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Joana Brilhante de Oliveira Vicente Silva

THE INSULAR EFFECT
LGBTQ PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE LENS OF GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION

Novembro de 2022

Instituto de Investigação Interdisciplinar
Universidade de Coimbra

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Title	The Insular Effect: LGBTQ people's experiences through the lens of geographical isolation
Author	Joana Brilhante
Scientific Supervision	Ana Cristina Santos, Ph.D. Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra Miguel Vale de Almeida, Ph.D. ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa
Scientific Domain	Human Rights in Contemporary Societies
Research Unit	Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra
Institution	Instituto de Investigação Interdisciplinar da Universidade de Coimbra
Funding	PhD scholarship granted by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT) (PD/BD/142803/2018; COVID/BD/152545/2022)

Primusca.

The geography of an island is the metaphor for what is experienced inside: identities surrounded by infinite possibilities that only the fortunate dare reach – but fortune is a quality that dwells within each of us.

Wolf and Dog (2022), Cláudia Varejão

Acknowledgements

Alguns estudos levam cientistas a defender a tese de que pessoas que comunicam em mais do que uma língua alteram a sua personalidade conforme a língua usada. Deste modo, não poderia deixar de escrever esta secção naquela que é a minha língua mãe, que me permite estar mais próxima do coração do que da academia.

Os meus primeiros agradecimentos são dirigidos aos meus orientadores. Começo pelo reconhecimento de que o desbravar do espinhoso caminho dos direitos das pessoas LGBTQ em Portugal foi feito pelas mãos de pessoas como Ana Cristina Santos e Miguel Vale de Almeida. Sem os seus esforços, dedicação e luta, que são também de tantas outras pessoas, não poderia estar hoje a fazer este trabalho de investigação, viver a vida como a vivo e ter como tangíveis os meus sonhos de futuro. É, portanto, de coração cheio que lhes dirijo este agradecimento e faço o reconhecimento de que trabalhar sob a supervisão de duas pessoas pelas quais nutro a maior das admirações intelectuais e políticas não pode ser classificado por menos do que um enorme privilégio.

Ter uma orientadora omnipresente como a Professora Doutora Ana Cristina Santos, cujo brilhantismo académico e activista é capaz de motivar qualquer jovem aprendiz nos passos das ciências sociais, faz todo o processo moroso (que rima com doloroso) de fazer um doutoramento parecer fácil. Na Cristina encontrei sempre, e muitas vezes fora de horas, palavras amigas, um suporte, epifanias intelectuais, validação, risos, motivação, uma imensa inspiração e força para continuar.

Com o Professor Doutor Miguel Vale de Almeida no leme da co-orientação, foi-me possível desenhar capítulos imaginativos, cuja profundidade muitas vezes se deveu às nossas preciosas reuniões de orientação. A disponibilidade e proximidade que me ofereceu, ainda que geograficamente distante, possibilitou-me uma enorme aprendizagem. Com a partilha das suas valiosas reflexões estendeu o meu horizonte, as suas sugestões de leitura inspiraram-me e desafiaram-me.

Noutra ilha, as minhas amizades. Às dos Açores: a Nanita, a Sofia, a Joana, a Suses, a Nónó, a João, a Sara, o Hugo, a Carol, a Fabi, o Bernardo e o Johnny. Em Coimbra, à primeira, o meu Sarilho, minha boca-de-incêndio. Às minhas (irmãs e braços direitos) Mimosas 'Fim, Fati, Dani, Cebola, Diana, Raq, Machinho e Pedro (pequeno). Ao meu Pedro (grande em tamanho, em amizade e ternura), à van Velze, à Vanessa, à Inês Margarida, ao João, à Mariana, à Agreira, à Clarisse. Todas estas pessoas construíram e continuam a construir bocadinhos de mim.

Numa outra ilha, pessoas que me trazem carinho e aprendizagem de formas tão diversas. A minha madrinha Belinha, a minha cunhada Ditinha, as "tias" Jo, Paula Morão e Maria Quintans. Assim como a todas as mães e pais das minhas amigas que, de alguma forma, também o foram para mim.

À ilha da Academia, cheia de colegas e amigas/os com quem tanto aprendo, Sebi, Caye, Ricardo, Luana, Marcus, Clarissa, Jéssica, Jô, Allana, Vanessa, Pedro, Rita, Lu, Fernanda e Mafalda. Na ilha da academia há um ilhéu com um farol. Esse farol tem duas comandantes, a Isa e a Mara que foram preciosas a iluminar este percurso com a sua amizade - conversas intermináveis, palavras de apoio, suporte, entreajuda, (re)encontros, passeios, gargalhadas, reflexões da academia, da vida pessoal, da política internacional e de música pimba, todas essenciais.

À ilha de pessoas que comigo fizeram parte de estruturas que mudaram a minha vida, fundamentais ao meu crescimento pessoal, humano e político: na Associação Académica de Coimbra, na Não te Prives, na PATH e no (A)MAR.

Se, por um lado, não posso terminar estes agradecimentos sem fazer referência à minha psicoterapeuta Dra. Joana Godinho, cuja dedicação e excelência profissional foram centrais na difícil missão de manter a minha sanidade mental durante este processo, por outro lado, deixo o último agradecimento para a Jane.

Quando somos crianças ou adolescentes, ou nesses tempos cujo tempo não sei precisar, fantasiamos (ou pelo menos fantasiei eu) em construir a vida em conjunto com alguém inteligente, carinhosa, amiga, desafiante e forte. Uma pessoa com quem possamos partilhar valores, projectos de futuro, partilhar os "Nocturnos" do Chopin e a "Sozinha" da Ágata. Alguém com quem possamos conversar para sempre, sobre tudo e sobre nada. A Jane reduziu todas estas minhas fantasias a eufemismos. Ela eleva ao expoente máximo as características com as quais eu poderia sonhar e transforma todos os dias em poesia. É simultaneamente uma fonte de admiração, de inspiração e, durante parte deste caminho, foi a minha estrutura. Se todas as outras pessoas consigo desenhar em ilhas, a Jane será sempre o espraiar no mar.

Abstract

The field of Geographies of Sexualities has been demonstrating for several decades how sexualities are shaped with and by places and spaces. Critical perspectives coming from scholars with work in Rural Queer Studies call attention to the need to decentralize academic knowledge - mainly focused on large, metropolitan cities -, and to engage with the valuable understandings and experiences that come from people who live in isolated, sparsely populated and rural communities. To understand how LGBTQ people's Human Rights are experienced, and how legislative changes are promoted or resisted, we must have an extended comprehension of contemporary spatialities. As such, this thesis contributes to fill the gap of knowledge regarding the intersections between LGBTQ people's experiences and the geographical condition of insular isolation, a perspective that has been insufficiently explored in LGBTQ scholarship.

This investigation comprises a multi-methods qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, making use of a case study, the Autonomous Region of Azores. The methodology encompassed online data collection, participant observation, documental analysis and 25 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 21 LGBTQ adults (ages 18 - 70) and 4 key informants, all of whom were Azorean-born or living on the islands.

In registering the experiences of queer people who live in a very particular geographical setting, this thesis adds new information to the national and international body of LGBTQ research. The islands studied breed an intimate and partly closed sociocultural ecosystem. Roughly shaped by its isolation, smallness and the fact that the islands are sparsely populated, these "sociocultural greenhouses" shape the experiences of the local LGBTQ people. The thematic threads around aspects such as Social Contract, Mobility, Space and Exposure, allowed reflections on the importance of categories like family and society, shedding light on the significance of the respect of the local social and cultural norms, which I call during this work, the maintenance of the sociocultural homeostasis. Grounded on these thematic lines, the theoretical work led to the development of the concept of the Insular Effect. The Insular Effect results from the intimate, sociocultural ecosystem which is sustained by the islands' geographical isolation. Therefore, when

looking at spaces with these conditions through the lens of LGBTQ studies, it is important to consider three main axes: the insular space, the feelings of exposure and the importance of the dominant social codes. These three axes create the insular effect that rebounds into the local LGBTQ community isolating the subjects. The ways in which this isolation was expressed in the case study were: leaving the islands; the invisibility of the subjects by the compliance with the sociocultural homeostasis; or the isolation that results from an exposure which is not desirable to the other LGBTQ locals. This exposure comes from the over conspicuousness of being openly gender and/or sexually diverse in spaces and places that are tailored by cis-heteronormativity.

This effect seems to be activated by an insular sense of place, which is highly marked by the feeling of proximity with all the members of the community as if the people's quotidian is surrounded by "intimate strangers". Although this seems to be a collective experience in all of the insular community, its impact is different on cis-heteronormative people, when compared to LGBTQ people.

Finally, another contribution of this work, which is based on the analysis of the data in light of an interdisciplinary body of knowledge, is the development of a five-point theoretical approach to LGBTQ studies in insular communities. Hopefully, this scientific endeavour offers an informed conceptual analysis of significant aspects to take into account when variables such as geographical isolation and LGBTQ people intersect.

The empirical data collected sheds light on the role of the geographical context in shaping LGBTQ people's experiences. With the highlight of the important aspects that emerged in the analysis of this case study, the grammar of LGBTQ people's Human Rights has been extended, allowing new perspectives towards future interventions that are compromised with the respect for human dignity, respect and freedom.

Keywords: LGBTQ, isolation, insularity, sense of place, intimacy.

Resumo

Há várias décadas que na área da Geografia das Sexualidades se tem vindo a demonstrar como as sexualidades são moldadas pelo e através do espaço. Críticas vindas do campo dos estudos *queer*, focados na ruralidade, chamam a atenção para a necessidade de descentralizar o conhecimento académico - que tem incidido principalmente nas grandes cidades e metrópoles - e envolver também o conhecimento e experiências de pessoas que vivem em lugares isolados e com pouca população. Esta inclusão promove uma boa compreensão de como os Direitos Humanos das pessoas LGBTQ são experienciados e como as alterações legislativas são disseminadas ou alvos de resistência. Para isso, é necessária uma compreensão extensiva das espacialidades contemporâneas. Assim, esta tese preenche uma lacuna no campo dos estudos LGBTQ, nomeadamente através da análise das intersecções entre as experiências de pessoas LGBTQ e o isolamento geográfico conferido pela insularidade, uma perspectiva que tem sido insuficientemente explorada na investigação LGBTQ.

Esta é uma tese feita a partir de uma análise qualitativa e multi-métodos, utilizando um estudo de caso, a Região Autónoma dos Açores. A metodologia combina a recolha de dados *online*, observação participante, análise documental e 25 entrevistas semiestruturadas. As entrevistas foram levadas a cabo com 4 informantes privilegiados e 21 pessoas LGBTQ adultas (idades compreendidas entre os 18 e os 70 anos), nascidas, ou a viver nas ilhas.

Ao registar as experiências de pessoas *queer* a viver neste contexto específico, esta tese adiciona novas perspectivas ao corpo teórico da investigação LGBTQ nacional e internacional. As ilhas estudadas constituem um ecossistema íntimo e parcialmente fechado, fortemente marcado pelo isolamento e pelo facto de as ilhas serem lugares pequenos e com poucos habitantes. Estes factores fazem destas ilhas pequenas "estufas socioculturais" que moldam as experiências das pessoas LGBTQ locais.

As linhas temáticas acerca de aspectos como o Contrato Social, a Mobilidade, o Espaço e a Exposição permitiram a reflexão sobre a importância de categorias como Família e

Sociedade, alertando para o peso do respeito pelas normas socioculturais locais. Respeito que esta investigação chama de manutenção da homeostasia sociocultural. Tendo estas linhas temáticas enquanto suporte, o trabalho teórico levou ao desenvolvimento do conceito de Efeito Insular. Este efeito resulta do ecossistema sociocultural e da sua intimidade, que são sustentados pelo isolamento geográfico das ilhas. Deste modo, ao olhar para espaços com estas condições através da lente dos estudos LGBTQ, considera-se importante ter em apreciação três eixos principais: o espaço insular, o sentimento de exposição e os códigos sociais dominantes. Estes três eixos criam o efeito insular que por sua vez se reflecte na comunidade LGBTQ local através do isolamento dos sujeitos. As formas pelas quais este isolamento se traduziu no decorrer deste trabalho foram: o sair da ilha; a invisibilidade da pessoa por coadunar com a homeostasia sociocultural; ou ainda, o isolamento resultante de uma exposição que parece ser evitada pela restante comunidade LGBTQ. Esta exposição resulta da conspicuidade de se ser abertamente *queer* em espaços que são formatados pela cis-heteronormatividade.

O Efeito Insular parece ser activado por um "*sense of place*" [sentido de espaço] insular, que é fortemente marcado por um sentimento de proximidade a todos membros da comunidade. Funciona como se o quotidiano das pessoas fosse rodeado de outras pessoas que são, simultaneamente, estranhas e íntimas. Ainda que este "*sense of place*" insular pareça ser uma experiência colectiva da comunidade das ilhas, o seu impacto é diferente em pessoas cis-heteronormativas e pessoas LGBTQ.

Uma das principais contribuições deste trabalho, que se baseia no estudo dos dados à luz de uma perspectiva interdisciplinar, é o desenvolvimento de uma teoria constituída por cinco pontos que se consideram variáveis fundamentais aquando da realização de investigação acerca de questões LGBTQ em comunidades isoladas.

Os dados empíricos recolhidos demonstraram o importante papel do contexto geográfico nas experiências das pessoas LGBTQ. Através dos aspectos levantados durante a análise deste estudo de caso, crê-se ter contribuído para a extensão da gramática dos Direitos Humanos das pessoas LGBTQ, permitindo novas perspectivas em intervenções futuras, comprometidas com o respeito pela dignidade humana e pela liberdade.

Palavras-chave: LGBTQ; isolamento, insularidade, "*sense of place*" e intimidade.

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Introduction

A significant amount of academic work has been rigorously and insightfully addressing questions of space, place, and sexualities in an array of different contexts. These studies, particularly the ones coming from the field of Geographies of Sexualities, demonstrate how we define and control not only sex and sexualities but also gender identities and expression (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Longhurst, 1995, 2001; Brown and Browne, 2016).

Social scientists with an interest in social exclusion and social inequalities argue that there is a need to have into account space as we analyse the marginalization of individuals, because "power is expressed in the manipulation of space" (Sibley, 1995:ix; see also Rodman, 1992). In other words, "social exclusion is not just created in space, but is also created by the use of space and exclusion from space" (Browne et al., 2021a: 31 [emphasis in original]).

Scholars from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer studies (hereafter LGBTQ) have been demonstrating for decades how compulsory cis-heteronormativity (Rich, 1980) has been informing cultural, political and legal settings globally, resulting in the marginalization and discrimination of queer people (Möser et al., 2022).

Keeping track of how LGBTQ people's discriminations work, how they are resisted and how they can be challenged is one of the main objectives of this research. By adding a new case study to LGBTQ scholarship, this investigation supplements the existing queer body of knowledge with new empirical data that steam from a very specific and interesting perspective, which is insularity.

The relevance of the study goes beyond the demonstrated need to decentralize queer knowledge from the large and metropolitan spaces (Herring, 2010; Thomsen, 2014; McGlynn, 2017). It also sheds light on a geographical context that has been also at the margins of Rural Queer research, from where most of the calls for this need (decentralization) have been made.

It remains unclear if (and if so, the extent to which) the specificities of living in insular contexts - that have been extensively addressed in fields such as Island Studies (IS) (Baldacchino, 2005, 2012, 2018; Grydehøj, 2017) -, relate to questions of sexual and gender diversity. With few exceptions (Karides, 2017; Lattas, 2014), theoretical conceptions about the possibilities of insularity and LGBTQ people's experiences being interconnected have been absent from most scholarship with interest in gender and/or sexual diversity. As such, many questions remain unanswered. Can insularity be a useful category when we speak about LGBTQ people's experiences? Does the "backwardness", conservatism, and other stereotypical ideas of small, rural and isolated communities (Howard, 1999; Halberstam, 2005; Thomsen, 2014) interfere with the ways in which an islander can be queer? Will the geographical characteristic of insularity somehow inform the social and spatial constructions of sexualities? Can queer people's insular experiences be of value to endow new theoretical insights into the broader scholarship on LGBTQ research?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed during this investigation, along with others that came up during the process of data interpretation.

To address the questions raised, this work uses an interdisciplinary, critical and multi-methods qualitative approach, making use of a case study. The case study is one of the only two Portuguese archipelagos, the Autonomous Region of Azores (ARA). Constituted by nine populated islands, the Azores are considered ultra-peripheral geographically, as the European Union (EU) has the archipelago classified as one of its eight outermost regions.

Based on previous work in LGBTQ studies and Geography (Geographies of Sexualities, Rural Queer Studies, and Island Studies), the current investigation sought to contribute to a better understanding of the interconnectedness between LGBTQ people's experiences, inequalities, resistances, and insular geographical isolation. Through five chapters, this work registered the experiences that the people who participated in this study kindly shared during semi-structured interviews. Valuable narratives, given the fact that insular queer statements have been insufficiently represented in LGBTQ scholarship.

With a systematic analysis of the data from the interviews and the assemblage of the results with the other data provided by the qualitative tools used during this research, I

sought to build a conceptual analysis of the aspects that this investigation led me to take as significant when analysing insular, small, isolated and sparsely populated areas in the light of LGBTQ studies. Therefore, during the chapters of this thesis I examined the particularities of the experiences shared by the participants, exploring what the systematic analysis revealed as being relevant for the case study under examination.

Results shed light on the relevance of taking into account the geographical characteristics of space while analysing small insular contexts, being in line with the demonstrated importance of spaces and places in sexualities scholarship (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Hubbard, 2000, 2008, 2011; Brown and Browne, 2016; Browne et al., 2007).

Insularity became a cornerstone in the analysis of the narratives of the LGBTQ people interviewed. Not just because of the actual discontinuity of territory it represents, and all the constraints caused by it, but also as a social construct and a cognitive resource which I argue to be of empirical validity.

The richness of the experiences shared, highly influenced by an insular experience, led me to conclude that LGBTQ people's sense of place is a key element to consider while analysing geographical spaces with similar conditions (smallness, isolation and sparsely populated). These results shed light on the significance of taking into account emotional components while doing research in such contexts, as it also opens the possibility for this to be an important aspect to have into account beyond insular spaces. Another important contribution of this work is a proposal of a theoretical approach to LGBTQ studies in insular communities.

I believe doing research on LGBTQ issues is also a form of resistance. Human Rights are constantly evolving and there are no irreversible rights. We have been intensively reminded of that in recent years, with the rise of several right-wing populist movements across Europe. These movements use sexuality and gender as political weapons and, as demonstrated in the work of Möser et al. (2022: 4), "[t]he emphasis right-wing actors have placed on sexual and gender politics has largely contributed to their current political success in many European countries (as well as beyond Europe"). The entanglement of these frequently nationalist ideologies with homophobia and transphobia (amongst many other forms of discrimination such as racism, antisemitism, misogyny and so on) are

beyond the scope of this research. Notwithstanding, their ascent reminds us of the relevance of creating resistance and writing alternative scripts to politics of hate.

Therefore, in doing a work that is compromised with the respect for human dignity, freedom and human rights, this investigation sought to contribute to the large array of LGBTQ body of knowledge that has been challenging the marginalization, and discrimination of members of the society as a result of who they are or whom they love.

The next section will provide an overview of each chapter, emphasizing the milieu in which this thesis is based.

Chapters' outline

This first section of this thesis serves as an introduction to the endeavours of the research. It is where I share the background and motivation for this investigation, demonstrate its importance, and highlight the need to fill the gap in regard to LGBTQ research in insular contexts. I argue that treasuring information that echoes from these contexts, might be valuable to LGBTQ scholarship, not only in similar geographical contexts but also outside small, isolated and sparsely populated spaces. Moreover, it also raises the central questions that led this investigation, its main findings and purposes, and finally, it will shed light on the structure of the work through this last section, where I present the chapter's outline.

Chapter 1 - Mapping Territories | delineates the interdisciplinary theoretical approach of this research. Reporting to literature in LGBTQ scholarship, Geographies of Sexualities (Queer Geographies and Rural Queer Studies), Island Studies and Cultural Geography. All of which served as pillars for the theoretical reflections during this investigation.

Chapter one also introduces the case study. It starts by shedding light on the most relevant legal achievements regarding LGBTQ people's Human Rights in Portugal and, afterwards, it narrows the focus to the case study, the Autonomous Region of the Azores.

After sharing general information about the archipelago, the chapter ends with the particularities of the development of LGBTQ social mobilization locally.

Chapter 2 – Steps of an 'out there' approach to the 'out there' | is composed of a detailed description of the instruments used to conduct this investigation, and the questions raised and answered during the process. After making a step-by-step approach to the methodological procedure, I also reveal my positionalities and ethical concerns. Finally, the chapter mentions the methodological limitations, and what I consider to be the strengths of this work.

Chapter 3 - What's in an island? | focuses on the gross results of data analysis, shedding light on the inductive and deductive processes that gave structure to the research design of this research. By giving a full and raw picture of the data, and afterwards tapering to detailed results, it demonstrates how the study was conceptualized, indicating transparency over data interpretation and the consistency of data analysis. Its tapered and systematic analysis led to the deduction of a scheme that served as a structure for the following conceptual and theoretical reflections of this investigation.

Chapter 4- The insular effect | discusses and outlines the aspects considered the core of the queer experiences researched. The first section of the chapter is about the imagery and representations of LGBTQ people's freedoms and their relations with geographical space. Drawing on knowledge coming from Rural Queer Studies and concepts such as metronormativity (Halberstam, 2014), this section reflects on the presence of the idea that "outside the islands is easier to be queer", present in the imaginary of the local LGBTQ community, and the connections and ruptures between the idea of island and closet.

The following section narrows the analysis from the people's imaginary to practices and behaviours. Concepts such as visibility, exposure and their strong connection with the geographical characteristics of space are the core of the discussion. Relating the results of data analysis with the theoretical background of Geographies of Sexualities and Island Studies allowed the understanding that the intimate sociocultural ecosystem (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018) present on these islands, attributes great value to the respect for the local social and cultural norms, which impacts directly into the experiences of the local LGBTQ population.

The last section of the chapter is where I develop the concept of the "insular effect" which gives name to this thesis. The local sociocultural ecosystem, bordered by the geographical insular conditions creates an outcome which I call the insular effect. When analysing these spaces and such ecosystems through the lens of LGBTQ studies, I argue that there are three main axes to have into account: the insular space, the feeling of exposure felt by the local queer community, and the importance of the maintenance of the dominant social codes. These three axes seem to create the insular effect which rebounds into the queer community isolating the subjects. During this last section, my reflections conspire me to indicate that the insular effect seems to function as an additional layer to the difficulties faced by LGBTQ people.

Chapter 5- Ecology of Insularity | is the last empirical chapter of this research. It provides an in-depth analysis of the concept of insularity from the lens of LGBTQ research. Reflecting on the insular characteristics of space, I argue that (if the right conditions are met) insular contexts might facilitate changes on the way to progress towards LGBTQ people's equality (such as achieving legal protection) faster. Notwithstanding, I also argue that the same characteristics that may allow this to happen might also make progressive legal changes in such contexts more vulnerable. As such, one might consider the necessity of being extra attentive whilst working in such spaces as we know human rights are always subject to backlash.

The following section is where I propose that insularity might be interpreted as more than a geographical characteristic of space. I argue that insularity can also be analysed as a social construct and a cognitive resource with empirical validity. Using theoretical frames coming from Cultural Geography and Anthropology, I use concepts such as "sense of place" (Anderson, 2015) to consider the hypothesis of insularity as happening at the intersection between culture and space, and how this interpretation helps to understand the "activation" of the insular effect.

The final section of the chapter is where I present a five-point theoretical proposal for a better understanding of the relation between insularity and LGBTQ people's experiences. Using Gregory Bateson's work (1972) on aspects of unity of social groups, I point out five aspects of insular intimacy, that this investigation led me to argue that if had into account, may inform better approaches towards the understanding of queer insular experiences. Moreover, during this last section, I also consider the hypothesis of the

concept of insularity to be of interest to interpret queer people's sense of place in spaces and places tailored by cis-heteronormativity.

Final Considerations | is the last section of this research. It provides the overall summary of the results and main findings, as it discusses how an analysis of an insular case study moves forward the knowledge on LGBTQ people's experiences. During this final part, I also discuss key limitations of the research and provide suggestions and directions for future work. The final paragraph falls on a take-home message and the overall conclusion of this study.

Chapter 1- Mapping Territories

As the insular geographical contexts analysed in this work, this dissertation is also delimited, not by the sea, but by its theoretical approach and its object of study. Therefore, with this chapter, I aim to circumscribe this investigation to its theoretical and geographical "limits". To do so, section 1.1- *Theoretical Territory* is where I introduce the interdisciplinary scholarship that sustained this research. It borrows insights from LGBTQ studies, Island Studies, Geographies of sexualities (Queer Geographies, and Rural Queer Studies), and Cultural Geography. Therefore, this section reports the body of knowledge that allowed the theoretical reflections that will be made along the chapters that will follow, mainly the theoretical chapters that are written in the light of the empirical data, such as Chapter 4 – *The insular Effect* and Chapter 5- *Ecology of Insularity*.

Section 1.*2- Geographical Territories*, is where I make a brief description of the case study. It starts with a short description of some of the most important legal achievements regarding LGBTQ people's rights in Portugal. Afterwards, section 1.2.1- *The case study,* narrows the focus to the geographical context under analysis during this investigation, the Autonomous Region of Azores. This section is where I report some general information about the Azorean archipelago. Finally, section 1.2.2.1 - *An intermittent rainbow over the Atlantic* is where I contextualize the development of LGBTQ activism on the islands, as its particularities were one of the key factors that instigated my curiosity in conducting this research.

1.1 - Theoretical Territories

A central book that explores sexualities from the perspective of geography is David Bell and Gill Valentine's *Mapping Desire*. Published in 1995, this work cuts across a great

range of geographies, from cities to the countryside, referring to all five continents. It is considered one of the most important publications in the field of the Geography of Sexualities (GS), where various authors provide the readers "a range of theoretical and empirical perspectives, drawn not only from geography but also from much further afield, together to inform our thinking about the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute one another" (Bell and Valentine, 1995a: 2).

Much of the work in GS has been made in the light of the experiences of sexual and/or gender-diverse people to whom spaces in everyday life are often perceived as aggressively cisgender and heterosexual (Hubbard, 2000; Browne and Brown, 2016; Johnston, 2018; Browne et al., 2021). While displays of heterosexual affection or "proper" gendered behaviour (e.g. feminine and masculine) are recognized as "normal" in most spaces, it has been noted that for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer people those spaces are frequently perceived as oppressive and potentially dangerous (Hubbard, 2000, 2018; Ferreira, 2010; Ferreira et al., 2018; Browne et al., 2007; Browne and Brown, 2016). The cause of that is that places and spaces are by default defined by cisnormativity and heteronormativity (hereafter cis-heteronormative or cis—heteronormativity).

Cisnormativity, because spaces are used - or are expected to be used - by explicit men and explicit women, who behave unequivocally masculine and feminine, respectively. In addition, this normativity also assumes that those physical and cultural bodies are "naturally" attracted to each other. As a result, the expected visible sexualities to be expressed are the ones defined by heteronormativity, which in turn marks the space as heterosexual without the need for any name or label (Browne and Brown 2016). In other words, cis-heteronormativity "refers to the ways in which sexuality, sex and gender are intertwined in ways that are presumed to be natural" (Browne and Brown, 2016:1). As explained in the work of Kath Browne and Gavin Brown (2016), the expected and "uncomplicated" demonstrations of heterosexuality are what is expected to be visible. As such, what marks the space as heterosexual is heteronormativity. David Bell (1994) gives the example of heterosexual couples holding hands, in most places of the Global North, such kind of behaviour would be unmarked by its "normality". On another note, Kath Browne (2004) calls to our attention the use of public bathrooms for gender-diverse people, and how these people can be subjects of abuse and violence in such contexts. Therefore, "the sexuality of space tends only to be noticed, and named as

such, when it is not heterosexual/straight. Gay spaces are marked as different and named as 'gay', but this is not the case for straight spaces. What this means is that sexualities remake everyday spaces, often as 'normal' (where normal means straight and adhering to gender norms). People using these spaces can conform to the norms of the spaces. As a result, they are not subject to violence, looks or comments. Their 'normality' remains unremarked and invisible. In this way places also remake people's lives, identities and bodies" (Browne and Brown, 2016: 1-2).

Heidi Nast's (1998) work "Unsexy Geographies", goes further in the adjectives for classifying heterosexual expected behaviour. The author also uses words such as "unremarkable" and "natural" but adds "innocent" to the adjectives classifying cis-heteronormativity. Nast exemplifies as follows:

> [H]etero-couples kissing in parks; placing a public advert in a local newspaper for a hetero-mate; the public predominance of heterosexual dating agencies; and promotional tourism images of affectionate heterosexual couples, often scantily clad, sipping pina coladas or wading through blue waters with small children in tow, are simply not perceived as racy or even sexy - an effacement with a long history. In contrast, homosexual couples carrying out, or portrayed doing the same kinds of activities in public arenas (a ClubMed tourism advertisement showing a racially `mixed' lesbian couple, scantily clad and romantically intertwined) are seen as sexed and deviant (Nast, 1998: 192).

In a paper from the 1980s focusing on lesbian experiences, Adrienne Rich called the scale by which these experiences were perceived "the bias of compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980: 632). According to Rich, it is this bias of compulsory heterosexuality that makes the visibility of some existences seen as being normal or natural, while the visibility of others that are somehow diverse, are identified as being deviant, different, immoral, even ideological (Rich, 1980; Nast, 1998; Sibley, 1995; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017; Argüello, 2021). LGBTQ studies and academic work around Geographies of Sexualities (particularly from queer geographies) helps us to understand that this bias is also created through and by space, as both sexuality and sex are geographical and spaces are sexualized (Brown et al. 2007; Browne and Brown 2016). As noted by Margaret Rodman "[a]s anthropologists and as ordinary people living in the world, we are as situated in place as we are in time or culture" (Rodman, 1992: 640). To understand the

ways in which geography impacts sexualities, we must take into account both politics and practice because, commonly, those regulate the public sphere (Browne et al. 2007).

If Foucault (1995) instructs us to reflect on how discipline organizes the analytical space, Ken Plummer reminds us that:

> Power is not a simple attribute or a capacity, but a flow of negotiations and shifting outcomes. As electricity is to the physical world, so power may be to the social world: it is the conduit through which much life gets enacted. But its shapes and forms are immensely varied. Like the air we breathe, or the blood that flows through our veins, it is omnipresent. It is not a property of people *per se*, nor is it zero-sum: we do not either have it or not have it. Instead it flows through all interaction, through in starkly different ways. It is both *negative* - repressing, oppressing, depressing – and *positive* – constructive, creative, constitutive (Plummer, 1995: 26).

Plummer argues that "sexual stories live in this flow of power": into the lives of the people; through our networks of social activity and through the negotiated social order (Plummer, 1995). During this research, to understand the ways in which the flows of power intertwined with social networks and with queer experiences, it was crucial to comprehend the distinction that geographers do between spaces and places.

According to Lucy Lippard (1997), spaces would be where people live from a cultural perspective, whereas places would be the union of culture and space. We can picture spaces as being scientific while places are emotional (Anderson, 2015). The "connective tissue" (Davidson and Milligan, 2004) that links emotions and spaces turning them into places, proved to be extremely important to the reflections made during this work. This became evident as I understood that there was a ubiquitous presence during the interviews, related to insularity, which I came to understand was known in some fields of knowledge as "sense of place". According to Jon Anderson, sense of place can be an individual or collective experience and it refers "to the emotional, experimental, and affective traces that tie humans into particular environments" (Anderson, 2015: 53).

Another aspect that is important to "map" is the terms used during this work. In the discipline of Geographies of Sexualities, the term "sexualities" can be read as problematic since it encompasses not only "sexualities" in regards to sexual orientation,

but also considers gender identities and expression (Brown and Browne, 2016). During this work, I do the same overarching use of the concept of sexualities. Notwithstanding, I try as much to refer to terms such as cis-heteronormativity, instead of just using heteronormativity, even if it can sometimes sound wordy. I do that because I do not wish to overshadow one aspect (sexual orientation) to the detriment of the other (gender identity/expression). Even though I will do a critical analysis of the calls for visibility coming from queer activists, I do believe that visibility is important to share awareness over the questions surrounding LBGTQ people's inequalities (Ayoub, 2014, 2016). Nonetheless, themes of sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct, and given their specificities there are immense reasons to treat them separately.

For the course of this investigation, due to the fact of underrepresentation in academic research of the experiences of LGBTQ people in Portuguese insular contexts, I decided not to waste the opportunity to incorporate the knowledge that people with diverse sexual orientations shared with me, as well as those of people whose gender identities and gender expression were outside the cisgender norm. Not forgetting their differences, I also retain that there is a long-term shared history and common struggles as both groups have been historically targets of discrimination and prejudice. Therefore, I will use the acronym LGBTQ and the word queer as umbrella terms to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer people.

To summarize, studying sexualities from the perspective of spaces and places reveal that cis-heteronormativity is a "fractured and complex set of practices, albeit with certain performances of masculinity and femininity being deemed normal (and hence bequeathed with certain privileges and powers)" (Hubbard, 2008: 654). To understand how these practices are lived, and to comprehend how legislative changes are promoted or resisted, we must have an extended comprehension of contemporary spatialities and places (Browne et al., 2021). As noted by Kath Browne, Gavin Brown and Catherine Nash (2021), "despite the inherent spatialities of sexual and gender equalities and the centrality of sexual and gendered power relations to the constitution of human lives in and between places, these have yet to be fully recognised within and beyond geographies" (Browne et al., 2021: 1324). As such, this work will address a gap within academic research, shedding light on the experiences of LGBTQ people who live in insular, isolated spaces. Therefore, this research aims at contributing to the comprehension of these particular

contexts, which, I argue, have so much to offer to LGBTQ theory and the progressiveness of LGBTQ people's Human Rights.

1.1.1- Small and isolated communities

> [H]umans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents. Islands are either from before or for after humankind.
>
> Deleuze, 2004: 9

The challenges of considering geographical space as intertwined with gender and sexual orientation have historically been entangled with urban and (especially) metropolitan spaces (Brown, Myrdahl and Vieira, 2016; Hubbard, 2011; Bell and Valentine, 1995b). This "metrocentrism" (Bell and Valentine, 1995b) or "metronormativity"[1] (Halberstam, 2005) is so conspicuous that some scholars suggest a connection between LGBTQ lives and large/ metropolitan cities (McGlynn, 2017; Halberstam, 2005). The heterogeneity, population size, anonymity and augmented possibilities conferred by these contexts, nurtured utopian representations of metropolitan settings for queer imaginary (Bell and Valentine, 1995b). Alexis Annes and Meredith Redlin (2012) tell us that "[c]ities have been portrayed as "homosexual paradises" whose tolerance of non-heterosexual identities and sexual practices attracted numerous rural individuals trying to escape the conservative culture of their place of birth" (Annes and Redline, 2012: 57).

Notwithstanding, utopian and imagined representations are not exclusive to urban areas. As referred in the work of Mary Gray, Colin Johnson and Brian Gilley, *Queering the countryside: new frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, "Raymond Williams noted decades

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[1] These terms (metrocentrism and metronormativity) express the main city-bias of LGBTQ scholarship. Geographers with work in queer suburban and rural studies point this metronormativity as if there were "no queers out there" (Hodge, 1995 *apud* Podmore and Bain, 2020), shedding light on the need to decentralize knowledge production.

ago, rurality has long served as a kind of constitutive outside to urban life precisely because its over-whelming vastness accommodates an absolutely dizzying array of fantasies and associations, including the popular conceit that rural life is, by definition, unchanging" (Gray et al., 2016: 1). The rural, small and sparsely populated contexts are frequently pictured as being slow spaces, constrained by religious conservatism and as places where queer people desire to escape (Halberstam, 2005; Herring, 2010; Thomsen, 2014; Gray et al., 2016).

Scholars with work in Rural Queer Studies – which developed mainly after the growing awareness of the metronormativity of the mid-1990s –, identify a symbolic construction of "rurality", often juxtaposed with queer city culture (Halberstam, 2005; Herring, 2010; Thomsen, 2014; Brown and Browne, 2016). These critiques of a dichotomous approach to rural/urban queer lives have been defying the idea that only urban spaces are "free spaces" for LGBTQ people, where queer people can be "out loud and proud" (Thomsen, 2014) and to whom the rural would mean "closet", discriminatory and aggressive spaces for sexual and gender diverse people (Thomsen, 2014; Browne and McGlynn, 2013). Academics in Rural Queer studies have been demonstrating that this is not always the case for rural queer communities and that the rural is also full of diversity. These views offer an alternative script to the ways in which rural contexts are frequently pictured in literature (Herring, 2010; Thomsen, 2014; Gorman-Murray et al., 2013). For example, Gray et al. (2016) point out how several rural states in the US were progressive in what regards LGBTQ legal rights:

> […] for all the finger-pointing, fiery invective, and viciously discriminatory ballot initiatives to have come out of nonmetropolitan communities in recent years — we have also seen how important rural America can be in the movement to expand equality for LGBT people. Just consider the fact that Vermont, America's most rural state, was also the first state to legalize gay marriage by legislative action in 2009. Three years later, Maine, which ranks third on that list, became the first state to approve marriage equality by popular referendum. Consider as well that in January 2013, Vicco, Kentucky, population 335, became the smallest municipality to pass an ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Gray et al., 2016: 5).

In this investigation, the archipelago that serves as case study comprehends various characteristics. Besides being mainly rural, it is also small, sparsely populated, insular and ultra-peripheral.

In 2004, the well-known Island Studies specialist, Godfrey Baldacchino, published a paper entitled "The coming age of island studies". In that work, Baldacchino states that "at face value, an island's 'signature' is its obvious optic: it is geographically finite, total, discrete, sharply precise physical entity which <u>accentuates clear and holistic notions of location and identity</u>" ([my emphasis] Baldacchino, 2004: 272; see also Brunhes, 1925). Considering the term *islandness* to be preferable to the vernacular use of *insularity*, Baldacchino ponders that the word "insularity" "unwittingly come[s] along with a semantic baggage of separation and backwardness, [and that] [t]his negativism does not mete out fair justice to the subject matter" (Baldacchino, 2004: 272). As in this work, my interest relies on the intersections between LGBTQ people's experiences and living in small, isolated and insular communities; the "baggage" of insularity did not feel out of place with the results of this investigation. Therefore, insularity will be the term that I will be employing, notwithstanding the significance of Baldacchino's critique in other studies focusing on insular settings.

Although islands have several significant geographical defining features, Robin Kearns and Tara Coleman (2018), identify as being key aspects; the features of isolation, boundedness and intimacy. From these three aspects, intimacy and isolation will be especially interesting aspects in order to interpret queer people's experiences in the light of insular geographical isolation.

Insular contexts are not, or should not, be interpreted as a scaled-down version of the mainland. Islands have "an 'ecology' of their own; which means that islands comprise a target that is suggestive of deserving particular strategies and epistemologies" (Baldacchino, 2018:xxx).

An extensive and deep analysis of Island Studies is beyond the scope of this work; instead, this research aims to grapple with valuable content that comes from Island Studies scholarship, particularly small islands studies, as I trust that what Baldacchino coined as being a social "ecology of smallness" (Baldacchino, 1997, 2018), can be extremely valuable as we analyse the experiences of LGBTQ people.

The literature surrounding islands frequently pictures island societies as being united and living in harmony with a shared sense of community. Although ubiquitous, this way of describing insular contexts is challenged by some scholars with studies on small islands such as Jeffrey Richards (1982), Dennis Austin (2000) and Godfrey Baldacchino (2012). Stating that island societies are not as affable and welcoming as many times it is suggested in both fictional and non-fictional readings. Godfrey Baldacchino and Wouter Veenendaal note that "island societies are not always as friendly as the literature may suggest, especially for those members of society who do not conform to dominant norms and practices. In their case, the pressures to leave and settle elsewhere would be immense" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 339; see also Baldacchino, 2012).

The conceptual and analytic framework that is given by these authors is rooted in the social dynamics of island societies. One of the striking aspects, which would be considered the one of core characteristics of small communities (often island communities) would be, as previously mentioned, its intimacy. This intimacy is characterized by the fact that people are oftentimes connected and that social relationships frequently overlap (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). According to Mark Bray, "everybody seems to know everybody else and does so in a wide range of different contexts" (Bray, 1991: 20).

With good or bad relationships, the fact is that inhabitants of small communities often have to deal with each other and the "line" that separates private and professional relationships can be very tender (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). This feature is distinct from what has been described as being characteristic of Western contemporary societies where "the workplace is culturally imagined and spatially constructed as separate from personal life" (Santos and Alcaire, 2020: 2). In what regards small societies, people "have detailed knowledge about each other's personal lives, and learn to get along, like it or not, with one another, knowing that they are likely to renew and reinforce relationships with the same persons in a variety of contexts over a whole lifespan" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 342; Baldacchino, 1997). According to Mark Bray, people know that they will have to deal with each other for a long-time period and individuals find ways to avoid conflict and hostilities. As such, small societies develop "strategies for "managed intimacy" which can make these spaces more difficult to comprise divergent views" (Bray, 1991: 21).

Investigating queer people's experiences through the lens of insularity brought me to these theoretical intersections between geographies and sexualities. These relations will be thoroughly explored during the empirical chapters of this work. Before advancing to it, the next section will give some insights into the case study chosen to guide this investigation.

1.2 - Geographical Territory

The Carnation Revolution on the 25th of April 1974 frees Portugal from a 48-year-long dictatorship. This revolution - influenced by the difficulties of maintenance of the regime in an increasingly democratic Europe; the profound social inequalities that led to a big flow of emigration; and the colonial war - paved the way for the flourishing of social mobilization (Amaral and Moita, 2004). Therefore, Portuguese history as a country is built upon democratic values, juridical transformation and especially, since 1986[2], the convergence with the cultural-political, social and economic values of European institutions, influenced by wider processes of globalization (Vale de Almeida 2012; Amaral and Moita, 2004).

Women's movement gained special dynamism after 1974 and until the beginning of the 1980s, and notwithstanding the presence of lesbians in the movement, LGBTQ rights only really flourished during the 1990s (Amaral and Moita, 2004; Santos, 2005; Vale de Almeida, 2009a). One of the determinant aspects of that development was the visibility that AIDS/HIV brought to the LGBTQ community internationally (Weeks, 2014; Swan, 2004) and also at the local level (Cascais, 2006; Vale de Almeida, 2009b). That brought up the necessity of empowerment and fighting against social stigma. At the same time, academic work on the topic started to emerge, especially in areas such as psychology and sociology.

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[2] Year when Portugal was accepted as a member of European Union - former European Economic Community.

Portugal has a strong Catholic influence and it interfered directly with its modernization process. That was visible, for instance, during the debates about same-sex marriage (SSM) or the decriminalization of abortion (Santos, 2005, 2010, 2013, 2018; Vale de Almeida, 2009a). Although there are Portuguese records that place the origin of LGBTQ groups before 1995 (Santos, 2005; Vale de Almeida, 2009a), Ana Cristina Santos (2018) establishes this year as being the key year for the development of the LGBTQ struggles as an organized movement in the country. The reasons pointed out by the author are that in that year Portugal celebrated for the first time the Stonewall Riots and, the oldest (still remaining) Portuguese LGBTQ association ILGA Portugal was founded. Two years later (1997), Lisbon (Portugal's capital city) had its first Pride Party [Arraial Pride] and in 2000 the country's first pride march (Vale de Almeida, 2009a; Santos, 2018).

In the book *A Chave do Armário: homossexualidade, casamento, família*, Miguel Vale de Almeida documents some features of the Portuguese LGBTQ social movement as follows:

> In very general terms, one can argue that the Portuguese LGBT movement has been suffering from the same structural weaknesses as most of the social movements in the country, being the possible exception, trade-unionism: the capacity of mobilization is low; there are no public or private support nor funding; there is a week national tradition concerning associate work except for Church organizations and local entertaining associations (Vale de Almeida, 2009a: 185)[3].

By the time Miguel Vale de Almeida published the book *A Chave do Armário*, there were only two cities in Portugal with LGBTQ pride marches: Lisbon (since 2000) and Oporto (since 2006). In 2018, the year I wrote the project for this research, the number of Pride marches had risen to 11 Portuguese cities. By chronological order; Lisbon, Oporto, Coimbra, Ponta Delgada, Braga, Funchal, Vila Real, Viseu, Bragança, Guimarães and Faro. And, by the time I am writing these lines in 2022, the calendar of Portuguese Pride marches for the current year registers 21 cities. In addition to the ones previously mentioned, this year there have been (or will be) marches also at the cities of Aveiro, Santarém, Leiria, Beja, Barcelos, Covilhã, Caldas da Rainha, Vila Nova de Famalicão, Esposende and Vizela (dezanove, 2022). This shows that the LGBTQ collective

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[3] My translation.

mobilization is growing in Portugal. Every year, the tendency of seeing more and more people attending events such as pride marches offers a credible alternative script compared to what Miguel Vale de Almeida described 13 years ago. Interestingly, the difficulties pointed out by Vale de Almeida seem to be up to date in what regards the case study of this investigation. This will be demonstrated as I will map the evolution of LGBTQ activism in the archipelago in section 1.2.1.1 of this chapter.

The decriminalization of homosexuality in Portugal only happened in 1982. Nonetheless, after that important milestone, the LGBTQ community had to wait until 2001 to see a new legislative advance (Santos, 2013, 2018). That was the year that new legislation on partnerships[4] allowed the recognition of same-sex couples. Two years later, in 2003, due to a binding EU Declaration on labour, the Portuguese Labour Code starts forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Constitutional revision in the following year (2004) included the same measure. In 2007, the Portuguese Penal Code is revised and important measures concerning the recognition of domestic violence in same-sex couples, same age of consent for homo and heterosexual activities, and an extended penal framework for hate crime based on sexual orientation are incorporated (Santos, 2018).

In 2010, the approval of same-sex marriage (SSM); the following year, the approval of the gender identity law (7/2011) (Saleiro, 2013; Santos, 2018). This law (7/2011), is the first Portuguese law that targeted, specifically, the rights of non-cisgender people.

In 2016, same-sex couples were entitled to adopt and at the end of the same year, the access to assisted conception was expanded for every woman.

In 2018, Resolution nº28/XIII, allows people their right to auto-determination based on their gender identity and the protection of intersex people, prohibiting unnecessary "corrective" surgeries in intersex babies (Santos, 2018).

As the long work about Portuguese LGBTQ social movements allows us to understand, the activism around LGBTQ rights was undoubtedly a key factor in the substantial

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[4] Although the law was only approved in 2001, this discussion started in 1997, two years after the emergence of the LGBTQ Portuguese movement (Santos, 2018).

achievements concerning sexual citizenship[5] in Portugal during the first decades of the 21st century (Santos, 2004, 2013, 2018; Amaral and Moita, 2004; Vale de Almeida, 2009a; Saleiro, 2013). Before the emergence of the Portuguese LGBTQ social movements, it took 19 years after the first legal change until the next legal achievement concerning the rights of LGBTQ people. Congruously with the spread of LGBTQ associations and social movements, many legal, social and juridical changes had been happening over the years (Santos, 2018). Nonetheless, LGBTQ scholarship has been long demonstrating that legal achievements are not enough to secure the social, economic and political status of the queer community (Kapur, 2006; Ferreira and Silva, 2011; Silva et al., 2021; Santos, 2022). This fact is also settled by the data from annual national and international reports on LGBTQ people's discrimination and inequalities (FRA, 2020, 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022; ILGA, 2022).

This section served the purpose of doing a short summary of Portugal's legal achievements regarding LGBTQ people's rights, and also to highlight the importance of LGBTQ activism in the progressiveness of the legal setting. The next sections will narrow the focus to the particular case study of this investigation, which are the two most populated Azorean islands, São Miguel and Terceira.

1.2.1 – The case study

The Autonomous Region of Azores (ARA) is a set of nine populated Portuguese islands, situated in the North Atlantic. Uninhabited before the arrival of the first Portuguese settlers, it occupies the most westerly position in Europe. The archipelago is distanced 1500 km from Portugal's mainland and 4000 km from the United States (please refer to the red circle in figure 1.1, upper right corner). As stated by authors like António Barreto, the Azores seem to embody what academic jargon usually refers to as "periphery" and

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[5] This notion of sexual citizenship stands with the definition used by authors such as Diane Richardson and Ana Cristina Santos, to whom sexual citizenship refers to the access to sexual rights, such as the recognition of non-normative relationships or the right to self-definition (Richardson, 2000a, 2000b; Santos, 2013).

that the United Nations (UN) reinforced with the classification of "ultra-peripheral region"[6] (Barreto, 1994: 267). According to Pordata statistics (2021), the archipelago has 236.440 inhabitants distributed over its nine islands. The distribution of the populations is very uneven as nearly 80 % of the people live in two of the islands, São Miguel (133.295) and Terceira (53.244). Figure 1.1 shows the population distribution per island.
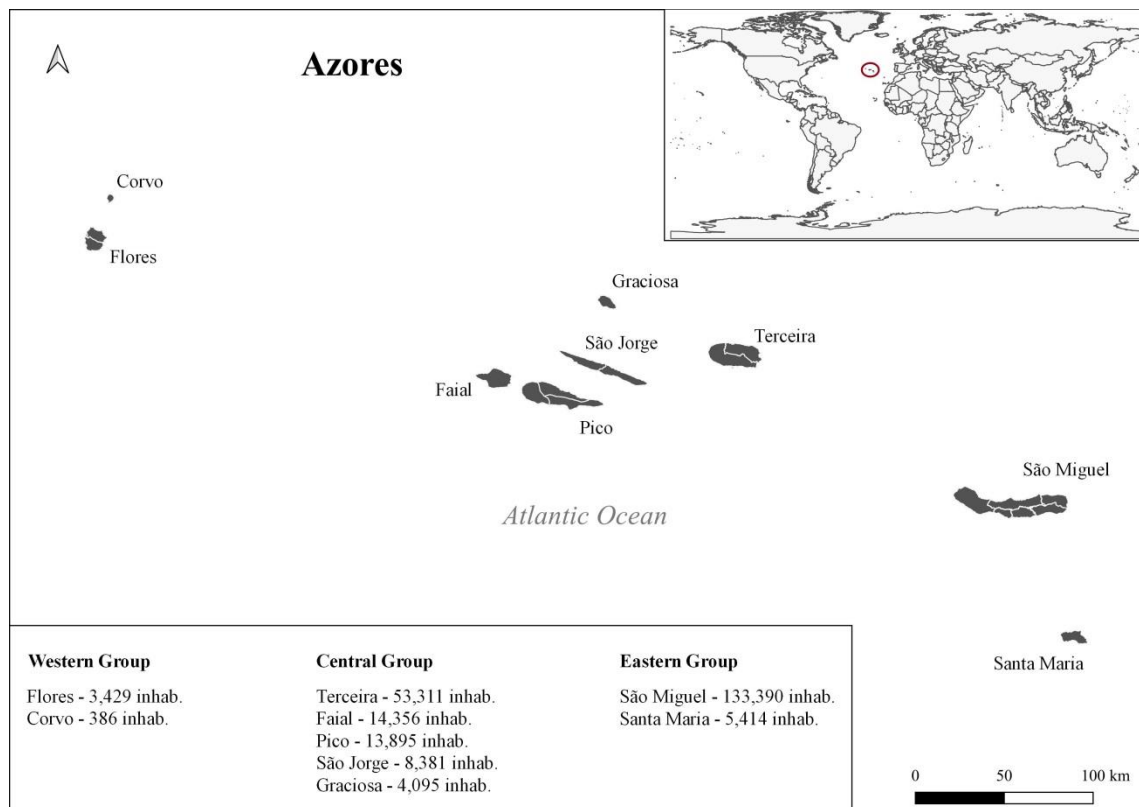
Figure 1. 1 Azorean archipelago's location and population.

The Azores has been pointed as Portugal's most religious region (Teixeira, 2012). A famous sentence by Vitorino Nemésio, regarding the biggest island of the archipelago, states: "*São Miguel é uma ilha rodeada de religião por todos os lados, incluindo por cima*" [São Miguel is an Island surrounded by religion from every side, including from above][7] (*apud*, 1999). This island holds the biggest religious event on the islands *Festas do Senhor Santo Cristo*, which represents an important post

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[6] To know more about the European outermost regions, see for instance: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/outermost-regions/ [accessed 23-08-2022].
[7] My translation.

card of the region, being a well-known itinerary as it attracts a great amount of religious tourism and emigrants (Guerreiro, 2018).

The influence of the United States (U.S.) is very present in the archipelago. The U.S. military presence at the islands goes back to 1944, and until today they hold a military base in Terceira island called *Base das Lajes*. This fact influenced historically the population of the archipelago, especially in Terceira, and has built economic and cultural relations between the islands and the U.S. (Rodrigues, 2000). An additional factor that links the archipelago with the US (also Canada) is that a strong Azorean diaspora spread across the North American continent, especially during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Machado Pires, 1978).

People from São Miguel are known as "*Coriscos*" which means mischievous, whereas the people from Terceira are known as "*Rabos Tortos*" which could be translated into English as "bent asses"[8]. Also, Terceira is known vernacularly for being the "Gay Island". For example, according to the locally well-known Azorean professor Victor Rui Dores (2012), gay and lesbian Azoreans have chosen the island of Terceira to live on because there they felt included. In 1978 an Azorean poet, José Henrique Santos Barros wrote an essay called "*Uma perspectiva histórica da homossexualidade na Terceira*" [A historical perspective of homosexuality in Terceira] where the author explores the history of the "homosexual phenomenon" in Terceira (Dores, 2012:n.p.). According to Victor Rui Dores, one of the fundamental reasons that Barros stresses is the Spanish invasion[9] (Dores, 2012: np).

According to Jon Binnie (2004: 9) "sexuality plays a crucial role in the symbolic enclosure of space in nationalism". In this case, it would not be nationalism but perhaps regional (Azorean) identity. One can wonder why no one has ever researched the origins of the "heterosexual phenomenon" in Terceira. Would the authors also put its "source" outside the local population? This outsourcing is a great example of the claims made in geographies of sexuality scholarship, highlighting the centrality of the spatial relationship and the policing of diverse sexualities (Browne and Brown, 2016). It

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[8] The origin of the name "rabo torto" is assigned to an extinct dog breed which had a devistion on its tail, that was original from Terceira island. According to Azorean professor Vitor Rui Dores, this expression is now associated to homosexual behaviour (Dores, 2021). As such, I choose a literal translation of "*rabos*" which would be "asses", instead of a translation informed by the historical origin of the term. In that case, the translation would be "bent tails".

[9] In the original: "Invasão Castelhana".

can also be argued that this outsourcing can, in a certain way, be similar to the debates about modernity, homosexuality and imperialism in postcolonial African countries. As Neville Hoad (1999) puts it:

> Within these national discourses, such rights [LGBTQ people's Human Rights] are frequently described as a threatening imperialist import. It is asserted that their point of origin is outside the space, norms, and psyche of the nation (…) People laying claim to lesbian and gay identity have been repudiated as corruptors of the state (…) un-African, and victims of a white man's disease (Hoad, 1999: 561-563).

To give another practical example, in 2011 before the first pride march took place in the Azores, a petition for financial support was delivered to the Azorean Parliament, which approved it. In return for this approval, a member of parliament from a conservative party CDS-PP, Pedro Medina, answered as follows: "The Azorean Regional Government seems to be more concerned with importing events which have nothing to do with our people, instead of enhancing our culture"[10] (Dezanove, 2011a). This statement of Pedro Medina seems to substantiate the connections between the ideas about governmentality, regional identity, outsourcing of non-normative sexualities and the implicit invisibility of LGBTQ Azoreans.

On the Azorean islands, it is common to (over) hear in conversations or to read in local publications about what some authors have called an "Azorean identity" (Leal, 1997, 2005; Chrystello, 2008) also referred to as Azoreanity (Nemésio, 1932; Fagundes, 2007). You can read or hear about it in television shows[11], books[12], political discourses, radio shows (Mendes, 1996), and perhaps, most notably, in locally famous literary works of local and non-local writers, such as the acclaimed Azorean writer and poet, Vitorino Nemésio.

According to the Azorean Encyclopaedia, the term Azoreanity "expresses the historical, geographical, social and human condition of being Azorean" (*apud* Lusa,

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[10] My translation. In the original: "O governo Regional dos Açores parece estar mais preocupado em importar eventos que não tem a ver com as nossas gentes, em vez de potenciar a nossa cultura".

[11] There is the example of a television show called "Açorianidade", available at: http://videos.sapo.pt/rtpacores/playview/38 [Accessed: 12-02-2019].

[12] See for instance "Páginas sobre Açorianidade" a book from António Machado Pires (2013).

2017: n.p.). This cultural imaginary of a particular way of "being" is argued to be influenced by the history and geography of any region or territory. Additionally, when applied to islands it has a special romanticized imaginary, as idyllic places, remote, insular and "natural" (Machado Pires, 1978; Baldacchino, 2005). In the case of the Azores these romanticized imaginary particularities, heard and seen in the language, translate to isolation, solitude, and attachment to the sea. The influence of the warm tropical climate, separation and natural disasters; storms, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes feed into the affectivities of life on the islands. The latter disasters have at the same time strengthened catholic traditions, fuelled outward migration, and led Azorean people to be associated with highly conservative religious values (Machado Pires, 1978). This regionalist identity gained a prominent space in local political discourses, especially from 1976 onwards, after the Azores became an Autonomous Region (Mendes, 1996).

As Pierre Bourdieu states, practical classifications or representations "are always subordinated to practical functions and oriented towards the production of social effects" (Bourdieu, 1991: 220) creating mental (e.g. language, accent) and objectified cultural representations (e.g. flag, anthem) that are powerful strategic tools that influence the way groups see themselves and are seen by others. The author also argues that "[r]egionalist discourse is a performative discourse which aims to impose as legitimate a new definition of the frontiers and to get people to know and recognize the region that is thus delimited in opposition to the dominant" (Bourdieu, 1991: 223).

Social identities and space are closely related. Using the words of Eduarda Ferreira "social identities, meanings and relations produce material and symbolic or metaphorical spaces", and "space and social identities are mutually constitutive" (Ferreira, 2012: 3; see also Cloke et al., 1991; Massey, 2005).

Having made a short-portrait of some relevant aspects regarding the case study, I must say that one of the things that instigated my curiosity about the Azorean context, was the fact that LGBTQ activism locally unfolded in such a distinct way from what is documented to be the movements in other parts of the Portuguese national territory. As such, that instigated me to research this particular case study through a lens that differentiates it from the others (with the exception of Madeira) which is its insularity. Therefore, the next section will shed light on the development of local LGBTQ activism.

1.2.1.1 An intermittent rainbow over the Atlantic

The current section explores the Azorean LGBTQ movements. My aim is not to conduct an in-depth analysis of the movement, nor to explore the influences of insularity in its development as I do elsewhere (Brilhante, 2021). Instead, the objective will be to map the development of the local queer movements, in order to register how they seem to have their own particular outline in comparison to what is happening in other cities across the mainland and in the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

Ponta Delgada (PDL) is the biggest and most populated city, on the biggest and most populated island of the Autonomous Region of Azores, and it was the 4th city in Portugal to have an LGBTQ march (which took place in 2012), organized by a local LGBTQ association (dezanove, 2012). Although it was one of the first cities in the country to have such an event, it only had two other posterior editions (2013 and 2014).

In contrast to what has been documented to be the realities in other Portuguese contexts, the participation of the three editions of LGBTQ marches in PDL diminished every year. The first march (2012) had an attendance of around 200 people (dezanove, 2012). In the following year (2013), only a few dozen people participated (Açores24horas, 2013) and, in its third edition in 2014, was joined by a little over 10 participants. That was also the year in which, for the first time, the Regional Government was not officially represented in the march (Açoriano Oriental, 2014).

The marches and other activities organized by the local association (not just in São Miguel, but on other islands too (dezanove, 2014), led more than 50 people, between 2012 and 2014, to contact the association to report hate crimes and bullying (Association online page, 18/05/2014). The organization justified the decline in participation in the march with the backlash that had risen after the first public events they organized. As reported by Amnesty International (*Amnistia Internacional* - Portugal), the backlash felt by the LGBTQ movement had many forms. Hundreds of hate messages sent to the association, insults in local newspapers, and pressures for the march to happen at a private place (Amnistia Internacional, 2012). Interestingly, in one of the (hate) opinion articles targeting the president of the local LGBTQ association, the author of the article said that the activist did not live in the Azores [although the author admits that it was not possible to confirm this information]. This reminded me of the outsourcing endeavours

previously mentioned in this chapter. Moreover, the article author also indicates that the activists' discourse is a discourse that is coming from someone who does not know the reality in the Azores (dezanove, 2012).

During an interview in 2014 with the oldest Portuguese newspaper still in circulation, *Açoriano Oriental*, the president of the queer association said:

> [T]hree years ago when the first Azorean Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) festival took place, the topic came to the public sphere and there were more people coming out of the closet on the islands, but meanwhile, and especially on the last year, there was more pressure from different lobbies towards the silencing of the cause. (…) [F]or example, some publications don't talk anymore about the festival or about our association and there are certain entities that stopped participating on the event because when they did, there were critiques and retaliation against them (Açoriano Oriental, 2014: n.p.).

To give another example of the backlash that followed queer public visibility in the islands, there was an opinion article written in the Azorean newspaper *A União*[13] by a columnist who entitled the article "Açores de rabo para o ar" which could be translated to "Azores bent over". In that article, he said that "an Azorean pride march could only be a reason for shame for reasonable homosexuals', a noisy and schizophrenic moment" (dezanove, 2011b: n.p.).

The year 2014 was the last year that the first Azorean LGBTQ movement organized Ponta Delgada's pride march and the Pride Festival.

In 2016, a new movement risen. Organized by two young activists, with no activism background, no media impact, and without a collectively organized action group. According to their social media, from 2016 until 2018, they managed to organize one activity for conviviality for queer people, and one talk about LGBTQ people's discrimination. In September 2018, one of the founders of this movement, with the help of some friends and family, organized the 4th PDL pride march (four years after the last), which had a participation of approximately 60 people (dezanove, 2018; Açoriano

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[13] *A União* was a newspaper from Terceira island that existed for 120 years, it was property of Angra do Heroísmo Diocese. https://www.auniao.com/ [Accessed: 20/02/2019]. I don't use the original news to cite the author because the newspaper had its last publication in 2012 and the website was closed.

Oriental, 2018). Again, the intermittency of the queer local movements takes place and there was not another pride march until 2022 (esqrever, 2022). This last march happened with joint efforts of this movement and another young activist that had created a Facebook page to share awareness over LGBTQ discrimination.

In 2017, this time on Terceira Island, a local activist organized a sit-in to raise awareness about LGBT Human Rights. According to the images aired by the local TV channel RTP-Açores, nine people participated in that event.

These examples would be the closest that the archipelago had in regard to social mobilization toward LGBTQ people's equality. Many of these efforts were done with the help of non-queer associations such as a locally well-known feminist collective.

The public sphere on these islands seems to be a challenging place for non-normativity's and its supporters. It is remarkable how quickly the first local LGBTQ movement emerged – being the 4th city in Portugal to have a march and the speed at which it was soon after diluted. During this work, I will reflect on these negotiations and resistances to queer visibility, and try to understand the possible relations they can have with the geographical isolation of the case study, namely its insularity.

As argued by social sciences, particularly LGBTQ studies and Queer Theory, new forms of sexuality and gender identities/expressions can be threatening to the stability of social norms (Butler, 1999, 2004; Ayoub, 2014). Ideas such as the stability of nations and culture (Vale de Almeida, 2002), or even identities (Seidman, 1996), as being stable and fixed, besides being unreal, serve as a cover for the diversity and inequalities within society.

Summing up, this chapter served as a way to circumscribe this investigation. First theoretically, and afterwards, briefly introducing the case study and the idiosyncrasies of its LGBTQ social mobilization. The theoretical intersections stem from my own epistemological and methodological decisions. The next chapter will address other methodological choices such as the tools used for conducting this research, as I will also set forth my ethical concerns.

Chapter 2 – Steps of an 'out there' approach to the 'out there'

In one of his most cited books, the sociologist and well-known expert in qualitative methods Uwe Flick tells us that doing qualitative research is about "approaching the world(s) 'out there' instead of doing studies in specialized research settings such as laboratories" (Flick, 2018: 6). Making use of the same words, Halberstam (2005) explains how the rural and peripheral areas are usually pictured as the "out there" for people who are used to live in large, metropolitan cities. To some extent, my dissertation can be seen as drawing on an imagined dialogue between Flick and Halberstam, generating what might be interpreted as an 'out there' approach to the 'out there'.

In qualitative investigation, researchers do not work with data in the traditional sense of the word, but interpret phenomena and formulate links in particular ways that they can be used as data (Flick, 2018). The development of theory from this data, which is obtained systematically through social research, is known as "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In other words, "grounded theory is an empirical approach to the study of social life through qualitative research and analysis" (Clarke, 2011:557). This concept – which has been extensively used and developed within diverse fields in the social sciences (Clarke, 1991, 2011; Charmaz, 1995, 2000, 2003; Flick, 2018) -, had in parallel with many other venues of knowledge within the academy, what Adele Clarke (2011) called "the postmodern turn".

Clarke opposes the "simplification" and "universality" of the modern theoretical approaches to the "complications" and "positionalities" of postmodernism:

> If modernism emphasized universality, generalization, simplification, permanence, stability, wholeness, rationality, regularity, homogeneity, and sufficiency, then postmodernism has shifted emphases to localities, partialities, positionalities, complications, tenuousness, instabilities, irregularities, contradictions, heterogeneities, situatedness, and fragmentation— complexities. Postmodernism itself is not a unified system of beliefs or assumptions but rather

an ongoing array of possibilities, "a series of fragments in continuous flux . . . abandoning overarching paradigms and theoretical and methodological metasystems" (Fontana 2002:162). Postmodern scholarship seeks to address "almost unthinkably complex, interrelated and interactive global" situations while simultaneously acknowledging the "ungraspable of this world (Usher 1997: 30)" (Clarke, 2011: 555).

This "turn" compelled scholars to identify aspects of academic research such as the complexities of diversity; the recognition of the political nature of research; and the acknowledgement that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1991, 2004; Clarke, 2011). As such, during this chapter I will refer to aspects regarding my positionality as a situated researcher, treasuring one of the cornerstones of feminist scholarship which is standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; 2003; Heckmanm 1997; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002).

> [F]eminist standpoint theorists have recognized that feminist politics demand a justification for the truth claims of feminist theory, that is, that feminist politics are necessarily epistemological. Throughout the theory's development, feminist standpoint theorists' quest for truth and politics has been shaped by two central understandings: that knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced. As the theory has developed, feminist standpoint theorists have explored, first, how knowledge can be situated yet "true," and, second, how we can acknowledge difference without obviating the possibility of critique and thus a viable feminist politics (Heckman, 1997: 342).

Having this in mind, my intentions with this chapter go beyond the explanation of the tools used for conducting this research. As I describe the methodologies and the process of the research, I will simultaneously do a critical analysis of my positionality(ies) – both ontological and epistemological – which are fundamental aspects when addressing ground theory (Clarke, 2011; Wang, 2021). Moreover, I hope to engage with what Sandra Harding (1991) calls "strong objectivity" which is required while conducting social research that values standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; 2004). Harding explores the concept of strong objectivity as follows:

> In an important sense, our cultures have agendas and make assumptions that we as individuals cannot simply detect. Theoretically unmediated experience, that aspect of a group's or an individual's experience in which cultural influences cannot be detected, functions as part of the evidence for scientific claims. Cultural agendas and assumptions are part of the background assumptions and auxiliary hypotheses that philosophers have identified. If the goal is to make available for critical scrutiny *all* the evidence marshalled for or against scientific hypothesis, then this evidence too requires critical examination of strong objectivity as extending the notion of scientific research to include systematic examination of such powerful background beliefs. (…) To enact or operationalize the directive of strong objectivity is to value the Other's perspective and to pass over in though into the social condition that creates it –not in order to stay there, to "go native" or merge the self within the Other, but in order to look back at the self in all its cultural particularity from a more distant, critical, objectifying location (Harding, 1991: 149-151).

In my work, the use of a critical, intersectional and interdisciplinary approach became indispensable to understanding the concept of insularity. As it will be explored in the following chapters, the findings of this research lead me to argue that "insularity" is more than a geographical aspect given by the space; it is also socially constructed and an important empirical category. This will be carefully explored in Chapter 4 – *The Insular Effect* and Chapter 5- *Ecology of Insularity*.

The geographical condition of insular spaces translates into the isolation of its communities. Therefore, my interest was in understanding if this isolation given by territorial discontinuity affected the experiences of queer people, in a way that could be relevant for LGBTQ studies. As such, the leading question of this investigation can be formulated as follows:

- Can insularity be a useful category when we speak about LGBTQ people's experiences?

Having this central question in mind, other sub-questions emerged, the latter, following fieldwork and in the early stages of analysis. Those sub-questions were the following:

- Does the "backwardness", conservatism, and other stereotypical ideas of small, rural and isolated communities interfere with the ways in which an islander can be queer?

- Will the geographical characteristic of insularity somehow inform the social and spatial constructions of sexualities?

- Can queer people's insular experiences be of value to endow new theoretical insights to the broader scholarship on LGBTQ research?

- Do Azorean queers flee from the islands searching for the "freedom" associated with large, metropolitan cities?

- Is the idea of island/insularity somehow related to the idea of closet?

- Does the insular geographical condition influence the local LGBTQ social movements?

- Is it different to be queer on an island or elsewhere?

Each of these sub-questions informed the analysis and structure of the thesis, in a process that has been inspired by bottom-up approaches grounded in empirical data. As such, soon my sub-questions became the motto for further enquiry in each of the analytical chapters.

After having selected my case study – LGBTQ people's experiences in the Azorean Archipelago – I used a multi-methods, qualitative and interdisciplinary approach. All of the original empirical data I gathered was analysed in light of relevant theoretical contributions within LGBTQ studies, Geography of Sexualities (Queer Geographies and Rural Queer Studies) and Island Studies, as previously presented in Chapter 1- *Mapping Territories*.

2.1- Methodology

Through a critical analysis of the online data gathered for this dissertation (in social media, webpages of the local LGBTQ movements/associations and mainstream national media) and documental analysis of local newspapers, I examined the representations and discourses of the local LGBTQ groups. This stage of the research had a time span of 10 years, starting in 2011, the year before the emergence of the first LGBTQ association in the Azores, and finishing in 2021, the year in which the first LGBTQ support centre in the Azores was created: (A)MAR- *Açores pela diversidade.*

I also engaged in non-covert participant observation in several queer-related events in the Azores (please refer to Chapter 3, pages 51-52 for a detailed list). This phase of fieldwork started and ended in the city of Ponta Delgada (2018-2021). It began during an exploratory analysis made at the 4th pride march of the city, in August of 2018, and it ended with the inauguration event of the (A)MAR support centre, in May 2021. These two events, and a participant observation done at *IMPROPRIA*, a gender equality film festival in 2019, were the only moments where participant observation was possible to conduct on-site.

The restrictions to conduct face-to-face empirical research stemmed from the unexpected circumstance of the outbreak of COVID-19, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020. As the disease became classified as a pandemic, the entire world entered into lockdown. Prohibition of social contacts, interdiction of flights or other forms of travel, together with other confinement measures, became the "new normality" that lasted, intermittently, for nearly two years. These sanitary rules forced societies worldwide to adapt, and many events that once would happen on-site started to be organized online. This shift from onsite to online also impacted the research, which had been originally designed to include more face-to-face observations, and had to be rearranged to include forms of data collection that could be done virtually, rather than on-site. The rearrangement of the original plan of fieldwork included non-covert participant observation in online activities related to LGBTQ issues in the Azores.

The same adaptation had to be made regarding the interview phase, to which I dedicated a great amount of time and thought in terms of sample, form and content. From the outset of this research, I was interested in learning about the experiences of being an LGBTQ

person living in an insular context. As such, I was convinced that semi-structured interviews would be an adequate tool to collect the data. It allowed people to speak freely, without a rigid interview guide that could limit the discussion (Jupp, 2006). Also, as an anthropologist, my main concern is the people and how they pictured their experiences. Therefore, I fully agree with Price and Smith when they suggest that "semi-structured- interview data provide us a view into the complex cognitive links that we humans draw in our minds when processing our social words" (Price and Smith, 2021: 186). Having this in mind, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ people living on the Azorean islands, LGBTQ Azoreans living outside the Azorean archipelago, local LGBTQ activists and key informants in the Azorean context, such as politicians and members of local non-queer associations.

The recruitment of the first participants was possible due to the initial field trip during the exploratory analysis, which happened before the pandemic started. At that time, I met LGBTQ activists that served as gatekeepers (Crowhurst, 2013), enabling subsequent snowball sampling (Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017), until the thematic saturation of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The interview phase occurred from June to September of 2020. As this happened during the no-flight and mandatory isolation restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online using the Zoom platform, contrary to my original research design. I drew on four different interview guides, one for each group of interest: LGBTQ people living on the islands, LGBTQ Azoreans living outside the archipelago, local activists and key informants. The invitation to participate in the study was sent by e-mail. Although the scripts of the interviews were slightly different, as they were adapted to each group of interest, they all shared an overall structure. The first set of questions focusing on the person's career and life allowed me to gather the participant's biographical data. A second with questions directed to LGBTQ activism, and queer events. This second section was very useful to make sense of aspects such as public visibility and isolation. And finally, the third set of questions would consider aspects related to geography and space.

At this stage, I must say I was positively surprised both by the good reception my invitations had, and the willingness of the participants to share names and contacts of other people they thought I could or should interview. I believe that the ease of this

process had to do with COVID-19, but also with what Carly Thomsen (2004: 44) calls "the cultural politics of the region". Starting with the latter, and using Azorean Professor *Graça Castanho*'s words: "Sea, sun, vegetation, the art of hospitality, exclusivity, are just a few of the specificities that characterise the nine Azorean islands"[14] (Castanho, 2012:16). I believe that the welcoming art of hospitality, which is something deep-rooted in Azorean culture, had significant influence in the amount of support I felt during this phase of the fieldwork. In relation to COVID-19, the fact that many of the participants were not working at the time of the interview due to pandemic restrictions may have influenced positively the research, as participants had more spare time, especially when they did not have parental or other childcare responsibilities.

A total number of 25 interviews were conducted, all of which were with people over 18 years old. The age span ranged from 18 to >60 years old. Every participant was Azorean born or living on the Azorean islands.

For practical reasons, my initial intention was to research the two most populated islands of the archipelago, São Miguel and Terceira, where 80% of the population lives. However, with the course of the fieldwork - negotiation of access and having built rapport - participants suggested to me names of other potential contacts, all of whom respected criteria such as age and the connection to the archipelago, but that lived outside São Miguel and Terceira. In the end, it was possible to involve participants based in the islands of São Miguel, Terceira, Pico, Faial and Flores.

This was an unexpected output of both snowball sampling and COVID-19 pandemic. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions were implemented leading to a variety of changes and adjustments across the globe. In the academic world and beyond, online meetings and other events became a common strategy to facilitate communication despite the lockdown and the more enduring fear of travelling. Possibly, under different circumstances, I would have discarded contacts of people who were based outside of São Miguel and Terceira, as those had been the locations originally decided to conduct fieldwork. Moreover, in addition to the pandemic-related restrictions, the costly prices of inter-island flights and the time allocated to conduct my fieldwork would have made

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[14] My translation. The original : Mar, sol, vegetação, a arte de bem receber, exclusividade, são apenas algumas das especificidades que caracterizam as nove ilhas dos Açores (Castanho, 2012: 16).

face-to-face access to so many islands impractical. Also given the limited time frame of a doctoral research, I did not consider realistic the hypothesis of meeting queer participants in less populated islands as it is the case of Flores, with a population of 3,793 people only (Census, 2021).

These deviations from the original research plan also allowed me to interview four queer Azoreans who did not live in the Azores. Two lived in Portugal's mainland and two in foreign countries (one European country and one North-American country). These four interviews turned out to be very important to analyse questions about mobility which will be further investigated in Chapter 4- *The Insular Effect*.

Another unexpected outcome of online interviews was the fact that people accepted my invitation in situations that probably would have been declined if the interview was on-site. That was the case with one of my participants who had performed a gender confirmation surgery the day before the interview. Despite being in Hospital, away from the Azores, at the time of the interview, this participant insisted on taking part since the interview was online.

The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and two and a half hours, with an average time of 1h30 minutes. I make a detailed sample description of the research design in Chapter 3- *What's in an island?*. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese and transcribed *verbatim* using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The usefulness provided by using analysis software is well documented in the literature (Oliveira et al., 2013; O'Kane et al., 2021; Gizzi and Rädiker, 2021). Some of its features treasured during this investigation are explained in the work of Mírian Oliveira et al. (2013). The authors assert that qualitative data analysis software is a practical and useful way to store and organize data; it allows hierarchical coding which is very advantageous to conducting thematic analysis, as it admits associating codes into categories; and it provides the use of analytical tools - such as the visual tools, that are used in chapter 3 - that helps the researcher reflect on the process and the results obtained from content analysis.

Thereafter, to assure the confidentiality of the data, I de-identified it by attributing to each participant a fictional name and reporting their ages in a 10-year range. Afterwards, I translated the excerpts used during the theoretical reflections.

This section served to describe the methodology used for the purpose of this research, the following will shed light on data analysis.

2.2 Data analysis

Having described the methodology of data collection, I will now turn to describe data interpretation. Data analysis was made systematically through Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Lester et al. 2020) and complemented with thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Both analytic methods were revealed as extremely useful for the interpretation of my data as they both offer the much-needed theoretical flexibility I was searching for (Braun and Clarke, 2006). "This theoretical flexibility allows researchers across a range of disciplines to engage disciplinary theories and perspectives when conducting a thematic analysis, potentially generating a more meaningful and relevant analysis for a given field" (Lester et al., 2020: 98). Given the insular specificities of both the geographical space and the socio-cultural setting, I felt the need of researching about such different theoretical fields as Cultural Geography and Islands Studies, and intersecting them with LGBTQ studies and Queer Theory. I believe this interdisciplinary approach is essential to analyse contexts as idiosyncratic as small insular geographies and as complex as gender and sexualities. As such, the use of thematic analysis has proved to be extremely useful. It allowed me to identify the relationships between the results of this investigation and the results of such different theoretical fields that also use grounded theory methodologies (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The thematic analysis was conducted according to the 7 phases suggested by Jessica Lester, Yonjoo Cho and Chad Lochmiller (2020) when the authors describe the process of conducting a useful thematic analytic approach. Phase 1, is called "Preparing and organizing the data for analysis". This phase consists of gathering all the data files into one location. In the case of this work, it was the MAXQDA software, and the files consisted of the audio recordings of the interviews, the fieldwork notes and the documents I wished to analyse, such as articles from newspapers. Phase 2 is "transcribing

the data". The transcripts were made *verbatim* as this methodology allows an accurate record of the conversation (Lester et al., 2020). Phase 3 resides in "becoming familiar with the data". This phase starts simultaneously with phase 2, in the cases that the researchers decide to do the transcriptions on their own. I felt the need to read each interview several times and the accomplishment of this phase allowed the assurance that I had achieved data saturation. Phase 4 "memoing the data", is done as the researcher is reviewing its content and, simultaneously, writing descriptive memos that are the initial reflections and interpretations. Phase 5 is the coding phase. This phase is divided into three sub-phases. The first is a simple coding step, which means assigning short, descriptive codes to all of the dataset. In the second, the researcher returns to the segments previously coded and assigns additional codes with a higher level of inference. Finally, a third phase in which the codes reach a higher level of inference. Phase 6 is called "moving from codes to categories and categories to themes". This phase would be the inductive engagement with the data set, allowing broader interpretations of the singular cases. Finally, the last phase, phase 7, is "making the analytic process transparent". The achievement of this phase would be to map the analytical process in a transparent way. That can be executed, for example, by making use of visual tools or by creating a clear report of information as code frequencies.

This task lasted for 4 months (from the 19th of September, 2020 to mid-January, 2021). The time used for thematic analysis was associated with transcription, language and coding. The process of transcribing is always very time-consuming (which is a feature of qualitative research in general (O'Kane et al., 2021)), but that difficulty acquired an additional layer in this research because some Azorean accents can be challenging to understand, even for other Azoreans. I recognized this difficulty especially whilst transcribing the interviews with some of the people who lived in small parishes.

In addition, I felt the necessity to code the interviews both on paper and at MAXQDA software to assure that phase 3 "becoming familiar with the data" (Lester et al., 2020) was successful.

Every time I finished coding an interview, I would proceed into making a thematic network of that particular transcript already coded and, after the thematic network was completed, I would then crosscheck the information with my fieldwork notes of that interview in particular. I repeated the process for each interview transcript. This

systematic procedure helped me to organize what I considered essential material regarding each interview.

After accomplishing the last phase of coding the last interview, I made a general thematic network with the vital results of the investigation. That model which is presented in a scheme (please refer to figure 3.8, page 70) is the foundation of my empirical analysis. I present this result in the next chapter – Chapter 3- *What's in an Island?* - which was built to be in touch with phase 7 "making the analytic process transparent" (Lester et al., 2020).

Both theoretical arguments and metaphors that I have used for analytical inspiration have been largely informed by the material offered by the interviews – or, perhaps I should say more accurately, my interpretation of the interviews. When I started this journey, I did not anticipate that I would at some point, during the process of writing, explore bodies of scholarship such as literature in neurosciences, or in-depth aspects in theoretical fields such as cultural geography like non-representational geography[15] (Anderson, 2015). However, in the process of producing a theoretical sense of my empirical data, I felt the need to expand my analytical lenses and search for answers in unexpected places, all of it in an attempt to grasp the (not so) "simple" concept of insularity, that I fallaciously thought I knew, just because I was born and raised on an island. This research made me understand that I did not quite know what insularity was, what I really knew was how it felt. The epistemological assemblages of non-representational geography and insularity are discussed in Chapter 5 - *Ecology of insularity*. I believe that this particular chapter (chapter 5) is a good result of the strengths of conducting qualitative investigation. In a sense that, the qualitative approach allowed such a deep reflection on the outputs of the research, that led me in the direction of feelings and abstractions, both of which, I consider key elements of this work. I would be sceptical to trust that quantitative tools would have pointed me in the same direction.

With this dissertation, my intention went beyond documenting queer experiences of people in the Azores. Although this result was a very important output of this

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[15] "Non-representational geography defined itself as different to – as before or beyond – representation. It began from the assumption that representation is partial and does not necessarily include all aspects of cultural life in our studies. (…) A non-representational geography therefore began with a focus on practices, on the experiences rather than the things that constitute our world (Anderson, 2015: 41)".

investigation, as the Azorean queer representation has been insufficiently explored in the Portuguese LGBTQ body of knowledge. This is not a knowledge gap just in Portuguese literature; the representation of LBGTQ people's experiences coming from insular contexts is still sparse in international queer and LGBTQ literature. As such, my main interest was to critically analyse the narratives, intersecting them with aspects of the geographical insular conditions and grapple with their content, stimulating theoretical insights. My theoretical contributions are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

A critical analysis of the empirical data is a mandatory lens to see through the cis-heteronormative curtain. As such, my approach is situated, critical and political. My participants' stories were engaging, rich, and meaningful. Notwithstanding, as I was listening and then reading their stories I could also see normativity hiding pain, difficulties, fears and sometimes (self) prejudice. I believe this might be particularly expressive in spaces that lack strong and time-consistent social movements that are capable of sharing awareness over topics such as sexual and gender diversity (Santos, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2013). This void keeps diversity invisible and normativity untouched. Therefore, one must remain vigilant in relation to silences and sensitive in relation to absences.

As a queer person, a doctoral student in human rights, an LGBTQ activist and an Azorean, I take a multi-layered interest in the topics of this research. With the exception of the four interviews with key informants - to whom I did not disclose my sexual orientation –, I revealed my positionality as a queer researcher in the interviews. I did not feel that this had a major influence on the course of the conversations. The only exception lies in one interview with one activist. After I came out, the conversation became more fluid and deep. I believe this happened because the activist was used to speaking to the media and his discourse felt somehow already prepared for other purposes until that moment of my coming out during the interview, after which his discourse felt more spontaneous and at ease.

In qualitative research it is common to hear the sentence "the researcher is the instrument" (Mertens, 2018: 33). This became very clear during the phase of data collection. More than being queer, the aspect that I felt made an immense difference in the course of the interviews, was the fact that I am an Azorean. This dimension did not come immediately to my mind as I was preparing for my fieldwork. It was something that

I understood during the first two or three interviews, as there was a clear difference in how people would speak to me before and after this information. As "just" a researcher, people would speak to me as an outsider who should be informed about how beautiful and welcoming the Azores and the Azoreans are. Therefore, participants would focus on explaining to me how the landscapes are stunning and peaceful, and how these islands are great places to live. As an Azorean researcher, the conversations became very different. Starting many times with "you know how it is" and then going in directions I believe they would only disclose to someone that would know *how it feels*. I do not think this difference in the conversations was something that was made consciously. In fact, after I wrote chapter 5, where I explore the notion of insularity, I understood that the reason for the difference is that I share the participant's sense of place, which is something that one is not quite simply aware of.

This section intended to offer a reflexive explanation of the tools used and aspects that influenced data analysis. The next section will reflect on my ethical concerns during the development of this work.

2.3 Ethics

The first minutes of each interview were dedicated to ethical questions. First, I would start every interview by sharing the information that I needed to record the conversation for the purpose of the research. After obtaining the participants' approval, I would read the informed consent form in which I would formally ask for permission to record the conversation and ask for authorisation to use the data for future research-related purposes. This step was repeated at the beginning of the 25 interviews. After I got the consent and ensured there were no additional questions, the interview would start. Before using the interview script, I always started with a brief explanation of my research purpose. At this point, my description did not mention my intention to analyse questions related to the geographical space, as I wanted to avoid influencing the direction of the narratives regarding this aspect. After that, I would stress the voluntary nature of the participation in

this study and inform the participant that they were free to drop out of the investigation at any time during the process.

Given the originality and the purpose of this work – as it analyses queer experiences that are underrepresented in literature and through a very specific lens, which is insularity – I experienced a double responsibility. Firstly, to make sure the people were heard, and that their main concerns were not undermined. To deliver this point, I have put great effort into writing a balanced, fair and respectful representation of their narratives. Secondly, to build an analytical framework that was trustworthy and transparent. That was the main reason for dedicating a full chapter to the research design, instead of addressing it in just a section in the methodological chapter. By doing this, I hope to give full disclosure of the interpretation of data, make use of visual tools, and indicate what has been deducted and what has been inducted from the material. I hope this contributes to making the process more transparent, hence avoiding the "mysterious" feature that some authors point out as being characteristic of qualitative research (O'Kane et al., 2021).

Moreover, doing qualitative research entails facing complex ethical questions due to the intimacy of the methodology (Mertens, 2018). I felt the particular weight of this characteristic during the course of the work when I was asking people about things they do not usually speak about. This became especially visible as I noticed that often participants perceived past discrimination and other past experiences of prejudice against them, only whilst they were telling me their stories. This made me feel a great sense of responsibility as I knew that there was no professional aid (e.g. psychological healthcare providers) specialized in LGBTQ issues in the Azores at the time of the interviews. I always shared my contacts with the participants and made myself available to help (e.g. putting them in contact with national associations that provide this type of specialized support and where I had previous contacts), if needed.

These ethical concerns led me to join a small group of women in the Azores who shared a similar desire to create an enduring support network for LGBTQ people in the Azorean context. Together, we funded in 2021 the first support centre for LGBTQ people on the Azorean Islands, and we called it (A)MAR- *Açores pela diversidade*. Through the (A)MAR centre, after finishing the preliminary stages of fieldwork and subsequent analysis, I decided to share some of the knowledge I gained during this investigation with society at large, instead of focusing exclusively on an academic audience. Making

consultancy with the psychologists who worked in the centre, organizing local events, and writing for the local newspapers have been some of the activities that I undertook. This allowed me to prepare specialized events/activities taking into account the particularities of the space. That tailored design of activities bearing in mind insular-related features is already a substantial part of my argument in the thesis, as it will become more evident in the forthcoming chapters.

My aim in joining this group of women and in founding the (A)MAR centre stemmed from my position as an LGBTQ activist, compromised with social change towards LGBTQ people's equality. Although informed by my background as a social researcher, my aim with the foundation of the centre was disconnected from any intention of conducting applied qualitative research (Walker, 1985; Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Therefore, I did not monitor or evaluate the practices of the centre, as this was beyond the scope of this investigation. Notwithstanding, my involvement certainly created an extra opportunity for obtaining information from the field, which allowed me to take field notes that helped me in making sense of data during the analysis. That would be the reason why I added the frequent meetings that the group of founders of (A)MAR had in the list of events attended during fieldwork. I believe this "opportunity" may have softened the impact of COVID-19 restrictions in this investigation, which prevented me from having a longer on-site experience in the field.

This section shed light on the ethical concerns that I felt during the course of this investigation. The next section will explore what I would consider some of the limitations and strengths of this work.

2.4 Strengths and limitations

I wish to acknowledge some of the strengths and limitations identified during the course of this investigation. I believe the two most valuable features of this work are the way I systematically, carefully and exhaustively carried the data analysis phase and the conditions created, namely the foundation of (A)MAR support centre, which allowed me to both collect information and deliver knowledge back to the community. The first,

ensues a set of results and the formulation of hypothesis which I am confident about. The second, assured the materialization of the theoretical work in practical activities. For me, a young researcher and a queer activist committed to the belief of the progressiveness of social change, this was particularly meaningful. Additionally, I was concerned about the diversity of the views collected during the interview phase. Therefore, the qualitative sample was gender diverse, with people from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds and with a large age span (from 18 to >60 years old).

Nevertheless, this work also presents several limitations which I wish to acknowledge. Firstly, the lack of diversity regarding aspects such as race, ableism or religious beliefs. Having a more diversified group of participants regarding these aspects (and possibly others) would bring valuable intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) perspectives about the understanding of the resistances, the visibilities and arguably the way it all intersects within space. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic had several impacts that forced adjustments to the original work plan as already mentioned. Despite unanticipated advantages, such as the involvement of interviewees from additional islands or those who would not be able to join face-to-face, the COVID-19-related restrictions had a major impact on my access to fieldwork *in situ*, making extended stays in the archipelago impractical and presumably unproductive, as self-isolation was then mandatory. I believe this was an unavoidable limitation of the work herewith the difficulties of gathering online data such as occasional internet connection failures during the interviews.

A final limitation stems from the need of translating the statements of the participants. The mandatory working language of my doctoral program in Human Rights in Contemporary Societies is English. Therefore, all statements were originally transcribed in Portuguese and then translated by me from Portuguese to English. The limitations of translations are well described in the literature of translation studies, in the works of authors such as Katharina Reiss (2000) or the works of Bogusia Temple and Alys Young (2004). To minimise the impacts of translation I tried to stay as faithful to the original as possible, even when the translation may not result particularly elegant. Hopefully, the sense and meaning will have been preserved.

These shortcomings and limitations offer possibilities for further improvement in future work. At the time of data collection, the pandemic was still in the beginning, it did not assume the long–term span it has today, thus the data does not translate its impacts on the

lives of the participants. Future investigation to understand how the pandemic may have interfered with aspects such as the mobility of queer people to larger cities (or back to the islands) is needed. Moreover, a larger and more diverse sample could have incited deeper reflections such as the capacity of geographical isolation to enhance discrimination regarding intersecting aspects such as race and sexual orientation.

This methodological chapter served as a means to make a detailed description of the instruments used to conduct this research. At first, it raises some of the main questions that were brought up and answered during the process of this investigation. Secondly, it makes a step-by-step approach to the methodological procedure. Afterwards, I make a detailed description of data interpretation, I identify my positionalities and I also raise my main ethical concerns. Finally, it flags the methodological limitations and some of the strengths of this work. I believe that the methodologies and data collection strategies used contributed to the objectivity and scientific validity of this investigation. The results and my theoretical reflections and contributions will be formulated in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 - What's in an island?

The research design in qualitative research stems from the flexibility of the empirical evidence (Salkind, 2010). As such, this chapter was built to shed light on the inductive and deductive process that led to the research design, whose purpose is to serve as an integrative structure that demonstrates the aim and conceptualization of this study. To do so, it starts by giving a picture of the results gathered during fieldwork. It's constituted by rather descriptive components, occasionally complemented with short reflexive notes that will allow a step-by-step view of the analysis as a way to describe data interpretation and the "making of" the research design in a transparent course. This will hopefully contribute to the trustworthiness (Lester et al., 2020; O'Kane et al., 2021) of this investigation as it paves the way for the consistency of the analysis and design of the empirical chapters that will follow. It is organized in a tapered way, from raw data to detailed results that conclude with the deduction of a scheme that will serve as a lens to lead all the conceptual and theoretical reflections of this investigation.

The first section (3.1) is dedicated to participant observation and online data collection phases. Participant observation was one of the most challenging steps of data collection as it had many unexpected constraints. Firstly because of the lack of organization of LGBTQ initiatives, such as Ponta Delgada's pride march (that was supposed to happen in August 2019, but it did not), and afterwards due to Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. Nevertheless, necessary adjustments to the initial plan were made and *in situ* fieldwork was primarily replaced by participant observation in online activities. In addition, the creation of the first LGBTQ support centre: (A)MAR- *Açores pela diversidade*, allowed a new set of events that proved extremely valuable and timely both for fieldwork and analysis.

The following sections are dedicated to the interviews. Section 3.2 presents the sample description putting forward relevant sociodemographic information about the participants. The 25 interviews were very rich as participants were considerably diverse regarding age, education and social class.

Section 3.3 outlines the analytical and inductive process starring the main results of the thematic analysis and the thematic networks. The four main themes that emerged from data analysis: Mobility; Space; Exposure; and Social Contract, give centre stage to the research design. This section concludes with a scheme built from the themes and main categories of the analysis which is the foundation of the empirical chapters that will follow.

3.1- Participant observation and online data collection

Participant observation phase was the most challenging part of fieldwork in terms of planning. Its dependency on the local organization of queer events (there were none in 2019) and a pandemic situation, made impossible *in situ* observation during 2020. The necessary adjustments have been made to make fieldwork possible and the results are presented in table 3.1.

Fieldwork started with an exploratory analysis in 2018 at the 4th Ponta Delgada Pride march and it kept going intermittently until the 17th of May of 2021, at the inauguration of the first support centre for LGBTQ people in the Azores – (A)MAR- *Açores pela diversidade*. I participated in all of the listed activities, most of them in online format, doing participant observation. In some of them, I participated as an observer, in other cases as a co-organiser and at the last event of fieldwork, as an invited speaker. In all the events I shared my status as a researcher with the audience. The field notes from this phase resulted in valuable information for data interpretation during all of the analytical development.

Table 3. 1 Participant observation – events attended.

Event	Place	Date	Aim
Ponta Delgada Pride March	São Miguel	August 2018	Exploratory analysis- Participant observation
IMPRÓPRIA- Gender equality film festival	São Miguel	October, 2019	Participant observation
Webinar: Projecto Educação- Live /As cores dos Açores & Rede Ex-Aequo	Online	July, 2020	Participant observation
Webinar: Ser mais família- Live / As cores dos Açores & AMPLOS	Online	July, 2020	Participant observation
Meeting: Building an Azorean LGBTQ platform	Online	August, 2020	Participant observation
Webinar: Municipal day of equality (org. UMAR- Açores)	Online	October, 2020	Non-participant observation
Meeting: "Azorean families reunion" (org. AMPLOS)	Online	November, 2020	Non- participant observation
Meeting: Project free presentation to Azorean institutions	Online	January, 2021	Non-participant observation

Event	Place	Date	Aim
Meetings (2): informal group reunions for LGBTQ action-creation of (A)MAR	Online	January, 2021: 2 meetings	Participant observation and co-organizer
Meetings (11): (A)MAR group with national and local groups/ institutions	Online	**February, 2021:** Meeting #1- with Plano I, Meeting #2 with AMPLOS, Meeting #3 with the Commission for citizenship and gender equality (CIG); **March, 2021:** Meeting #4 with ILGA Portugal, Meeting #5 with Casa Qui, Meeting #6 with local social solidarity institutions, Meeting #7 with Rede Ex-Aequo, Meeting #8 with the Secretary of State for Equality and Citizenship; **April, 2021:** Meeting #9 with Local LGBTQ Activists, Meeting #10 with the Regional Directorate of Social Solidarity, Meeting #11 with Lagoa's City Council.	Participant observation and co-organizer
Webinar/ Book launch: Azores- Portrait and social tendencies	Online	March, 2021	Non-participant observation
Inauguration of the 1st Azorean LGBTQ support centre: (A)MAR- *Açores pela diversidade*	São Miguel	May, 2021	Co-organizer, Participant observation
Webinar: PDL Talks: sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination	Online	May, 2021	Invited Speaker, Participant observation

Besides the attendance at queer-related events, another precious source of field notes came from the analysis of the local association's online pages in social media and online documental analysis from newspapers.

As the time range of the documental analysis phase (2011-2021) is wider than the fieldwork stage (2018-2021), it allowed a clear relation between the existence of an active local LGBTQ movement and press visibility of queer-related subjects. With the exception of a political "scandal" between a mayor and an activist, which resulted in a legal court case won by the activist, topics related to LGBTQ matters seem to be absent from the local newspapers under analysis (*Açoriano Oriental* and *Diário Insular*).

The prime time of LGBTQ visibility during the 10-year range analysed is directly related to two major aspects, the existence of the first LGBTQ association which was responsible for 3 years of pride festivals and the creation of the first LGBTQ support centre *(A)MAR-Açores pela diversidade*, almost a decade after the first association started. The clear relation between these aspects shows the crucial importance of healthy and active LGBTQ movements (Santos, 2013) creating visibility and occupying spaces, in this case, written space, that by default was not occupied with queer-related affairs. "Visibility" will be a backbone topic during this work as it will be further explored.

3.2- Interviews- Sample description

A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted between June and September, 2020. Their duration varied between 30 minutes and 2h30 (average time 1h30 min). As a result, more than 30h of audio recordings and 253 pages of transcriptions were carefully analysed.

In some of the interviews people did not mention their sexual orientation directly. In those cases, the information is inferred from the data and identified as WSW (women who have sex with women) and MSM (men who have sex with men), WSM (women who have sex with men) and MSW (men who have sex with women). Regarding gender

identity, interestingly but not surprisingly given the weight of cisnormativity, it was only mentioned in cases where it did not correspond to the cisgender "norm".

The following tables and figures offer an overview of participants' sociodemographic information for a better general idea of the sample. As a way of assuring the confidentiality of data, all ages are diluted into a 10-year range.

Table 3. 2 Participants' information, category of interest and age.

Interview identification	Category of interest	Age
E1	WSW	50-59
E2	Gay/activist	20-29
E3	MSM/Activist	40-49
E4	Bisexual/activist	<20
E5	MSM	30-39
E6	WSW	50-59
E7	Gay	30-39
E8	Gay/non binary/activist	20-29
E9	Gay	<20
E10	Lesbian	30-39
E11	Key informant – local politician	40-49
E12	Key informant – local association	>60
E13	Gay	30-39
E14	WSW	50-59
E15	WSW	20-29
E16	Key informant – local association	40-49
E17	Lesbian/Activist	30-39
E18	Activist	30-39
E19	MSM/Activist	20-29
E20	Key informant- local politician	30-39
E21	Gay	50-59
E22	Trans	30-39
E23	Bisexual	20-29
E24	Trans	20-29
E25	Trans	30-39
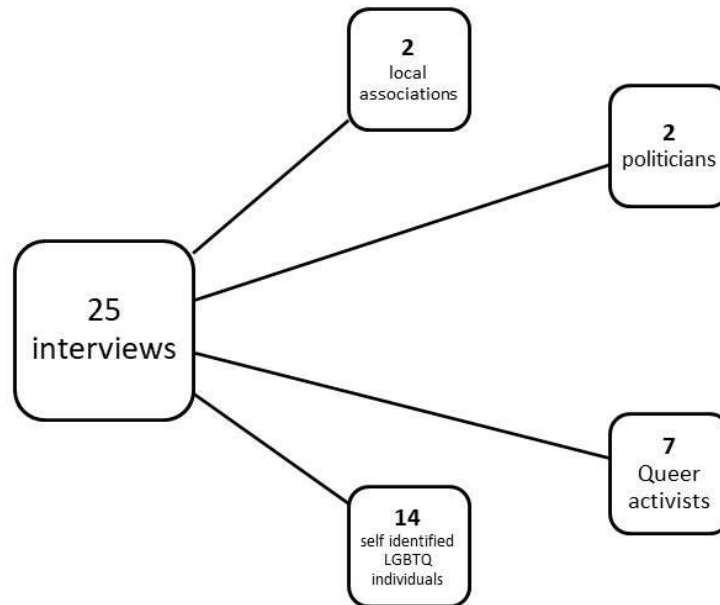
Figure 3. 1 Overview of number of interviews by group of interest.

Data from the 4 interviews with local associations and politics will be analysed further in this chapter. The following results correspond to information from the 21 interviews with queer people (LGBTQ individuals + activists). Sexual orientation (SO) and gender identity (GI) were referred to as follows:

Table 3. 3 Sexual orientation (SO)

SO	n
Lesbian	2
Gay	7
Bisexual	2
Heterosexual	1
MSM	2
WSW	4
MSW	2
WSM	1
Total	21

Table 3. 4 Gender identity (GI)

GI	n
Trans woman	1
Trans man	2
Non-binary	1
Total	4

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[16] In this work I use the terms "queer" or "LGBTQ" to refer to the people I interviewed which have sexual orientations or gender identities/expression outside the cis-hetero norm. Or, in the case of one activist, which self-identified as "Queer" and "being part of the LGBTQ community" not because of his gender identity or sexual orientation, but because of his political positions.

The person who identified as non-binary also identified as "gay" and did not use inclusive pronouns/language. Remarkably, in the same way as none of the presumably cisgender interviewees felt the necessity to identify as such, also none of the trans participants referred to their sexual orientation, although all of them mentioned being (in past or present situations) in romantic relationships that could be considered heterosexual. This data goes in line with the work of Kath Browne and Gavin Brown (2016) as they argue that sexuality and gender identity are only named or identified when are not cis-heteronormative, leaving "normality" unmarked and unseen. The only exception to this is within the interview of one of the LGBTQ activists who identified as straight.

With regards to age distribution table 3.5 resumes it in five main groups.

Table 3. 5 Participants' age distribution

Age distribution	n
< 20	2
20-29	6
30-39	8
40-49	1
50-59	4
Total	21

The sample is very diverse with respect to social class. On the one hand, part of the participants spoke about their privileged place in local society. Some by means of their "family names", some just acknowledging being financially privileged, and others, despite not speaking directly about their social class, it could be inferred from the data. On the other hand, the study includes experiences of people from poor social contexts such as migrations for economic reasons, premature dropouts from school, and even one case where one person had to search for institutional help as a result of being expelled from home for being openly queer.

Regarding the level of education and employment, the sample was also diverse. A slight majority of the queer people interviewed had a bachelor's degree, some bachelor's and M. Sc., and one a Ph.D. All participants with higher education were employed at the time. Regarding the interviewees who had not attended university, some finished high school and some dropout mandatory education and followed vocational courses (table 3.6). It is

important to note that from the 3 people who identified as trans or non-binary, 2 were unemployed.

Table 3. 6 Participant's level of education

Education	n
Academic degree	12
Mandatory education or equivalent	9
Total	21

This case study focuses on the two most populated Azorean islands. Therefore, with the exception of one activist, all of the participants were born in São Miguel (13 interviews) and Terceira (7 interviews). The majority were living on the island they were born (14 interviews), three living on other Azorean islands, two on mainland Portugal and two abroad (table 3.7).

Table 3. 7 Relation between participants' place of birth and residence

Residence = Place of birth	Residence ≠ place of birth
n=14	n=7
Total	21

Regarding the interviewees who were not living at their place of birth, it is interesting to note that 6 out of 7 could be considered upper-middle class.

Another remarkable finding that was conspicuous during the interviews was how common it was to live away from the Azores for at least a period of time. The reasons for this were mainly related to academic and professional grounds. Nevertheless, some spent time away from the Azores due to access to trans-related healthcare services that required long-term stays (e.g. two of the three trans participants stated that they had to live in mainland Portugal for about one year), whilst some related the motive with seeking better life conditions and, in one case, family/personal reasons. In short, of all the 20 interviews (here excluding the activist who was not Azorean born), only 4 participants had never lived outside the island they were born, and only one of them did not mention the desire to do so. Despite conspicuous, this tendency to spend time outside the island is not surprising. On the contrary, it is well described in literature how extended diaspora is a strong part of Azorean history and culture (Machado Pires, 1978; Rodrigues, 2000), which is not an Azorean exclusive characteristic but a feature of island geographies as

confirmed by different authors working in the field of Island Studies (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018; Kelman and Randall, 2018).

In what regards key informants, the interviews with the representatives of local associations and politicians were analysed separately from those with activists. Traditionally all of the activists would be considered key informants, but in this study in particular, with just one exception - one person who has been doing LGBTQ activism on the islands for almost a decade –, all of the activists had a shared experience very similar with the non-activists queer participants. Reasons for this overlap of experiences include the lack of structures, support and isolation which were substantial aspects emerging from the analysis of interviews with both activists and non-activists queer participants. As a result, the information that will be attributed to key informants throughout this work stems from the perspective of community members who are not part of the queer community[17], but who have political and social roles that can or indeed impact locally in LGBTQ rights and visibility. Their names, departments or associations came out from the interviews with the activists. It was asked if there were any local structures that had initiatives regarding LGBTQ people's equality, or which had given support when activists organized them. Five names of associations and government departments were recurrently mentioned, either because they were recognised as allies, or identified by the activists as the ones from whom aid should come. From the five, four accepted my interview invitation. Information about key informants is described in table 3.8. These interviews provided valuable material to explore intersections, contradictions and assumptions between the opinions of policymakers and other people with relevant social roles regarding local LGBTQ rights and experiences.

Table 3. 8 Key informants' information

Key informants	Features
Politician from the regional government	Social solidarity department
National association with local representation	Ally
Local association	Works in equality politics
Politician from the regional government	Youth department

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[17] In fact, one can argue that a queer "community" was inexistent on the islands at the time of this research. I will go further on this topic over the next chapter of this work.

This first section of the results was intended to provide a general idea of the sample, including an overall sociodemographic glimpse of it. The next section will unravel the main results of one of the key moments of the analytic process - interview coding through thematic analysis and thematic networks.

3.3- Analytical process and research design

Thematic analysis (Lester et al., 2020) of the transcriptions was made in MAXQDA software alongside the construction of thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) on paper. The coding of the queer participants' responses had an outcome of 1852 codified segments of text that were meticulously analysed and compared with fieldwork notes (e.g. first reflexive notes made shortly after the interviews or during participant observation).

The themes, categories and number of codes associated, their frequencies and percentages are portrayed in the next tables. The use of illustrative quotations from the interviews will hopefully shed light on the process of code deduction. As a result of searching for patterns, similar phrases and relations between codes and with the aid of thematic networks, 47 categories were produced, from which 4 recurring themes emerged: Mobility, Space, Exposure, and Social Contract.

In this research, I use "Mobility" as the big umbrella that would fit all the statements that are related to people getting "out" or getting "in" the islands. That could be related to many different motives, the six most frequent or important named the categories that are within the "mobility" umbrella, which can be referred to in table 3.9.

Mobility was a key aspect that came to light during interviews. Although it is the theme with fewer codes and categories associated (132), 21 out of 21 interviews mentioned aspects that have been coded as mobility-related topics.

Table 3. 9 Mobility theme: its codes, frequencies and percentage within the interviews.

Theme	Categories	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Mobility	Tourism	12	8	38,10%
	Academic	17	12	51,10%
	Social Class	12	7	33,30%
	Lajes base	5	4	19%
	Leaving the island	**63**	**17**	**81%**
	People flow	23	9	42,90%
Documents with codes			21	100%
Total	132 codes associated			

The most prominent category within the mobility umbrella is, by far, "leaving the island" with 81% of representation over the 21 interviews. In other words, 17 out of 21 interviews contain codes that would fit this particular category ("leaving the island"). The next excerpts are examples that have been coded within this category:

My decision of not living in the Azores is far-flung. I always knew that I didn't want to live in the Azores and that I felt asphyxiated by the island.

Natália, WSW, 50-59 yo

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I think coming back [to the island]…only on vacation. And I say this full of love, because is very painful for me and for the people close to me when I live in the Azores. I get very frustrated with lots of things as I've seen so much already, I've experienced so many different things. I feel like I had to have a different personality to adapt to the Azores.

Daniela, Bissexual, < 20 yo

These examples are illustrative of the category "leaving the island" but they could be used within other categories, as many times, the same excerpt can have more than one code associated.

Another theme that resulted from the analysis is Space, with 365 segments of code associated and with 8 categories under its umbrella. As the name suggests the categories and therefore the codes were made when people mentioned aspects related to space, like geography, public space, the lack of LGBTQ spaces and so on. The names of the categories under the theme are indicative of the subjects of the codes that they hold.

Table 3. 10 Space theme: its codes, frequencies and percentage within the interviews

Theme	Categories	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
	Geography	**83**	**19**	**90,50%**
	LGBTQ spaces	21	9	42,90%
	Difference between islands	24	16	76,20%
Space	Online	42	13	61,90%
	Size of the space	53	18	85,50%
	Cosmopolitan vs rural	22	9	42,90%
	Public / private	64	19	90,50%
	Insularity	56	17	81%
Documents with codes			21	100%
Total		365 codes associated		

The category with the most codes in this theme is "geography" (83) and 19 out of the 21 interviews have codes associated with this category, which represents 90,5% of the sample. The following quotations are illustrative of segments of text with codes that constitute this category:

> *Maybe if I had been born in another place… maybe if I had been born in Lisbon everything would be easier. But as I've been born here, everything was new. Everything was so… confusing. It was a novelty, that's it.*

> Margarida, Trans, 30-39 yo

[When asked if it was important to meet LGBTQ people where he lives]

No. But in Oporto it was. In the beginning, to help me understand that I was not alone.

Pedro, Trans, 20-29 yo

Another relevant category in Space theme is "Public / private". Although it does not have as many coded segments (64) as "geography" it has a frequency of 90,5% of the interviews meaning 19 out of 21 people mention topics related to this category, as these two excerpts:

For example, the boy I met the other day, he is out for his mother, but he cannot be out on the street.

Jorge, Gay, 20-29 yo

(...) we had a 17th of May that it was here [on the island] and it was so difficult to manage a public place for us to do the event.

Zé, MSM, 40-49 yo

This specific theme was very interesting to analyse. As this work was interested in the particular insular condition of the case study, it is not surprising that codes about geography or other space-related codes would emerge from data; as a result of the third part of the interview script being directed to insularity. Notwithstanding, the expressive number of codes (365) attributed to this theme is illustrative that space-related references went way beyond the script. Namely, codes within the "geography" category. Short coding about space-related subjects started as soon as the first minutes of the interviews, showing the centrality of space as an important object of analysis and, in this particular case, geography and insularity aspects came into light in the conversation way before I directed the conversation to it.

The third theme, and the second more complex was "Social Contract", with 16 categories and 643 codes associated. Within this theme, all codes are related to excerpts where the people spoke about expectations or behaviours related to institutions or society. This could be related to many different topics which are illustrated over the categories that constitute the theme (please refer to table 3.11).

Table 3. 11 Social Contract theme: its codes, frequencies and percentage within the interviews

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
	Work	35	18	85,70%
	Health	27	8	38,10%
	Politics	12	4	19%
	School	61	15	71,40%
	Family	**134**	**21**	**100%**
	Society	**82**	**21**	**100%**
	Religion	32	14	66,70%
	Social class	15	7	33,30%
Social contract	Regional identity	14	8	38,1
	Intimate relationship	60	17	81%
	Support group	10	3	14,30%
	Law	25	13	61,90%
	LGBTQ community	15	6	28,60%
	Friends	39	14	66,70%
	Behaviour	35	15	71,40%
	Self-image	47	16	76,20%
Documents with codes			21	100%
Total	643 codes associated			

Categories as "family", "society" and "intimate relationship" are the top 3 throughout the transcripts, being the ones with more codes associated. Whereas considering frequency regarding the number of interviews in which categories emerge, there is a slight difference as "family" and "society" are still the two most significant being mentioned in 100% of the interviews, but in third place it appears "work".

The excerpt that follows is representative of a segment of text with codes associated with the category "family".

> *Oh yes, the family was soon a problem. But it is like… as I… as I already brought [queer] couples here to the [family] house… they would come from Lisbon, they would stay here to meet the island, and my parents were gradually being familiarised with this. I mean, my father still… it still makes him a little confusion.*

João, Queer, 30-39 yo

Even though "family" and "society" are categories notably present in every interview, "family" takes a greater number of codes associated (134), almost as much as the most represented category in all of the interviews which is portrayed in the fourth and last theme "Exposure".

Exposure is the most complex theme and with more codes associated (707). It has 15 categories. In this work, I use this theme to gather all the categories related to codes where people spoke about the existence/exposure of queer people. This could be by means of visibility brought by couples of queer tourists that show public affection, by means of the outing of a friend, by the explanation of why LGBTQ people would choose not to be publicly exposed, and so on. Table 3.12 describes the most relevant categories within the theme, the number of codes associated and their frequency. As we can see by the percentage of the categories within the interviews, many of them are represented in more than 80% of the interviews and with high numbers of codes associated, showing the immense importance of the categories within the theme "Exposure" for the queer Azoreans interviewed.

Table 3. 12 Exposure theme: its codes, frequencies and percentage within the interviews

Theme	Categories	Codes	Frequency	Percentage
	Visibility	38	12	57,10%
	Invisibility	**142**	**21**	**100%**
	Closet	35	17	81%
	Suffering	19	8	38,10%
	Queer people	49	17	81%
	Isolation	34	13	61,.9%
	Fear	40	18	85,70%
Exposure	Responses to discrimination	36	14	66,70%
	Prejudice/ Discrimination	105	16	76,20%
	References/representation	71	17	81%
	Allies	7	5	23,80%
	Activism	83	18	85,70%
	Outing	14	8	38,1
	Tourism	15	11	52,40%
	Coming out	28	14	66,70%
Documents with codes			21	100%
Total	707 codes associated[18]			

There are 142 segments of text coded with topics related to "invisibility" in all of the 21 interviews. The next excerpts are demonstrative of it:

No, no [here] people live in the closet, they do not disclosure. There are lots of couples where the man, or the woman, has a gay tendency and they live a fake marriage, with children and everything by the book. But in the background, they have the relationship they want.

Marta, WSW, 50-59 yo

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[18] Categories with less than 6 codes were discharged from this table.

[Speaking about the lack of people joining local LGBTQ activism]

I think it's because [here] people don't want to expose themselves as being part of a group. I mean, me, individually, it works very well. But me ... with a group it is a greater exposure, I am sticking out a lot more and the majority tries to be very low profile.

Frederico, Gay, 30-39 yo

--

My mother sometimes does not want my grandparents to know [about my sexual orientation]. Many of my uncles know already, I have no stress to tell. But they [parents] do not want them to know and are always worried if I post anything online.

Tânia, Bisexual, 20-29 yo

This detailed description of the use of thematic analysis had the main goal to demonstrate in a clean and transparent course what were the main topics and concerns that the local queer people spoke about.

To make the reflections on the connections between the themes and categories, besides the precious use of thematic networks that were manually made, MAXQDA analytic tools were also very useful. Figure 3.2 provides an interesting visual tool that it is the word cloud.

The 24 words represented in this cloud appeared in the interview transcripts at least 100 times. The scale of the word is related to its frequency, which means that "people" is by far the most frequent word in all of the interviews (it appears 888 times). All of the words represented are connected with the themes deducted by the codes which shows the consistency of the analysis.

Figure 3. 2 Word Cloud

The "code relations browser" tool was used to confirm the associations that had been manually identified by the use of thematic networks and show that are many connections between codes, categories and themes. The categories that displayed greater relations were "Family", "Society", "Geography", "Size of the space" and "Invisibility".

Regarding "Family", the code map comes as illustrated:

Figure 3. 3 Code relation browser to the category "family".

The category relates strongly with invisibility and society, creating a very thought-provoking triangulation. It also shows robust connections with categories such as coming out and intimate relationships.

The next category that showed the greater code relations was "society". The code map for this category is represented in figure 3.4:

Figure 3. 4 Code relation browser to the category "society".

Geography was one of the categories that related in a very interesting way. As it is not surprising that it has a strong relation with the category "insularity" but both categories being strongly related to "invisibility" is a very striking aspect that will be carefully explored over the next empirical chapters.
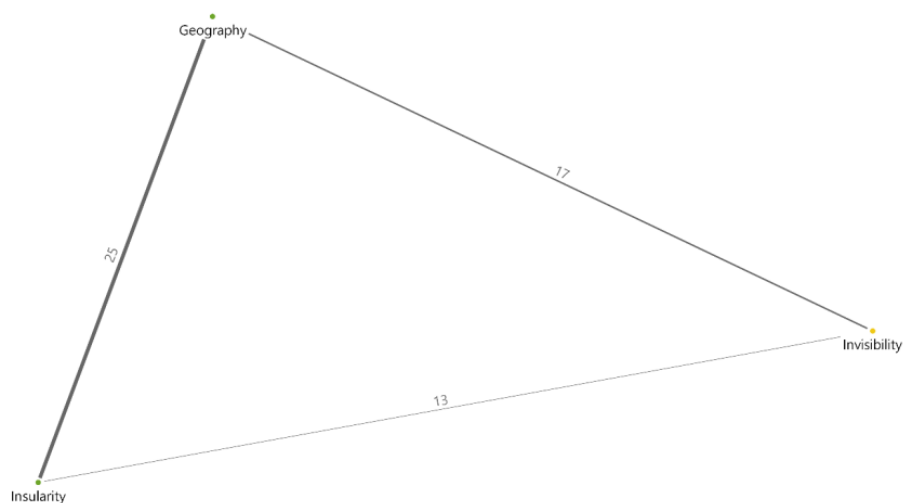
Figure 3. 5 Code relation browser to the category "geography".

Regarding "size of the space" (figure 3.6) it strongly relates to categories such as "society" and "invisibility":
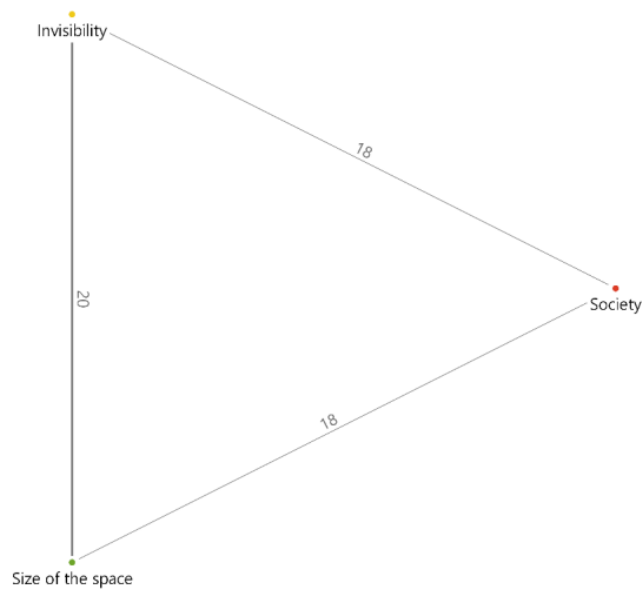
Figure 3. 6 Code relation browser to the category "size of the space".

The last and most complex of all categories is "invisibility" (figure 3.7). It is associated with categories of 3 out of the 4 themes developed during the thematic networks analysis. The map sheds light on the ramification of the category, demonstrating the crucial aspects that have to be taken into account when analysing the topic.
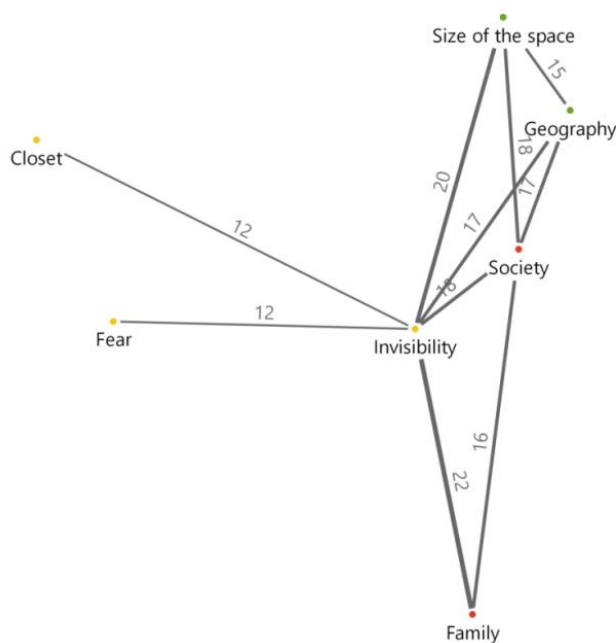
Figure 3. 7 Code relation browser to the category "invisibility".

According to the analysis of the interviews, the "invisibility" of the queer people locally was strongly related to the categories portrayed on the map.

The reasons were frequently associated with fear of discrimination; being in the closet because of the family - as the existence of a queer family member would be seen as a shame in the eyes of the local society; invisibility would also be associated with the insular geography, characterised by the participants as "small place" where they feel "very exposed", and those reasons would justify the number of examples that were given of LGBTQ people that chose to live abroad, or to simply justify the absence of public expressions of affection by same-sex couples.

The results that have been presented allowed the construction of a model (figure 3.8) that serves as the main foundation for all of the empirical work that will follow. It is constituted by the categories that showed stronger relations and the ones for each theme with more codes associated.
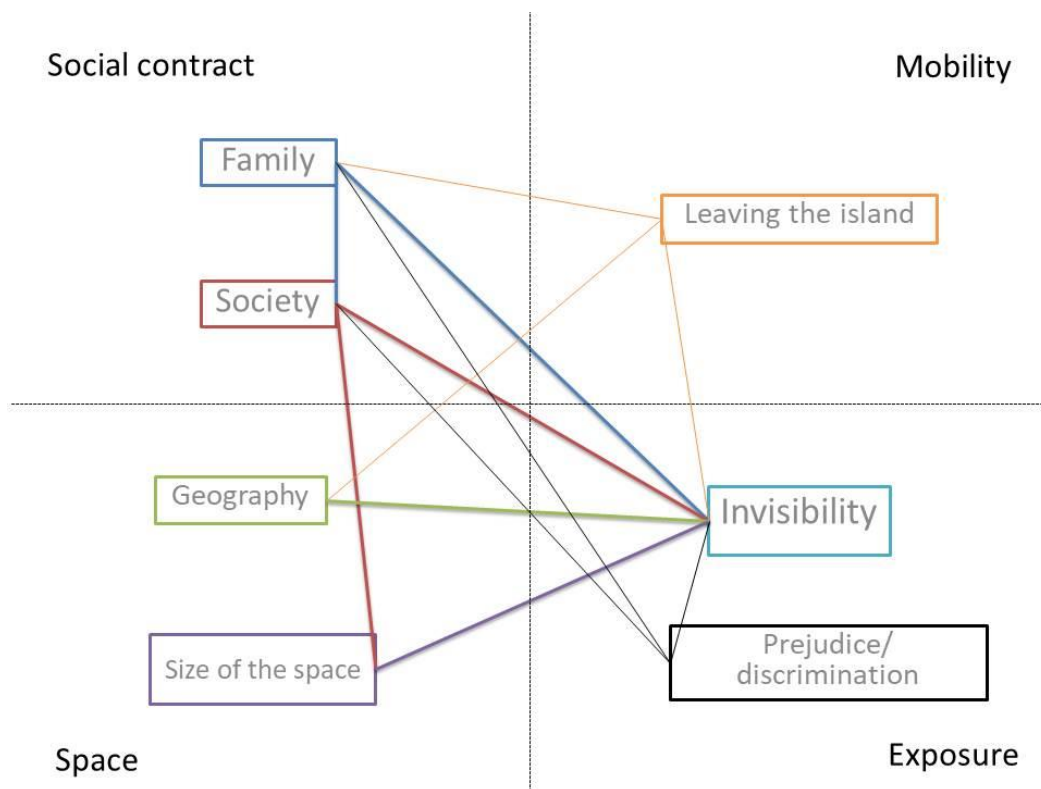
Figure 3. 8 Most relevant categories within the themes and relations between categories

The themes and categories portrayed are the ones that the inductive process led me to consider as the backbone of this investigation. Although in the scheme I only illustrate the most direct relations between categories (the ones that can be directly deducted from the data), I believe that all categories are related as they influence and reinforce each other.

This section focused on the results of the thematic and network analysis of the interviews showing the main topics, their relations and how the inductive process was conducted. All of the results presented here will be explored in depth over the next empirical chapters.

This chapter shows the overall results of this investigation. Its tapered organization allows the understanding of the data analysis process from the raw data set, until the development of a scheme that will be the foundation of all the following empirical content of this research.

The next chapters will go in depth over the results presented, browsing the connections between the data and the aim of this investigation: exploring the concept of insularity as a tool to reflect on LGBTQ people's experiences.

Chapter 4 – The Insular Effect

> Only free beings can be strangers to each other. They have a shared freedom but that is *precisely* what separates them.
>
> Jean-Luc Godard, *Adieu au langage* (2014)[19]

With this chapter, my aim is to respond to the leading question of this investigation: Can insularity be an important analytical category when we speak about LGBTQ people's experiences?

To answer the question, I use the analytical results of the fieldwork conducted, informed by the theoretical body of work in the fields of queer and LGBTQ studies, Geographies of Sexualities, Rural Queer Studies and Island Studies. My main regard is to unpack the Themes and Categories[20] which resulted from the data analysis of the interviews. In this way, I believe I am doing justice to the concerns and experiences of the people who shared their stories, and to whom I am immensely grateful.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first, 4.1- *"Out[side], loud and proud!": an insular perspective of a metronormative approach*, is about the participant's imagery and representations of LGBTQ people's freedom and space. It identifies the influence of

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[19] This is a quote from Jean-Luc Godard's film "*Adieu au langage*"(2014). On the original: "*Seuls les êtres libres peuvent être étrangers les uns aux autres. Ils ont une liberté commune, mais précisément cela les sépare*". Both reference and translation were retrieved from Ted Fendt's Blog: https://mubi.com/pt/notebook/posts/adieu-au-langage-goodbye-to-language-a-works-cited [accessed 10-12-2020].

[20] The thematic analysis was conducted according to the steps described in the work of Lester et al., 2020. Firstly, a coding phase merely descriptive; secondly, a higher level of inferring, connecting codes and searching for patterns; and finally, connecting the data with theory. Within these steps the simple Codes are developed into more inclusive Categories, and finally the Categories are developed in broader Themes. To have detailed information about the methodology and research design, please refer to chapter 2 and chapter 3, respectively.

the international LGBTQ agenda in the local queer movements, namely the influence of the LGBTQ history of the United States. Critiques coming from scholars with work in Rural Queer Studies point out that the calls for LGBTQ visibility coming from the international queer agenda of LGBTQ rights advocates are a misfit to small and peripheral areas (Herring, 2010; Thomsen, 2014). Using the words of Carly Thomsen, their approach is metronormative, and "metronormative narratives are those that, for example, implicitly naturalize urban/rural dichotomies, render the rural backwords, and assign value to rural-to-urban migration patterns – and the "out loud and proud" ways of being such moves ostensibly enable. Metronormativity normalizes the metropolitan as the space for gays to the extent that the ethos of the urban functions as unremarkable, as that which need not to be marked" (Thomsen, 2014:3). Although these critiques are valid to the particular setting analysed, calls for visibility coming from the local movements were common. The reflections about the presence of this metronormative imaginary in the local LGBTQ community and the connections and ruptures between the ideas of island and closet, led me to raise new questions to which I searched for answers in section 4.2.

Section 4.2 *Invisible me: maintaining sociocultural homeostasis,* narrows the investigation from the people's imaginary to the people's practices and behaviours. The reflection starts with the perception of the local queer community about public visibility, using the codes related to questions about LGBTQ activism. Aspects regarding Exposure become particularly relevant during this section and they are directly connected to the insular geographical conditions of the space. As such, the contributions from Geography of Sexualities and Island Studies become a substantial part of the considerations I make in this section. Characteristics identified as being structural in island societies as intimacy (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018) made me reflect on the concept of sociocultural homeostasis (Damásio and Damásio, 2015) and how it seems to be an interesting concept to understand the sociocultural ecosystem framed by the geographical conditions of insularity, which I argue that affects directly the lives of the local queer people.

The third and last section, *4.3- As insular as an island* is where I make the concluding remarks of the chapter. The analytical process of the first two sections led me to believe that the assemblage of the geographical, social and cultural aspects - which I call the Insular Effect - that we encounter in spaces with these insular characteristics interfere directly with the lives of the local LGBTQ people, isolating them.

In the case of this particular case study, the "insular" is translated into an actual discontinuity of territory as we are speaking about islands that are geographically isolated from the mainland. But I do believe that this "insularity" is equivalent to the features that other scholars identify in rural queerness, in spaces that are small, peripheral and rural (Herring 2010; Halberstam, 2005).

With this chapter I discuss and outline the aspects that I considered the core of the queer experiences analysed. My aim is not to provide a model of what the experiences of being an LGBTQ person in an insular setting are, nor to universalize what I discuss as being the reality in every insular context. Instead, I would hope that this reflection becomes a conceptual analysis of significant aspects to take into account when analysing such settings. With this chapter, I hope to contribute to the ways in which island queerness can be understood, while at the same time, adding new perspectives to the national body of knowledge on LGBTQ studies, as peripheral areas have been insufficiently represented.

4.1- "Out[side], loud and proud!": an insular perspective of a metronormative approach

The most prominent Theme that came out of the interview analysis was "Exposure". As demonstrated in the last chapter (table 3.12 page 65), this Theme gathered under its umbrella Categories as Visibility, Invisibility, Closet or Activism. In other words, the presence of these Categories expresses how these aspects are central in the descriptions of the experiences of local queer people interviewed.

One central aim of this thesis is to understand if, and the extent to which, the geographical insular conditions are related to LGBTQ people's experiences. To address this issue, the first section of this chapter will focus on Categories within the Theme Exposure, and their relation with the other two Themes that resulted from data analysis: Mobility and Space. As such, these Categories and Themes will be explored in light of the empirical data.

Concepts such as "visibility" and "voice" are well-established in social sciences (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). More specifically, the relationship between political rights and visibility is fiercely defended by human rights advocates (Reynolds, 2019; Cruikshank, 1992). Pride followed visibility and, using the words of Margaret Cruikshank, for LGBTQ people "shame and invisibility are inseparable" (Cruikshank, 1992:3).

We can see calls for visibility from international institutions, as well as from small grassroots activist groups, making this subject a key element in LGBTQ studies. For example, ILGA World, an international association for the rights of LGBTQ people with representation in 168 countries, includes the following in its "world strategic plan" (2019-2023):

> The plan calls for increased efforts to assist members in their use of international human rights norms at the national level, establishing new channels of peer learning and member to member communication, and a continued emphasis on empowering and giving visibility to people of marginalized and diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics [emphasis added].

> ILGA World, 2019

On a very different scale, a small informal Azorean LGBTQ group made a post in their social media to advertise an activity to celebrate pride month. Their description was as follows:

> Visibility is very important to our community and this month it is a great opportunity to increase the LGBTI+ community in the Azores [emphasis added].

> Facebook post, 26 June 2021

On the online site of other LGBTQ local association one can read:

> Over the past three years, the association [name] worked towards the visibility of sexual diverse people and diverse gender identities

> Association's webpage, 2014

The influence of the international LGBTQ agenda, particularly the one from the United States (US), on local activist movements was an interesting finding of this research. A few examples illustrate this finding:

Throughout documental analysis, while searching about the origin of the first LGBTQ Azorean movement (2011), I found out that the day symbolically chosen to launch the association was the "anniversary of the Stonewall Riots" at the 28th of June (Diário dos Açores, 2011:n.p).

The second LGBTQ movement to be created on the islands started its activities in 2018. The reason for its emergence was disclosed by its founder during the 4th PDL Pride March in which I participated in the course of fieldwork. During the inaugural speech, the founder spoke about the horrible Orlando massacre[21] (United States, 2016) and how it motivated him to create this local movement. The names of all the victims were said during his speech and there was a big poster with their names that was carried during the LGBTQ pride march.

In the same line, the abovementioned example of the small informal LGBTQ group, where I highlighted the influence of the visibility discourse, it is also indicative of the guidance of the international queer agenda, namely (and again) the queer history of the United States, as the Facebook publication refers to an activity to celebrate "pride month" which is also historically related to the stonewall riots. Although interesting, this influence of the United States, a country with a political and social setting markedly different from this peripheral region of Southern Europe, is not surprising. The worldwide influence of the urban US queer history is well described in the literature (Rosello and Dasgupta, 2014; Atay, 2015; Bronski, 2011). Nevertheless, I believe that this influence might also be interpreted in light of the presence of the United States in the

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[21] To learn more about the Orlando shooting: https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/2016-orlando-shooting [Accessed: 16-01-2022].

Azorean archipelago, which goes way beyond queer history representation[22]. The US military presence on the islands (Base das Lajes) goes back to 1944 and keeps having a part in the local history, especially at Terceira Island (Machado Pires, 1978). An additional factor might be the strong people flow between the islands and the US, as the Azorean diaspora during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, spread mainly to the North American continent (Rodrigues, 2000).

Despite its ubiquitous presence, the relation between political rights and visibility does not come unperturbed by the critique. One of the fields from which it has been considered some limitations of this approach comes from scholars with work in Rural Queer Studies. It has been argued that the visibility approaches of dominant LGBTQ rights groups- the calls to be "out loud and proud", which are assimilated by smaller movements, are inadequate and unrepresentative of small, isolated and rural communities (Thomsen, 2014). In fact, it is suggested that this approach is responsible for the maintenance of a stereotypical idea of the rural areas - or the "out there" using the words of Halberstam (2005:32) – that are constructed in opposition to the urban places where the modern queerness lays (Halberstam, 2005; Howard, 1999).

In the work of Halberstam (2005), the author cites Howard in his book: *Men like that: a Southern Queer History*, to illustrate de dichotomy between urban/rural, using the concept of "closet":

> To reach gay self-actualization, the closet must be overcome. In the historical collective coming-out narrative- the theoretical model in which American lesbian and gay history rests- the rural landscape functions as an analogous space. The countryside must be left behind to reach gay culture and community formation in the cities. Thus the South- rural space generally- functions as gay America's closet (Howard, 1999:63).

This excerpt of Howard's book is very interesting as it tackles many Categories to discuss in this section, in one hand, the ones related to Exposure, such as the Closet and

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[22] To know more about the economic and cultural relations between the Azores and the US see, for instance, Machado Pires (1978) or Rodrigues (2000).

Visibility, and on the other, Categories under the Themes Space and Mobility. As it will become visible throughout the chapter, these categories often overlap showing how intimately related they are.

This image of the rural and small peripheral towns - hereafter I will replace these adjectives with insular/island - as places from where LGBTQ people desire to escape to find freedom in the big, urban "gay spaces" (Weston, 1995; Rubin,1983), was common in the US history of the '70s and '80s, a time that Kath Weston describes as the "Great Gay Migration", and it is present in the imaginary and practices of contemporary queer Azoreans.

This became evident during thematic analysis as Mobility issues became one of the four main Themes of data interpretation. "Mobility has historical and geographical specificity and is constituted through power relations between social categories - including power relations constraining and impelling sexual and gender minorities" (Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016: 249). The most expressive Category under the Mobility Theme was precisely: Leaving the Island, and there was a clear connection between this will to flee from the island with the ideal of finding "freedom in the big cities".

Dani, a self-identified gay/non-binary interviewee, expressed this idea as follows:

> *I want to go there [to the mainland]. (..) I feel freer there. I can be who I am, do you understand?*

> Dani, Gay / non-binary, 20-29 yo

A similar argument was put forward by other interviewees, including António and Emanuel:

> *I don't know if it is because it's the Azores or a small place, but it seems that many people care about the old, the traditional… the things that are written in the bible. That's why I've always wanted to leave this place to those big cities!*

> António, Gay, < 20 yo

> *That's why our LGBT society here in the Azores… many have that idea: I am going to the mainland, or to another country, to run away and achieve a liberty that I cannot have here.*

> Emanuel, MSM, 20-29

This relationship between cosmopolitan/big cities and freedom was present in many of the interviews. When not speaking about themselves, almost every participant spoke about another queer person (sometimes several people) who "left the island" so that they could be "who they are". For example, Frederico, explained:

> *Here in the Azores people are used to migration. The people are used to getting out and to see others go out. If that manifests in the LGBTQ community? I believe so, as it is way easier to start from scratch outside the Azores.* **Without the chains of the islands** *[emphasis added]. (…) It is obvious that in a big city no one knows who you are. Most people do not care about your sexual orientation or what food you eat. So I do believe there, one can have a bigger sense of freedom.*

> Frederico, Gay, 30-39 yo

Sustaining Frederico's statement, an expressive amount of participants in this study have been living abroad for at least a period of time[23] , and a significant part "came back". Given the reasons for leaving expressed by interviewees, the act of returning after living abroad raises many questions. Firstly, why? Why chose to return, if the imaginary of this place represents a barrier to one's personal freedom? Secondly, what does it mean to come back to the island? Could there be a direct or tacit relation between returning to the island and returning to the closet? Or can one simply assume that this -the closet- was overcome by living abroad?

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[23] I explore these numbers in Chapter 3- page 57.

In regards to the first question about why people returned to the Azores after living in other places, the reasons given were primarily related to professional grounds, family issues or because of the comfort associated with living in a small place. The next three excerpts exemplify some of the motives to return. Margarida told me:

> *I came back because I have my family here. In the beginning, my family did not agree very well with my transition, that's it. They didn't support me 100% because... well... the education was very scarce here.*

> Margarida, Trans, 30-39 yo

In the case of João, an LGBTQ activist, he explained that the reasons to return to the island were related to professional aspirations and his will to develop an agricultural project. He then concluded his thought by saying:

> *I came here also because I was sick of living in the city, I confess. After nine years I decided that I am a boy from the countryside.*

> João, Queer, 30-39 yo

Regarding Emília's experience, the motive was in touch with what she considered to be the "natural flow of things". Her testimonial was as follows:

> *Honestly, at the time [of the return] it was a necessity. Personally, I was not understanding very well... but I just let the natural flow of things happen, I'll be honest.*

> Emília, Lesbian, 30-39 yo

From the in-depth thematic analysis conducted for the thesis, it was interesting to note that the excerpts about Leaving the Island showed a clear and expressive connection with the imaginary of freedom regarding sexual/gender diversity. Whilst in regards to the excerpts about "coming back" aspects related to sexual and gender diversity were absent from the conversation.

In what concerns the second question, I wondered if coming back felt as if people were returning to the closet. The statement of Zé, an LGBTQ activist, is extremely interesting if we were to consider a dichotomous interpretation of cosmopolitan/freedom vs island/closet. From his point of view, there was a clear connection between coming back to the island and returning to the closet:

> *Especially men, they go out and go to Lisbon, Oporto, Madrid or whatever, and that's it… how we usually say, they become such huge queens. Then they come back to the Azores and turn into conservative gentlemen and slang about everyone and everything.*

> Zé, MSM, 40-49 yo

Although Zé's testimonial was sharp illustrating his opinion, it is compelling to see that when looking into the interviews of people who left the islands and then came back, there was no connection with the perception of coming back to the closet, with one exception. The exception relies on the experience of one person who had lived many years on the mainland and then returned to the Azores but not to the island where he was born. At the time of the interview, due to professional reasons, he was living on a "smaller island" which was the reason he used to explain why his sexual orientation was currently having an impact on his social life. He interpreted this impact as being a direct result of the fact that people "there" (i.e. at the smaller island) did not know his sexual orientation. In other words, one could argue that in "the smaller island" this participant was not out of the closet.

Coming back to the question if the return to the island was perceived as being related to the closet or with lack of freedom, participants were clear in showing that this was not

how they perceived it. On the contrary, the opinions were aligned with lived experiences free from prejudice, discrimination or social constraints. The next excerpts exemplify these ideas. The first one comes from Marta, who lived on the mainland for several years before returning to the Azores:

It is how I tell you. I've never had significant difficulties of acceptance.

Marta, WSW, 50-59

The other example comes from Maria who lived many years outside the islands, some on the mainland and others outside the country. Maria said:

I do not feel any impediment to my way of being because I live in the Azores.

Maria, WSW, 50-59 yo

Fausto also lived away from his island due to academic reasons and then returned. During the time of the interview, he said:

Sincerely, I face homosexuality, at least mine, I think it is a… let's say it in quotes: "a secondary fact". I think I am a man, I am integrated, I am free, I feel good with myself, with my family, my friends, the society, I am peaceful.

Fausto, Gay, 50-59 yo

These last testimonials seem to be misaligned with the connection island/closet. Moreover, in addition to the perceptions of the people who returned to the islands, none

of the three interviews with Azoreans who chose to live outside the islands – and who "don't want to come back", related their decision to move abroad to reasons stemming from their sexual orientation (SO) or gender identity/expression (GI). Conversely, all of them explained that the reasons why they did not want to live on the islands anymore had nothing to do with their SO or GI.

Interestingly, this rupture of the connection of island/closet is only present when people are talking about their own lives. When the question arises from the perspective of other people, for example, when I asked if they thought if other LGBTQ people lived freely in the archipelago, their opinion brought the closet back on the table. I will focus on excerpts from the same three interviews used to illustrate the point about the rupture (island/closet). Starting with Fausto:

> *Look, I will be honest; I think [here] people live in the closet. I do think that because I am approached by people who are married [men in heterosexual marriages]. (...) This happens because it is a small place and the people have that fear which is natural in small places.*

> Fausto, Gay, 50-59 yo

This excerpt of Fausto gets a step ahead relating the importance of the space as an aspect that almost "by itself" explains people's behaviour. But I will return to the importance of space later in this chapter.

In the case of Maria, her opinion was:

> *I think that more and more it starts to be like this [people feel free like her], but there are still many in the closet. It starts to show… especially a new generation who does not have problems in showing up.*

> Maria, WSW, 50-59 yo

Regarding Marta's perception, it was as follows:

> *No, no [the people don't live freely]. People live in the closet. They do*
> *not come out.*

<div align="right">Marta, WSW, 50-59 yo</div>

The idea that LGBTQ Azoreans live in the closet is not restricted to these three interviews. On the contrary, it is a shared view by almost all of the participants of this study. Here we can raise new questions. If these islands are places where LGBTQ people say they live freely - which is also an opinion largely homogeneous among the participants when speaking about their own lives -, how can a metronormative perspective be so striking in many of the statements? Furthermore, what would be the reasons that the other local LGBTQ people would have to allegedly live in the closet? Here I think the answer to those questions lies in what Judith Butler (1999) says that is "the real task [which is] to figure out how a subject who is constituted in and by discourses then recites that very same discourse but perhaps to another purpose" (Thomsen, 2014: 79). I suggest that the evaluation of many of the participants about LGBTQ public visibility and social behaviour can help to shed light over the answers to these questions which I will analyse in the next section.

In this section, I wanted to explore the hypothesis that space is an essential aspect regarding the shared experiences of LGBTQ islanders. This is demonstrated by the perception that leaving the island is an effective way to achieve freedom regarding sexual/gender identities. This is especially true if people are not speaking about their own lives. The exception lies in younger participants to whom the idea of "escaping" the islands seems to guarantee more freedom in their own lives and the lives of everyone else. Interestingly, this imaginary seems to fade away as participants grow older. And that seems to happen not because the view that "outside the Azores it's easier" disappears (it does not), but it vanishes from the perception about their own lives, as they argued that would not be any difference in their lives if they were living in other places, but at the same time, they say that for (other) LGBTQ people living outside the islands is easier.

The next section will continue the reflection on Categories within the Themes of Exposure and Space but this time I will replace the Categories of the Theme Mobility with Categories of the Social Contract Theme, such as Family and Society.

4.2- Invisible me: maintaining sociocultural homeostasis

The conception of being "in the closet" is directly related to invisibility (Thomsen, 2014). As demonstrated in Chapter 3 with the code relation tool, the Category Invisibility had an intricate attachment with many other Categories (please refer to figure 3.7 page 69). In this section, I will focus on the triangulation that Invisibility does with the Categories of Geography and Size of the Space (both from the Theme: Space), and afterwards, in subsection 4.2.1, I will show the connections between these Categories and the Social Contract Theme.

To understand the participants' opinions about public visibility, I asked them about one key aspect of LGBTQ public visibility: queer activism (Santos, 2008, 2013, 2018). I will not be exhaustive in making a reflection on how geographical insularity affects the local LGBTQ movements as I did elsewhere (Brilhante, 2021)[24], but it is important to bring up this question as it relates directly to aspects of the Themes of Exposure and Space.

I asked about people's opinions regarding events organized by local activists, or when they did not know about the existence of local movements, I asked about LGBTQ pride marches elsewhere or any kind of queer events they considered relevant.

António's statement was very interesting, as he knew a young activist on his island and he demonstrated will to participate in the activities organized. The motive why he kept reluctant about joining this kind of events was his mother's reactions to his public demonstrations of affection with his boyfriend. He explained that every time they had any

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[24]I explore this subject here: *Island-activists: the centrality of space in the (in)visibility of sexual diversity* (Brilhante, 2021).

kind of public demonstration of affection she would "correct his behaviour". This would happen even if she was not present. For example, he told me that one time he was on vacation on another island of the archipelago and that he and his boyfriend took advantage of the distance to the family to walk in the streets holding hands. He said that not long after, he received a phone call from his mother asking for a justification for that behaviour. Regarding LGBTQ marches, his statement was as follows:

> *I am going to be honest, I am curious about it [pride marches] (...) but if my mother dreamed or even thought that I would be in a thing like that... I think she would have a heart attack.*

> António, Gay, <20 yo

Margarida had never participated in any activity regarding queer themes. She told me how she thought it was sad that the island where she lives had no events to raise awareness over LGBTQ discrimination, and how she considered important that these kinds of topics were discussed in schools. I asked if she would join an LGBTQ movement if she could and she said:

> *Well, there is a part of me that says that I would, of course I would. But there is another part, as this is a small place, I would expose my life too much. Because... although this is a small place, many people do not know my story, my life. There are many people that ... for them... well, they do not know my story nor I have to expose my life, right?*

> Margarida, Trans, 30-39 yo

The experience of Frederico was different. He was aware of the existence of local LGBTQ movements and he had collaborated in events related to queer literature. Regarding the marches, he said:

I never participated in a march because I never had the chance. Also, I don't know if it would be my way of expression. I prefer other types of intervention as you probably already understood, right?

As he continued speaking about queer events organized by the local movements, he said:

I think that is very good and that the initiatives are very valid but they lack in participants. A person feels very exposed in showing up in this kind of events. (...) I think that happens because there is not a sense of [LGBTQ] community (...) I think the people do not want to expose themselves as being part of a group. I mean, me, individually, I work very well, but me as a group I am much more exposed.

Frederico, Gay, 30-39 yo

Frederico's opinion about the absence of a local LGBTQ community is aligned with the results of this study. The feeling of exposure that he mentions is one of the most evident aspects that resulted from data analysis. The motive that he highlights as being one of the reasons for local people remaining absent from this type of event (don't want to be part of a group) is exactly what keeps Bernardo from attending a local march.

Bernardo, who lives in a big city on the mainland since he was 18 years old, told me how he never missed an LGBTQ pride march at his current city of residence and why he never had participated in one at the Azores. He said he already had thought a lot about this, and that he had two reasons for that: one "rational" and one "emotional". He explained it as follows:

I think that [the march] is in the beginning of September or the end of August and I am never there [the island] during this time. This is the rational reason. The emotional version is that... I think that there is still something that blocks me to attend a march there. And... when I try to understand ... because, I could perfectly postpone my return in one week, for example. But I don't, why? Especially because it is something

that is so important to me and I do rearrange my schedule in [city he lives] to go to the march [there]. Do you get it? There is not… Sometimes I think about this and the answer that I think is closer to reality is this one: what I think that is going to happen is something that makes me very uncomfortable. Which is, I imagine that the march will be very small, that there is not big visibility and when I put myself in that position I feel a little… unprotected, unprotected and a little ashamed. Ashamed not because I am gay, obviously, but because I am in that situation… that we are just 4 or 5 [people]. Do you understand? (…) And I also think that is because I do not have a network of friends there that would join me.

<div align="right">

Bernardo, Gay, 30-39 yo

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There is a consistent aspect that underlies all of the statements: the feeling of exposure attached to the feeling of unprotection. This seems to be a strong motive that keeps the distance between local LGBTQ people and local queer movements and activities. This feeling of exposure was not only related to group queer activities, but it was also visible in everyday life. For example, testimonials when participants were speaking about their public visibility, as in the case of Emilia, a lesbian activist:

[…] it is a small place and you get very exposed […] what I mean by this, is that it is very difficult for you to move around here because you don't feel as protected [as in the big cities], you don't feel as comfortable. It's like… small things, like I am walking in the street holding hands with my girlfriend, which is perfectly normal, and people still stop and stare. Even though they know I am from here, I never hid my sexual orientation […] but there are always those looks, that "shock" […] it is literally like that, it's not one day, or two, it is every day, several times per day, it is devastating.

<div align="right">

Emília, Lesbian, 30-39 yo

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There was a clear relation between the size of the space, insularity and the feeling of exposure felt by the participants.

> *[…] in an island, everyone knows everyone and you fear doing certain things because it will always get to someone's ears.*

Tânia, Bisexual, 20-29 yo

This feeling of exposure - I would actually consider it as overexposure - is present in all of the interviews and it has a direct relation to the geographical characteristics of the space. As demonstrated in the literature in the field of Geography of Sexualities, geographies, sexual rights and politics are strongly intertwined (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Browne and Brown, 2016; Hubbard, 2018; Browne et al., 2021a). In the case of this study, the geographical conditions of living in an insular space, that is isolated, small and ultra-peripheral, accommodates particularities that are very relevant to LGBTQ studies.

Some of these geographic particularities were once noted by Halberstam (2005) as been beautifully described by Willa Cather in her novel Lucy Gayheart: "In little towns, lives roll along so close to one another; loves and hates beat about, their wings almost touching" (Cather, 1935:108).

Based on the analysis, I argue that this intimacy, which is shared both by small and insular spaces, interferes directly with the social behaviour of the local queer community. Firstly, as demonstrated in this section, this intimacy puts people off from the local movements. This hampers the possibility of creating a community or even maintaining a consistent movement, capable of sharing awareness over the multiple discriminations faced by people with gender and/or sexual diversity. These conditions help the maintenance of societies that are structurally homophobic and transphobic keeping cis-heteronormativity unchallenged.

Secondly, I argue that this intimacy, which was described by Halberstam as a "suffocating sense of proximity" (Halberstam, 2005:39), has also an impact on the way

LGBTQ people behave while living in places with these insular conditions. I will explore these aspects in the next subsection of this chapter, as I believe that the Categories in the Social Contract Theme can be helpful to shed light on the reflection.

4.2.1- Intimate Strangers: a panoptical view of insular intimacy

> On an island, however, there are no "other lands": everything is immediately conceivable, nothing is hidden. For that reason, in order to make other ways of being possible, Anglo-Saxons, conceived invisible islands, always situated above the horizon, that can or not be discovered, but that do not require physical presence to exist.
>
> Dictionary of imaginary places, 2013: XXVII

Many times there is a negotiation regarding queer visibility which relates directly to the person's sense of risk or vulnerability (Cruikshank, 1992; Colliver, 2021). In this section, I will explore how this negotiation is deeply spatial. For queer people, the decision to be out in the workplace, in school, at home, with friends, in accessing healthcare services, and so on, is not indivisible from the anxiety of the possibility of losing affections, the fear of marginalization and discrimination, even the fright of physical violence (Plummer, 1995; Pieri and Brilhante, 2022). Here, I would highlight that all of these aspects which are demonstrated in queer literature and LGBTQ studies are particularly enhanced while looking at insular communities, and how the negotiation between visibility and invisibility does not work in the same way in metropolitan and in insular, small and isolated contexts.

One of the most striking aspects of island societies is intimacy. This is defined as a "social environment characterised by pervasive personal connections and overlapping role relationships" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 342). This characteristic translates in inhabitants of small places to being almost "familiar" to everyone else's which is incompatible with the sense of anonymity that has been linked to comfort and protection in the interviews I conducted. It would be as if the people in sparsely populated and insular communities live surrounded by "intimate strangers" (Cohen, 1999)[25]. This island-related feature has been demonstrated in the field of Island Studies and is corroborated by this particular case study. Let us look at the following statements:

I may not know the person, but I do. Because it's son, cousin, uncle [of someone he knows] ... almost all of us are connected.

Emanuel, MSM, 30-39 yo

Because everybody knows everybody, literally.

Zé, MSM, 40-49 yo

Because it is a very enclosed environment, a small place, everybody knows everybody.

Dani, Gay/nonbinary, 20-29 yo

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[25] The term "intimate stranger" appears in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's book *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages.* Taking us into an epistemology about giants, the author introduces the term "intimate stranger" as having "much in common" with the term queer, and explains it as follows: "abjected realm outside but entwined within, the "normal", the unambiguous, the culturally central – a surprising place, perhaps, to find so vast a body waiting" (Cohen,1999: xiii-xiv). For the purpose of this investigation I will borrow the term "intimate stranger[s]" with a different meaning. My aim is that intimate strangers translate the sense of proximity that people in small and insular communities seem to share with everyone else in the community, even though they might not know "everyone".

I believe this intimacy is key for us to reflect upon the fact that the negotiation between visibility/invisibility is in fact, partially a privilege configured by large, metropolitan spaces. Furthermore, what seems to be "intimate" in the light of Geography and Island Studies, I would argue that when looked through the lens of Queer and LGBTQ Studies, would feel more like a constant sense of surveillance.

Experts in the field of Island Studies state that the proximity characteristic of island spaces forces a "complex situation of managed intimacy" (Lowenthal, 1972; Bray, 1991 *apud* Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 342). As such, this management of intimacy instigates local people to avoid conflict and creates "strong pressures to conform to dominant social codes" (Baldacchino, 2012; Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 343). In the case of the Azores, this conformation to the social roles was very expressive in the interviews, not only because of the way the local LGBTQ people behave, but also in the way they spoke about society in general. Natália called it "Azorean culture" and described it as follows:

> *I think the Azorean culture is very closed, and more, it is not just closed, it is a culture of appearances, which still keeps the appearances of the catholic culture, Judaeo-Christian.*
>
> Natália, WSW, 50-59

The maintenance of appearances that Natália speaks about, would translate to the queer experiences analysed through their social invisibility consequential of public normative behaviour, the absence of conversations about their GI or SO with friends, family and others, and the erasure of these topics from public sight. This was so conspicuous during data analysis that I created a code called "don't ask don't tell" under the Category Invisibility. Excerpts within this code would be passages where the participants say that the people around them know about their SO or GI but they don't speak about it, like the example of Jorge:

> *Here in the house, everyone knows I am homosexual even though we never spoke about it.*

<div align="right">

Jorge, Gay, 20-29

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Besides excerpts like the abovementioned, the code also contains many descriptions of how, locally, people were very fierce in maintaining their social image or their "family [good] name". The example given by Pedro was clear-cut illustrating this. He was explaining to me how his mother behaved in very different terms regarding his queerness and his brother's. In his case, he was expelled from home at a young age, whereas regarding his brother, his mother "didn't care" about who "he slept with". He explained it as follows:

> *Here in the islands [people] have very closed minds. So I thought it could be because of her [mother's] age, she has another way of seeing things. But that didn't justify everything, because she accepted my brother. He was bisexual and she accepted him perfectly. The thing is that he didn't assume it publicly. We, in the family, we knew, but he in public was a womaniser. He didn't look [bisexual], and that for her, was everything. If you cannot see it, it's all right. Just here, between our doors.*

<div align="right">

Pedro, Trans, 20-29 yo

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This concern with social behaviour was present not only when speaking about gender or sexual diversity, but also on other subjects that would be socially divisive, as the example of abortion:

> *Everything is made on the sly, to keep up appearances: "Ohhh that's horrible, that's a crime!! A terrible thing! [Abortion]." [They] do it, without a problem. What is needed is to keep the appearance of the politically correct that that is a crime.*

<div align="right">

Natália, WSW, 50-59 yo

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Another example was suicide. This topic was brought to the conversation by one activist. He told me that the most noticeable problem that he saw on the islands was a "huge problem of suicides" that "no one speaks about it". The activist did not say that suicides were related to queer people, instead, he just described them as being from "people who were not happy with themselves". But as he continued speaking, he said that this was not the only topic that was masked by the local society and "everybody knows" and no one "speaks about it". There were also "criminal issues" of people disappearing. And then he related a case of a young boy who had been in contact with him because of the local queer association he founded. The boy was killed sometime after that. When describing what happened he said:

> *When the police contacted the family, it was the family themselves that asked not to speak about it, or nothing like that, because he [the boy] had engaged in prostitution with men.*

> Zé, MSM, 40-49 yo

These excerpts are in line with the characteristics Baldacchino and Veenendaal (2018) coined as being typical of intimate, insular communities, regarding their pressure to conform to the social norms. Here, I would like to add that this intimacy and feeling of familiarity, when looked upon the lives and experiences of queer people, has a similar consequence Bentham's panoptic structure, creating the feeling of omnipresent surveillance that Foucault discusses in his famous book *Discipline & Punish: the birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1995). As Foucault puts it:

> Panopticism is the general principle of a new "political anatomy" whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline. The celebrated, transparent, circular cage, with its high towers powerful and knowing, may have been for Bentham a project of perfect disciplinary institution; but he also set out to show how one may "unlock" the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body. These disciplines, which the classical age had elaborated in

specific, relatively enclosed places — barracks, schools, workshops — and whose total implementation had been imagined only at the limited and temporary scale of a plague-stricken town, Bentham dreamt of transforming into a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or in time. The panoptic arrangement provides the formula for this generalization. It programmes, at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms Foucault, 1995: n.p.).

In the case of this research, the structure that entails the regulatory mechanism of society is not constructed as in Bentham's projections and drawings but given by intimate geographical conditions of space.

Before further reflection, I would like to make a "theoretical jump" to the field of neurosciences with a quick stop in biology, to borrow a definition that I consider that can be useful for the present discussion.

In 2015, António and Hanna Damásio published a paper in which they propose an extended comprehension of the definition of "homeostasis", a term that comes from the field of biology, physiology if we want to be precise. They called it "sociocultural homeostasis[26]" and used the concept to create value in understanding economic problems. The classical definition of homeostasis would be "a non-conscious form of physiological control which operates automatically without awareness or deliberation on the part of the organism" (Damásio and Damásio, 2015: 126). The authors identify a limitation with the classical concept of homeostasis as they indicate it provides a fractional version of reality in what regards human beings. Besides the automatic biological controls that we all have, such as the capacity of the kidneys to slow down the diuretic function if the body is dehydrated, humans also endure a supplementary mechanism of self-regulation that involves feelings (Damásio, 2010, 2015; Berridge and Kringelbach, 2015; Damásio and Damásio 2015). Researchers such as the Damásios and Alberto Kent Berridge and

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[26] The Damásios were not pioneers in the application of the concept of homeostasis into the interpretation of sociocultural phenomena. In the book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), the famous anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, also uses the term as a key-unit to read the adaptive changes of individuals, societies and ecosystems. I will come back to Bateson's work later in this work.

Morten Kringelbach (2015), argue that homeostatic feelings work together with basic homeostasis and that they both intervene in resolving vital aspects of life regulation. In other words, our capacity of being in a homeostatic state (a state of well-being) is influenced not only by our individual experiences and necessities but also by our sociocultural circumstances. António and Hanna Damásio put it as follows:

> In its standard format, the concept of homeostasis refers to the ability, present in all living organisms, of continuously maintaining certain functional variables within a range of values compatible with survival. (…) This traditional explanation fails to capture the richness of the concept and the range of circumstances in which it can be applied to living systems. (…) This includes its application to systems in which the presence of conscious and deliberative minds, individually and in social groups, permits the creation of supplementary regulatory mechanisms aimed at achieving balanced and survivable life states[.] (…) From the perspective of life regulation, all devices of sociocultural homeostasis appear to have their origin in an identified need. They all aim at a goal compatible with both survival and a state of well-being. In other words, states of physical equilibrium or neutral balance do not appear sufficient. An up-regulation toward well-being is easily identifiable as a general human goal. (Damásio and Damásio, 2015: 125-128).

What I would like to propose is that this concept that "searches for values compatible with survival" comes across biology and economy, also being applicable in the field of queer and LGBTQ studies. I would argue that this sociocultural homeostasis is precisely what we encounter when we analyse the experiences of LGBTQ people in insular spaces[27] (presumably, not exclusively of these spaces), regarding what Baldacchino (2005) calls "conforming to dominant social codes". In the case of insular societies, it translates as an enormous importance in the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis. As in these societies' individuals often depend on each other, or simply cannot avoid being known. In other words, voices of disagreement or the violation of the social codes

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[27] It would also be interesting to understand how the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis is probably identifiable in places outside the geographical scope of this investigation, such as large, metropolitan cities. If one is to consider that this mechanism functions as an automatic response to survival, one might argue that the historical discrimination of queer communities worldwide might also have led many LGBTQ people to conform to the sociocultural homeostasis, regardless of the geographical space that frames their experiences.

which can lead to marginalization or ostracism is particularly significant for people in small and interdependent communities (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). I claim that these insular characteristics become particularly visible when looked through the lens of LGBTQ people's lives and experiences, which translates to an enhancement of the difficulties that are already known to affect the LGBTQ community regarding their rights and experiences.

As the analytical work of this investigation demonstrates, in the circumstance of this case study, one of the main Themes of data analysis was in fact Social Contract. I suggest that the relevance of the Theme comes exactly because of the significance that the local people assigned to the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis. Let us consider the following excerpt from Emanuel's interview:

> *I usually say that if a LGBT person here in the Azores… if they have a very well structured family… very open minded (which is very difficult because there's always someone who is not)… But if is not like that, you get angry, because you have to hide what you are. And you do, because it is not accepted. "You can be, but you don't need to show"; "you don't need to walk holding hands"; "you don't need to speak about it", and I do believe that there are many young people who do not have that capacity to deal with this.*

> Emanuel, MSM, 20-29 yo

According to Emanuel's opinion, you can be queer in the Azores if you don't break the social contract showing that you are. This was very visible in many of the interviews when the people spoke about their behaviour in public. Fausto's experience offers a good example:

> *I never felt discriminated against, but we have to have into account that I am a person who has great respect for my privacy. I never had a public manifestation of affection, nor a kiss on the street, neither in my parish, island or even the Azores. And here you might ask, but are you*

being yourself? Well, I think it is very beautiful to be able to kiss who you love (...) but is self-protection. Because, I am so integrated into society, and I am so relaxed and peaceful on so many levels, my friends know, at work they know (...) so I am so relaxed in those aspects that I also "understand", between quotation marks, that I have to abdicate the so-called spontaneous kiss. (...) And you could say: Ok, but you weren't completely open or transparent to society; you never walked holding hands with your boyfriend (...). Well, of course, it is like that, and obviously, I am not completely fulfilled as I had to accommodate to society in certain aspects.

Fausto, Gay, 50-59 yo

Fausto's way of behaving in public was not unique among the interviews. On the contrary, the large majority of participants hid or avoided certain behaviours in public, and not always as a form of self-protection. Sometimes, I understood it as a way to show society or their families that they were grateful. Grateful, in the sense that they have been accepted by them. In other cases, grateful because they were not discriminated against by these people (close relatives or friends); or even grateful because they have been supportive in some way.

The case of Maria is a blatant expression of this. Although nowadays she is happily and freely (according to her own words) married to another woman, her story was not always like this. She described how she left the Azores during her adolescence to study and get an international curriculum. While she was living abroad, she met another woman which was "the love of [her] life". When her parents found out, her mother went to pick her up, destroyed her notebook where she had all her contacts and brought her back to the Azores. She lost contact forever with that love as this happened before the existence of the internet and mobile phones as we know them. One year after that, she married her male best friend. She told me her story as follows:

(...) she took my notebook and destroyed it. Put me in an aeroplane and I came back to the Azores after all this time. So I lost contact. In [year] I am marrying [with a man]. This is a jump of one year, more or less. As such, it was a difficult time; my mother didn't accept at all my

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relationship with another woman. (…) She thought I was disgusting. She would heal me, rightly or wrongly, she would heal me. (…) And I thought I could try… I saw their [parents'] disappointment. They did an enormous effort for me to have my studies (…) and the fact that they had done that great economical effort (…) I thought, well, I can sacrifice myself and I will do everything by the book, I am going to do things their way.

<div align="right">Maria, WSW, 50-59</div>

In a different way, António's statement also shows that his family has influence in the way he behaves:

I was never flamboyant, I don't like it and I do have that in attention. Even in the way I dress, and I am not discriminating against the people who dress like a woman, between quotation marks "like sissies". I respect and I know people that are like that and I respect them. But I am always careful about the way I dress because… my family, well, I don't know… when they speak about these things I think: "Oh my, if I was like that… I imagine what they would say about me.

<div align="right">António, Gay, <20 yo</div>

Besides these ideas of "accommodating to the society" or living "by the book" because of the family, in certain cases, the way that people explained why they didn't have public manifestations of affection or other ways of being queerly visible, sounded like they felt their visibility was a form of violence towards other people. Let's look at Natália and Tânia's statements. Natália does not live in the Azores anymore and was explaining to me how she was very at ease with her sexual orientation, as she inclusively was capable of going to the Azores followed by her girlfriend:

For me is as natural to be homosexual as to be heterosexual that I do not have the necessity to show off or to hide. If I am with someone

> *[romantically] and I have to go there [the island], I am capable of going there accompanied, but I will not **violate** complicated situations at my mother's house, for example [Emphasis added].*

<div align="right">Natália, WSW, 50-59</div>

Sharing the same feeling as Natália, Tânia also mentioned that she was at ease with her sexual orientation while living on her island. But she told me she wanted to go and live abroad and contextualised it as follows:

> *It is not that I don't feel free here. I actually feel free but… I don't know, I think I'll have more… maybe because I don't have the family there [abroad], and [here] there are certain families that don't know [my SO] (…) For example, here, sometimes I am at the city and I don't feel all right walking holding hands [with another girl]. I don't feel very well. (..) And even though you are out [of the closet] and you do not have problems with that, you always have that part **of respect**. For example, there are old people passing through, and they stare at you and you feel bad about it [Emphasis added].*

<div align="right">Tânia, Bisexual, 20-29 yo</div>

Here I would like to go back to the questions raised in the previous section and to Butler's (1999) "task" to figure out how people are constructed by the discourses and can use the same discourses to serve a different purpose. I believe that this "invisibility cloak" that local people use as a form of maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis is the motive why there is a general opinion about local LGBTQ people living in the closet. As we are speaking about an insular space, characterised by its intimacy (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018); no one gets to be anonymous - if someone is gay, trans, etc., people will know about it. But, as people do not speak freely about their SO or GI, and besides that, also avoid public visibility, the idea of closet remains, but just when referring to others, not to oneself. This shows how the metronormative approach of being "out loud and proud" is present in the imaginary of local people, even when their practices and

behaviours counter such imaginary. To put it in other words, the calls on visibility are the scale participants use to perceive if others (and not themselves) are closeted or not. At the same time, people do not seem to see themselves as being in the closet as they do not feel they are hiding. They know there is no place to "hide" on an island, they are just "well adapted", a "part of the community" and so on. Here I would underline the idea that framing the "coming out" as a choice, is only partially applicable to small communities, in the way that anonymity is a privilege configured by the space. Also, the metropolitan visibility approach reclaimed by several LGBTQ advocates, including locally, seems to be a mismatch for islanders as they already pay a huge price of being unwillingly visible. Here, this work stays in line with the investigation in Rural Queer Studies, made by Carly Thomsen, where she highlights the "aversion" for the politically contrived forms of visibility on the part of the queer rural women she interviewed. Instead, she focuses on how the community is their priority (Thomsen, 2014). In the case of this work, I would substitute "community" with the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis as the priority. Notwithstanding, in the case under analysis in this investigation, I would not discard the effect that these "metropolitan approaches" have on the local LGBTQ community. These calls on visibility seem to be the scale of how the locals perceive the outness of others. It is also present in the discourses of the local activists and the imaginary of many of the people interviewed as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter.

This section aimed at demonstrating how the geographical insular characteristics of space create a socio-cultural ecosystem with particularities that are relevant to LGBTQ and Queer studies as they affect directly the lives of the local queer community and, as demonstrated in the previous section, inform their imaginary. In the next section, I will conclude these reflections as I present the concept of the "Insular effect".

4.3- As insular as an island

I started this chapter with a section about the imaginary of the local queer people interviewed. I explored their discourses about the cosmopolitan and big cities in

comparison with the islands where they live(ed), and how their idea of closet was informed by this imaginary. As a result, the importance of space as an essential element of analysis when studying insular, small and peripheral communities became evident.

In the second section, I narrowed the analysis by focusing on the participants' behaviours and practices. Supported by the knowledge from works in the fields of Island Studies and Rural Queer Studies, I reflected on the insular characteristics of "intimate societies" that translate into queer lives as an omnipresent sense of surveillance. This sense of constant observation combined with the enormous importance of the respect for the local social norms translates into a homeostatic way of behaving which erases queer visibility.

The analytical course of this study led me to the conclusion that the sociocultural ecosystem bordered by the geographical conditions of insularity creates an outcome to which I call "the insular effect" that I will explore in this last section of the chapter.

Portugal has one of the world's most progressive legal frameworks regarding the protection and the assurance of the rights of gender and sexually diverse people. At the present time, according to ILGA's Europe rating[28], the country stands in 4th place, after Malta (1st), Belgium (2nd) and Luxembourg (3rd). Unfortunately, and as demonstrated by LGBTQ and Queer studies (Silva et al., 2021; Santos, 2022), the existence of progressive legal frameworks does not translate directly to social rights. The case study under analysis serves as an example of this reality. The results seem to imply a further obstacle for the LGBTQ community when living in spaces with insular characteristics, regardless of the national legal framework.

I argue that this hardship comes from what I would call an insular effect. This effect is the result of the geographical characteristics of the space, which influence the sociocultural setting. Insular, isolated and small communities are characteristics of spaces where respect for the dominant social codes has a leading role. The community is highly inter-dependent and social roles frequently overlap. Besides, in these places people seem to share a ubiquitous sense of proximity with everyone else, creating a sensation of exposure and surveillance.

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[28] Available at: https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking [accessed: 03-02-2022].

When analysing these characteristics of these spaces from a perspective of LGBTQ studies, I would say that we have three main axes: the Insular Space, the feeling of Exposure, and the importance of the local Dominant Social Codes (please refer to figure 4.1). Together, they create the insular effect, which seems to rebound in the local LGBTQ people in three main ways, all of them with the same side effect which is the isolation of the subject.
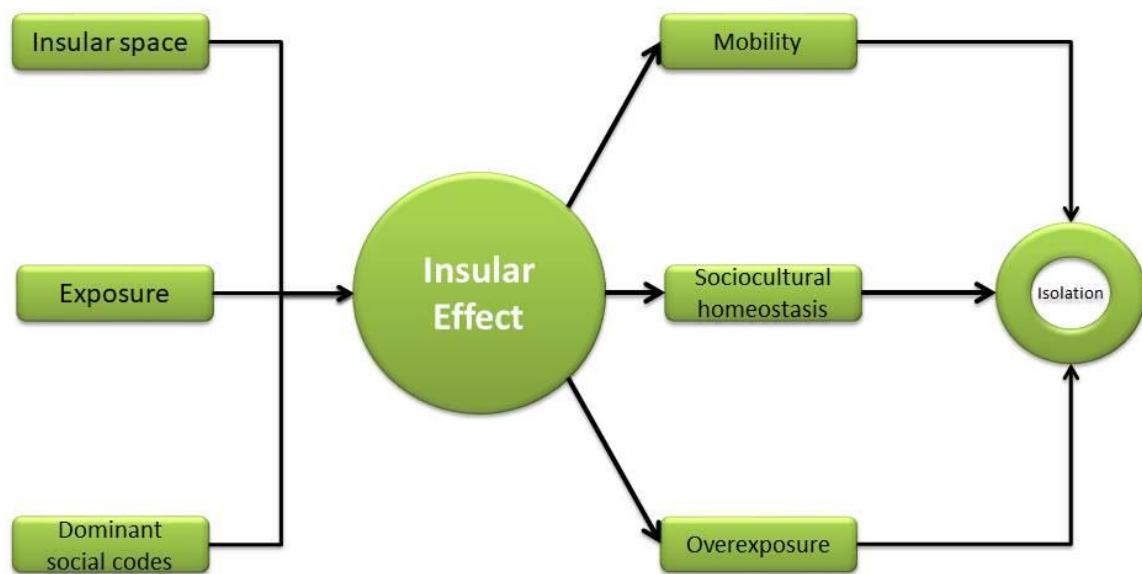
Figure 4. 1 Illustrative figure of the insular effect.

One of the possible outputs of the insular effect is Mobility, which can translate into the person leaving the island. The response to that mobility seemed to always be the search for a greater sense of anonymity and liberty. The other is the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis, which would be the consequence of not violating the dominant social codes. That results in the erasure of LGBTQ issues and visibility, which is also a shared aspect with mobility. And finally, overexposure, this would be the aftermath of not choosing any of the other two. The queer people who do not leave or who do not avoid being visible are enhanced by the insular effect as their difference become conspicuous in the cis-heteronormative spaces that are protected and assured by the maintenance of

sociocultural homeostasis. This result, besides being tiring and, bringing again the words of Emília- "devastating"-, also isolates the subject as their visibility is unwelcomed by the other local queers, which chose to behave according to the cis-heteronormative social norms. Let's analyse this excerpt from Pedro:

> *Independently of what I am, I do not have to be with people that walk with signs on their foreheads saying "I am lesbian" or "I am gay". To me, hanging out with a lesbian, hanging out with a gay, or with a straight, is exactly the same thing as long as they have a proper posture, as long as they are not exaggerated.*

> Pedro, Trans, 20-29 yo

All three possible outputs that I identified have the same result in the participants: they all become isolated. I would say that they all become as insular as an island. This insular effect, in societies which are structurally homo and transphobic, isolates LGBTQ subjects having harmful consequences, as social isolation has been demonstrated to be consequential of great psychosocial damage for the individuals (Garcia et al., 2020). Besides, I would argue that the insular effect also becomes an additional challenge for LGBTQ rights advocates locally and for progressive social change.

To avoid these damaging results, I believe that intervention has to be done taking into account the specificities of the space. There is an enormous necessity of understanding the regional and local realities in order to apply general laws and design social change. The case of the Azores is blatant in showing that the claims to be "out loud and proud" do not serve the local community. A metronormative approach to sexual rights is too socially "expensive" when you live in a small and peripheral community. Instead, the population seems to adapt. What I understood through the analysis of this case study is that this adaptation undergoes a process in which people learn to behave according to the expectations of the cis-heteronorm. But this comes with emotional costs, even though the people didn't seem to identify it as such. I will use the example of Frederico to illustrate how this homeostatic form of preservation of the social contract can be emotionally

harmful. Frederico said to me that he was perfectly "involved" within his community, he had a social position of respect, and how everyone knew his SO, including family, friends and at work. He puts it this way:

> *This [sexual orientation] is not a taboo in my life, I do not hide. Although I am going to be sincere, I also do not walk with a gay flag every day, right?*

Right after that, he told me how he never had a bad experience even though he was from a small place within the island he lives. The interview was long and very rich as Frederico's experience was truly interesting. Although he was not an activist, he used his privileged position in society to share awareness of LGBTQ issues from time to time. One of these times, he told me, he had invited two speakers to do a small intervention with a group of people, mainly men, from peripheral places within the island. This intervention tackled aspects regarding human rights, women's rights and LGBTQ people's rights. When Frederico had the chance, he asked the group what was their opinion about the activity he organized. One of the responses he had was, according to his narration:

> *"[Reference to the interviewee] it was very interesting, but at some point she [the speaker] said some things that… oh… well, I was thinking if my brother came home one day and tells me that he is gay, I would break his legs!!!" (…) And then he started to be very offensive regarding the situation and his brother.*

> Frederico, Gay, 40-49

Although Frederico described this moment as a "very interesting experience", one can imagine the violence of being in his position[29]. While the daily living of being on an

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[29] Here I would like to take a moment to make a small reflection on this experience. As in this case with Frederico, many times during the interviews, people would describe several events

island comes with the sensation of familiarity as "everyone knows everyone", the truth is that's not to be interpreted literally. As we can see, the person who made the commentary was not familiar with Frederico's sexual orientation. Nor anyone can be familiar with other 133,295 or even 53,244 people, which is the current population of São Miguel and Terceira[30], respectively. Although this feeling of familiarity is not literal, it has a similar effect to Bentham's panoptic structure (Foucault, 1995). The feeling of constant surveillance is the repercussion of having the sensation of being familiar with everyone else. In the words of Foucault, in the panoptic mechanism, individuals are "seen but do not see; [they are] object[s] of information, never subject[s] in communication (…) [and where] invisibility is the guarantee of order" (Foucault, 1995:np). The acknowledgement of this social control overpassed the interviews of the queer people and it was visible also in the interviews with the key informants. One of the politicians interviewed stated:

> *Here we have social control for good and for bad. Obviously, there are also good things about it, like support, mainly related to economic aspects. But the truth is when you speak about other kinds of social values like equality, privacy, and the right to be different… perhaps these rights become a little more constrained.*

(Key informant)

Even though the majority of the participants framed their experiences as being free, good and without prejudice, there was not one where pain, suffering and/or discrimination were not present. Due to the insular effect, the majority of the participants adapted their way of living to the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis. I believe that this adaptation has direct costs, as we can see by the example of Frederico. Besides this

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related with queer themes, concerning them or other people, in a light and casual way. Notwithstanding, later in the conversation, people would identify such experiences as discriminatory, violent and/or painful. As such, the violence that I highlight is not to be interpreted as a patronizing view of the experience shared by Frederico, but as something that did not come immediately to his mind as he was telling me what happened.

[30] Population in São Miguel and Terceira according to the Regional Service of Statistics, 2021. Source: https://srea.azores.gov.pt/upl/%7B93e06621-8d46-469e-b429-3be32902cdf4%7D.pdf [Accessed : 02-02-2022].

example of unintended discrimination, to which any "invisible" LGBTQ person can be targeted, in the long run, it also contributes to the maintenance of spaces and places that are bred to accommodate cis-heteronormative behaviour and where difference becomes ultra-conspicuous.

In the work of Godfrey Baldacchino and Wouter Veenendaal (2018), the authors explain that the characteristics existing in island societies create spaces marked by pragmatic conservatism and where political and social changes become particularly challenging. In this work, I argue that the insular effect goes in line with the claims of these authors and that the way that LGBTQ people adapted to the sociocultural environment is the materialization of the challenges these authors identify.

The insular effect seems to function as an additional layer to the difficulties of the lives of LGBTQ people as it: erases LGBTQ visibility; does the maintenance of spaces and places as cis-heteronormative; isolates queer people; preserves the conspicuousness of any difference; keeps the people away from LGBTQ activism; retains LGBTQ issues out of the public discussion; conserves ignorance regarding these themes; maintains the ideal of "outside the island is better"; and retains the legitimacy of "correction" of behaviours that harm sociocultural homeostasis.

I would argue that all of these aspects make the contexts in insular spaces particularly challenging regarding LGBTQ people's rights. Even in settings with progressive legal frameworks as is the case in Portugal.

I also believe that this insular effect is not exclusive to island communities, as I trust that this effect can be felt in any peripheral, rural and small community that shares the insular characteristic of isolation or that share a "social 'ecology' of smallness" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018:340). This work has shown how these insular characteristics can be challenging for LGBTQ people even though some seem to adapt to them. As such, I will end this chapter with a new question that will open the discussion for the reflections that will follow:

Are queer islanders doomed?

Chapter 5 – Ecology of Insularity

> Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone - or it is starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew.

> *Deleuze, 2004:10*

The main concern in the previous chapter was responding to the leading question of this investigation: Can insularity be an important analytical category when we speak about LGBTQ people's rights and experiences? The empirical evidence led me to develop a scheme in which I describe what I have been calling the insular effect. The insular effect could be simply defined as follows:

The isolation of LGBTQ people that results from the effects of the socio-geographical characteristics of space.

On a more detailed note, the assemblage of the three main axes that result from the socio-geographical characteristics of space (which would be: the insular space, the feeling of exposure and the importance of the dominant social norms), create the insular effect which rebounds into the local LGBTQ community isolating the subjects. This isolation translates into three main forms: a feeling of overexposure, the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis and mobility.

Isolation is a well-known issue for people who experience marginalization as it is the case for gender and sexually diverse people (Ratanashevorn and Brown, 2021; Garcia et al., 2020). Based on my empirical research, I suggest that insularity plays a relevant part in how queer people from rural/peripheral and small communities become isolated. In addition, my analysis also demonstrates how the geographical space is related to other categories such as invisibility, suffering and marginalization. Moreover, I argue that

insularity is an important category to have into account when studying rural/peripheral and small communities.

As such, in this chapter, I felt the necessity to develop a more in-depth analysis of the concept of insularity, to understand it better, as I believe that such reflections may be useful to improve future interventions regarding LGBTQ equality in spaces with insular characteristics.

I start my considerations with section 5.*1 – Natural laboratories, komodo dragons, greenhouses and other metaphors towards LGBTQ people's equality*. Making use of metaphors and giving other examples of insular spaces, my aim is to understand if there was something about insular contexts that would reveal useful when considering queer people's rights. The only aspect identified that could be seen as advantageous was – and if the right conditions were achieved – the possibility of reaching legal changes faster based on the size of the territory. However, I also suspect that this characteristic might make progressive legal changes in such contexts more vulnerable. As such, one might consider the necessity of being extra attentive whilst working in such spaces as we know human rights are always subject to backlash.

In section 5.*2- Schrödinger's Insularity: it does not exist and yet it's everywhere*, I reflect on the possibility of looking at insularity as more than just a geographical characteristic of the space, but as having a strong emotional aspect about it, which I trust to be relevant when conducting LGBTQ-related research. Making use of the theoretical frames of Cultural Geography and Anthropology, I consider the possibility of insularity as happening at the intersection of culture and space, and how this reflection is related to the "activation" of the insular effect.

Section 5.*3- Making intimacy intimate again*, is where I return to considerations made in the previous sections to suggest a theoretical proposal for future interventions regarding LGBTQ people's rights in spaces with socio-geographical conditions similar to the case study analysed in this work. My proposal would be that the self-centred, individualist modern discourses of LGBTQ advocates might not be the best approach in such contexts. The complex situation ruled by the intimacy of the space (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018), with frequently overlapping social roles and a big sense of proximity with everyone else, instigates the local community to be highly attentive to the social norms.

As such, these characteristics turn insular communities into a difficult ground for social change. On that matter, I use Gregory Bateson's work (1972) on the aspects of unity that underlie social groups, to make a proposal of how one can look at insular intimacy through the lens of LGBTQ studies.

5.1- Natural laboratories, komodo dragons, greenhouses and other metaphors towards LGBTQ people's equality

The previous chapter ended with a question: Are queer islanders doomed? I will dedicate this chapter to the search for an answer to this question. I would like to start with the considerations by making use of a metaphor inspired by the work of ecologists and biologists during the last centuries for whom the value of studying insular contexts did not go unnoticed. Retrieving inspiration from knowledge produced in the natural sciences is far from being innovative. In fact, the discipline of Cultural Geography - which will be a valuable tool through the reflections of this chapter- stems from a multidisciplinary approach in fields as diverse as Ecology, Botany, Anthropology or Feminism (Anderson, 2015).

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the noun ecology means the study of living things in relation to their environment. We can go back to the nineteenth century when Charles Darwin was building his evolution theory and see his notes on the *Zoology of the Archipelagoes* where he draws attention to the particularities of what we call today island biogeography (MacArthur and Wilson, 2001). Used in the natural sciences as "natural laboratories" (Scott and Whittaker, 2003), islands' biogeographical phenomena are as complex as fascinating. The continuous observation work on islands led scientists to draw a rule in which it is stated that "organisms on islands differ from their continental counterparts in a host of ecological, behavioural and morphological traits" (Baeckens and Van Damme, 2020:np). These insular idiosyncrasies led to the development of charismatic individuals, in some cases, animals that become smaller than their continental

counterparts, such as miniature hippopotamuses, "little" elephants and even a hominin species, *Homo floresiensis,* which is informally nicknamed by physical anthropologists as the "Hobbit".

In the same way that ecological conditions can "produce" miniature individuals, the opposite can also occur. In that case, we have organisms whose development is augmented - biologists call it "island gigantism" -, and that effect generated animals such as giant tortoises and the komodo dragons.

I use this almost amateur description of ecological theory only as a means to offer a metaphor for the social sciences. During the reflections in the previous chapter, the insular effect seemed to increase the difficulties that are acknowledged to be part of the lives of gender and sexually-diverse people (FRA, 2020). If one wants to consider the illustrative example of the development of the body size of the species, it would be as if the rights and the experiences of queer people are minimized. This led me to think if it would be possible that the opposite could also occur. Would it be possible that the "natural laboratories" could be a place with an ecological setting where the freedom of LGBTQ people could somehow be persuaded by something similar to insular gigantism? If so, where is our komodo dragon?

I felt that the answer to my question could be over the top of the LGBTQ equality charts and rankings: the European Union's smallest (and insular) state, Malta. Just to give two examples, in ILGA's rainbow Europe country ranking, Malta is isolated as the #1 country with an enviable 92.02% punctuation[31] (ILGA Europe, 2022). In another study, about the 150 worst and safest countries worldwide for LGBTQ+ people to travel, Malta scores at 4th place, after Canada (1st), the Netherlands and Sweden (tied up in the 2nd and 3rd places) (Fergusson and Fergusson, 2021).

The accession of this small Mediterranean archipelago into the European Union in 2004 fuelled a set of significant legislative changes. In 2011, Malta was one of the three last

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[31] ILGA-Europe makes this ranking according with the following information: "The rankings are based on how the laws and policies of each country impact on the lives of LGBTI people. The ranking records a country's legal standards for comparison with its European neighbours but the numbers only provide one part of the story. (…) ILGA-Europe track each country using a wide range of indicators; covering everything from equality, family issues and hate speech to legal gender recognition, freedom of expression and asylum rights" (ILGA Europe, 2022:n.p). Available at: https://www.rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking#eu [Accessed 22-06-2022].

states in the world where divorce was forbidden (along with the Philippines and Vatican City). That changed that year as a non-binding referendum pressed the government to advance on legalising the divorce. The years that followed were of progressive and unequivocal legislative change towards social equality. Just to draw a handful of examples, in 2014 same-sex civil unions; 2015 a law that removed the need for trans people to undergo surgery in order to change their gender legally; 2016 conversion "therapies" were banned; and, in 2017, same-sex marriage was legalized (The Guardian, 2011, 2016; Equaldex, 2022). In summary, in about a decade, Malta metamorphosed from a country where divorce was forbidden and scored 0% (2012) in ILGA's Rainbow Europe Index into a country considered "pioneers of progress, exemplary to other European countries and the rest of the world" regarding LGBTQ legal protection (Fenech, 2021; Ferrara, 2021). Could this mean that Malta is our Komodo Dragon? I searched for recent and past investigations in the fields of LGBTQ studies done in Malta to explore this hypothesis.

In the work of Gabriella Meli (2021), the author makes reference to a survey, which was conducted before Malta's legal "revolution" towards legal LGBTQ equality, where it was stated that the local queer communities "were victims of physical violence, psychological harassment, and harassment in schools and at the workplace. People were refused employment and hid their relationships to avoid violence or harassment. Individuals who hid their sexual orientation and/or gender identity were discriminated against when seeking health services" (Meli, 2021: 75). Although I maintain that to be a scholar in the field of LGBTQ studies one must be an optimistic believer with a pessimistic knowledge, it would be unwisely optimistic to think that, in a decade, the socio-cultural factors that nurtured various reports on discrimination, aggression and marginalization of the Maltese LGBTQ community, simply vanished with the accomplishment of legal change. Even so, I looked for the most recent data.

In 2021, the Human Rights Directorate within the Maltese Ministry for Equality, Research and Innovation published a book entitled *Mapping the Rainbow* in which it is included a set of academic works focusing on LGBTQ issues in this particular insular setting. I do not know if the title of the book was chosen to resonate with one of the most important publications in the field of the Geography of Sexualities – *Mapping Desire*, published in 1995, and in which David Bell and Gill Valentine demonstrated the

centrality of space whilst researching about sexual and gender diversity. Coincidence or not, I thought this was a curious fact to register.

Whilst reading the book *Mapping the Rainbow*, the similarity of the results of the Maltese investigations in comparison with other LGBTQ works in different contexts is clear. The data show the local LGBTQ community to experience stigma in school, in their families, at the workplace, and among their friends (Fenech, 2021). Other topics included the stress of coming out and selective disclosure (Deguara, 2021; see also Deguara, 2018). In Carmen Ferrara's work, they explored the advance of Maltese civil rights whilst, at the same time demonstrating through in-depth interviews how "the presence of laws, however, proved insufficient to guarantee the inclusion of all" (Ferrara, 2021: 70). Reading these results reminded me of an inaugural lecture led by Kath Browne at the University of Brighton in 2016. In this lecture, Browne drew attention to the importance of legislative change whilst, at the same time, explaining that changing legislation does not necessarily change LGBTQ people's lives for the better[32]. In her words, "legislation is partial and generally an unhelpful measure of liveability for LGBTQ people" (Browne, 2016: n.p.).

My reflections about this topic are limited as I did not conduct fieldwork in Malta. Even so, I will dare to consider that many of the socio-geographical conditions that led me to develop the concept of the insular effect in this particular case study, would probably also be applicable to the Maltese context.

Just to raise a curious coincidence, during a meeting I attended in March 2022, I met a Maltese queer academic who also researches LGBTQ issues. As we spoke about my own investigation, he told me he understood the aim of my study since he, as a gay man, would not walk in the streets of Malta holding hands with his partner because he did not feel comfortable to do it in such a small place. I will return to this example later on in this chapter to suggest that perhaps more significant than the size of the island, the key to understanding the discomfort of being visibly LGBTQ in insular contexts is not on the size of the space in itself but rather how it *feels* to live in such spaces.

To summarize, as pointed out by Brown (2016), legal progressiveness might be important, but it does not tell us how people really feel whilst living in these contexts.

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[32] Albeit, literature indicates that legislation can positively modify opinions towards more accepting societies. See for instance the work of Kreitzer et al. (2014).

Legal change *per se* is not a good predictor of social progressiveness, as the work conducted for this dissertation is also demonstrative.

Although these results seem to dismiss the hypotheses of having found our Komodo Dragon, I believe that there is something about Malta's insularity that is worth further reflection. According to several interviews conducted by Ferrara (2021) the reasons appointed for Malta's "both surreal and unbelievable" (Formosa, 2021: 33) progress were: the entrance of Malta into the EU, the approval of the divorce law, the close work with ILGA-Europe, the fact that English is an official language and, according to an interviewee from the Maltese Human Rights Directorate, the size of Malta (Ferrara, 2021). I agree that the insular geographical conditions of Malta (including its size, as mentioned by the interviewee) might have played a preponderant part in how some legal rights, including the right to divorce, were achieved so late (considering the rest of Europe, even the world) and how LGBTQ legal rights were developed so fast (again, considering the rest of Europe and the world). Also, we can wonder that the parties in government at the time also played a preponderant part and, eventually, the protagonism of specific queer activists, which is also a factor that comes along with scale. Before further developing this argument, I want to add another example to the discussion.

Tasmania was known for having Australia's worst anti-gay laws. In fact, it was the last Australian State to decriminalize homosexuality in 1997 (Morris, 1995; Baird, 2006; Grant, 2021). According to Ruby Grant (2021, see also Baird, 2006), "Despite its troubling past, over the last two decades, Tasmania has led the way in Australian LGBTQ law reform, becoming the first Australian state to officially recognize same-sex relationships and overseas marriages, to legalize same-sex parent adoption, and to introduce marriage equality legislation to parliament"(Grant, 2021: 1134).

Taking into account both the Maltese and Tasmanian examples, I suggest looking at insular, isolated, small communities, not as "natural laboratories" as it is usually the case with biological sciences, but as sociocultural greenhouses. A greenhouse is a closed environment, as such, if the right conditions are set, the development of the seeds can happen in a much faster way than the ones outside, which are subject to the randomness of the climate and other external influences. In a similar way, the intimate characteristics of living in a small, isolated space, like an island, where the populations are close to each other, facilitate the impact of political pressures and other forms of lobbying. As

identified in the work of Ferrara (2021), the fact that Malta is a small island allowed the local LGBTQ movements to have easy access to politicians whilst negotiating the advances of legal rights.

I would argue that if we are to consider that insular communities function as sociocultural greenhouses, they may be spaces where there are strong pressures to conform to the sociocultural homeostasis (as previously discussed in chapter 4) but, if we manage to trespass these initial difficulties, then the intimate characteristics of the space might serve as a catalyser for progressive change, at least, in practical issues as changing laws. Using the words of Baldacchino, "[b]eing geographically defined and circular, an island is easier to hold, to own, to manage or to manipulate, to embrace and to caress" (Baldacchino, 2005: 247).

When considering deeper changes such as mentalities, cultural habits, and overarching social change, I believe that the insular "ecosystem" becomes a challenging setting towards social progressiveness. Notwithstanding, it is also possible that Malta's insularity could have had a part in the peculiar (to say the least) fact that it remains the only EU state where abortion is illegal (Malta Today, 2021, 2022; Euronews, 2021), even though literature links the progressiveness of LGB rights with both gender equality and reproductive rights (Henry et al., 2022).

In the same way I argue insularity might have an influence on how practical changes can be rapidly achieved, I also regard that insularity may turn these changes even more volatile. For example, I would suggest that it is not a coincidence that the first nation to ever legalize and then revoke same-sex marriage was precisely the insular territory of Bermuda[33] (Reuters, 2022; The Guardian, 2022).

In conclusion, even though we might have not been able to consider that insular contexts can breed komodo dragons from the perspective of social sciences - at least from the standpoint of LGBTQ studies -, we may have found the sociocultural equivalent to the natural laboratories: sociocultural greenhouses. As such, one might find it useful to consider the catalyser ability of the greenhouse, as a valuable tool whilst developing future interventions in places with insular, isolated and intimate characteristics.

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[33] For a timeline of the legal battles regarding same-sex marriage in Bermuda: https://www.royalgazette.com/same-sex-marriage/news/article/20220314/a-timeline-of-legal-challenges-over-same-sex-marriage/ [Accessed 20-04-2022].

This section discussed the hypothesis that insularity can work as a means to achieve legal changes faster, but that could also mean that these changes become more volatile in such contexts. In the next section, I will engage in a deeper reflection about an aspect that I consider essential to have in consideration whilst researching LGBTQ people's experiences in insular communities.

5.2- Schrödinger's Insularity: it does not exist and yet it's everywhere

> **Daughter:** Daddy, why do things have outlines?
> **Father:** Do they? I don't know. What sort of things do you mean?
> **Daughter:** I mean, when I draw things, why do they have outlines?
> **Father:** Well, what about other sort of things – a flock or a sheep? Or a conversation? Do they have outlines?
> **Daughter:** Don't be silly. I can't draw a conversation. I mean things.
> **Father:** Yes- I was trying to find out just what you meant. Do you mean "Why do we give things outlines when we draw them?" Or do you mean that the things have outlines whether we draw them or not?
>
> Gregory Bateson, 1972a

The previous chapter explored how space influences the lives of the queer people interviewed. The practical consequences of being an LGBTQ person living in the Azores were explained by what I called "the insular effect". I identified three main "responses" to it – mobility; the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis; and overexposure – all of which contributed to the isolation of the subject. These results go in line with the works of academics in the area of studies of Geography of Sexualities (GS) which, for more than three decades, have been stressing the relevance of analysing spaces and places as they have a direct influence on the way we represent, behave and treat sexual and gender

diversity (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Phillips et al., 2000; Browne et al., 2007; Browne and Brown, 2016; Johnston, 2018; Browne et al., 2021). In other words, this scholarship underlies how sexed bodies and spaces are mutually constitutive (Johnston, 2018). Arguably, the previous chapter served as a good example of this close relation between sexuality(ies) and space, and how the geographical context had an impact on the everyday life of the local LGBTQ people.

Whilst the responses to the insular effect were not the same for every person, there was not one single interview where I could not find a strong presence of insularity. Regardless of age, social class, or level of education, even in the interviews with the key informants[34], all of the statements shared something that I did not know how to explain. For now, I suggest to call it the weight of insularity. As I felt the need to reflect on this omnipresence along this last chapter, I went back to the transcriptions of the interviews to try to extract something that would help me to complete such a task. As I browsed through the hundreds of pages, I was shocked that I did not seem to find anything that would help me unpack the ever-present weight of insularity. How could this be possible? Although I had no particular difficulty identifying and analysing the insular effect and its consequences, I was absolutely lost as I searched for pieces of text that would help me to illustrate the importance of insularity in the lives of the people I interviewed. If on one hand, I had the certainty of the centrality and omnipresence of the weight of insularity, on the other hand, I had not one single excerpt that would be good enough demonstrating it. It reminded me of Schrödinger's quantum mechanics paradox, where the cat can be considered simultaneously alive and dead. In the case of my research, insularity was everywhere and, at the same time, it did not exist in the sense that I was not being able to demonstrate it scientifically.

As I figuratively ran to the literature for help, it was in Gregory Bateson famous monograph *Naven* (1936) that I started to understand my own Schrödinger's dilemma. In the first pages of the book, Bateson states:

> If it were possible adequately to present the whole of a culture, stressing every
> aspect exactly as it is stressed in the culture itself, no single detail would appear

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[34] The four people interviewed as key informants were not subjects of attention because of their sexual orientation/gender identity, but because they had social or political positions of interest for the research. As an informative note, during the interviews all of the four mentioned being (past or present) in romantic relationships that could be considered straight.

bizarre or strange or arbitrary to the reader, but rather the details would all appear natural and reasonable as they do to the natives who have lived all their lives within the culture. (…) [Anthropologists] have set themselves the same great task, that of describing culture as a whole in such a manner that each detail shall appear as the natural consequence of the remainder of the culture. But their method differs from that of the great artists in one fundamental point. The artist is content to describe culture in such a manner that many of its premises and the inter-relations of its parts are <u>implicit in his composition</u>. He can leave a great many of the most fundamental aspects of culture to <u>be picked up, not from his actual words, but from his emphasis</u>. He can choose words whose very sound is more significant than their dictionary meaning and he can so group and stress them that the reader almost unconsciously receives information which is not explicit in the sentences and which the artist would find it hard almost impossible to express in analytic terms. [Anthropologists] have described the structure of several societies and shown the main outlines of the pragmatic functioning of this structure. But they have scarcely attempted the delineation of those aspects of culture which the artist is able to express by impressionistic methods [my emphasis] (Bateson, 1936: 1-2).

I believe that what the author explains as being the impossibility of describing completely a culture in analytic terms, is similar to what happens when I try to explain insularity. Although it was present in all of the interviews, insularity was implicit, not explicitly formulated.

To help me illustrate this in practical terms is the fact that the words "island" or "islands" appear in the interviews 247 times, whereas the words "insularity" or "insular" appears two times only. While the participants spoke about the islands in terms that could be used and explored analytically – their size, the number of habitants, etc. –, the weight of insularity was tacit.

Having in mind the abovementioned excerpt of Gregory Bateson, I searched for Azorean literature, remembered the contemporary Ballet performances of Milagres Paz[35] and

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[35] Milagres Paz is an Azorean choreographer and Ballet teacher. More information at: https://balletteatropaz.com/companhia-danca-contemporanea/direcao-artistica-milagres-paz/ [Accessed 07-04-2022]

researched paintings of Azorean artists. Precisely as referred by Bateson, I found a great number of examples where insularity was present, yet, "implicit in its composition", "to be picked up" from the reader/audience. I will share three examples: an excerpt of a text written by Vitorino Nemésio, a painting of José Medeiros Cabral and an excerpt of a poem by Natália Correia – all of whom belong to the universe of Azorean artists.

> Quisera poder enfeixar nesta página emotiva o essencial da minha consciência de ilhéu. (…) Uma espécie de embriaguez do isolamento impregna a alma e os atos de todo o ilhéu, estrutura-lhe o espírito e procura uma fórmula quasi religiosa de convívio com quem não teve a fortuna de nascer, como o logos, na água" (Nemésio, 1935:59)[36,37]

Vitorino Nemésio, "Açorianidade", 1932[38]

Figure 5. 1 *The death of an academic by isolation*. Medeiros Cabral, 1979

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[36] English translation: "I wish I could bundle on this page the essential of my islander consciousness... Some kind of inebriety concerning isolation impregnates the soul and actions of all the islanders, organizes their spirits and seeks an almost religious formula for socializing with those who have not had the fortune to be born, like logos, in water."

[37] The excerpts of Nemésio and Correia were kindly translated for this thesis by Maria Quintans.

[38] Excerpt from: https://sites.google.com/site/ciberlusofonia/PT/Lit-Acoriana [accessed 7-04-2022].

Limão aceso na meia-noite ilhada,
O relógio na torre da Matriz
Põe o ponteiro na hora atraiçoada
Da ilha que me deram e eu não quis.

Mas, ó de alvos umbrais Ponta Delgada!
Meu prefixo de pastos, a raiz
É de calhau e de onda encabritada:
Um triz de hortênsia e estala-me o verniz.

Atamancada em fama a tosca ilhoa,
Só na praça e no prelo é de Lisboa,
Seu gesto, cãibra de garça interrompida.

No mais, osso campesino e duro
É fervor, é fogo e fé que juro
Ao lume e às flores da Graça recebida[39].

Natália Correia, "Mãe ilha", 1990[40]

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[39] Lit lemon in the islanded midnight,
The clock in the Mother church tower
Puts its pointer on the betrayed hour
From the island they gave me and I didn't want it.

But, oh, Ponta Delgada of clear umbrals!
My pasture prefix, the root
It's made of pebble and encumbered wave:
A hint of hydrangea and my varnish breaks.

Tarnished in fame the rough islet
Only in the square and in the press is from Lisboa
It's nod, interrupted heron cramp

At the most, country hard bone
Is fervor, is fire and faith I swear
To the light and the flowers of the Grace
received.

[40] Natália Correia (1923-1993), Sonetos românticos, Lisboa, Edições O Jornal, 1990, Available at: https://folhadepoesia.blogspot.com/2010/05/signo-insulado.html [Accessed 7-04-2022].

Reading Nemésio and the poems of Natália Correia, admiring the painting of Medeiros Cabral[41], or remembering Milagres' ballet performances – it all pointed towards a resemblance with what I felt whilst re-reading the transcripts of the interviews: the abstract presence of insularity. How could a space, or a geographical characteristic, become so ingrained in the culture and in people's experiences?

I continued to search for inspiration in non-academic literature to explore this topic. Firstly, I read Thomas More's famous *Utopia* (1995 [1516]). I wondered if it was by chance that More placed his ideal society on an imaginary island. I could not find any reference to the motive for that throughout the book, it was a rather "natural" aspect, as it was easy for the reader (which it was) to imagine the model of the "perfect" society illustrated by an island. But, as noted by Godfrey Baldacchino (2005), not only paradises are frequently pictured on islands – so are Gulags[42].

In 2013, the publisher Tinta da China edited a book called *Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Alberto Manguel and Giani Guadalupi eds.). In about 1000 pages the book organizes hundreds of imaginary places pictured by writers over centuries. I believe that is not possible to read more than three pages in a row without finding an island. Of all the geographical possibilities that the writers had to draw imaginary places, islands were by far represented the most. In the preface of the book, one can read "Islands are essential to the geography of an imaginary journey[43]" (Manguel, Guadalupi, 2013: xxii). Even though I was born and raised on an island, I was struck by this sentence as I had never thought about this aspect before. By then, it became very evident to me that there was a link between emotions and space that I had to discuss in my work.

The field of Cultural Geography (CG) is a sub-discipline of Human Geography which addresses precisely the relations between people and places. Geographers call it non-representational geography and Jon Anderson defines it as follows:

> Non-representational geography defined itself as different to – as before or beyond – representation. It began from the assumption that representation is partial and does not necessarily include all aspects of cultural life in our studies.

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[41] Imaged retrieved from the website: https://agendacores.pt/top-azores-15-pintores-acorianos/ [Accessed: 07-04-2022] .

[42] The author gives the example of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973).

[43] My translation. In the original: *As ilhas são essenciais à geografia da viagem imaginária.*

(…) A non-representational geography therefore began with a focus on practices, on the experiences rather than the things that constitute our world (Anderson, 2015: 41).

In the book *Understanding Cultural Geography: places and traces* (2015), Anderson tells us that geography is not an abstract discipline.

Things, ideas, practices, and emotions all occur in a context, in a broader world that influences, values, celebrates, regulates, criminalises, sneers, or tuts at particular activities and objects. Interest in this context, and how it influences, values, celebrates etc., is one thing that geography and geographers do. As Cook (in Clifford and Valentine, 2003: 127) identifies, 'so much depends on the context'. Context can influence what actions we choose to make and how we choose to make them, it can influence how these actions are judged by ourselves and others, and thus how successful and significant they turn out to be. Context is therefore vital to take notice of and understand, yet in everyday life it is something we often ignore – we are so used to it that it becomes ordinary, obvious, and even natural. Cresswell (2000: 263) describes this through using the South East Asian phrase 'the fish don't talk about the water'; in normal life we are often like fish in that we don't talk about our geographical context. (…) What cultural geography seeks to do therefore, is to explore the intersections of context and culture. It asks why cultural activities happen in particular ways in particular contexts. <u>It is interested in exploring how cultural activities and contexts interact, influence, and perhaps even become synonymous with one another.</u> It operationalises this interest through identifying that the product of the intersection between context and culture is *place* [my emphasis underlined] (Anderson, 2015: 3-6).

One valuable distinction offered by geographers is the one that compares and contrasts place and space. Lucy Lippard tells us that "if space is where culture is lived, then place is a result of their union" (Lippard, 1997: 10). Whilst spaces are scientific, places are emotional (Anderson, 2015). "Geographical space becomes place when human beings imbue it with meaning" (Kalterborn, 1997, *apud* Anderson, 2015: 176). For Davidson and Milligan (2004: 524), "Emotions (…) might be seen as a form of connective tissue that links experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with(in) broader

social geographies of place". This differentiation (between spaces and places) becomes fundamental for a deep understanding of the concept of insularity along this work. It opens the possibility to interpret the idea of insularity as being more that "just" a result of the geographical characteristic of space.

At this point, the acknowledgement that to deeply understand such an intricate concept (insularity) I would have to treasure an interdisciplinary approach to its study was reinforced. In the field of cultural geography, I understood that the ubiquitous substance along my work is known in some scientific fields as a sense of place[44]. "Sense of place refers to the emotional, experimental, and affective traces that tie humans into particular environments" (Anderson, 2015: 53). In fact, one could argue that this *sense of place* would be similar to the term Bateson developed whilst dissecting the functional details of culture, which is the term *ethos*. According to Bateson, if "we isolate from "pragmatic function" the concept of affective function which we may define, rigidly, in terms of relations between details of culture and the emotional needs of the individuals" (Bateson, 1936: 32) we get the ethological category (*ethos)*. To put it simply, *ethos* would be the emotional emphasis of the culture. Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the importance of the cultural setting to reflect on LGBTQ people's experiences and the probably blurred line that separates our emotional relation to a given space and its *ethos*, I will employ the use of *sense of place* as in this work I am exploring this emotional aspect from the perspective of space[45].

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[44] Out of curiosity, in biology fields as ecology and conservation, scientists are using people's sense of place as a means to turn their conservation efforts more effective. (e.g. understanding how a lake is emotionally important for a given community might help them to have the community as allies preserving the natural habitats).

[45] Here I would like to take a moment to make a reflection about the idea of *ethos*. For practical reasons I use the concept of sense of place to address the questions about emotions and space. But I believe that the choice of using ethos could be equally valid. It is although important to refer that for the employment of the concept of *ethos*, it must be an employment that does not fall in an essentialist dimension, reducing its basis to a dichotomous view between psychology and culture - which have been critically discarded from anthropology scholarship. It is crucial to engage with *ethos* as something that reflects places of power, resistances, entailing voices of diversity and different positionalities, all in all, to picture culture as something that has to be analysed in a historical and critical perspective. Moreover, all of these dimensions are also influenced by other factors as the environment, such as spaces and places, and in the case of the case study under analysis, insularity. It is with this multidimensional view of ethos that I appeal to Bateson's work. I believe it will become more clear as I will continue to explore (further in this chapter, please refer to section 5.3- page 129) this aspect from the book Steps to an Ecology of Mind (Bateson, 1972).

Coming back to Anderson (2015), the author explains to us that the sense of place can be an individual experience, but sometimes it is collective, which I argue is the case of insularity in my investigation. The author gives the interesting example of the Welsh, who have in their vocabulary the word "hitaeth" which is "that sense of belonging or homesickness that Welsh people feel in their hearts when a long way from the Valleys of the south or the mountains of the north" (Anderson, 2015: 56). This example immediately reminded me of the term *Açorianidade* - word that "expresses the historical, geographical, social and human condition of being Azorean" (Lusa, 2017: np) - that was firstly used by Vitorino Nemésio in the journal chronicle cited before in this chapter (page 120), that according to Machado Pires (1995), is a text filled with homesickness of his (Nemésio's) home-island.

Reflecting on these aspects helped me to better understand the empirical evidence of my data. In the previous chapter, I discussed the sense of constant surveillance that LGBTQ people seemed *to feel* whilst living in this insular setting. I advance that this perceived surveillance is precisely related to what geographers call sense of place and, this investigation leads me to argue, that this is a truly important aspect to reflect on when researching LGBTQ people's experiences.

 In the case of the Azorean archipelago, the islands are *spaces* that offer legal conditions for queer people to live freely and without prejudice, but according to the results of this investigation, their *places* are not. I believe that happens because *insularity* is more than a geographical characteristic of the space, it is also an emotional experience – regarding a place. The shared sense of place that people who live in small insular communities have regarding the familiarity with everyone else ("everyone knows everyone"), although it is shared by both queer and cis/hetero individuals, has a particular impact on the way LGBTQ people feel. If on the one hand, for cis/hetero people it also fosters a feeling of a constant sense of surveillance, this surveillance can influence the way they behave socially but it has nothing to do with their identity; social identity, maybe, but not their sense of self. In other words, this sense of surveillance does not make them "the other". On the other hand, for queer people, it is who they are that triggers the menace of sociocultural homeostasis, they become "sexual others who do not conform to the expectations inscribed in such spaces [and that might make them] feel 'out of place', and experience a range of emotional conflicts that require management and a duplicitous 'presentation of self'" (Hubbard, 2008: 643; see also Valentine, 1993). As such, public

behaviour will not just be about having a good social image, but it is a balance between personal identity and public image. In other words, although the geographical characteristic of insularity seems to embody a sense of place that is shared by all the insular community, it has a different impact on cis/hetero and queer individuals.

A thought-provoking way of reflecting on the sense of place is through the experiences shared by participants in my study about the public visibility of LGBTQ people locally. As demonstrated in Chapter 3 and discussed in detail in Chapter 4, the categories of "geography", "insularity" and "invisibility" were strongly related to each other. The code relation tool showed an interesting triangulation between the categories (see figure 3.5 page 68), and whilst analysed in detail, the conclusions were that public visibility was unwelcomed for the large majority of the participants of this study, and pictured as undesirable for the local LGBTQ community in general. As is also explored in the previous chapter, "public visibility" of other LGBTQ people (e.g. same-sex couples kissing in public) seems to be the scale that the local people use to perceive how the Azores have become less conservative regarding sexual/gender liberties. In other words, people used the examples of public demonstrations of affection between LGBTQ people to corroborate the fact that "things are getting better" for queer people in the Azores. The interesting part of this, is that the examples that were referred to demonstrate it, were mostly performed by tourists. Jorge, a local LGBTQ activist, referred to it as follows:

> *In the streets - the tourists have been having a great role about what I am about to say - which is, here, my LGBTQ friends can't walk in the streets holding hands. They can't break the taboo. It's the tourists who come to break it.*

<div align="right">Jorge, gay, 20-29</div>

The example of the tourists was not used just to show how things are "getting better", it was also used to demonstrate how they believed that in some Azorean islands it was easier to be LGBTQ than in others. One of the key informants who worked in a local association explained it as follows:

(…) because some islands that always had tourism, always had more people from the outside, living, on vacation. Therefore, I always thought about Faial as an island where people were more open-minded, because at least they saw outsiders that came by yacht, and other islands didn't have that.

Key informant

Even on a smaller scale, the example of tourism serves to show how queer visibility is starting to happen in the Azorean context, but also to show how it is welcomed differently depending on the space where it happens. As Maria explains:

For example imagine, now with the tourism which we had a lot, and a lot of gay tourism… Last summer, believe me, we had loads of gay tourism. And if a [gay] couple goes to Lomba da Maia [small peripheral village, in São Miguel], or to Porto Formoso [another example of a very small place in São Miguel], oh… that will seem like the soap opera of the day. They [the tourists] will have people... it's not that they [the tourists] will be disturbed, but people will stare at them, because it's a new thing… this will happen. But if you are in Ponta Delgada, or at Furnas, which are already extremely touristic places, even at Mosteiros, this will not happen.

Maria, WSW, 50-59

I felt surprised by the number of participants (in nine of the interviews, to be precise) that used tourism as an example to illustrate their feeling that "things are getting better". Arguably, the insular effect does not affect tourists (or other short-time visitors) and I trust that the fundamental cause for that is because tourists do not share an essential aspect with the local queer community which is precisely the sense of place. As Anderson

(2015:176) explained, "you may travel through spaces (…), but you will live your everyday lives in places". That is to say that the way we feel when we are socially connected to the space, interferes with our behaviour.

I consider that the three axes identified to be the causes of the insular effect (please refer to page 104, figure 4.1), namely the insular space, the feeling of exposure and the dominant social codes, are only applicable if the person shares the sense of place. That means that it would be necessary to be part of the local culture, to be socially rooted. Insularity *per se* is not capable of causing the insular effect; one must be emotionally connected to the space. I found empirically-based evidence that sustains my argument, and one of them is the experience of Fausto:

> *(…) I never felt discriminated, not that I noticed… I felt discriminated once, we were in Malta, and I met a guy and we were hanging out, at night, and then we started kissing on the street, which is perfectly normal – but that's something I do not do here [the Azores].*

> Fausto, gay, 50-59

When Fausto is at his home island, his sense of place "activates" the insular effect. In his case, he conforms to the maintenance of the local sociocultural homeostasis. Interestingly, the way his insularity works in the Azores is not transposable to other places, even to ones with geographical insular characteristics, as it is the case in Malta. And that would be because his sense of place in Malta is completely different from the sense of place of the Maltese researcher I previously mentioned, for whom holding hands with his partner in the streets of Malta is understood as unsafe. Therefore, despite being both islanders and gay men referring to the same insular space (Malta), what seems to influence their opposite social behaviour is precisely their different sense of place.

Fundamentally, what I have been arguing is that insularity can be interpreted as more than a geographical characteristic of space, "insularity" can also be a social construct or a cognitive resource, with empirical validity. If we consider the hypothesis of looking at insularity as something that happens between culture and space, I believe it is interesting

to think about the insular sense of place expressed by the participants of this study as something that does not come exclusively from the island. As a matter of fact, one can identify it as people compare their experiences within the island, outside the island, as they relate it with the people who come from the exterior of the island.

I believe this conclusion can help us to reflect on future interventions toward the human rights of LGBTQ people living in insular contexts, trying to transform spaces into liveable places for gender and sexual diversity, or at least, to help us understand that having queer spaces is not enough, as everyday life happens in places. Therefore, if one can look at the "sociocultural greenhouses" as useful regarding aspects such as the progressiveness of the legal frame, these changes remain applicable only to the superficial layer which is space. To go deeper, that is, to change places one must understand which triggers activate the insular effect. In the case of my investigation, the way people feel whilst living on the islands turned out to be what I consider the key aspect of this study, and the way people felt was directly related to a fundamental aspect of the space, which is intimacy.

This section reflected on how one could picture insularity as happening in the intersection between culture and space, and how relevant could be to understand the emotional connection of the people to the places in order to understand what I have been calling the insular effect. The next section will analyse insularity from the perspective of one of its more distinctive characteristics: intimacy.

5.3- Make intimacy intimate again

I have been reflecting on the importance of understanding insularity to comprehend how it affects the lives of queer people in small isolated spaces. I argued that insularity is more

than a geographical condition; it is also a shared feeling by the local community which happens at the intersection between culture and space. It was important to reflect on this characteristic, as it is an aspect that although it is shared by the local people, has a different impact on LGBTQ people and people whose identities do not challenge cis-heteronormativity.

Places and spaces are by default defined by the cis-heteronorm. That means that they 'should' be used – or are expected to be used – by explicit men and explicit women, who behave unequivocally masculine and feminine, respectively. Consequently, this cis-heteronormativity also assumes that those physical and cultural bodies are 'naturally' attracted to each other. As a result, the expected visible sexualities to be expressed are the ones defined by cis-heteronormativity, which in turn marks the space as cisgender and heterosexual without the need for any name or label (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Browne and Brown; 2016; Browne and Ferreira, 2016). As explained by Kath Browne and Gavin Brown (2006:n.p.) "the sexuality of space tends only to be noticed, and named as such, when it is not [cis]heterosexual/straight. (…) '[N]ormality' remains unmarked and invisible. In this way, places also remake people's lives, identities and bodies." These default places consequently can become spaces of 'correction' for people who do not fit the norm. These characteristics are not exclusive to insular contexts. However, I would argue that in places with intimate characteristics the effects of cis-heteronormativity seem to be aggravated.

As insularity seems to cause a shared sense of place for insular individuals, I would now turn to the hypothesis that the sense of place queer people share in cis-heteronormative places (which would be almost everywhere) triggers a form of insularity, a feeling that is shared by the LGBTQ community. As such, one might consider that cis-heteronormativity tailors places and spaces in a way that makes LGBTQ people feel insular.

But there is an important difference between this queer insular sense of place, I shall call it, whilst you are on an actual island (small, isolated, sparsely populated) or elsewhere. The insular sense of place in actual islands is aggravated by a characteristic that has been argued to be distinctive of insular communities, as already mentioned in this work, which is intimacy (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). This intimacy is characteristic of small populations that are isolated and interdependent, and where social roles frequently

overlap. In the case of this investigation, it was perceptive through the affirmation of the participants as they felt that in the islands "everyone knows everyone". In the previous chapter, I called this false perception "intimate strangers", in order to designate this characteristic of space that makes people feel as if they have proximity to everyone else in the community. Although people might not know "everyone" there is a shared panoptical sense of surveillance caused by this perception of proximity with everyone else.

In the fields of LGBTQ studies, Feminist scholarship, Anthropology, Geography of Sexualities and Cultural Geography, the concept of intimacy is often addressed in connection with notions such as family, friends, love, affection or care (Alasuutari, 2021; Morrison et al., 2012; Bell and Binnie, 2000; hooks, 2000;). As Jamieson (2005: 189) puts it:

> In everyday current usage, intimacy is often presumed to involve practices of close association, familiarity and privileged knowledge, strong positive emotional attachments, such as love, and a very particular form of 'closeness' and being 'special' to another person, associated with high levels of trust. Recent discussions of intimacy emphasize one particular practice of generating 'closeness' above all others, self-disclosure. Intimacy of the inner self, 'disclosing intimacy' or 'self-expressing intimacy' has become celebrated in popular culture as the key to a 'good relationship' although some academic work has suggested that this type of intimacy may be more of an ideological construct than an everyday lived reality.

For the queer people interviewed, the intimate character of the space generated a different perspective on the concept of intimacy, as it was more related to the feelings of surveillance, discomfort and exposure. As such, the question I would like to raise is: how do we make intimacy intimate again?

My proposal would be that it might consider useful to adapt the discourses for future interventions in such contexts.

As mentioned in the work of Mepschen et al. (2010: 965):

> [d]uring the transformations associated with the 'long 1960s', sexuality was again pivotal in the development of forms of opposition to patriarchy and heteronormativity, and to the reshaping of regimes of self. [...] The emergent feminist and lesbian and gay liberation movements employed new discourses and practices of self and reshaped political agency. These 'new social movements' reinforced an <u>ethos of individual freedom</u>, autonomy and enjoyment as alternatives to the authoritarian past [my emphasis].

Based on my analysis of the empirical material gathered in the Azorean context, I suggest that the individual freedoms that are often used as symbols of liberal democracies, progress and modernity (Puar, 2007, 2013) might not be the best tools to challenge hegemonic cis-heteronormativity in intimate spaces.

In spaces where social control and one's reputation are very relevant, amongst highly interdependent populations where people feel they carry the "weight" of their family names, it would perhaps become more useful to invest in discourses about the benefits of having a community that values diversity. Instead of singular "out loud and proud" approaches, which have been demonstrated to be unwelcomed in the context of this case study, perhaps combining discourses that are focused on how homo/bi and transphobia are harmful not just to queer individuals, but also to their families and even the local population, would be more efficient in achieving social change. Although liberal notions of individual freedom that characterize modern discourses (Žižek, 2000; Weeks, 2014) are important, they may prove to be ineffective to produce lasting social changes in insular contexts. The complexity of the management of intimacy that produces strong pressures to conform to social norms in insular spaces might need more than "self"-centred views on equality.

At this point, I would like to return to Gregory Bateson's work, this time to the book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972). The author invites us to consider five important points whilst studying aspects of behaviour in a given culture that causes the unity of a group:

> (a) *A structural aspect of unity* The behaviour of any one individual in any one context is, in some sense, cognitively consistent with the behaviour of

all the other individuals in all other contexts. Here we must be prepared to find that the inherent logic of one culture differs profoundly from that of others. (…)

This aspect of the unity of the body of behaviour patterns may be restated in terms of a standardization of the cognitive aspects of the personalities of the individuals. We may say that the patterns of thought of the individuals are so standardized that their behaviour appears to them logical.

(b) *Affective aspects of unity* In studying the culture from this point of view, we are concerned to show the emotional setting of all the details of behaviour. We shall see the whole body of behaviour as a concerted mechanism oriented toward affective satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the individuals.

This aspect of a culture may also be described in terms of a standardization of affective aspects of the personalities of the individuals, which are so modified by their culture that their behaviour is to them emotionally consistent.

(c) *Economic unity* Here we shall see the whole body of behaviour as a mechanism oriented toward the production and distribution of material objects.

(d) *Chronological and spatial unity* Here we shall see the behaviour patterns as schematically ordered according to time and place(…).

(e) *Sociological unity* Here we shall see the behaviour of the individuals as oriented toward integration and disintegration of the major unit, the Group as a whole. (…) (Bateson, 1972: 63/4).

I would like to borrow Bateson's guiding principles and test them in an attempt to understand LGBTQ people's behaviour in insular-like communities.

As mentioned by the author, these aspects are thought to be applicable in homogeneous groups/communities, or "in a state of approximate equilibrium". As communities are diverse and contemporaneity is marked by the flux of people, Bateson suggests searching for the homogeneous groups within the major differentiated communities.

For the purpose of this reflection I would suggest a replacement of the concept of "unity" with the notion of intimacy that draws from my research, that is, a result of the insularity

of the space that triggers feelings of exposure, surveillance and discomfort. I believe this concept of intimacy resembles the unity defined by Bateson as living surrounded by intimate strangers giving this false perception of oneness. In the last Chapter, I developed further this idea (please refer to section 4.2.1, page 91). The idea is that in small, thinly populated spaces people share a sense of proximity with everyone else. This was very common, as almost everyone I interviewed told me "here everyone knows everyone" even though that is not the actual case, this is a shared feeling. As such, I believe that this false sense of oneness can be equivalent to Bateson's idea of unity.

Furthermore, although one might not have what I would consider a homogenous population (is any population ever homogenous?), I think what Bateson considers "a state of approximate equilibrium" could be considered symmetric to what other authors in the field of geography of sexualities would regard as being the complex situation of intimacy that pressures the local community to conform to the social norms in insular spaces (Lowental, 1972; Bray, 1991; Baldacchino, 2012; Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). In that sense, one might consider that in insular communities people tend to maintain a state of equilibrium.

Therefore, to understand the impact of insularity on queer people, I argue for the centrality of the following aspects stemming from geographical intimacy:

(A) *Structural aspects of intimacy* – Intimate spaces are framed by cis-heteronormativity. As such, the visible patterns of behaviours tend to be standardized according to what is expected by the cis-heteronorm, which for many queer people is the logical way of behaviour.

In the case of my research, this point became clear as many of the participants would not consider their absence of visibility (as queer individuals) as if they were "closeted"; they just regarded themselves as being well adapted to the community.

(B) *Affective aspects of intimacy* – these refer to the emotional importance related to the details of behaviour. In small communities, people tend to represent more than just their individual identities. They carry the weight of being the uncle of X, the granddaughter of Y, and so on. As such, one might find it

useful to see how this emotional aspect relates to the behaviour of queer people locally.

This aspect might also be described in terms of the standardization of affective aspects of behaviours, which are so modified by cis-heteronormativity that the behaviours seem to be emotionally consistent. I would argue that this point is crucial to interpret highly discriminatory experiences that are perceived and interpreted by the victim as normal/ natural.

(C) *Economic aspects of intimacy* – Having in mind that intimate populations are highly interdependent.

In short, the interplay of society and economy plays a determinant role in the consideration (or not) of breaking the socio-cultural norms.

(D) *Chronological and spatial intimacy* – In addition to the fact that time and space are always relevant categories, in this particular context I would also consider the analytical importance of the sense of place for each person.

(E) *Sociological intimacy* – This point is related to what I designated in my work as sociocultural homeostasis[46]. Individuals' behaviour is oriented towards the integration or disintegration of the community as a whole.

In the case of this research, the insular effect spurs me to claim that the three most common behaviours were the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis (invisibility of queer identities), mobility (leaving the island) and overexposure (being visible).

I sustain that acknowledging these five aspects of insular intimacy facilitates the process of understanding how insularity affects the behaviour of LGBTQ people, and, consequently, their experiences. Considering these particularities will contribute to inform better approaches towards LGBTQ equality in such places, and may lead to

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[46] Please refer to chapter 4, section 4.2.1- *Intimate Strangers: a panoptical view of insular intimacy* (page 91).

transforming the insular features of intimacy into something that would be worthy of being intimate.

If, as argued throughout the chapter, cis-heteronormativity is not exclusive to intimate societies and is indeed able of inflicting insular-like feelings on LGBTQ people elsewhere, it would be politically and theoretically important to consider the ways in which the insular effect affects (or not) queer people living in large, metropolitan spaces. Literature demonstrates that LGBTQ people still negotiate their visibilities in many different contexts including workplace, school or healthcare services (FRA, 2022; ILGA-Europe, 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022), and most of this literature is produced based on data from urban contexts. This might be indicative of fertile grounds to test/research the hypothesis of existing a similar "insular effect" in which its origin is not rooted in the characteristics of spaces but rooted in (cis-heteronormative) places. In other words, I suggest that insularity might be an interesting lens to interpret queer people's sense of place.

In this chapter, my aim was to make a deep reflection on the concept of insularity whilst relating it to the main results of this investigation. I hope this reflection served as a theoretical contribution to the way one might look at queer people's realities whilst living in small and isolated communities. As I argue that insular places might be particularly challenging to gender and sexual diversity, I claim the importance of acknowledging not just the influence of space and culture but also being attentive to the intersection of both which lies in the sphere of emotions.

Final considerations

For several decades, the far-reaching body of knowledge on gender and sexualities has been demonstrating the pertinence of LGBTQ and feminist scholarly work. Similarly, the relentless data about discrimination in contemporary international reports and related research (FRA, 2020, 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022; ILGA, 2022) reinforce the relevance and timely necessity of continuing to contribute to such body of knowledge.

With this thesis, my aim was to contribute to a better understanding of LGBTQ people's experiences in insular contexts. Investigating queer people's experiences through the lens of insularity brought me to the theoretical intersection between geography and sexuality. The relation between geography and sexualities has been considered within the area of Geographies of Sexualities (GS) for the past forty years, with special increase and diversification after the 1990s and the publication of David Bell and Gill Valentine's *Mapping Desire* in 1995. This area of knowledge has proliferated beyond the field of geography to anthropology, sociology, and others, exploring the "centrality of place, space and other spatial relationships in shaping sexual desires, practices and identities, as well as how they are represented, policed and treated in law and everyday life" (Browne and Brown, 2016:1). Therefore, my purpose in understanding a very specific geographical context (isolated and insular) and its connections with the way we represent, shape, and police sexual and gender diversity seems to be both pertinent and necessary.

As my work unfolded and I progressed on the empirically-based analysis, I came to understand insular contexts as fertile grounds to conduct LGBTQ-related research, since they provide partially closed sociocultural ecosystems. I find this characteristic to be particularly useful for social scientists and beyond, as it enables an in-depth analysis of the relations between people, the dominant cultural and social norms, the environment, and the ways in which all of these different elements are interconnected.

In the thesis, I have designated the insular contexts as sociocultural greenhouses, opening up the possibility of analysing a specific context as if we were observing it through a

magnifying glass. I suggested that these contexts provide valuable understandings of the power relations, resistances and emotions, all of which are useful to reflect on LGBTQ people's human rights, not only in insular contexts but also beyond them (less populated, rural areas, for instance). Therefore, the development of this work encouraged me to confirm the hypothesis that conducting qualitative research in these geographical settings allows for an in-depth and nuanced understanding of inequalities and discriminations, furnishing the construction of broader theory and generating findings that are valuable to inform practice. I believe that the main findings of this research, which I will summarize in the next pages, illustrate the value of studying insular contexts.

In this thesis, data analysis has been organized into three main empirical chapters. The first one, Chapter 3 - *What's in an island?*, is where I provided a more encompassing, overall analysis of the results, from which the more detailed analytical model was developed. The analytical design facilitated the identification of the main aspects to have into account whilst studying this specific case study. These aspects became thematic threads weaved in the different chapters of the thesis, and they were four: 1) the importance of variables related to the **Social Contract** such as the family and society; 2) the ways in which the geographical contexts, such as the size of the **Space**, interfere with the people's perceptions and social relations; 3) the significance of the feeling of **Exposure** while living in these settings, and finally; 4) the importance of variables related with questions of **Mobility** (e.g. leaving the island). These four themes and subsequent categories were the main results of data analysis of the multi-methods qualitative approach to fieldwork. Therefore, they are the guiding, thematic lines that informed the theoretical work that followed.

The subsequent chapters (Chapter 4- *The Insular Effect,* and Chapter 5 - *Ecology of Insularity*) comprise the analysis of the empirical data in light of the theoretical literature, valuing an interdisciplinary and critical perspective. The next section will present an overview of the main findings of this doctoral investigation, as well as the most salient theoretical contributions of this work.

Main findings

During the theoretical analysis of Chapter 5- *The Insular Effect*, the first finding emerged as I understood how space was revealed to be an essential aspect regarding the shared experiences of LGBTQ islanders. This was made clear as the theme Mobility became one of the cornerstones of this investigation, clearly indicative of the critical role played by the geographical space informing the imaginary and the experiences of the local queer community.

Another relevant finding was the presence of a metronormative ideal of "easiness" in relation to the queer people that live in large, metropolitan spaces. This was verified by the fact that many people shared the feeling/perception that in larger Portuguese cities such as Lisbon or Oporto, it is "easier" to be an LGBTQ person, regardless of the fact that both the mainland and the archipelagos share the same legal protection in what regards queer people's rights. This aspect reinforces the centrality of analysing space, as it is also indicative of the limitations of the feeling of protection given by a progressive legal framework.

The enormous value attributed to the compliance of the Social Contract was also an important finding of this investigation. This result goes in line with the work of Baldacchino and Veenendaal in which the authors argue that in insular communities - where the populations are highly interdependent - the community is forced into a complex situation of "managed intimacy" (Lowenthal, 1987 *apud* Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). This instigates the local populations to conform to the socio-cultural norms. These results, in societies that are tailored by cis-heteronormativity, make queer public visibility unwelcomed and LGBTQ-related issues undesirable.

Another important finding was the major relevance of the feeling of over-exposure that queer people seem to experience in these contexts. This aspect has a direct relation with the scale of the context. The perception of living in a space that, because of its size, creates an intimate sense of proximity with everyone else is particularly interesting to analyse in light of LGBTQ studies. The sensation of living surrounded by what can be understood as "intimate strangers" translates into a sense of constant surveillance. As such, the geographical space functions in a way that I have argued to be similar to

Bentham's panoptic structure – a regulatory mechanism of a given society (Foucault, 1995). This feeling of omnipresent social control also instigates local queer people to conform to the dominant social codes, maintaining sociocultural homeostasis (Damásio and Damásio, 2015). As I have suggested in the thesis, a homeostatic adaptation translates into the erasure of queer visibility as a form of maintenance of the cis-heteronormative environment and, consequently, the local dominant social codes. I also argue that this conformation with sociocultural local norms has a direct impact on local LGBTQ activism as it discourages potential members from joining social movements, given that public visibility is frequently unwelcomed.

In addition to this response (the maintenance of sociocultural homeostasis), which seems to be the most common adaptation of the local queer community to the community's norms, I identified two other results emerging from my research. One was Mobility/leaving the island, which is explained by the exit of the queer people from the island and searching for comfort and security under the anonymity conferred by large, metropolitan spaces. This result is confirmed by previous investigations in the field of LGBTQ studies, especially regarding LGBTQ people from rural and peripheral contexts (Rubin, 1983; Kramer, 1995; Weston, 1995). Moreover, questions about mobility are also familiar to the scholarship in Island Studies, as being a recurring aspect in insular communities (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018). The final main finding of my research is related to a less frequently reported way of behaving that I have identified during data analysis, and it is related to non-conformance with the erasure of LGBTQ people's visibility. In those cases, participants shared a feeling of exhaustion/discomfort regarding their public visibility as they become ultra-conspicuous because of their "difference".

These seven conclusions, which resulted from the theoretical development of Chapter 4, spurred me to advance a scheme in which I develop the concept of the Insular Effect.

The Insular Effect, as I have advanced it in the dissertation, is the assemblage of the socio-geographical characteristics of the space that rebound into the local LGBTQ community isolating the subjects. I argue that this effect is an additional layer to the well-known difficulties faced by gender and sexually diverse people (FRA, 2020) and that it contributes to the maintenance of cis-heteronormativity in these geographical contexts.

The final conviction of the chapter would be that, according to the evidence of this case study, insular contexts are challenging grounds regarding LGBTQ people's human rights. The sociocultural setting nurtures into its community an insular sense of place that influences the experiences of the local queer people. The intimacy of living in a small and isolated space, with a very interdependent society, where the importance of maintaining sociocultural homeostasis is highly regarded, and the shared sense of constant surveillance conferred by the space, assembles into the insular ecosystem a handful of layers that summate to the challenges that are known to affect LGBTQ people.

In regards to Chapter 5- *Ecology of Insularity*, one of the main findings of the chapter is that the geographical characteristics of insular spaces create a socio-cultural environment - that arises from its isolation and intimate/small communities – that I have argued to function as being similar to Sociocultural Greenhouses. These greenhouses may operate as catalysers for progressive change towards LGBTQ people's equality (e.g. changing laws rapidly), as the intimate characteristics of the space might facilitate the impact of political pressures and other forms of lobbying. This conclusion does not contradict the last conclusion of Chapter 4 (of insular spaces as challenging grounds for LGBTQ equality), as it does not seem to work the same way in what concerns social rights. I also argue in Chapter 5 that this catalysing effect produced by the Sociocultural Greenhouse might turn the legal advances more volatile in insular contexts than elsewhere.

The tacit omnipresence of the weight of insularity in all of the interviews, besides endorsing the centrality of space when analysing insular communities as discussed in Chapter 4, also enlightens the need to consider a core aspect which is queer people's sense of place. This means that the way an LGBTQ person feels when they are socially rooted and living in these contexts interferes with their social behaviour. As such, I ponder that insularity can be interpreted as more than a geographical characteristic of the space, it is also a social construct and a cognitive resource with empirical validity. This means that the insular geographical characteristic *per se* is not capable of causing the Insular Effect. The evidence leads me to assert that, in the case of LGBTQ people, when the person is socially rooted and is part of the local culture, it is their sense of place that activates the Insular Effect.

Therefore, understanding the way that queer people feel when living in insular societies made me understand the importance of the distinction that geographers make between

spaces and places, and how valuable it is to apply this distinction in LGBTQ studies. The archipelago under scrutiny is a space with legal conditions for LGBTQ people to live freely, but their places are not.

Insularity seems to cause a collective experience which is a shared sense of place for insular individuals. Even so, there is an important difference between cis-heteronormative people and people who are gender and/or sexually diverse. In the case of the cis-heteronormative population, the insular sense of place possibly influences the way people behave publicly. This happens because the social image is something very close to the heart in intimate societies. Notwithstanding, for the LGBTQ population the insular sense of place conflicts directly with their sense of self, as it is who they are/whom they love that threats the local sociocultural homeostasis.

These findings encourage me to support the claim that insular spaces and their sociocultural greenhouses can be useful for features such as the progressiveness of the legal framework, but that this aspect does not trespass on a superficial layer which is space. To go deeper and transform places we must understand which triggers activate the insular effect. In the case of this investigation, it was the queer people's insular sense of place. If we consider these findings as scientifically valid results, I also advance the hypothesis that compulsory cis-heteronormativity (Rich, 1980) in other spaces (e.g. large, metropolitan cities) might also foster a shared sense of place for LGBTQ people. In other words, if we accept that most places are tailored by cis-heteronormativity they might incite a similar collective sense of place for LGBTQ people that can, in a way, make them feel insular. If so, it might be interesting to search for something similar to the insular effect outside the insular geographies.

Another relevant aspect of this work is the reflection on how the modern discourses, characteristic of liberal democracies and centred on individual freedoms, might not be the best approaches to insular settings. The complexities of intimate societies which are highly interdependent might foster more advantageously another kind of rhetoric, perhaps more centred on the benefit of the whole (community) than the self (individual).

One of the final contributions of this work is a 5 point suggestion of a theoretical approach to LGBTQ studies in insular communities. Inspired by the work of Gregory Bateson (1972) on the cultural aspects of behaviour that causes the unity of a group, in

Chapter 5 I suggested that in order to have a deep understanding of the complexities of living in places with a "social ecology of smallness" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 1999:340) it can be valuable to consider these five aspects regarding intimacy:

- the structural aspects of intimacy;
- the affective aspects of intimacy;
- the economic aspects of intimacy;
- the chronological and spatial intimacy;
- and sociological intimacy. [47]

The final finding which articulates with the leading question of this investigation would be that "insularity" constitutes indeed a very interesting and fruitful lens of analysis to undertake Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer related research. The unique ecosystem nurtured by territorial discontinuity creates a precious opportunity to reflect on issues that are pivotal for LGBTQ studies such as intimacy, isolation or (in)visibility.

In the next section, I will put forward the reasons why I believe that researching LGBTQ people's experiences through an insular perspective contributes to the general body of knowledge of LGBTQ studies. In this final section, I will also identify some limitations of this research and propose directions for future work.

Conclusions, limitations and directions for future work

This thesis, through its multi-methods qualitative approach, sought to contribute to the body of literature on LGBTQ studies, as it considered a case study with a specific geographical context that has been under-explored in both national and international settings.

The research undertaken adds to the national body of LGBTQ knowledge of the experiences of these insular queer people, whose stories became valuable material to understand the resistances, power relations and emotional aspects of queer people's

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[47] I explore these five points in detail in chapter 5. Please refer to page 134-135.

insularity. The aim of this investigation was not to provide a model of what the experiences of being an LGBTQ person in insular contexts are, nor to universalize what I discuss and theorize as being the reality of every person or even of every insular context. Instead, the ambition of this research is that the reflections offered can inform a conceptual analysis of significant aspects to take into account when variables such as geographical insularity and LGBTQ people intersect. Moreover, some of these "insular" considerations might also be useful to the understanding and practice of LGBTQ theory outside insular geographical contexts.

This study, as any other, is not exempt from criticism. Some of its shortcomings are circumstantial, as the ones addressed in the methodological chapter (Chapter 2- *Steps to an 'out there' approach to the 'out there'*). In short, these circumstantial limitations stem from the pandemic context that generated several impacts on data gathering; and limitations on sample diversity regarding aspects such as race, or disabilities. Others, such as the selection regarding data collection, derive from the choice of the researcher. Therefore, perhaps collecting data from other sources besides the ones addressed in this work could bring equally valuable perspectives. For example, having a larger and more diverse group of key informants, such as healthcare professionals or teachers, could also have brought helpful insights.

The interdisciplinary approach that was chosen to conduct this research was constituted by fields of knowledge that are immensely vast, namely Geography of Sexualities (Queer Geographies and Rural Queer Studies), Island Studies and LGBTQ studies. As Ken Plummer reminds us, "[w]e live in a world of mobile [disciplinary] borders" (Plummer, 2008:12). This fact is at the same time a limitation and a possibility for future research, as there is room for additional investigation using the same theoretical grounds, or perhaps, adding some new lens to the analysis, such as cultural psychology or cyber studies, for example.

The development of the research design in this investigation did not point me in the direction of the internet or the role of the "new technologies" in the experiences that were at the core of my analysis. Notwithstanding, the use of "gay apps" or social media seems to be a fertile ground to reflect on aspects such as physical and online space and the ways in which they interfere with LGBTQ people's lives, as it is demonstrated by the works of Bryce Renninger (2018), Andre Cavalcante (2019), or Shelley Craig et al. (2021). On

another note, the influence of technologies on the configuration of LGBTQ youth also shed light on how "youth use this material, embodied, and visual texts to reinforce, challenge, combat, and/or resist identities of difference" (Wargo, 2017: 560). These are fields that have not been intersected with LGBTQ insular experiences and that can bring valuable understandings of how the internet can (and if does, the extent to which) influence queer people's insular experiences.

Rather than considering the insular effect just through the lens of geographical isolation, it might be interesting to explore the ways in which a similar effect can be felt by LGBTQ people who live in large, metropolitan cities. Overall, taking into account queer people's sense of place when conducting LGBTQ-related research.

The results of this investigation led me to argue that the majority of people interviewed tend to maintain sociocultural homeostasis. In Portugal, the progressive legal framework allows same-sex marriage and adoption (just to give two examples). Both these examples include, in some ways, public visibility, which this work demonstrated to be unwelcome to the majority of the people interviewed. It would certainly be worth investigating further if the insular effect affects the ways in which people enjoy their legal rights.

To conclude, I believe that this investigation successfully examined the particularities of the experiences shared by participants of this study. It explored what were the main aspects that seemed to be relevant to the lives of LGBTQ people in the Azorean context. It contributed to corroborate the important relationship between geographical space and sexualities. It helped to understand the significance of taking into account emotional elements while doing research in such contexts (and perhaps beyond them). Moreover, it also developed a theoretical approach to LGBTQ studies in insular communities.

I hope that this thesis, and the empirical data it provides, will contribute to the advancement of the field of LGTBQ studies, especially Rural Queer Studies, by providing not only new information but also reflexive cues about the similarities between rurality and insularity. I wish that these data and reflections will provide new insights for understanding the role of the geographical context in LGBTQ people's experiences, as well as the potentially important aspects to have into account while looking at insular communities.

Hopefully, this scientific endeavour can inform future academic work in isolated queer communities. As it can also be useful to instruct practice in structures whose intentions, such as the ones in this research, are aligned with social progressiveness toward LGBTQ people's equality.

The empirical data collected indicate the importance to add to the "grammar of human rights" (Santos, 2013; 2018) the intersection between geographical isolation and LGBTQ people's experiences, and also, the significance of queer people's sense of place. The recognition of the idiosyncrasies of living in spaces impregnated with a "social ecology of smallness" (Baldacchino and Veenendaal, 2018: 340), filled with resistances, silences and suffering, - notwithstanding the Portuguese progressive legal framework - shed light on the need to consider these aspects in the respect for human dignity while employing human rights discourses and implementing practices. The insular effect, which isolates the local queer community, must be resisted and changed. Those changes can be earned, not solely, but certainly side by side, with the power of words. As Ursula Le Guin brilliantly reminded us during her speech at the 2014 National Books awards, "power can be resisted and changed by human beings; resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art — the art of words. (…) The name of our beautiful reward is not profit. Its name is freedom".

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