead, “Nostalgia Assuages Spatial Anxiety,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 112 (2024): 1–12.

50 *Ibidem*, 2.

as a result, counteracts loneliness, proving motivational potential of this construct.⁵¹

As regards *nostalgia*'s inherent links to memory, in 1979 the sociologist Fred Davis pioneered, in *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, another utility of the emotion. He linked the cognitive storage of nostalgic experiences⁵² with monetary deposits, asserting that *nostalgia* "reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment," to later suggest that nostalgic memories are not for the past but for the future since they serve as a wellspring, or a vitamin that nourishes the individual toward grappling with the vagaries of the future.⁵³ Nostalgia Inventory,⁵⁴ on the other hand, was designed as a tool measuring how often and how deeply people feel nostalgic by asking them to rate how much they miss 19–20 specific items from their past, including places, people and childhood experiences. Significantly, within this theoretical framework, *nostalgia* is not merely an autobiographical recollection or homesickness but entails an affectively selective idealisation of the past as "subjects scoring high (...) rated the past more favorably."⁵⁵

Nostalgia in History and Literary Tradition

Nostalgia's history, spanning approximately 2800 years, commences in Homer's epic whose eponymous hero, during his 10-year sea voyage, repeatedly experiences pining for his homeland. However, instead of restraining Odysseus, this pining inspirits him, energising "the cunning itinerant to invent solutions to an ever-changing and threatening landscape, making steady strides toward his eventual homecoming."⁵⁶ Quite surprisingly, the theme of longing for the past then remained, for

51 Xinyue Zhou, Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, and Ding-Guo Gao, "Counteracting Loneliness: On the Restorative Function of Nostalgia," *Psychological Science* 19/10 (2008): 1023–1029.

52 It shall be noted that according to Davis, individuals are typically able to differentiate between *nostalgia* and homesickness.

53 Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 420.

54 A psychometric instrument and a self-report measure developed in 1995 by Krystine Batcho to assess how nostalgic a person tends to be.

55 Krystine I. Batcho, "Personal Nostalgia, World View, Memory, and Emotionality," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 87/2 (1998): 411–432.

56 Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, "The Motivational Potency of Nostalgia: The Future is Called Yesterday," in *Advances in Motivation Science*, vol. 7, ed. Andrew J. Elliot (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2020), 75–111.

a long time, nearly absent from literary and scholarly tradition – with few references found in Hippocrates, Cesar and the biblical Psalms – to be brought back only after nearly 2500 years from *Odyssey* by the medical student Johannes Hofer.⁵⁷ Hofer coined the term *nostalgia* and presented it as a “cerebral disease” afflicting the Swiss mercenaries, students and domestic servants sent abroad away from homeland. In *Dissertatio medica de Nostalgia, oder Heimwehe* (1688), he proposed a catalogue of symptoms (weeping, anxiety, lethargy, etc.) experienced by these groups while stricken by *nostalgia*. By the early 19th century this condition was considered not so much a disease but a sort of melancholia or depression. Its notoriety lasted for many decades to follow, while the psychodynamic approach dominant in mid-20th century categorised it – equally damningly – as “monomaniacal obsessive mental state causing intense unhappiness,”⁵⁸ with identified symptoms being compared to conditions shell shock or schizophrenia, among others.

In Romantic literature, *nostalgia* emerged as a deep spiritual and emotional experience, expressing a longing for nature, childhood, and a lost sense of unity. Boym affirms that:

Nostalgia as a historical emotion came of age at the time of Romanticism and is coeval with the birth of mass culture. It began with the early-nineteenth century memory boom that turned the salon culture of educated urban dwellers and landowners into a ritual commemoration of lost youth, lost springs, lost dances, lost chances.⁵⁹

This commemoration of lost youth, experiences and chances would be openly demonstrated, taking shape, among others, of the souvenirisation of the salon culture and social theatricality that turned everyday life into art, even if not always masterful.⁶⁰ Importantly, during the 19th century, *nostalgia* also became institutionalised in the form of museums and urban memorials – the past being now treated as heritage – thus acquiring public dimension and space.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 76.

⁵⁸ Nandor Fodor, “Varieties of Nostalgia,” *Psychoanalytic Review* 37 (1950): 25–38.

⁵⁹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 16.

⁶⁰ Sylwia J. Wojciechowska, *Nostalgia as a Mode of Reflection in the Autobiographical Narratives of Joseph Conrad and Henry James* (Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2023), 16.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 15.

As suggested by Sylwia J. Wojciechowska, the early-modernist British literature at the beginning of the 20th century saw a transformation consisting in the intertwining of *nostalgia* and autobiographical narration, which can be clearly illustrated by the writings of Henry James – the transitional figure between literary realism and modernism.⁶² Drawing on Małgorzata Czermińska's distinction between communal sites and individual sites of autobiographical memory, Wojciechowska sustains that the latter portray home differently, in line with a particular author's pattern of belonging.⁶³ For these patterns to be fully developed in prose, two necessary conditions formulated by Czermińska have to be fulfilled, an autobiographic element and a sensitivity to geographical elements, both of which, as proved by Wojciechowska, are clearly noticeable especially in James' early work.

Such a repositioning of interest marked within *nostalgia* towards one's self may be an indirect result of the Industrial Revolution, in which *nostalgia* started to convey what Boym calls a longing for the shrinking "space of experience that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations."⁶⁴ Indeed, modernist writers transformed it into a more melancholic reflection on fragmentation, memory, and the collapse of stable meanings. Experts in the field also agree that modernist *nostalgia* is characterised by "the critical potential" – a term defined by Tammy Clewell as "an interpretative stance, one that mediates the interplay between the individual and collective, continuity and rupture, memory and desire, escapist fantasy and social critique."⁶⁵ This interpretative potential could be developed in two contrary directions: either to promote resistance or to foster "a progressive politics for the future."⁶⁶ Finally, in postmodernism, *nostalgia* evolved further into a cultural-aesthetic mode, marked by retro stylisation, the reconstruction of the past, and playful simulations of history.⁶⁷

62 *Ibidem*, 14.

63 *Ibidem*, 189.

64 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 10.

65 Tammy Clewell, "Introduction: Past 'Perfect' and Present 'Tense': The Abuses and Uses of Modernist Nostalgia," in *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*, ed. Tammy Clewell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–17.

66 *Ibidem*, 1.

67 Sam Caleb, Niall Ó Cuileagáin, "Forget, Remember! Literature and Nostalgia," in *Moveable Type* 12 (2020): 3–15.

Spatiality of *Nostalgia*

Given that a return to home symbolically implies a return to the past, *nóstos* denotes a partly futile wish for neither home – representing the past – nor the person – the rememberer – remain the same.⁶⁸ Yet it is already by the blend of the ancient root with the spatial meaning of homecoming that *nostalgia* is fundamentally grounded in spatial experience. As proposed by Svetlana Boym in the Introduction to *The Future of Nostalgia*, it is:

(...) a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed (...) a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life.⁶⁹

The spatiality of *nostalgia* is shown here by framing it as an emotional experience structured around distance, displacement, and the imagined relationship between “home” and “abroad.” *Nostalgia* emerges through the tension between absent or unattainable places and the subject's present location. The theoretician also differentiates between *restorative nostalgia*, which emphasizes *nóstos* and attempts “a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” and *reflective nostalgia* that “thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately,” dwelling in the imperfect relation to places of the past.⁷⁰ Therefore, while restoratively nostalgic people make attempts at re-creating what they regard as an idealised golden age of their lives, oftentimes experiencing related sadness or regret, reflectively nostalgic individuals appear to be more accepting and joyous about their past, taking pleasure in (re)living emotions linked to happy memories.⁷¹

The idea that *nostalgia* is essentially intertwined with spatial, not only temporal, object of longing is further developed by Mario Panico, who maps out the notion of “spaces of nostalgia,” defining them as sites allowing practices that are “out of time”. In some spaces, he notes, “temporality is the protagonist: the past, and the emotions and the values related to

68 Sententiae Antiquae, *Greek Nostos and English Nostalgia*.

69 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

70 *Ibidem*, xviii.

71 “Nostalgia,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed May 14, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/science/nostalgia#refl330984>.

it, are recreated spatially.”⁷² The author emphasises the significance of the space–nostalgia relationship by observing that spaces act as triggers, stages and “spatial consolation” for nostalgic returns. As he put it in the Introduction to *Spaces for Nostalgia Difficult Memories and Material Consolations*: “While this temporal dimension of nostalgia is certainly important, its spatial side has been little considered, even though [...] it is potentially of equal relevance: after all, space is one of the most common and capable memory triggers.”⁷³ One of clear examples with which he illustrates the spatiality of *nostalgia* through real locations is the Italian town Predappio, analysed as a “space of nostalgia”:

If you happened to pass through Predappio on the anniversary of the birth or the death of Benito Mussolini... there is a good chance you would meet a sizeable group of neo-fascists wearing T-shirts, watches or baseball caps adorned with the dictator’s face, bought at the souvenir shops on the town’s main street... If you then decided to follow that group of people, you would arrive at the cemetery of San Cassiano... where Mussolini was buried in the family crypt.⁷⁴

Apparently, *nostalgia* is activated and sustained through physical places and not just memories in time. The urban landscape mediates the emotional connection to the past, with streets, memorials, shops and other objects all becoming a stage where nostalgic practices are re-enacted, allowing forms of consolation for nostalgic desires. The very existence of such forms, as also suggested by the aforementioned findings of other scholars, proves that nostalgic recollection has therapeutic potential of reducing spatial anxiety.

Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to provide an analysis of the concepts of *saudade* and *nostalgia* from the space and time categories perspective. Given the pervasiveness of *saudade* in the Portuguese language, culture, literature and philosophy, as well as its rootedness in the country’s history, it naturally constitutes one of crucial elements of Portugal’s temperament

72 Mario Panico, *Spazi della nostalgia. Approccio semiotico a una passione spazializzata*, tesi di dottorato (Bologna: Università di Bologna, 2020), 7.

73 Panico Mario, *Spaces for Nostalgia. Difficult Memories and Material Consolations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 1–2.

74 Mario Panico, “Degrees of Nostalgia. Predappio, a Case Study,” *Studi Culturali* 1 (2020): 51–62.

and national identity. From both historical and literary traditions point of view, *nostalgia* – deeply rooted in the history and epic of ancient Greece – represents an equally multi-layered construct, perceptions and applications of which have been changing over the centuries and spaces affected.

As the author wished to prove, while both *saudade* and *nostalgia* emerge from the deeply human experience of loss and lack, and are directly linked to the intricate inner workings of memory, they appear to substantially differ in the conceptual constitution, impact and balance of temporal and spatial dimensions structuring each of them. *Saudade* is primarily governed by a diffuse and sometimes ahistorical temporality, or else, the simultaneity of diverse time levels, in which space remains secondary or indeterminate. In contrast, *nostalgia* – already etymologically containing an essential spatial element – is strongly organised around spatial longing for an absent or imagined home, thereby foregrounding place as the principal framework within which nostalgic reflection unfolds.

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