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Macaronesia

Ontological and Epistemological Tensions of a Name

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ABSTRACT:

This essay undertakes a multifaceted exploration of the name "Macaronesia". Particularly focused on decoding the geological dimensions of some of the identity-forming processes at the macro-archipelago level, the essay nonetheless refrains from definitively answering the question "what is Macaronesia?". The analysis begins by exploring the ways in which the noun acts in the formulation of forms of belonging at the geo-local level, questioning its origins and applicability, drawing on Island and Archipelagic Studies to understand it. It also recognizes the existence of foundational geological conditions that shape the sense of place the name geo-localizes. Finally, it reflects on two divergent geological identities that underpin two historiographical directions: the first endogenous, resulting from a relationship with the use of land, and the second exogenous, imperial, and exoticizing, constructed around the sense of isolation that the oceanic distance of the territories from the continent suggests.

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RESUMO:

Este ensaio empreende uma exploração multifacetada do nome "Macaronésia". Particularmente focado em descodificar as dimensões geológicas de alguns dos processos constitutivos de identidade, ao nível do macro-arquipélago, o ensaio, ainda assim, abstém-se de responder definitivamente à questão sobre "o que é a Macaronésia?". A análise começa por explorar as formas pelas quais o substantivo actua na formulação de formas de pertença, ao nível do geo-local, questionando as suas origens e aplicabilidade, recorrendo aos Estudos Insulares e Arquipelágicos para entendê-la. Reconhece também a existência de condições geológicas fundacionais do sentido de lugar que o nome geo-localiza. Por fim, reflecte sobre duas formas de identidade geológica divergentes que fundamentam duas direcções historiográficas: a primeira endógena, resultante de uma relação com o uso da terra, e a segunda exógena, imperial e exotizante, construída em torno do sentido de isolamento que a distância oceânica dos territórios em relação ao continente sugere.

KEYWORDS:

Macaronesia; island studies; archipelagity; geosocial; Atlantic history

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Macaronésia; estudos insulares; arquipelagidade; geosocial; história do Atlântico

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1. Introduction: What do We Mean by "Macaronesia"?

EVEN IF OBVIOUS, it is worth starting this essay by being reminded that the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde are archipelagoes and, therefore, composed of islands. At first, this observation may seem redundant, not pertinent even given the array of references to the name in local and regional media and literary circles and international political discourse. Yet, given the rise of the field of study concerned with islands and their mesologies, succinctly described by Grant McCall as being concerned with islands "on their own terms" (McCall 1994), addressing these territories in all their complex ways from an inside-out perspective rather than outside-in becomes unavoidable. If, on the one hand, they are part of global systems of circulation, such as those of their respective national and official languages (Portuguese and Castilian), on the other, they reveal much more dynamic and convoluted forms of belonging to different regional and oceanic mesologies. Therefore, studying Macaronesia and its cultural realities in a post-colonial contemporaneity calls for a profoundly critical, unapologetically comparative, theoretical exploration of its material and historical conditions.

At first, we are talking about the archipelagic haecceity of Macaronesia, and the reason for that, alone, is not difficult to conceive. It is an archipelago of archipelagoes, which Robert J. Whittaker *et al*. call a meta-archipelago (Whittaker *et al*. 2018). What, then, *is* an archipelago? What lingers behind the noun archipelago demands a dose of inquiry. It stems from the convention that an archipelago is a group of islands, islets, and/or skerries clustered together for geographical, political, or cultural reasons. It is a word that has been in use since at least the Sixteenth century, borrowed from the Italian noun for the Aegean Sea, and etymologically based on a portmanteau of Latin and Greek origin (*archi* – chief/principal + *pelagos* – sea). For our argument, the archipelagic nature of Macaronesia is the function by which a composite of effects, affects, reflections, narratives, and other pragmatic forms of relationality signify the emergence of form from perceived substance working at the scale at which complexity occurs in the region, being it simultaneously the scale of the civic-self and that of the globe, in its most planetary assertion. Archipelagity, or the sense of archipelago, translates an idea of interconnectedness that extrapolates from very specific forms of locality such as islands, or navicular bodies, for instance, to the sphere of the global, only to elliptically recentre sensibilities back into ontological nodes, islanders, in our case.

Usually approached from the fields of the Natural Sciences, the four archipelagoes have been traditionally clustered into a form of geo-localized unity, a meta-archipelago[1] historically addressed by various names. The tendency to call it Macaronesia has seen growing adherence, particularly from the second half of the 20th Century, supposedly following in the steps of the 19th Century English naturalist

[1] Robert J. Whittaker and others define a meta-archipelago in the following manner: "a constellation of […] archipelagos that have and […] exhibit a meaningful level of information exchange[s] […] among constituent archipelagos[.] [These exchanges of information] should occur significantly less often than the level of exchange typical within an archipelago, but significantly more than with other areas" (Whittaker *et al.* 2019, 6). In this sense, we could complement the scholars' take by calling each possible unit a *governance,* as conceived by Paul Carter (2018).

Philip Barker Webb (1793-1854), who associated it with the Madeira-Canaries archipelagic complex. On its turn, the first occurrence, in English, of the adjective 'Macaronesian' is registered in the botanist H. B. Guppy's 1917 *Plants, seeds and currents in the west Indies and the Azores*. Coincidently, it also marks the moment when this nine-island archipelago became formally associated with the geo-construct.

The noun 'Macaronesia' itself is a hellenization of Pliny the Elder's *Fortunatae Insulae*, a group of islands commonly associated with the Canaries, which the Roman naturalist calculated, from previous Greek sources, as being just west of River Okeanus, off the coast of Libya (Northern Africa), "six-hundred and twenty-five miles" (Pliny [1855] 2006, 6:37) away from the *Purpurariae*, the 'Purple Islands', sometimes associated to the Madeira group, in particular the Selvagens. While it cannot be said the noun 'archipelago' – less so, 'macro-archipelago' – was around in Pliny' time, at least in its whole assertion, the detailed description of singular islands inserted in systems of relations between each other, with emergence of their own, to the point of having ontological value as a group, suggests its form. Moreso, despite the distinction Pliny makes between the Fortunate and the Purple Islands, one can argue there also was a sense of the existence of networks between these different groupings in a manner that is specific to their confluence as points of navigational reference. The late recovery of the noun Macaronesia, by overpassing the distinction between both classical archipelagoes, was, on the one hand, an attempt at recognizing similarities between basic organic units – the islands – and the larger systemic dimension with which they share their insular and oceanic conditions, at the same time epistemic (they are all island-forms) and mesological (they are alloplastic-systems), on the other, approximates the islands to a classical past, affiliated with Europe.[2] This attempt at organizing formal knowledge about this region of the world, as the unified geographical construct Macaronesia conceives, is challenging to achieve in a chorographic manner. Their fragmentary and dispersed nature, along with substantial sociological and historical disparities, make each archipelago, and even each island, singular units of analysis, different in some manners, similar in others, from one another, and, in a larger frame, distinct from other archipelagic complexes, easier to contextualize within their geographies. Historically too, contextualizing these archipelagoes into a single unit has its challenges. On one side, despite sharing relatively late periods of human arrival, all these islands represent different moments in the history of humanity's expansion and, from the 14th Century onwards, of their integration in the development of both the empires in which they were included and capitalism itself. While early human occupation of these islands was restricted – to the best of our current knowledge – to some of the Canary Islands, with ranging human histories of about two thousand years before European colonization, the disparity of the scales of human interaction with each other on these territories, and with the territories themselves, only adds to the difficulty in addressing Macaronesia as a cohesive totality.

This essay, nonetheless, attempts to understand what drives the push to do so. It departs from the assumption that Macaronesia can be addressed as a unit of sorts

[2] While this is not our goal, it is worth noticing how the hidden politics of the name de-Africanize the islands' geography.

and, in that sense, fits in the epistemological exercises we have seen above. The push towards conceptualizing Macaronesia as a human-geographical compound is met with some resistance, mainly when conceived from the perspective of disciplines that require material from realms not evident, such as the narratological and literary, dependent on the interpretation of senses and sensibilities of aesthetical, discursive and narratological values not necessarily of locative natures, unlike those of naturalist knowledge. This is a unity produced not from a single radiant center, but that sustains itself on an assortment of relations occurring along complex networks of nodes and *crossabilites* whose dynamics are, therefore, rhizomatic. This rhizomatic nature results from convergent and divergent movements of identitary and political affirmation that historically delineated the forms of belonging each archipelago performed in both the region and their imperial contexts. Often, this has been done more easily through the fields of historical and political knowledge. If the first is so for the nature of historiography itself, which allows for the study of these regions to be approached through specific accounts of direct or indirect material and sociological sources, the registry of local and global memory, the second is so because of the particular socio-political practices and forms of organization of these territories in their contemporaneity, not to mention their obviously strategic geo-political positions in the Atlantic.

Independently, these two areas of knowledge have, more commonly than not, approached the region from documentarian, descriptive, and compartmentalized manners derived from their specific forms of knowledge management and their grounding in the political narratives they may be put to serve. As a result, the area has been addressed mainly as a compound of different historical and political units, at times convergent, at others divergent, only sparsely related between themselves or, regarding the oceanic milieu they occupy, with an endogenous history of themselves. As Javier Luis Álvarez Santo puts it: "Following [the] concern about the impression left by the Atlantic on the islands, […] generations of island historians continued to be concerned with analyzing how the islands were determined by […] exogenous Atlantic dynamics" (Álvarez Santos 2022, x).

This is different from the version of Macaronesia we wish to explore here. Even though it is of interest to study these archipelagoes in the contexts of their political and historical affiliations, we do not wish to think of them only as parts of imperial histories and narratives, European or African, but to approach them through their macro-archipelagic nature, "cis-Atlantic" (Álvarez Santos 2022, I) in scope. To do so, we must articulate historicist and political approaches with attempts that reach the object of our study through the dimension of its oceanic and geosocial (Clark and Yusoff, 2017) telos, that is, the study of Macaronesia through the dimensions that signify them firstly as island spaces, point-zero of their ontologies and, secondly, as progressions of movement (tectonic, biological, economical, etc…) geologically conceived. Epistemologically, this attempt begs to drink from different fields of knowledge. Scholars of the fields of Island and Archipelagic Studies have deposited their attention into geographies where more evident archipelagic units of study have historically left a relevant print on the development of inter-societal webs of relation while sustaining forms of national and local identity more obviously approached from the perspective of post-colonial studies. These are, specifically, the Pacific and

Indian Oceans, the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and Northern seas on one side, and, to a lesser extent, the Arctic region. As a response, primarily through the prism of the disciplines of History, the relevant work of scholars such as the Madeiran Alberto Vieira, the Canarian Javier Luis Álvarez Santos, or the Azorean Urbano Bettencourt, amongst others, have consistently attempted to introduce Macaronesia, as an extension proper to the study of the Atlantic, into this roll of island scholarship, more invested in their characteristics as a place of inter-island relations rather than a group of isolated geo-sociological island phenomena, with an historiography destined to be continental in perspective.

How, then, should we address the islands of this region in a cohesive and logical manner that does not hinder the particularities of each singular unit yet contributes to the understanding of an all-encompassing regionality? What makes Macaronesia a human reality beyond its primary naturalist assertion? And to that extent, what kind of concepts and epistemic formulations should we address when thinking about its complexities? Since it is not necessarily clear which of the dimensions of study required to produce theoretical knowledge take precedence over others, the limitations of what can be achieved are primarily disciplinary. Awareness of this fragility is significant because it helps sustain the formalization of certain viscous forms of reading that, in a comparative manner, must be drawn from different noetic impulses without crystallizing forms of knowledge production in specific disciplinary modes or tendencies. A form of trans-disciplinary approach is at the core of the substantial synergies that the field of Island Studies requests. In the face of global - and local – environmental crises, for instance, this forces us to reconsider established categories, repositioning ourselves before the theoretical complexities that arise from ordinary understandings of specific poetic, social, geological, and, therefore, geosocial problems brought about by our broader objects of study which are, ultimately, as put by Lanny Thompson, "geosocial locations for the production of knowledge" (Thompson 2017, 68).

Our attempt at reaching an understanding of 'macaronesianness' will, then, be focused on two main arches of analysis:

1. The geosocial dimension of the region;
2. The tensions between the local and imperial scales of Macaronesian identity.

This division allows for an approach that, in the limited space of our essay, is sensitive in addressing both the elemental substances of each archipelago and their overarching transinsular archipelagic forms.

2. Macaronesia: The Specter of Geology

While politically, in the sense of statehood we use today, the notion of an archipelagic community affiliating itself with the Iberian Peninsula traces back to the early 15th Century, the archipelagos constituting Macaronesia have deep-rooted histories on the shores of the three continents bordering the Atlantic. Fauna and phyto-geological and human exchanges have historically co-occurred between the continental masses and each singular island in the archipelagoes, besides, at varying scales, between themselves. Connections and exchanges played significant roles in establishing the

places of belonging characteristic of the intricate cultural web woven around the oceanic dimension that is Macaronesia. The islands emerge not only as elements of an enlarged Mediterranean system, the *Méditerranée Atlantique* (Abulafia 2019, 483), as much a socio-political entity and "jellylike" three-dimensional mass as that sea itself, following in the footsteps of Lorenzo Pezzani's assertion (2015), but also as pivotal demarcating spaces, informing, at once, the functioning of that sea as well as that of the Atlantic, whether as the first places beyond their limits or the last just before. To a certain extent, we can even consider the constitutive role these islands and their occupation have played in surrounding archipelagic bodies with which they share geographical and cultural affinities, such as São Tomé and Príncipe and other islands of the Gulf of Guinea, the estuary archipelago of the Bissagos in Guinea Bissau, the Balearic Islands, and, to a broader extent, the Antilles (Hernández González 1994, 176), thought of as an encompassing grouping of the Western islands of the Atlantic Ocean, such as the Bermudas, and the Caribbean. It follows that despite our present focus on the happening together of these islands into an ontological unit called 'Macaronesia', not only must we acknowledge the heterogeneity of individual forms of affiliation between its constituent parts but also recognize the intersection of the system itself into larger webs of oceanic relation, authentic *invisible archipelagoes* (again with Pezzani), forms of ghost geographies characterized by interconnected chains of affiliation produced from variations of movement occurring between stratified onto-geological nodules. This network of affiliations constitutes the fabric with which Macaronesia, as an idea, is woven. It is also because of these networks of affiliations that, as we will see, Macaronesia becomes a cultural region.

Even though, in most cases, the islands only boast a permanent human history of roughly six hundred years, the imposition of the geological, present, on one side, by the evidence of land *on* the sea and, on the other, by the practical need to understand the territory in order to adapt it to human life – a late Neolithic Revolution, we might say – fundamentally altered human relation to historical time. On one side, sustaining a population on a territory that technically walks towards geological finitude is difficult. These are islands of different geological ages, ranging from the twenty-six-million-year-old Selvagens[3] to the most recently formed Pico Island. In much shorter geologic periods than those of continental dynamics, the islands of this region are prompt to see inconsistent, yet considerable, changes to the material makeup of their territories. This situation threatens survival and imposes constant adaptability. Geologic variation is, nonetheless, not limited to seismic and volcanic activity, such as Faial's Capelinhos eruption between 1957 and 1958, Terceira's 1980 earthquake, Fogo's eruption between 2014 and 2015, La Palma's in 2021 or São Jorge's continuing seismic crisis started in 2022, to name some of the most significant recent occurrences. It also encompasses other phenomena with a direct effect on the morphology of the territories and their inhabitants' way of living, caused by long-lasting interventions of human character, such as construction, extractivist or agricultural activities, which profoundly impact the landscape as well as the compositional and structural qualities of local soils, hindering their fertility, capacity for

[3] Or the twenty-million-year-old island of Fuerteventura, if we talk about inhabited islands.

water retention, and, ultimately, human settlement. Such is the case of the water courses of Madeira, which are highly susceptible to flash floodings, the most recent in 2010. Naturally, this implies a cultural move towards the territory. The constant threat of unpredictable spontaneity meant an ever-changing push towards adaptation. Narratives and discourses of exogenous or endogenous origin are adapted to it, incorporating elements in their stories, assuming it as their set, or even as an element of the plot, a move intimately connected to the necessity to adapt to geological conditions particular to islands, which remain stratified in the structures of any given present-moment in historical time. Natural contingencies in these territories are ghost events for which human sustainability must account and form the body of an ever-present "anticipatory history", as conceived by DeSilvey (2012), marked by forms of "landscape now and landscapes past converg[ing]" (Matless 2018, 4).

On the other side, the constraint of the ocean delineates the boundaries of habitable land and, simultaneously, the connectedness between island spaces. The in-betweenness of the oceanic system (with its liquid, atmospheric, and solid complexity) lies at the core of the web of relations between the geologic materiality of these places and the humans that occupy them. Faced with a common oceanic condition that disrupts yet unites, island bodies become different totalities, and islanders practice islandness, that is, a sense of being intricately woven with an affiliation to spaces, times, and forms of island-type territories, or as put by Philip Conkling: a "metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical Isolation" (Conkling 2007, 191). Hence, islandness results from a perception that elemental geologic variation is a constant of the territory. At the scale of biological life, despite the apparent permanence of the landscape, the permanence of space is inconsistent. Recognizing the relations between social phenomena and geologic occurrences allows for the understanding and better contemplation of forms of inheritance that are unique to the cultural contexts of these archipelagoes: the intricate connections between agriculture, architecture, settlement, and movement, amongst other forms of cultural behavior are, at one time, the material realities of both the memory of these populations and their territories, grounding, or *earthing*, theoretical analyses in historical and material constructs.

The dialectics between human presence and individual islands' co-concurrent geographical and geological bodies mold the system and structures of much more dynamic forms of oceanic archipelagity. As a cultural space, we find ourselves delving into a diverse and permanently re-signifying reality of, primarily, strong European and African influences around the Northeastern Atlantic archipelagos of the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and Cape Verde. It represents a unique convergence of cultures shaped by historical and social factors over centuries and, to that extent, maintains a distinctive social, cultural, and political makeup, which is enough to classify it as a separate region not fully belonging to any of its surrounding continental masses. The rationale behind selecting Macaronesia as an object of post-colonial and regional interest is, therefore, rooted in the perception that in the case of these archipelagos, emerging from their distinct moments in Modernity (such as the rise and end of empires, the standardization of reading, the spread of scholarly interest, de-located diasporic voices and their consolidation in literary traditions), cultural identity is linked to a profoundly complex association with the geo-social

dynamics inherent to islandness. In this sense, at the level of its mesologies, Macaronesia's archipelagity is a conceptual frame that conveys the diversity of geosocial relations at the base of the sense of regional belonging characteristic of these islands, a sense that is materially dependent on the varied insular systems of the archipelagoes, grounded on both the geological – or temporal – and the historical or material – realities of their islands. Their islandic conditions form a complex of identification at the center of this region's cultural mesologies. Islandness, then, is the epistemic condition of ontologies exhibiting multiple relational filiations of contrasting geographical complexity: an 'I' and a 'land' entangled in genitive contortion marked by a functional in-betweenness regarding the continental masses that justified their inscriptions in world history. It is also composed of networks of movement that stand, symbolically, opposed to the perceived static nature of insular bodies when perceived from the centers of imperiality. At the level of the archipelagic, each island functions as a stratum of larger systems of exchange of information, which, at its level, produces other strata - the archipelago - with dynamics of its own. This is the nature of the engagement of the macro-archipelagic. In becoming aware of one another, *where* and *when* two island bodies meet, they become archipelagic and exist in a state of impending communication. The type of affiliations produced therein is concordant with what Elizabeth DeLoughrey classifies as "I-lander" agencies, "a dialectic between land and sea that is of crucial significance" (DeLoughrey 2001, 44) and which reflects the conditions and forms of human-territory mesologies in island-like geographies. This sense of belonging stands in diversion to exogenous perceptions of islands as isolated and distanced specks of land with an inherent lack of the connectedness and centrality continentality provides. As the scholar puts it, islanders search for their roots in the seas (2001, 41). The readability of these forms of location is, epistemologically speaking, viscous: they hold different hermeneutic degrees, and, consequentially, at the level of interpretation, the fluxes of their inter-connections are subject to varying degrees of resistance, depending on the material and epistemological realities of each specific relational mode. The materiality of the viscous condition of archipelagity, on both its spatial and temporal dimensions, pairs with other discursive forms used to signify dimensional occurrences which play a role in the flux of trans-oceanic connectedness, and intra-oceanic exchanges, contributing to overcoming the "reductive images of the island" as being in a state of "supposed isolation from [the] continental" (40).

3. The Tensions of Historical Belonging

Tendencies for a global push, strongly associated with a sense of political pertaining to cosmopolitan perceptions of worldhood, whether a belonging to empire, such as in the period between the 14th and 20th Centuries, or to other forms of circulatory systems, are complementarian aspects of the region's identity. As both entrance and exit doors to empires, they were strategic to the functioning of global commerce routes and, through them, the functioning of early-modern forms of capitalism. This is perhaps the most well-identified manifestation of their characters, whether because they functioned as nodal points, crucial in the establishment of trans-oceanic

routes, or because of their laboratory qualities discovered at the break of the 15th Century, vastly influential throughout the advent of globalization (Braudel 1983; Hancock 1998). The permanence of certain economic activities in the archipelagoes today, such as sugar-cane production, is inseparable from a sense of cultural identity that is rooted in 14th and 15th Centuries socio-economic structures perpetuated throughout historical time, in one form or another, in the cultural environments of these islands and of their spheres of influence (Nunes 2018). The implementation of earlier forms of exploratory capitalism not only laid the basis for their highly stratified socio-economic structures but also socio-cultural tendencies. For instance, fed by the income of vast amounts of revenue from wood, wheat, dairy, meat, and sugar exports – free from taxes by royal decree since 1444 when exporting into Lisbon or other peninsular ports (Abulafia 2019, 486) – early expressions of court-like structures developed into significant forms of endogenous cultural milieus, particularly in Madeira's two main centers, Funchal and Machico (Cruz 1958, 4; Tonini 2001, 17). Similar movements occurred on the Canary Islands (Tenerife and Gran Canaria) and the Azores (São Miguel, Terceira and Faial) despite the tardiness and difficulty in conquering, in the case of the first, and populating both archipelagoes.

In the context of this effervescent overseas Renaissance, economic and cultural, European merchants, clergy, and others influenced the cultural habits of the first generations of islanders. A strong case for the existence of a proper form of cis-Atlantic island-based cosmopolitanism with its own archipelagic structures, as opposed to a solely trans-oceanic vision of local history, can be made from the presence, throughout the Atlantic, of reminiscences of the Carolingian cycle in the forms of popular performances, the most obvious example being those of São Tomé's *Tchiloli* or *The Tragedy of the Marquis of Mantua and Emperor Carloto Magno*. In this case, the presence of that text in its adapted local form hides a second layer of significance to the argument of a cosmopolitan Macaronesia since it is hypothesized (Reis 1969; Valbert 1985) that the text entered São Tomé through the export from Madeira – via Cape Verde – of specialized workers to collaborate in the sugar industry, who brought along the Carolingian poem as fixated by Madeiran poet Baltazar Dias (Mata 2010, 40), in the early 16th Century. In its turn, the fact that Baltazar Dias' work marked the entrance of this cycle of chivalry literature in Portuguese literature (Gomes 1983, 58) is of no minor importance: it testifies to the dynamic transcultural environment of the island from where he originated. The presence of Castilian, French, Italian, and Flemish merchants and clergy, as well as indigenous Canarian, North-African and sub-Saharan enslaved people – who, by the 17th Century, were primarily associated with work in the domestic space (Veríssimo 2000, 85; Vieira 2004, 295)[4] – complemented in unique manners the presence of Portuguese settlers, contributing to the development of local cultures of public and private sociability. In Cape Verde, colonization was also the product of the collective agency of Portuguese, Castilian, Flemish, and Genoese settlers. Despite this, the situation was distinct. In

[4] In Cape Verde, due to its importance in the slave routes feeding the Spanish Americas, the reality was one of different proportions with a high presence of "urban slaves", with domestic occupations and an even higher presence of slaves occupied with cotton plantations which, on its turn, financed the Feitoria do Cacheu. This will eventually decline with the eventual surpassing of the Cape Verde-Americas route for the Guinea – Americas one (Santos *et al.* 2001).

this regard, due to their condition as uninhabited, the Azores, Cape Verde, and Madeira were the closest in their settling experience, different from the type of miscegenation on the Canary Islands, genocidal at its root. Yet, different islands had different ethnographic ratios, depending on the type of prevalent economic activity practiced therein. While in these last two, the ethnic makeup of the archipelagoes is marked by a prevalence of European settlers, mainly from Portugal, the Italian Peninsula, and Flanders, occupied with merchant and administrative roles in Cape-Verde due to cyclic droughts, disease, and the difficulty in attracting a peninsular-originated population (the *reinós*) (Duarte 2023, 22), the development of the archipelago was restricted to the Island of Santiago for over a century (Brito-Semedo 2023, 55-56). This further approximated the islands to the coast of West Africa, a relation which quickly supplemented the one with the Peninsula. Furthermore, the development of a Creole elite (Silva 2023, 40) further distanced the sociographic models of these islands from those of the others, creating a "sociologic equator of the world" (49). This pattern of occupation overlaps with the pattern of directions of the leading networks of revenue sources: medium to large-scale agricultural production, slavocrat in type[5], mainly directed either towards Europe or one another, from the northern Iberian archipelagoes, and towards Africa and Brazil, departing from Cape Verde.

Yet, the "rift" (40) between the archipelagoes, while confirming the region's heterogenic history, does little to affect the discursive recurrence to an archipelagic ontology directly associated with the geo-locality suggested by 'Macaronesia'. At the genesis of the formation of these culturally active geo-localized communities is a constant negotiation between forms of endogenous belonging and exogenous otherness, identitarian discourses, formal and informal, around the sense and the practice of shared insular qualities. 'Macaronesia' is a "figure of relationality" (Carter 2018, 11), a noun that finds itself trying to connect the product of an organizational move towards the stratification of forms of highly specialized work designed around the adaptation of free and forced labor to the specificities of oceanic territories. Despite their geographical situations in the web of global relations, these islands, as well as the outward direction of their production, formed part of systems of circulation marked by structural human-territory interactions, which worked in transinsular adaptive manners (Cubero 2017) of foundational importance for an inter-hemispheric Atlantic World.[6] The geological richness of these territories, in the manner it translates into networks of profit, is a fundamental part of recognizing the

[5] A term we use according to António Correia e Silva's terms, as a society at the core of whose structures lies the presence of the enslaved (Silva 2023, 40).

[6] The concept of an Atlantic World is itself problematic. While Bernard Bailyn (2005) conceives of the Atlantic as a plain of history "essentially spatial" (2005, 55), he delineates its temporal range between Columbus' voyage in 1492 and the Liberal Revolutions of the 19th Century. This has been met with some resistance by scholars such as David Armitage (2017) or Alison Games (2006), who tend to move away from the Euro-American centrality of Bailyn's analysis, raising questions about the author's success in conceiving a history that is different from the history of empires, on its own, something Bailyn was very keen on affirming (Bailyn 2005, 5). While they do not necessarily contradict Bailyn's view of the Atlantic as a spatial (and temporal) category, for these authors, Atlantic History stems from *circum-oceanic*, rather than trans-continental, dynamics of exchange that happen at varying scales of historical time itself, accounting for the particularities of micro-histories and other forms of approach.

viscosity of the relation of human history with the history of the interconnectedness of humans in more-than-human ecologies.

While these islands' strategic geo-political and military positions were still of relevance even after the fall of Terceira in 1583 and the advent of the Iberian Union, with the translation of production chains into other geographies, particularly Brazil, economically, they lost primacy. This did not necessarily hinder the development of historical discourses of substantial globalist weight, of which the most relevant would be the Azorean priest Gaspar Frutuoso's[7] *opus magnum Saudades da Terra*, a massive work divided into six books, five of them concerned with the geography, history, culture, and populations of particular islands from the North Atlantic[8] in the context of the Iberian Empire. Frutuoso's text marks the first inter-stylistic and, as we would classify it today, transdisciplinary attempt at historical and poetic literature that would be centrally focused on the mesologies of the archipelagoes of the region that is modern-day Macaronesia, bringing together into his text elements of historical, geological, and mythical relevance. It is not to say he thought of Macaronesia as an archipelagic concept, *avant la lettre*; as José Damião Rodrigues points out, his goal was to englobe the maritime vocation of the islands through history and myth in the context of the idea of a utopian "universal empire" (Rodrigues 2011, 17), which he saw as embodied by the Iberian union. It also responds to the geographical effects of island isolation with the sketch of an underlying invisible imperial archipelago of pluralistic unity that is multi-scaled and, because trans-oceanic, thalassocratic, and which profited, narratively, from a sense of legitimacy based on the Roman principle of "*primo occupanti conceditur locus*" (Rodrigues 2011, 22). In a way, Frutuoso's disposition reminds us of Fernand Braudel's assertion, which John R. Gillis uses as an epithet for his essay on Atlantic archipelagity, that "events of history often […] make use of [islands]" (Gillis 2007, 21). Yet, unlike Rodrigues, we tend to also agree with Miguel Tremoço de Carvalho entirely when he says that the author's text "denotes a globalizing view of the Atlantic" while, *at the same time*, "a knowledge of […] an insular world" (Carvalho 2001, 77). Although not the "Atlantic Oceania" Gillis talks about, or that the noun Macaronesia recalls, by way of positioning the islands at the genesis of Iberia's maritime vocation, undoubtedly conscient of their heritages as trans-cultural global outposts, Frutuoso addresses the region with recognition of similarities despite their fragmentary nature. Engraved in the detailed narratives each island-dedicated book conveyed were the seeds of discursive

[7] c.1522-1591 Frutuoso studied in Salamanca, Spain, and lived, between 1553 and 1558, both in Peninsular Spain and Portugal. After this period, the author moved back to the island of São Miguel, in the Azores, to his birthplace of Ponta Delgada. Even though his works encompass the four archipelagoes of the region, Frutuoso never visited any besides his own.

[8] Books I – Cape-Verde and the Canary Islands; II – Madeira; III – Azores, Santa Maria island; IV – Azores, São Miguel island; VI – Azores, Terceira, Faial, Pico, Flores, Graciosa and São Jorge islands, plus another one (its fifth) which is, in fact, a fictional poem, typical of renaissance pastoral poetry, where two characters tell the story of their forced distancing from the homeland, in a somewhat autobiographical manner.

associations we see today that tend to uniformize the cluster as a functional archipelagic unit.[9]

If, on one side, political centrality blurs the place of small insular elements in the functioning of imperial bodies, it also feeds the growth of systemic chains of relation that, sometimes in resistance, coexisted with core imperial formulations. Such is quite relevant when we consider historical perceptions – specific islands, specific texts, etc. – and allegorical ideas of isolation, mass generalized perceptions of insularity, individuality, and what is public. In empires, narratives of belonging flow indistinctly between isolates, resisting with different viscosities to discursive monopolies built around continentally-minded dichotomic vertical structures of power, such as center versus peripheries, contributing to underlying ideas of space fluidity. Borrowing from Elizabeth DeLoughrey's work, Ellaine Stratford applies the notion of *archipelagraphy* as a counterapproach to continent-centred historiography, which marks them as plains of expansion and, ultimately, as exoticized *loci*, thus decentring the weight of established historical narratives. For the scholar, an archipelagraphic approach of this order helps lay bare the hidden geographies behind thalassocracies and thalassocratic imperialism and, we may argue, lend the frames via which one can signify geo-local knowledge "on its terms". Following the concept of "confetti of empire," as considered by Kate Marsh (2013) when talking about the Napoleonic French Empire, Stratford comes to propose an archipelagic turn in the perception of American collective consciousness away from the United States' absent-minded, overpowering relation to its overseas insular territories and maritime presence. She says as follows: "Someone with a continental mindset might ask, who can keep track of each piece of confetti as it is strewn across a room, and who can keep track of the fecks of land claimed by the United States in the far seas and oceans?" (Stratford 2017, 81).

Through the author's logic, to be a subject of empire means to behave according to a specific state of mind of absentness through distance, which characterizes the different scales and directions at and in which imperial frames work and move. By applying it to the American case, Stratford expresses the condition by which singular political agents – American citizens, in her example – are alienated and *de facto* barred, by the gravitas of vertical continentally-minded center-periphery discourses, from perceiving the horizontality of their empire's geographic range. Islands, in the context of empire, are generally approached as secondary speckles of a totalizing sense of teleological integrity running at different depths depending on the momentum of the situational context of center-peripheries, which become confetti spread all over the great room of colonial expansion. While this is true also for Macaronesia, as seen from the perspective of the insular histories of both Spain and Portugal, what the works we have looked at suggest is that a co-occurrent move to centralize historical narratives in that specific region emerged as a reaction and response to imperiality. Strolling slightly away, in a particularly comedic passage of Brazilian writer

[9] The historian Alberto Vieira argues it is with Frutuoso that a history of insularity, as spoken by islanders themselves, started. This was not only due to the writer's origin but, more importantly, to his reuse of popular accounts and oral literature (Vieira 2017, 34).

Lima Barreto's *O Homem que sabia javanês* (*The Man Who Knew Javanese*), Senhor Castelo, the main character, in an interaction with his Portuguese landlord says:

> […] Vou ser nomeado professor de javanês, e...
> Por aí o homem interrompeu-me:
> — Que diabo vem a ser isso, Senhor Castelo?
> Gostei da diversão e ataquei o patriotismo do homem:
> — É uma língua que se fala lá pelas bandas do Timor. Sabe onde é?
> […]
> — Eu cá por mim, não sei bem; mas ouvi dizer que são umas terras que temos lá para os lados de Macau. E o senhor sabe isso, Senhor Castelo? (Barreto 2004, 60)

Rather than historically relevant for specific, self-enclosed, chronologic categorizations and epistemologies, the difficulty in addressing these islands by similar manners and terms, as one would other post-colonial national and sub-national mesologies, stems from the questionable contraction of varying historical sensitivities, running at different, often divergent, intensities, and resulting in the identitary complex categorizable as a web of relations, only partially represented by the singularity and homogeneity of a noun such as 'Macaronesia,' or other networks of negotiation of the geo-local, such as, for Barreto's character, the meta-geography that encompassed "*umas terras que temos para os lados de Macau*" ("some lands we have over there towards the sides of Macao"). Stratford's uncovering of the American archipelago is, in a way, a reaction to Braudel's problematics of imperial historiography. For us, too, the constant attempt at identifying the invisible archipelago underlying the formal structures of Macaronesia is a way of approaching the ambiguities of its post-colonial legacy, but also to reclaim and re-center discourse, to the best of one's abilities, in the ambivalent interstice between the region as a spatial category and as a temporal segmentation of Atlantic History itself, comprehended between the 14th and the 20th Centuries,[10] akin to Modernism for the History of Art. In the case of Macaronesia, a hybrid between a historical location, a macro-archipelago of sorts, and a mythologic aspiration to transcendence, it is in scrutinizing the particularities of its manifestations, in the singularity of each of its islands, but in the spirit of the archipelagic, that we will come to understand and retrieve the sense of belonging that marks the identities of these islands in their regional and oceanic scopes.

4. Conclusion

Exploring Macaronesia is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that challenges traditional epistemological frameworks. The term 'Macaronesia' only partially captures the intricate archipelagic nature of this geo-ontology, which exists as a rhizomatic complex of oceanic nature. In the pursuit of uncovering the invisible archipelago underlying Macaronesia's formal structures, we have uncovered the persistence of a continual effort to signify its ambiguity. This essay, while not definitively answering the question of "What is Macaronesia?" laid bare the epistemological complexities of

[10] That is, between the arrival of Europeans and their own importation of a late Neolithic Revolution and the recovery of the noun by naturalists already at the break of the 20th Century.

the region, denoting its spatial qualities and temporal dimensions, particularly within the frames of an Atlantic world. By delving into the genesis of its culturally active communities and analyzing labor, aesthetics, and conceptual problems, we have recognized the shifts at the base of its sense of place, heavily influenced by its geological conditions, which we saw inform the modes of belonging of the islands' inhabitants to the territory, and, in much the same way, imperial discourses that encapsulated islanders in a formulaic otherness, isolated by oceanic condition. By understanding the relevance of the networks of intricate human-territory interactions shaping the region, we have been able to establish a framework that conceives the noun 'Macaronesia' as an array of fluxes moving between local and global frames of belonging, revealing a rich tapestry of diverse historical sensitivities and identities. The region's archipelagic nature, interweaving human-territory interactions and geological dynamics, paints a comprehensive picture contributing to a profound understanding of Macaronesia as both a geosocial category and a place of global relevance in search of regional identity.

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