



CHAPTER 1

Citizenship, Care and Choice: LGBTQ+ Intimacies in Southern Europe—An Introduction

Ana Cristina Santos

This book is about intimacies as an overarching frame encompassing personal attachments and relational well-being and including all sorts of bonds that are meaningful to humans. In 1998, Lauren Berlant edited a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* dedicated to intimacy. In the introduction to the volume, Berlant eloquently directs the reader towards a set of expectations around intimate bonds, noting how intimacy “involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way (...) set within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipating kinds of love” (1998, p. 281). In the same piece, Berlant also explores another fact about intimacy: “the unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions that make things turn out in unpredicted scenarios” (1998, p. 281). In this book, familiarity and comfort is as present as trouble and disruption, but the common

A. C. Santos (✉)

Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra (CES-UC), Coimbra, Portugal
e-mail: crisrina@ces.uc.pt

© The Author(s) 2023

A. C. Santos (ed.), *LGBTQ+ Intimacies in Southern Europe*,
Citizenship, Gender and Diversity,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13508-8_1

thread will remain the focus on meaningful, intimate relations involving LGBTQ+ people in rapidly changing sociopolitical and legal contexts. This focus is informed both theoretically and politically. Let me start with the theory.

In sociology, intimacy has been defined as “the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality. Although there may be no universal definition, intimate relationships are a type of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close” (Jamieson, 2011, p. 1). Lynn Jamieson proceeds to explain that “[i]ntimacy as a concept complements rather than supplants terms which seek to categorise types of personal relationships such as family, friends and kin and overlaps with other concepts seeking to capture the quality of relationships and the processes that bind people together, like love” (Jamieson, 2011, p. 2). Despite this and other honourable exceptions that take into account the significant sociocultural transformations affecting intimacy in recent decades, the canon of sociological literature about practices of intimacy has remained focused on the heterosexual, monogamous and reproductive couple (Roseneil et al., 2020). The persistent dismissal of intimate bonds that escape cis-heteronormative confinements inspired the decision to bring together a number of scholars working on LGBTQ+ intimacies—particularly on partnering, parenting and friendship—with a particular interest in issues of citizenship, care and choice.

The starting point for this book was INTIMATE,¹ a large research project funded by the European Research Council which I coordinated between 2014 and 2019 at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra. INTIMATE explored the lived experiences and sociopolitical contexts of LGBTQ+ people, with a particular interest in Southern Europe and, more specifically, in Portugal, Spain and Italy. The choice of countries can be partially explained by the existing sociological and social policy literature that constructs Southern Europe as a geopolitical context in which the particularities of welfare regimes and “gender regimes” (Walby, 2001) highlight distinctive features in relation to other European countries (Ferrera, 2005; Trifiletti, 1999). Southern Europe has often been presented as patriarchal, catholic, conservative and familistic (Ferrera,

¹Funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007–2013)/ERC Grant Agreement “INTIMATE—Citizenship, Care and Choice: The Micropolitics of Intimacy in Southern Europe” [338452].

2005; Flaquer, 2000), which reinforces a homogenizing image of these countries. Also in the sphere of care and public services, Southern European countries are described as having a strong “welfare society” (Sousa Santos, 1993) in contrast with the low provision of the welfare state, a feature stemming from their semi-peripheral position within the world-system.

Regardless of certain similarities, this somewhat generalized image of Southern European countries risks reproducing a stereotype, without properly interrogating it. In fact, sociological literature about this region often disregards important differences between countries, running the risk of contributing to a homogenous, albeit precarious imagination of “the other”. Conscious of these risks, INTIMATE comparatively explored the common as well as the distinctive features of Italy, Portugal and Spain regarding LGBTQ+ intimacies.

When preparing the application to submit to the European Research Council, I was convinced that Southern European countries offered valuable, though historically overlooked, knowledge regarding intimate citizenship. To further develop this argument, I considered the different historical, legal and political context of LGBTQ+ rights in each country, and, together with a team of five researchers, we conducted in-depth fieldwork on both micro (biographical) and macro (socio-legal) levels, focusing on three main types of intimate bonds: partnering, parenting and friendship. Partnering, parenting and friendship were selected as analytical dimensions for the study because of their significance in the construction of intimate biographies across a range of identities, backgrounds and geographic locations. I argued that partnering, parenting and friendship constitute three different, although potentially interlinked, angles, from which the idea of a “pure relationship” (Giddens, 1992) that characterizes contemporary personal relationships can be tested. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive but present reciprocal possibilities and implications, intersecting with local and supranational cultural, legal and social policy frameworks. Taking partnering, parenting and friendship as our point of departure, I intended to ask: how do intimate biographies of LGBTQ+ people in Southern Europe shed light on different national gender regimes? How do existing laws and policies in each country play out in terms of the opportunities and constraints affecting LGBTQ+ relationships? How can politics and practices of intimacy in everyday life contribute to new ways of conceiving fair and comprehensive laws and policies, as well as inclusive cultural representations of sexual diversity? What lessons

can be drawn from Southern European countries in terms of achieving formal equality? Needless to say, many of these questions remain unanswered, but they retain their precious value as ongoing driving forces for scholarly work and political practice.

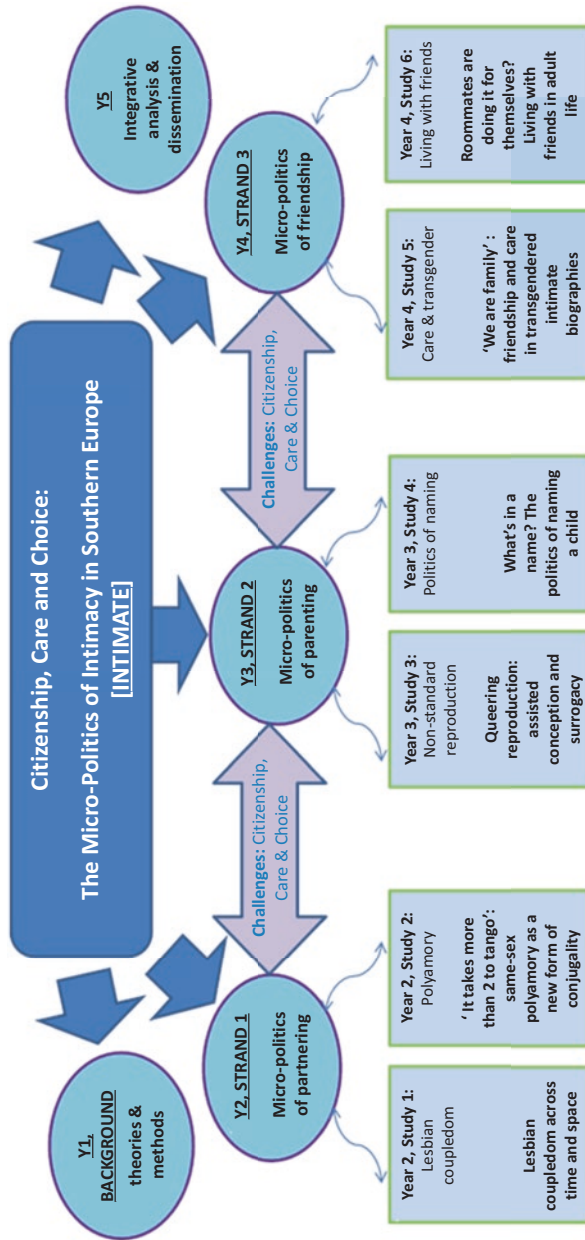
Overall, the INTIMATE research team conducted over 90 biographic narrative interviews and developed six cross-national, qualitative case studies focusing on topics as diverse as lesbian coupledom, consensual non-monogamies, surrogacy and assisted reproduction, naming a child, cohabiting with friends and trans networks of care. The following scheme summarizes the research design:

Stemming from the findings of INTIMATE, three major international conferences gathering hundreds of delegates from across the globe were organized: “Queering Partnering”, “Queering Parenting” and “Queering Friendship”, in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively. The book draws on some of the work presented during those conferences and brings together the team of researchers but also colleagues who generously agreed to become consultants in our International Advisory Group.

INTIMATE was submitted for funding in 2012, almost a decade ago. This book benefits from the passing of time, enabling a socio-historical overview of the most important transformations in the realm of citizenship, care and choice in the light of intimate citizenship. When the study started, in 2014, the situation of LGBTQ+ intimate relationships ranged from full legal recognition in Spain to a total absence of rights in Italy, with Portugal positioned between these two poles. At the time of arrival, in 2022, some sociocultural, legal and political features have changed, whilst others remain apparently impenetrable.

Academic knowledge has also advanced during this time. Our theoretical framework has evolved, and empirical studies have offered fundamental material to move beyond the theoretical dispute between intimate and sexual citizenship (Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2018), in order to advance productive ways in which these and other perspectives on citizenship can—and should—contribute to the politics and practices of intimacy in everyday life. And this is where the politically informed decision to focus on LGBTQ+ intimacies becomes central.

The book evolves around the interlinked notions and practices of citizenship, care and choice. These are, in my view, constitutive elements of doing intimacy, that is, the daily management of becoming, being or remaining intimate with others. Going back to Ken Plummer, when a few years ago we were invited speakers at the same event, I was struck by his



confession that he was actually never interested in law and that intimate citizenship was never about juridical texts because “rights on their own are not enough” (Plummer, 2018). In a recent book co-authored with Sasha Roseneil, Isabel Crowhurst, Tone Hellesund and Mariya Stoilova, *The Tenacity of the Couple-Norm*, we suggested “expanding the study of intimate citizenship beyond the formal, the legal and the rational, to encompass the affective realm of love, attachment, desire and belonging” (Roseneil et al., 2020, p. 19). My vision for this book draws heavily on that call.

Bringing our embodied experience to the centre of our analytical concerns remains an important political step that prevents difference from becoming portrayed as atomized exceptions, isolated accidents and residual collateral damage. In other words, as we have learned from feminist disability studies, it is never about someone’s inability to fit in—it is always about the context’s inability to undo the constraining boundaries with which it operates on a political, legal and sociocultural level.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Overall, the book is guided by the fundamental sociological question of how change takes place and, concomitantly, how the practices and expectations of individuals in the sphere of intimacy are adjusted to and/or shaped by the existing legal and social policy framework. Despite the geographical focus on Southern Europe, the book engages with reference literature mostly produced in the UK and the US and further considers significant developments in other parts of the world. More specifically, connections have been made with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, especially Brazil, due to language proximity and other historical reciprocal influences in LGBTQ+ culture and experiences.

The book argues for the importance of considering LGBTQ+ intimacies in Southern Europe as a gateway to three intersecting themes that will guide the different chapters in the book: citizenship, care and choice. Each of these themes has inspired a section of the book with its own set of concerns. Rather than self-contained categories, the themes are to be seen as intersecting one another as well as in dialogue with cut-across issues regarding partnering, parenting and friendship. In each section, attentive readers will notice a balance between more empirically based chapters and chapters which are mostly theoretically driven. In the end, hopefully, the 11 chapters in the book will contribute to rethinking and remaking

citizenship, care and choice through the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Southern Europe.

SECTION I: CITIZENSHIP MATTERS

The women's movement and other movements for sexual equality have been at the forefront of symbolic battles that have finally advanced the notion that the personal is indeed political (Giddens, 1992). Through the demands of social movements as well as supranational institutions, national states are increasingly expected to recognize rights that counter discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Cooper, 1994; Santos, 2012; Stychin, 2001; Stychin & Herman, 2000). Gradually the notion of citizenship is being pushed and stretched to include demands that had been previously left out (Plummer, 2003; Roseneil, 2010). Post-structuralist contributions to citizenship theory—namely, Young's (1990) notion of group differentiated citizenship and Kymlicka's (1995) notion of multicultural citizenship—have advanced the understanding of citizenship as highly contingent, fragmented and dynamic. Today it is argued that citizenship can be understood both as “an academic and political concept and as lived experience” (Lister et al., 2007, p. 1). In such a context, it seems important to consider the mutual implications of intimacy and citizenship, exploring the extent to which issues of partnering, parenting and friendship are important aspects of being/becoming recognized as citizens. Given this challenge, the aim in this section is to move beyond the theoretical dispute between intimate and sexual citizenship (Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2018), in order to advance reciprocal ways in which these and other perspectives on citizenship can—and should—contribute to the politics and practices of intimacy in everyday life. Therefore, this first section is focused on citizenship, namely, political practices of undoing and remaking that resist normative ways of being an intimate citizen.

The potential of queer as an action toolkit for surviving oppression in Spain, Portugal and Brazil is the main focus of João Manuel de Oliveira's contribution which places collective strategies of resistance in the public space at the centre of the analysis. Mafalda Esteves draws on the recent history of bisexual activism in Portugal to examine how relational recognition and related demands have remained excluded from the experiences of self-identified bisexual citizens. Pablo Pérez Navarro's chapter investigates ways in which friendship can offer important political and conceptual inputs to ongoing discussions about relationality and public order with a

particular focus on Spain and Portugal. Finally, in the last chapter of this section, I suggest that the nonconforming body can become a site for rethinking citizenship from the perspective of monstrosity as an embodied epistemology.

SECTION II: CARE MATTERS

Care can mean “to watch over, look after or assist in practical ways as well as to feel attachment and fondness” (Jamieson, 1998, p. 10). Care emerged as a topic for theoretical concern in the late 1970s (Land, 1978), and in the 1980s feminist literature started to draw attention to the emotional costs of care provision (Glendinning, 1989). Since then, feminist literature has successfully established that care is indeed gendered, to the extent that women are often expected to be the main providers (Finch & Groves, 1983; Lister et al., 2007; Portugal, 1998). A more recent aspect in the study of care is the focus on vulnerability (Koivunen et al., 2018; Vaitinen, 2015) and on inter-dependence (Fine & Glendinning, 2005) as a fundamentally politicized concepts, which are relevant for theory, politics and policies around care.

In Southern European countries, the importance of a strong “welfare society” that compensates for the shortcomings of state provision has been identified (Sousa Santos, 1993), but little has been said about the cis-heteronormative underpinnings of care provision in Southern Europe and elsewhere. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of heteronormative law and social policy (Carabine, 2004), there is a range of care practices which are particularly crucial in a context of economic crisis, when the welfare state fails to provide adequate support. A significant example, yet understudied in the context of southern European countries despite relevant and recent exceptions (Pieri, 2020; Pieri & Brillhante, 2022; Santos, 2020), is the role of friends as well as non-standard families and informal networks in providing care when formal provision reveals to be insufficient or inadequate.

This section puts care practices and health at the centre of the analysis, by looking at care practices experienced by those who live outside the heterosexual, nuclear family unit in Southern Europe. The aim in this section is twofold. On one hand, it consists of *studying care practices that mainstream sociological theory and social policy overlooks*, and, on the other hand, it examines the *social impact of framing policies around care without taking into account non-heteronormative care practices* and their significance in the politics and practices of intimacy in everyday life.

The first two chapters in this section draw on experiences of caring for others, suggesting new ways of increasing safety and well-being through counter-practices of partnering, parenting and caring. Drawing on empirically based studies conducted in the Italian context, Tatiana Motterle investigates daily practices of support, within and around the law, focusing in particular on the experiences of lesbian couples, trans* people and gay fathers through surrogacy. Luciana Moreira's chapter draws on biographical accounts of lesbian and bisexual mothers and of trans people whose parents were part of their care networks, to explore how alternative globalization and subaltern cosmopolitanism have been used in parenting practices in Spain. Chiara Bertone's chapter takes biomedical power as a powerful symbolic toolkit influencing both the frame and success of demands around the recognition of same-sex families. The last chapter in this section, by Beatrice Gusmano, investigates care from the point of view of relational networks of emotional and material support that are particularly significant in contexts of increasing precariousness.

SECTION III: CHOICE MATTERS

This last section of the book sits at the intersection of intimacy and choice, by gathering contributions that consider the centrality of friends who (we choose to) become part of our most intimate circle of trust.

LGBTQ+ people have been identified as pioneers in creating a new model for relationships that is less anchored in conventions and roles than in pleasure and self-determination (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Castells, 1997; Giddens, 1992; Roseneil, 2005, 2010). Giddens' notion of a "pure relationship" (Giddens, 1992) captures this idea, rendering modern intimacy freer from constraining, and perhaps meaningless, obligations. This is how the notion of "families of choice" (Weeks et al., 2001) came to make such an important contribution to gender and sexuality studies. Informed by this line of thought, in this research we want to *assess the ways in which everyday practices of friendship contribute to the debate on choice and self-determination as a fundamental human right*.

The chapters included in this final section place friendship at the centre of intimate choices that have an impact on the self and others. Ana Lúcia Santos takes her study about cohabiting with friends in adult life in Portugal as her point of departure to suggest a connection between intimacy, cohabitation and what she suggests framing as the "heterotopic citizenship" when precariousness and lack of formal recognition of queer

bonds are features cohabitants share. In her chapter, Zowie Davy investigates a central topic regarding friendship and choice that is still absent from research in Southern European countries—the role of friends who proactively choose to provide valuable peer-support to gender-diverse children in the school context. Finally, combining a genealogical perspective on Italian feminisms and social movement analysis, Elia A.G. Arfini reflects on the emergence and current state of queer transfeminist movements in Italy, highlighting their contribution to the theorization of post-traditional intimacies and materialist analysis of gender (as) labour.

REFERENCES

- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences. .
- Berlant, L. (1998). Intimacy: A Special Issue. *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2) Intimacy (Winter, 1998). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i257793>, 281–288.
- Carabine, J. (Ed.). (2004). *Sexualities: Personal lives and social policy*. Open University Press.
- Castells, M. (1997). *The power of identity*. Blackwell.
- Cooper, D. (1994). *Sexing the city*. Rivers Oram.
- Ferrera, M. (Ed.). (2005). *Welfare state reform in Southern Europe: Fighting poverty and social exclusion in Italy, Spain*. Routledge.
- Finch, J., & Groves, D. (Eds.). (1983). *A labour of love: Women, work and caring*. Routledge.
- Fine, M., & Glendinning, C. (2005). Dependence, independence or interdependence? Revisiting the concepts of ‘care’ and ‘dependency’. *Ageing & Society*, 25(4), 601–621.
- Flaquer, L. (2000). *Las políticas familiares en una perspectiva comparada*. Fundación La Caixa.
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love & eroticism in modern societies*. Polity Press.
- Glendinning, C. (1989). The costs of informal care: Looking inside the household. Her Majesty’s Stationery Office:
- Jamieson, L. (1998). *Intimacy: Personal relationships in modern societies*. Polity Press.
- Jamieson, L. (2011). Intimacy as a concept: Explaining social change in the context of globalisation or another form of ethnocentrism? *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4), 151–163.
- Koivunen, A., Kyrölä, K., & Ryberg, I. (2018). Vulnerability as a political language. In A. Koivunen, K. Kyrölä, & I. Ryberg (Eds.), *The power of vulnerabil-*

- ity: Mobilising affect in feminist, queer and anti-racist media cultures* (pp. 1–26). Manchester University Press.
- Kymlica, W. (1995). *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Clarendon Press.
- Land, H. (1978). Who cares for the family? *Journal of Social Policy*, 3(7), 357–384.
- Lister, R., Williams, F., Anttonen, A., Bussemaker, M., Gerhard, U., Heinen, J., Johansson, S., Leira, A., Siim, B., Tobio, C., & Gavanas, A. (2007). *Gendering citizenship in Western Europe: New challenges for citizenship research in a cross-national context*. The Policy Press.
- Pieri, M. (2020). Multiple estrangements in the twilight zone: Chronic illness and queerness in Southern Europe. In Z. Davy, A. C. Santos, C. Bertone, R. Thoreson, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Handbook of global sexualities* (pp. 386–403). SAGE.
- Pieri, M., & Brillhante, J. (2022). “The Light at the End of the Tunnel”: Experiences of LGBTQ+ Adults in Portuguese Healthcare. *Healthcare*, 10(1), 146.
- Plummer, K. (2003). *Intimate citizenship: Private decisions and public dialogues*. University of Washington Press.
- Plummer, K. (2018, April 26). *Re-imagining intimate citizenship in a troubled world* [Keynote]. Conference the political in the personal: Families and sexualities in times of social change in Europe. Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium.
- Portugal, S. (1998). Women, childcare and social networks. In V. Ferreira, T. Tavares, & S. Portugal (Eds.), *Shifting bonds, shifting bounds. Women, mobility and citizenship in Europe* (pp. 345–355). Celta.
- Richardson, D. (2018). *Sexuality and citizenship*. Polity.
- Roseneil, S. (2005). Living and loving beyond the boundaries of the heteronorm: Personal relationships in the 21st century. In L. McKie & S. Cunningham-Burley (Eds.), *Families in society: Boundaries and relationships* (pp. 241–257). The Policy Press.
- Roseneil, S. (2010). Intimate citizenship: A pragmatic, yet radical, proposal for a politics of personal life. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 17(1), 77–82.
- Roseneil, S., Crowhurst, I., Hellesund, T., Santos, A. C., & Stoilova, M. (2020). *The tenacity of the couple-norm: Intimate citizenship regimes in a changing Europe*. UCL Press.
- Santos, A. C. (2012). The politics of sexuality in Portugal: Confronting tradition, enacting change. In S. Hines & Y. Taylor (Eds.), *Sexualities: Reflections and futures* (pp. 168–185). Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Santos, A. C. (2020). From villain to hero: Trans men and non-binary persons as care providers in Southern Europe. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 5(2), 319–333.

- Sousa Santos, B. (1993). O Estado, as relações salariais e o bem-estar social na semi-periferia: o caso português. In B. de Sousa Santos (Ed.), *Portugal: um retrato singular* (pp. 17–56). Edições Afrontamento.
- Stychin, C. F. (2001). Sexual citizenship in the European Union. *Citizenship Studies*, 5(3), 285–301.
- Stychin, C. F., & Herman, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Sexuality in the legal arena*. The Athlone Press.
- Trifiletti, R. (1999). Southern European welfare regimes and the worsening position of women. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 9(1), 49–64.
- Vaittinen, T. (2015). The power of the vulnerable body. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17(1), 100–118.
- Walby, S. (2001). *From gendered welfare state to gender regimes: National Differences, convergence or re-structuring?* [Paper presentation]. Gender and Society Group, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Weeks, J., Heaphy, B., & Donovan, C. (2001). *Same sex intimacies: Families of choice and other life experiments*. Routledge.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

