

In the Azores, looking for the regions of knowing

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ABSTRACT: This multi-voice script highlights the process of five years of research with coastal fishing communities in the Azores islands of Portugal. Initially, we used photo elicitation and focus groups to invite people to speak about the sea and all the deep, complex and sometimes contradictory meanings that it may have. In later years, the researchers sought environmental justice within everyday processes, using deep ethnographic and autobiographic-narrative inquiry which led to participation in learning about – as well as supporting – collaborations between fishers, scientists and policy makers. The text is constructed via arts-informed research methodology and consists of two parallel, creative narratives, intermittently interrupted by a visual narrative. This work calls for looking at the sea through new eyes, hearing with new ears, feeling differently and awakening to the possibility of knowing the sea in unfamiliar ways.

Keywords: arts-informed research, Azores, fishing communities, islands, multivoice theatre, participatory reflexive practice, sea, social construction

Setting the scene

Driving to the Casa do Povo in Porto Judeu de Cima, we take the high main road up about a kilometre from the coast. In the distance the grey ocean seems to watch us through the misty openings of this February day. We are welcomed into the room of mostly women who may be as nervous as us for this first encounter. Alison stumbles through a hello and thank you to the coordinator of the program who arranged for our visit and asks the group if they would like to participate. Smiles and laughter rings at the mix of poor Portuguese and bits of English as we pass around the photos.

Alison: *Please look at these photos taken by me, a newly arrived Canadian; but also remember images from your own lives, images from other islands, images that a camera cannot capture. We want to know what the sea means to you.*

Women at the Casa do Povo: *Ah, but we have nothing important to say...*

Ana Arroz shakes her head with a smile knowing that that is not true and invites a woman to come sit by the data recorder. Two other women also join into the conversation.

Prologue

This multi-voiced script/article of life and research in the Azores islands follows the continuing critiques of the concepts of sustainability (Connelly, 2007; O'Connor, 1994; Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgard, 2006) and nature conservation (Barca, 2014) as well as aims to trouble the very notion of inner and outermost that the European Commission uses for space and which researchers use for knowledge and voice. Remoteness, isolation and smallness have been postulated as being challenging for the Azores; yet, in “thinking with the archipelago” (Stratford, 2013) points out that to claim these characteristics much social relationships, history and politics must be ignored. This ignorance points to strong power imbalances within the world of professional meaning-making and policy creation, in turn leading to further crypto-positivism within research and education (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). The title is meant to play between implicit and explicit discourses and practices, contradictory in meaning and intent; and following Tuck and Yang (2014, p. 812) who ask “What knowledge is desirable? Who profits? Who loses/pays/gives something away? Who is coerced, empowered, appointed to give away knowledge?” The actual names of all the people involved are used, with their full informed consent.

The form of the text as well as the content are meant to challenge, and to help to “hear the world and to make sure that it can speak back ... to render the world problematic by elaborating questions” (Thrift, 2008, p. 18). It refuses to conform to expectations to always interpret meanings of the words spoken by the people in the interviews and other research interactions (cf. Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005). It follows Taylor (2005) who suggests that a researcher needs to take herself seriously as an agent of knowledge production, to “accept the responsibilities of your practices as researcher, by accepting your practice of meaning creation as a political act of transformation” (Neilson & Castro, 2016). This position was taken as a “performative ontological project” to actively contribute to “novel economic performances ... in which we enact and construct ... economic realities” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 615). Like Gibson-Graham, who are two people who deliberately created a combined scholarly identity as a political act to break the hierarchies generated by name order in papers, this “aesthetic research” also challenges the hierarchy created by research practices.

This text is written as a multi-voice script (McGowan, n.d.), following calls for creative understandings and recognition of the equal importance of the real and the imagined of island life (Stratford, 2013) and “our being’s primal intercorporeality” (Maxwell, 2012) with the island. As Nolan (2014) asserts, Why not? Why not disrupt “the traditional, linear conceptions of collection, interpretation and dissemination” [so that] distinctions between researcher, “subjects” and audience disturbed-research become a flexible, recursive process with its “end” less definable” (Roberts, 2008, p. 18)? Harris, Hunter and Hall (2015) suggest that arts based research, such as this, is coming of age and urge “readers to move beyond binarized notions of scientific ‘versus’ arts based research that still dominates academic research environments and conversation, and outmoded practice/theory divides” (p. iii). Arts-based research paradigms guide ways of knowing, doing, being and becoming; in terms of methodology, it is as varied as the practices of the artists/scholars involved. But the defining element as art-based is the “primacy given to interacting with and making art” (Conrad & Black, 2015, p.5). Ontologically, we are “creative and aesthetic beings in intersubjective relation with each other and our environment” (p. 7), and using aesthetics as sensory, perceptual and emotional knowing, is the only identified research paradigm that accounts for aesthetics. The art in art-based research processes is inherently “alongside philosophy and science, as a way of organizing or composing the chaos of the cosmos (nature, the universe, the infinite), to extract something constant or coherent (Grosz, 2008)” (Conrad & Beck, 2015, p. 10). In terms of epistemology, art and making art is fundamental to knowledge creation and “fundamental to our very being”; we know via relations in multiple ways created “through creating, embodiment, feelings, intuition, and spirit” (Conrad & Beck, 2015, p. 11). An arts-based research paradigm values “openings, becoming-other, standing up against oppression, and brings value to all aspects of human life: these are among the efforts that must be undertaken through the arts in/as research” (Conrad & Beck, 2015, p. 13); this paradigm seeks to contribute to life and transform the world for the good of all life forms (axiology) (Conrad & Beck, 2015).

Multiple artistic elements and art practices, including theatre, fiction, multi-voice and photo storytelling have been used. Photos as illustration are common in much writing; photos as analysis, exploring what the contents of a photo can tell us about an experience is less common, but not unknown; although the rarer third use of photos, to make an argument, is our main goal (Newbury, 2011). Not all the photos have text below, but where there is text it is to include the context of the photo discourse, so the convention of the caption with numbers and titles to indicate what the photo illustrates, is not used. This photo conversation makes regular interruptions in the side-by-side dual text conversation (McGowan, 2015). The text on the right is the central conversation about the sea elicited through photos and primarily created by elderly members of fishing communities. The text on the left is multiple conversations related to the right-side conversation and the ways we all participate in telling these stories. The use of a different font for the text on the right side is based on helping readers follow each current of conversation without undermining the perceived value with the visual cues of informality.

Script

Narrator

Diverse stories emerge and cross in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on the Azores islands. Follow the journeys of multiple people who spoke to one another to learn about each other’s history and life, having been swept by multiple currents to cling onto these islands. Some

stories were told directly by those who lived the stories and others told by people who heard the telling of the stories. This is an Azores-based social construction of the knowledge known as the ocean; the storytellers highlight their own lived perspectives to show how they, together and along with the waves, fish and *cagarros* make meaning of the sea (Cagarros are seabirds whose maniacal call rings through the islands).

Chorus

We are fishers and researchers, mothers and brothers, birds and sailors and so our experiences and perspectives differ and like the sea of which we tell, our experiences are fluid. Our exploration of this journey is important because the policies and informal rules that govern fishing on the sea as well as the lessons taught to our children rely on only a narrow selection of understandings of the sea, voices and concerns, and hence do not serve all of us equally. Some individuals, some groups and some ideas have more power than others, in determining what gets listened to, what is treated as the norm and what gets edited out as unnecessary, peripheral, or unimportant. Regardless of how strongly we are motivated to build together an environmentally just and sustainable ocean, success in this endeavour requires understanding and changing the processes of negotiating meanings between each other and between groups in society. In other words, we need to learn about how telling these stories influence meaning. We have to explore how telling about limpets as a show of being proud of not being hungry, rather than merely describing food or a scientific classification of sea life affect meaning as well as the ways meaning is made by the identity of storytellers and their ways of telling.

Narrator

This is an attempt to change the normal practice by privileging the perspectives and voices that are commonly considered, like the islands, to be ultra-peripheral or which have been deliberately marginalized in public discussions about sustainability. These voices are not inherently better than others, or more close to the “truth”, however presenting them as the reference for other narratives creates a re-balancing, therefore serving social justice. Since many of these people live in a close relationship with the sea and marine ecosystems, their perspectives are likely closely attuned to the ocean and hence highly relevant.

This is built around the core stories told by the Azorean men and women primarily from fishing communities. Narratives of other people, including those of the researchers were sought and are presented by following the lead of these core stories. In order to be able to seek and present multiple stories in this manner, we engaged in a long process of reflecting on our residency in the Azores while also learning about fishing policies, fishing methods, fish biology, regional economics and politics, and local cultures: food, music, wine and dance. Some of the researchers were well equipped to understand the context of the core stories by virtue of being Azorean from birth. Nevertheless, Alison, who adopted the Azores as home for 6 years led the creation of this script. As the principle researcher and author by definition, she primarily chose the players, the scripts and directed and choreographed the storytelling. By highlighting this explicit role, we hope to invite readers to reflect critically on her influences on their listening and learning from these stories of the sea. Alison along with Rosalina Gabriel, Ana Moura Arroz, Enésima Mendonça, Ana Picanço and David Ross travelled across Terceira, Pico and São Jorge, three of the nine Azorean islands, to visit primarily retired people to hear them talk about growing up, living, and working in the middle of the sea.

Chorus

We began by identifying current and past work and pastimes related to the sea. We contacted sailing clubs, whale boat teams, organizations such as the association of wives of fishers and fleet owners, museums and marine tourism operators on multiple islands in order to find key informants, as well as gather photo images. We used photo elicitation and focus groups to overcome potential barriers of language and other social differences between the participants and the researchers (Doyle, 2001). We spoke to groups explaining our interest in their stories and experiences related to the sea. We offered a selection of photos to explore and to start conversations between individuals within focus groups. Photos allowed participants to engage with complexity and changing meanings (Beilin, 2005). They triggered memories, nuances and ambiguity, challenged as well as built rapport and helped to avoid researcher misinterpretation (Hurworth, 2003). Initial data, gathered between 2008 and 2010, includes some 25 hours of focus group discussions and interviews done at Casas do Povo and in various fishing ports with people associated with fishing and past whaling. The transcribed text was edited carefully to maintain the cadence and regional ways of speaking, but to remove interruptions and occasionally add words that were implied but only spoken later in the text.

After finishing the focus groups, we began taking more active roles in conversations. Initially we saw our roles as returning the Azorean stories to their communities: for example, via an invited panel along with UMAR-Açores (União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta, an association for women and gender equity) at the Fish Congress organized by the Federation of Azorean Fishers, a workshop for teachers on marine biology and culture, and one for local children about their sea heritage, both co-organized with fishing associations. We sought to retell stories without changing or interpreting them; however, as we found ourselves invited by the regional government to speak to other researchers and policy makers about fishing policy, so important to Azorean fishers, we understood that we needed to ask more questions and help make more space for the fishers to identify and address policy issues directly. In 2011, we organized an event in which fishers from all the islands would talk to one another, with international scientists and local policy makers (Neilson, Bulhão Pato & Sousa, 2012).

Narrator

During this period, the research team grew to include Carlos de Bulhão Pato and Laurinda Sousa, while some of the original team members ended their active participation. The work also extended to include other islands and other activities.

In the next section, as a nod to the photo elicitation focus groups, photos are offered as a visual conversation, to be considered simultaneously while reading text conversations. Follow these multiple dialogues by what catches the eye, ear and imagination. The selection and presentation of photos is deliberate, inviting broad and open meaning-making, hopefully allowing dynamic social constructions of meaning. (The two photos below, however, are used mainly to illustrate part of what is written above.)



Focus group Casa do Povo, Porto Judeu, Terceira.
Video still capture. © Alison Neilson 2009.



Focus group Casa do Povo, Porto Martins, Terceira.
Video still capture. © Alison Neilson 2009.

Listening to conversations

Enésima Mendonça and Ana Picanço facilitated many of the focus groups on Terceira and Pico islands and in 2014 spoke with Alison about their perspectives as Azoreans as well as their learning from the stories they heard five years earlier.

Enésima

As a native of the Azores, the sea is as important as the air we breathe, I cannot imagine living in a place without being able to see the ocean every day. I grew up thinking and dreaming about what was beyond the horizon, beyond the sea, as if the sea had the possibility to fulfil the dreams of children more easily. Since it was a border between the islands and the continent it was also like a mystery, a powerful being.

Ana Picanço

I resonate with Enésima's words about the sea being a mystery and our continuing wondering and longing for what is beyond the sea, but I mostly feel the sea as the connection between the islands.

Enésima

Nowadays, apart from recognizing the sea as one of the most important sources of resources, it continues to have the same power to make me dream and make me feel free.

Ana

From the interviews, I saw that the women saw the sea as a freeing moment, they could relax, show their legs. They spoke about the sensation of freedom near the sea and they could catch fish and collect lapas and they remembered with saudade. "Saudade" is a word very related to crossing the sea, the feeling when people leave the islands. The islands are connected with the mainland through this emotion because the sea connects them both.

An Azorean conversation - Lapas

The conversation presented below is both "fact" since it is composed of actual parts of the recorded conversations which occurred in focus groups and individual interviews, but it is also deliberate "fiction" since it is a mixture from multiple conversations: a quilt of conversations about lapas. This deliberate modification of the recorded conversations is an attempt to explicitly acknowledge that it is impossible for anyone to retell stories without changing them. These specific fragments were recorded in Porto Judeu (TPJ) and Porto Martins (TPM) on Terceira Island, as well as in Prainha (PPr), Ribeiras (PRi), and Santo António (PSA) on Pico Island.

Similar discussions occurred in other parts of these islands as well as in São Jorge Island. The English translation for lapas is limpets (aquatic snails that stick to rocks near the shore), but for the rest of this document, we chose to use the word lapas since it is commonly used when speaking English in the islands. Like the names of people and places, which we do not translate to other languages, lapas calls for the same level of respect.

Maria do Livramento Dias (PSA)

The connection that we had with the sea was that many times we would catch lapas for lunch, to be the main food for lunch. Some people remained in the house baking potatoes, and since we still lived close to the sea, some of us would go down by a laneway to pick lapas and we came home. We ate a few raw; some

The old ladies amused themselves, freed themselves, even their clothing, with the sea. During Salazar's dictatorship women had to wear long pants, women didn't work outside of the home, so going to the sea to catch small fish or lapas allowed them the freedom to wear shorts and to work outside the house.

The sea was a release from the oppression of the dictatorship. The women also worked a lot, had lots of children, so the sea was an escape, a way to release stress. The men also had more opportunities to work by the sea.

Enésima

I've always liked to listen to older people, so it was very enjoyable

Thinking about teaching

In addition to facilitating the first focus groups and interviews with fishers in the ports, Ana Moura Arroz and Rosalina Gabriel have been directly involved in the process of reviewing and analysing the interviews as senior researchers and teachers of the University of the Azores and mentors to Alison. During the long process of reading and finding meanings from the transcripts of the focus groups, Ana and Rosalina have also reflected on what these conversations about the sea mean for their practices of education and ecology. This constructed conversation has been drawn from multiple recorded meetings, jointly created documents, emails and interviews with Alison between 2009 and 2014.

Ana

The first thing I notice is that I had never taken the time to think about how important the sea is to me.

Rosalina

I was struck by the sea as communication among different cultures as well as among species. Coconuts, for example that go to other shores via ocean waves are communicating something from their origins.

we would pour boiling water on top. Others we cast into the potato water and made lunch that was 60 years ago, or 70 or so.

Matilde do Coração Jesus (PSA)

I always liked the sea. I married at age 22 and went to live there by the seashore. And the sea was always my best neighbour, my friend. It helped me a lot in my life. I reached the point where I bought a motorboat, took a sailor license. I sailed on that sea with Maria's husband, I went with him but I didn't have a license. Afterwards, I got the sailor's license so I could go alone, because he died and we were left without a captain. We had a small motorboat and we went on that boat out there. At 120 fathoms I caught lots of fish, perhaps because I was crazy.

I would wish I'm going there and I caught fish. It was the abundance of my house. I buy fish since 3 years now because I cannot go in the sea and the launch is stored at home. And my sailor's license has expired because it lasts only for a few years and I did not renew it because I will be 83.

I have sons-in-law, when they come here, they want to go pick lapas, barnacles, go fishing, and the boat is already there in the house waiting for them. The sea was a treasure for me, because I collected lapas, caught lots of fish with a cane sitting on the rocks, caught parrot fish, caught trigger fish, caught young horse mackerel, caught

Ana

This work showed me the complexity of the sea. The “sea” in Portuguese culture and history is huge, but I was still amazed by it in these conversations. There were several directions that intersect to be able to give meaning to a concept that can be lapas.

Rosalina

The spirituality inherent in many of the conversations makes me think about ecosystem services and the important spiritual service that the sea performs.

Ana

I'd like to survey how the sea is represented in school curricula. The sea does not appear much. I don't think that everything has to be taught, namely that the school has to teach what the sea is, no, the school has to create space for reflection, for students to reflect on the sea; it is very strange considering the importance that it had, for example in our past, don't you think?

There is the role of the navigator, and the discovery of other worlds and the sea is so enjoyable for Portuguese people, for pleasure, even around fishing activity, all activity around it. So, even here, in the Azores surrounded by water on all sides and as islands, how does the sea get passed by? How does the sea not appear prominently in school?

There is a different type of relationship with the sea compared to the land related to the experiential part, the part of the senses; the sea is very good for that. For example, sea as nature. When we used our senses in the teachers' workshop, the teachers loved thinking about the question of nature. Many of them told about needing to be in the sea, but as adults, we have a different connection with land as nature perhaps. For how many years did they not lay on the grass?

horse mackerel, caught everything that was there. I was crazy. It was my best neighbour, my best friend and I exploited it, because I did very well in exploiting it. When I left my gate, a neighbour of mine would tell me: “You are not going alone to the coast, are you?” And I said: “Yes. But I never go alone.” “Who are you going with?” “I'm here with Our Lord.” When I go out the gate I say, “Our Lord come with me and I pay your alms.” I have nothing there, but I always come home loaded. I have enough for me and I have some to give away. Now, for the last 3 years, I catch the fish, with paper bait (money). So the dish is in the hand and the paper to pay. Now I don't fish much.

António Lima (TPM)

My life has always been the sea. Since the age of 10 years I have always had that life. My father was a fisherman.

I did not even go to school, because at that time, it was time for being in school, but was not required to be in school. I told my dad I did not want to be in school. And he said, and then it is for you to go to sea. At sea there are a lot of things to do. The sea is always bad. Some days we went out and when good, returned, there were days when we have to face the bad weather.

You have to put your hands over your ears to look forward to where one has to go.

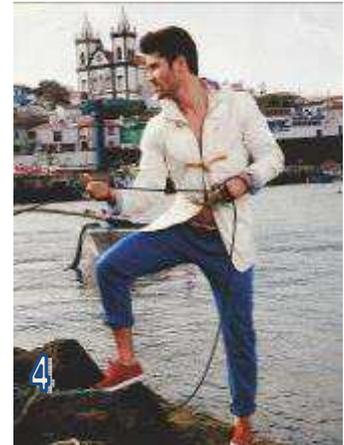
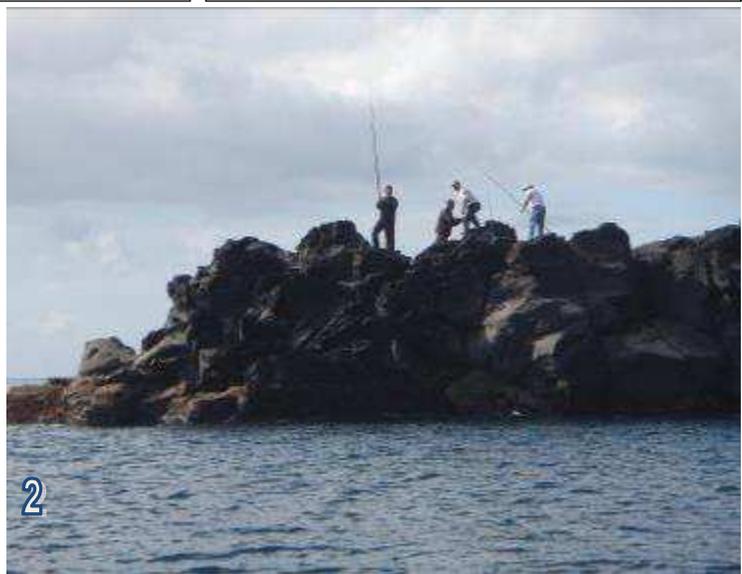
Rosalina

I also noticed the people teasing each other, sometimes arguing and challenging their versions of the stories or the meanings of the stories.

Ana

That was also one of the things that stuck to me, the elderly are longing to share, they are thirsty, that should be the word, they are willing to share their experiences, but usually they do not have anyone to do so with. It is very interesting, to see the quantity, to see, to feel, it's not that I did not know before since I have often focused on the elderly, but the amount of knowledge, experience that old people have is amazing and we do not take care of that heritage. People die and disappear,

I had packed for days. In all it is, there are good and there are bad days. And I walked many times to fish from the rocky shore when the weather did not let us go to sea, when the sea was rough we fished from the shore. I was mostly with my father when I was a boy, of 10, 11 years and we went fishing to Cabo da Praia and went fishing in reed ponds and collected a few ducks, a few sea bream and other things. And my father arrived home and gathered it into small bunches, and went back out to sell it. To get other things, you



and much information, knowledge, and experience that each of us holds disappears when we die.

Taking part in the conversations

In our role as researchers, we are simultaneously creating the meaning of the ocean and interpreting that meaning when we engage in conversation with the people who are routinely referred to as research participants. As the “researchers” began to engage deeper with the “participants”, these so-called participants began to take on greater roles as researchers in that they helped decide what was meaningful from the initial research transcripts as well as help direct this second stage of research which could be described as ethnography and participatory action research.

Specifically we saw how we could work together to address current issues that affect us on the islands. In 2011, after consulting widely on the needs and interests, fishers from all the islands as well as from various associations, and researchers came together in a 3-day seminar to explore these issues. During and following from this, Carlos and Alison went seeking answers and perspectives to inform their writing to include in a book aimed at educating EU policy makers about small scale fishing and possible changes to the Common Fisheries Policy (Neilson, Cardwell, Bulhão Pato, 2012). These works include the perspectives of Azoreans from all nine islands regarding current issues. More recently, in 2014, we revisited fishing communities in São Miguel Island to hear Micaelense perspectives on living in the sea.

As the priest of Ribeira Quente, Father Silvino was an obvious choice to ask about spirituality and the sea. Carlos and Alison shared with Father Silvino their developing thoughts about stories from other islands and asked him to talk about his community, his bond with the sea, how he appreciates the ways his community lives by the sea, and specifically the value of lapas to the community in terms of food and culture. We present his answers as monologue.

know? My father sold it and brought corn, or traded for corn, there was no money. He negotiated with what people had.

And sometimes I got to go for lapas, more often with my father. My father went to a few lapas rocky outcrops in the sea. I would pick a basket of lapas in a short while. There were many. I would pick a hamper of two bushels, a large basket of lapas, when he got home, I would put them in two baskets. I would put it on his back and he went to the road to sell. He sold lapas or plates to the houses. And it was so.

Matilde do Coração Jesus (PSA)

At 22 I started to live close to the sea. When it hits those rocks it is scary, but I live just on top the rock. I live down here in the big house. From my backyard I am on the coast. I go to collect lapas and anything else. There were many lapas, but now there aren't.

Maria Lídia Serpa da Costa (PPr)

I also collected lapas. I could swim. When I was a child, I went to the beach with other girls, and the women taught us. Sometimes we were afraid when the sea rose, with the bad weather But I always was lucky. Yes. I always went in the sea.

Maria Lídia Serpa da Costa (PPr)

Whichever was caught. Sometimes it was great, sometimes smaller, but caught. I saw several whales killed.

I think many of the men joked with the clothes they had to wear to cut up the

Padre Silvino Amaral

The crooked street, the straight street, this was because of pirates, fishers started to live here because they were in need, do you understand what I am saying? And they brought along their spouses and children, first to spend summers and then they built houses to spend winter. This is the basic story of the birth of this parish.

There is still in this parish a certain irregularity in the streets, not just because of the geography of the place which doesn't offer much space, but in second place because of pirates, all of them very narrow.

Yes, they would collect lapas, but the fishers do not. Anyone can collect lapas; women and children would do it often. They even said that they would go collect lapas instead of going for a walk. They collect the lapas right there in the rocky shore. But nowadays the ones that do it are the unemployed, to sell and get some euros. Some of the ones that collect do it now are for getting heavy drugs. It used to be part of the informal bartering economy.

The best was to eat them raw or stewed with rice and Afonso sauce.

Many people don't know about that and get repulsed when we catch a crab, put it directly into our mouth and bite it. It makes a sort of gum and then we spit the shell. Once I did that with some colleagues from the mainland that came here for a visit. I caught the crabs and ate them and then they went around calling to "come see our colleague eating live crabs!"

I never saw accidents because of lapas but there is news about many accidents mainly on the northern coast. Young men that go to the cliffs and that is dangerous. But on the seashore people know how to look after themselves.

The sea is worse than the army, there is no scheduled time, so the fishers are always in the harbour. They sit there watching the sea. This is a way to say that they can be called up at any moment.

whale. Because they had shorts or rolled up their trousers and they walked all covered in blood, and cutting the fat. But it also gave off a bad smell. The town of São Roque was all caked in a foul-smelling whale. Then the sea was all messed up too. I would collect lapas and suddenly find a mess. It was all over the sea and was being dumped where we would collect lapas.

Rúben Dutra (PSA)

First we went on a launch in the afternoon, well, late afternoon, almost at night. We went for the slipper lobster over the shoals, and with a twig that we held from this side, a stick with a hook, that is a cane. A long rod and a hook stuck in the cane and we attached the hook here. I caught slipper lobsters with a shrimp net at night with a Petromax (paraffin "Coleman" lantern) in the fore of the boat. We spotted the slipper lobster with an *óculo* (a scope to look down through a column of water). We had an *óculo* made of wood with a glass underneath. You could see the whole bottom of the sea, absolutely clear, the bottom of the sea. And we would put a shrimp net on top of it. We used the net and caught them. And then by diving, I caught lots while diving. I would go in summer, and collect 70-80 slipper lobsters. I also collected many lapas, and slipper lobsters.

If it were today, if it were today I would make lots of money. It is expensive today. But I never made any money on

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The community of Rabo de Peixe is often portrayed negatively in Portuguese media as a place of social problems and as such, also receives much attention from social workers and researchers. This attention understandably is not always welcomed by the residents. The women from the local fishing association had become strong collaborators with us during the seminar in 2011, although Carlos and Laurinda Sousa had lived and worked with people in Rabo de Peixe for many decades prior. We walked to the association building where we had often met and asked in the street for directions to the home of one of the women we knew.

any slipper lobster. I collected the slipper lobsters and told my wife to give them to people. Give away. And sometimes no one wanted them. I tied them with wires but she was still afraid. And I tied them here this way with a wire; she took them holding them far away with one arm to neighbours.

Oh. I would collect a lot, lapas and fish. I caught a lot of fish too. From the rock, with a rod. I have two boats and go angling to the sea. I go fishing a lot of times.



Maria Espírito Santo Ferreira

My father was a fisherman, he fished for mackerel at night and in the morning when he came from fishing mackerel, he would go and gather moss, we call it moss. It was algae. My father did not have a boat. I helped my father with the moss.

No, no, I never knew how to collect lapas, but a lot of people did, mostly women who have since died. They were young women, they gathered lapas, that was their life, go for lapas, came home, change, they didn't take a bath, for there were no bathrooms at that time. There were no heaters. They changed; they had to sell the lapas in Ponta Delgada, going by foot. I've never been picking lapas, never. But I gathered moss. And the crab, we went for crab.

It moves you, it moves your heart. When the sea, well now it isn't, but when I grew up, when the sea was rough, we thought it was child's play, because when the sea came tumbling in, all the boys, fled, fled, fled, but when the sea was going down, we would again move forward.

The sea life doesn't work anymore.

But if I had no kids, I would flee far away. The sea doesn't have it anymore. The sea is no longer what it was. The sea is no longer the happy sea that it was. It's nothing, I tell you, now it is no longer the happy sea that it was. You know, I can swim since I was 5 years old, I can swim, I jump from heights of 3, 4 meters high, even now at this age, there on the dock, I jump in the water. Why do I know how to swim? Because I was raised by the sea, in the water, by the rocky shore. I was raised there. We would go over there, me and my father and we only came back at night. Even in winter, we would wrap up in those shawls, my mother, we, all the fisherman's wives and daughters, all wrapped in those type of shawls as I'm making now for the pilgrimage. We would be covered in winter, standing against the walls. It was our paradise. Not anymore. The sea, the rocky shore, for me, when I grew up, it was my paradise.

Maria dos Santos da Silva (TPJ)

And my brothers, my father never allowed them in the sea. No! My oldest brother was a brick layer and the other was also a brick layer for a while, but later he came to the military base, here on Terceira. He worked for many years. They are all in Canada now. But he never allowed my brothers to go to the sea. Sometimes they'd pick lapas but he would watch them from above.

Filomena Azevedo (TPJ)

The same story happened with my brothers-in-law and my husband. None were fishers. My mother-in-law didn't want them to be fishers.

Maria dos Santos da Silva (TPJ)

And in Holy Week, Filomena, my father never let my brothers go for lapas.

Maria Alice Álvares da Glória Évora (PPr)

I am not the type of person who likes to go into the ocean. I never liked it. Even as a child, I would get my feet wet and collect lapas sometimes, but once I was with my sister-in-law and my neighbour. And my sister fell in the water, but the sea was raging and she was whirled around it. It seemed to me that she would never come to shore. I do not like the sea. I like the fish, I like the lapas, but I do not like the sea.

Living like Lapas

The nature of conversation is such that we get glimpses of the person with whom we are speaking, so the understanding is always partial and in flux. It is energy between the speakers as well as the power that is flowing around them from other sources: family, institutions, and language amongst other things. To attempt to be more precise with an interpretation of the meaning of anyone's relationship to the sea would loss the process of living the relationship with the ocean. Alison and Carlos discuss how they along with their Azorean neighbours live like lapas: marine and able to move at sea, but living in the spaces where sea and land blur together, resisting strong wave action and becoming injured or dying from any attempts to be removed from our rocky homes.

Carlos

I could have been one of your focus group participants as I grew up picking lapas and swimming every day in the ocean. Everyone in my family started swimming at 3 months of age and could swim in the open, rough sea by the time we were 2 years old – the rougher, the stronger the waves, the better. My second brother was born on the sea, on the way from the Azores to the mainland. His identification card indicates that he was born on the ship "Lima".

I grew up eating fish, picked lapas regularly so I could remain out by the ocean swimming, playing without having to come inside for food. Lapas are strong, so eating a few is enough to give energy for a long time. You use your fingernails or a knife to pry the first lapas off of the rocks and then you use the shell of the first lapas to get the other ones off the rocks. I spent a lot of time fishing with a cane and line.

Alison

Since arriving on the islands, I have become part of professional and personal networks, within a "small connected community" (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). When I go to buy bread, I bump into the mayor of São Mateus who may invite me to speak at an

I need the sea to be gentle, soft, if not, I do not like going to the sea. Always I like to fish, but I do not like fishing while at sea. I do not even like crossing the channel, even here in Faial. I never went to São. Jorge because I dislike the sea, I have a fear.

But I dislike the sea. Maybe it's an offence that I do not go the sea, I do not know.

Maria Lídia Serpa da Costa (PPr)

No, sometimes I am scared in trips we are afraid of the sea. But if I had to go back, and often was going there for Madalena, and we went to São Miguel, Prainha do Sul and then we would come around the coast. We often sailed in bad weather to get to Faial. But sometimes we had to go when we had to go.

Alexandrina Pereira Sampaio (TPJ)

No, who died down there was the husband of my mother-in-law, the father of your father-in-law. He was picking lapas on the islet. And the sea took him. The sea took him. He fell from the rocks. He fell from the rocks and was not saved.

Vivelinda Leal da Silveira (TPJ)

True. Look we saw 'What's his name' die at sea and never re-appeared. The husband of a cousin of mine, Paulinha, died at sea.

Maria José Némesis Costa (TPJ)

He went for lapas and died at sea.

upcoming meeting of fishers. He also asks why he has not seen me lately at the practices of the folklore group. When Enésima and I call the community centre to arrange to speak with seniors groups in the coming weeks, the coordinator will ask if we could pick up her uncle on our way, as he heard about our project and wants to share his stories even though he does not attend the group.

Carlos

Ah, that is standard for my life. Being on a small island also means lack of space, you drive around and always the sea is within sight, unlike the continent, you cannot drive away from the ocean. Yet my home, my “scape” includes the sea, when you are out there, you are obviously at home. I need that blue or grey line of the horizon of the ocean. It is always moving, always changing colours, always there, but always changing. It is a sea-tory, not a territory. The sea is the garden, or yard, of the island.

Alison

I am an insider of the communities we are studying. I eat fish; I see the ocean from my desk; I see fishing boats on the water and fishers carrying poles and buckets of freshly caught fish. But I am not a fisher, nor from a fishing family; I am from a place far from the sea coast. I am an outsider. Yet, insider and outsider are concepts too simplified and compartmentalized to be accepted uncritically as we engage in our own narrative about the narratives we see and hear.

Carlos

This reminds me of the differences when I am above compared to when I am below the surface of the ocean. I have spent a lot of time diving, but I don't see the fish when I am underwater as food, this is my sea scape and they are my “friends”, I never think of eating them when I am swimming under water with them. But when I am above water, with a cane and line, or when someone else catches them, I happily eat them.

Vivelinda Leal da Silveira (TPJ)

He went for lapas and died at sea.
Even though a speedboat was sought
for help, wasn't it so?

Maria de Fátima Dutra (PSA)

And the lapas, when lapas were collected outside the legal season, the bag was taken and its contents returned to the sea. The catcher is not allowed to eat them. This is what they do. Other times, they used to give them to nursing homes and it was like that before. Before, the lapas would go to old people to eat. I do not like lapas, but I like slipper lobster and shrimp and crab.

Vivelinda Leal da Silveira (TPJ)

Now few are sold. My father brought them home and we ate. At that time, he sold some. But my father also brought home slipper lobster, would cook it with salt water and it was so delicious. Lapas, I do not like. I gathered the lapas, but they were not for me to eat.

Maria José Némesis Costa (TPJ)

I went for lapas. People gathered them at the foot of the church. Jacinta and I were 12, 13 years old: we went for lapas. Our mothers made them with rice for us to eat, made the soup. Who eats it now? Who gathers them? My mother made bread on an iron sheet and used the embers to cook the fish sauce. When it came to boil she would put the lapas in.

Alison

I play a type of “peek-a-boo” game in my moving in and out of sight in the telling of the various conversations. Most of the other team members are native speakers of Portuguese and have high fluency in English, unlike me who began this work with little understanding of Portuguese and stood to the side of the focus groups to run the audio and video recorders. I watched for tears, laughter and other body language which conveyed strong meaning even if I could not match the spoken words from these interviews with the embodied communication until months and years later via an increased understanding of Portuguese as well as the translations done by you and Rosalina, along with continuing discussions about these.

Carlos

It is fantastic when you are out at sea with no land in sight; I feel like I am where I belong. Nemésio’s writings and idea that geography is as important as history is also important to me “with our own eyes we took from the sea the land that we missed.” Sometimes it is dangerous sailing on the sea, but the worse is being too close to land, especially during a storm, like the time I sailed from São Miguel with my friends Luís and Karen to go to Angra Jazz on Terceira. I couldn’t see through my rain-covered glasses and in my attempts to make sure our sails were down and we were staying clear of the water funnel coming at us, Karen had to keep telling me to keep clear of the island. I laugh when telling this story, especially remembering Karen’s rhetorical question about why we still love sailing, and when I think of the words of Guilhermina Menezes da Costa Ferreira of Porto Judeu, who said that if her house had wheels, she would have already moved it from the seashore.

Maria Leontina Bettencourt (PRi)

Then, there were many, many lapas. The rocks in the pebbles were almost all covered by lapas. And even my father often said when we went to the lapas, one eye for the knife, one eye for the lapas. When we picked up one lapas we were already looking at the next and the next one. There were plenty of lapas. The lapas were always welcome in all homes and all meals. Mainly to the picnic of the Brotherhoods of the Holy Spirit. The meal on Holy Friday always included lapas. Even when the sea was not good here in the South, there usually was a car to go to the north coast. Because the meal at that time was only made with cheese, ox liver and lapas. Now it is a banquet bigger than a wedding.

Maria da Glória de Oliveira (PRi)

And we went to the sea beneath the rocks when the tide was low. We went washing clothes. Because there were pools of fresh water. We went to do our laundry.

We laid the clothes on the coast to bleach; we caught lapas which we ate with cake (pão de milho) that we had brought. And then we brought the clothes almost dry from the rocks.

Ana Maria Borges (IPJ)

I'm not from here; I have been here for a short time now. But my father, we had difficulties in life. My father often went to pick lapas and he took me along with him. I was born in Angra do Heroísmo

Alison

Much of what we listen to from the multiple stories, make us think of the Azoreans as lapas themselves. We include ourselves and our stories among the comparison as well, floating around the currents and seemingly haphazardly landing on the same pieces of island rock, we cling resisting the pull of waves and predators. Like others have written, we learned “it’s not poetry, but community, that is lost in translation. The community-building role of actual language use is simply not part of what translation does” (Bellos, 2011 p. 353). For that reason, we close this presentation with statements that we dare suggest are communal; we also offer a snack as welcome to our island homes.

Like Ritinha from Pico, we wonder how the sea can be so calm and become so agitated from one moment to the next (António Domingos Ávila 2009). It moves us; it moves our collective hearts (Maria Espírito Santo Ferreira 2014). We doubt that we can live for much time away from the sea (Genuíno Madruga, Faial 2009).

but lived in Altares. And so my father greatly feared the sea. So he taught me when I was with him to watch the waves, because the first wave he said was low, the second would be higher, the other when it came, would roll (a riptide) and often drag the person who was on the shallow rocks far away. And when I saw the wave go down I would shout at him to come to shore. Because he would be distracted at times. He would go out to sea; the more lapas he picked the more he earned in order to live, so that in that weekend we could have milk and a lot of things. We sold them at some houses, to people and at other times in bars where they are eaten with garlic and wine.

Filomena Azevedo (TPJ)

What a snack.

Ana Maria Borges (TPJ)

These were snacks that we would make.

Filomena Azevedo (TPJ):

There was Afonso sauce. My husband made them with it some days. He enjoys these shells like this but I like them raw.



Epilogue

In research that is conceptualized to have data that can be known objectively, it is relatively straightforward to have multiple people involved in the analysis and authoring of a text. This text has been conceptualized and written following the epistemology, ontology, and axiology of the first author with the realization that the other authors, as well as the others who have voice in the text, may have multiple and conflicting beliefs in this regard. However, this too is part of understanding how knowledge of the ocean and sustainability is constructed. Who tells a story and how influences the process of meaning-making. Had that the idea that the narratives and the storytellers are important, been espoused, but via the more normalized social science practice of researcher elucidation with few direct quotations from interviews, this would have been a disrespectful contradiction. This arts-informed research representation is based on practising the ideas of Stratford (2013) and her colleagues, namely, that “the archipelago suggests relations built on connection, assemblage, mobility, and multiplicity” (p.3). The juxtaposition of extensive quoted text constructed with deliberate creative manipulation is an attempt to challenge readers to consider how they, along with the authors of this article, take part in the social processes of knowledge production, and to consider as well, the politics of this production. It asks the reader to give up expectations of receiving answers from experts and instead listen to the troubled dialogue between researcher and participants adding their own reverberations while reading (cf. dialogical research, Frank, 2005). Recently studies in anthropology and sociology have caught up to indigenous epistemologies (O’Riley, 2003; Smith, 1999) which,

... view knowledge as a dynamic process that emerges ‘directly from the relations that exist between minds, bodies, and environment’ (Marchand, 2010, p. 2). Knowledge is then a process and not an outcome. Furthermore, ‘knowledge is inevitably situated in a particular place and moment; that is inhabited by individual knowers and that is always changing and emergent’ (Harris, 2007, p. 4) (Degarrod, 2013, p. 405).

Where do these narratives lead in regards to sustainable development and nature conservation in the outermost European regions? The parallel currents of conversations engage the reader in a process of knowledge construction in order to suggest that transformation will depend on the processes involved. How and who takes part in defining and co-constructing sustainability will determine the outcomes. Climate change involves contested meanings of complex natural and social systems on a global scale, but which potentially threatens the economy, biodiversity and well-being of communities on small, isolated islands in a more rapid or extensive manner than in other larger areas. The members of these island communities have always had to depend on one another to ensure their survival, and it seems likely that their involvement would improve the knowledge, policies and actions needed for continuing survival. This text does not prescribe answers nor recommend environmental or sustainability education for fishers, politicians or readers; instead it presents a creative theatre which calls for further interactions between all islanders: fishers, researchers and politicians alike.

Having explored the socio-political aspects of knowledge construction related to fisheries policy and environmental justice in the Azores (cf. Neilson, Cardwell & Bulhão Pato, 2012; Neilson, Gabriel, Arroz & Mendonça, 2014), as well as having argued for the regional government to engage fully with the fishing communities and other publics in order to create better policies for sustainability (based on our experiences doing this on the islands) (Neilson, Bulhão Pato & Sousa, 2012), we do not suggest greater participation from a platform of naïve

optimism. Indeed, we have personal experience of how experts share stable conceptualizations, representations and models of the public as “ignorant, insufficiently informed and thus hostile to innovation, or mis-informed and unwilling to become more knowledgeable” (Castro & Mouro, 2015, p. 3). A detailed study of how farmers in southern Portugal imagine themselves as participating in biodiversity conservation shows that the farmers themselves can maintain these hegemonic representations as well as resist them depending on whether the farmers are speaking about “people” as others who do not bother to participate, or as fellow farmers and neighbours who have localized knowledge which is routinely ignored by experts (Castro & Mouro, 2015).

This text attempts to invite the reader to “think with” the stories being told (Frank, 2010) and accept the tellers as respected neighbours, not uninterested “other people”. Thomas King points out that “stories [can be] medicine” (2003, p. 92). Consider how we tell and live the stories of these islands. This text invites a cognitive escape from any dictates of how societies and economies must exist. It highlights the possibility of the sea being a treasure, a best neighbour and a best friend. At the same time, it does not shy away from acknowledging how scary the sea can be, that some islanders have always chosen to avoid the ocean, and some others consider their continuing security a matter of luck.

Not everyone will enjoy the taste of raw lapas. The memory of hunger and seemingly harsh waste of food as penalty for illegal collection may make some people loath to discuss some issues openly. Nevertheless, our continuing conversations are encouraging. We hope that the stories of lapas and the sea may move your heart. We invite the reader into these conversations, to look toward the ocean, and dream about a not-too-distant future where they could eat fish knowing that there are healthy populations in the ocean and where fishing communities could continue to exist in a sustainable manner with high levels of well-being.

Images by order of appearance in the document

1. Neilson, A.L. (2015). Preparing gamelas. Ribeira Quente, São Miguel Island.
2. Neilson, A.L. (2008). Fishing on the shore. Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island.
3. Neilson, A.L. (2013). Preparing gamelas. São Mateus, Terceira Island.
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14. Leal, A.C. (2010). Lapas on rocks. Submitted to RCE Açores 2010 Biodiversity photo contest. Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Island.
15. Neilson, A.L. (2014). Fish in Sol Mar grocery store. Rabe de Peixe, São Miguel Island.
16. Neilson, A.L. (2015). Lapas cooked in garlic and butter in restaurant in Ribeira Quente. São Miguel Island.

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