



Reconfiguring Islands

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Islands and islanders have long histories and complicated contemporary relationships with the mainlands, continents and metropolises to which they are related. The idea of *island* itself occupies ambiguous and ambivalent spaces: a landfall for weary sailors, a punishment for prisoners, a sentinel of empires, a quarantine for suspects, a paradise for tourists and a domicile for offshore capital, to name but a few of the traces conjured by and practices associated with islands. More importantly, islands are also home to vibrant cultures and societies around the world that, in spite of global processes and demographic challenges, have flourished and continue to do so. Islands around the world that share a particular jurisdictional identity, as we have seen in this collection of essays, have been included in the project on sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs) currently underway at the University of Prince Edward Island. The SNIJ Research Project has been exploring a wide range of issues: it has collected and made available data on more than a hundred of these island jurisdictions. The research papers in this collection outline a wide range of spatial, cultural, legal, environmental, juridical, fiscal, economic and administrative relationships that such islands have with national systems of governance. By foregrounding Prince Edward Island's status as a Sub-National Island Jurisdiction, this volume provides a useful comparative context in which to think about the island province's possibilities for autonomy and agency in charting its economic and social trajectories.

The designation of *Sub-National Island Jurisdiction* is large and resonant, containing notions of difference, hierarchy and possibility. The focus on sub-national island jurisdictions allows us to re-imagine island communities and to re-invent spatial configurations by bringing these territories together in ways that compare and contrast the differences and similarities amongst them. As Kathleen Stuart argues in this volume, examining the ways in which SNIJs have tackled transportation issues provides the opportunity to critically evaluate our deeply held ideas about geography, relative isolation, small size, and adverse weather in the

context of islands. In so doing, it provides a dynamic framework with which to think about and to look at these islands jurisdictions — and the analyses in this collection offer some lessons learned. The project and the research papers in this collection draw out the possibilities, more so than the limitations and constraints, faced by such island jurisdictions around the world. In his Introduction to this volume, Godfrey Baldacchino urges us to rethink jurisdiction in more active terms: it is best formulated as a resource, rather than as a neutral, passive or territorial term.

Thinking about islands in a global context offers a perspective that underlines the interconnectedness and flows in new ways that facilitate our understanding of the differences and disparities that are produced and even enforced through long-standing and ongoing global processes. Looking at social, cultural and economic processes in the contemporary clustering of islands that comprise sub-national island jurisdictions underlines the ways in which the intense circulation of commodities, people and ideas, connections and flows are now accentuated in an era of globalization. Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 16) suggest that globalization “differentiates the world as it connects it” and it is from this vantage point that sub-national island jurisdictions may provide an effective lens through which disparities can be viewed. Global economic processes shape and reshape islands in complex and complicated ways, and islanders have long been engaging, accommodating, resisting, embracing and initiating such changes. The framework and analyses of the diverse experiences of sub-national island jurisdictions highlights the agency of islanders and their political machinery in ways that counter representations of island jurisdictions as dependent, spatially peripheralized and fiscally constrained. It is instructive to examine the experience of a range of islands with the same set of governance issues and structures as PEI.

The Review of Papers

Each research paper in this collection focuses on a key area of concern facing sub-national island jurisdictions, documenting the complexity, strength and the limitations in the areas of governance, immigration, social capital, transportation and the environment. In a chapter entitled “The Capacity of Sub-National Island Jurisdictions to Increase Autonomy: The Example of Prince Edward Island,” Hans Connor explores how PEI could better use its jurisdictional autonomy. He outlines opportunities and capacity in this policy area but at the same time underlines the need to prevent the erosion of autonomy in policy making and revenue generation. In weighing geographical and political factors and the juridi-

cal, executive and legislative features of sub-national island jurisdictions, Connor noted that there is some independence but also subordination to metropolitan areas. The jurisdictions which best lend themselves to a suitable comparison with PEI are Hawaii, Tasmania, Balearic Islands and Canary Islands (Spain). Connor analyzes Tasmania and PEI in some detail. Prince Edward Island, according to Connor, has several advantages in governance compared to other SNIJs including representation in the metropolitan government and the constitutional power to generate revenue. The latter, argues Connor, is one crucial area that Prince Edward Islanders could use better to enhance its policy autonomy. He recommends that Prince Edward Islanders develop an attitude of economic autonomy rather than an unthinking reliance on Federal funding; that is, Islanders ought to consider jurisdiction as an economic and political resource. Connor's message is clear: Prince Edward Islanders have jurisdictional powers that could be better utilized, and reliance on federal funding could be problematic in the long run for it erodes autonomy and confidence.

Crystal Fall's paper explores demographic matters, particularly issues related to immigration and migration to SNIJs. There is some concern over the demographics of PEI which, like many territories in the Western world, has an aging population. Island life is also characterized by the out-migration of young people. According to the author, PEI is in a position of need: we need immigrants to come and to stay and we also need Islanders to return home. One of the key concerns in this chapter is: How can we attract and retain immigrants? As echoed in Groome Wynne's paper (about which more below), we must build bridges to new Islanders, many of whom leave before spending two years here. Fall examines the varied strategies deployed by SNIJs in relation to demographic issues, including the exclusionary strategies of Bermuda; Tasmania's efforts to attract skilled immigrants through Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) Visas; and the complicated multi-tiered system of residency in the Turks and Caicos. The author also explores approaches and opportunities within PEI including retirement communities in Alberton, Francophone immigration, and temporary foreign workers at fish plants. Prince Edward Island has made some headway with the creation of a Provincial Population Secretariat to forge policies that promote immigration, retention and repatriation.

In looking at migration in the context of islands, we are reminded that modernity and global processes have long engendered travel wherein the young leave their islands to find work, education or adventure else-

where. When they do so, the emigrants may send remittances home (at least for a while) and they are invariably enriched by new ideas, new commodities and new contacts. Many islanders dream about returning home and some do return permanently while others return as tourists and retirees. Mobility is increasingly shaped through the national and transnational flows of people and goods, and by technology through which “virtual neighbourhoods” offer imaginative resources for new ways of connecting.

Barbara Groome Wynne’s chapter on “Social Capital and Social Economy” underlines the relational nature of islanders and islands. The chapter identifies the networks and norms as well as the bonds and bridges that allow islanders to act and to create civil societies. Bonds concern internalities and the activities within a group while bridges speak to externalities and the need for groups to build alliances with outside groups. From this vantage point, oppositional binaries such as inside/outside are of less value in understanding the twofold linkages of internal and external, bonds and bridges, roots and routes that more accurately capture the lives of islanders. The author has noted that islanders are generous with their time and resources, and this creates a solid network of relationships that supports social capital on the island. At the same time, this dense social network makes it difficult for newcomers or outsiders to access such networks and develop a genuine sense of belonging. It may also dampen dissent and constrain islanders from raising public concern about any number of important issues, such as environmental degradation and unsustainable farming practices.

In her paper on transportation, Kathleen Stuart notes the complexity of transportation systems comprised of tangible structures and networks that “encompass invisible spatial and temporal concepts such as “shipping lanes,” “flight paths,” and “airspace,” that are informed by political and geopolitical concerns. Stuart suggests that we “return to the Sea”, and while this is a powerful idea, the possibility is often hampered by federal policy and weak fiscal support. Stuart noted that islands such as Hawaii have been shaped by geo-political processes which designate that place as both military installation and tourist destination. She has noted the ways in which Palau in Micronesia creates an alternative use of military infrastructure such as was done in PEI at Slemmon Industrial Park in the Summerside area. Stuart, too, argues that islanders must have clarity of vision in order to avoid being overly pressured by competing outside interests, be they private, imperial, military or metropolitan.

The intimate linkages between islands and their environments are

examined by Lawrence Liao in his paper entitled: “The Environment as Resource: Lessons for Prince Edward Island from other Sub-National Island Jurisdictions.” Island environments, he argues, are “self-contained” by their physical and geographical nature; the fragility and finite nature of resources on island environments are increasingly commanding public policy attention. Environmental issues have become concerns of governance as environmental degradation is evidenced on land, coastal areas, air and sea. There is, as he argues, “a connectivity of ecological components”. The stability of ecosystems is built upon a cohesive yet dynamic interaction of biological components occupying different niches and performing different functions. In PEI, as in other places, there is an emerging concern about the environment. As a SNIJ, the PEI provincial government is vested with authority and some autonomy from the national government, enabling it to craft laws that respond to the particular needs and demands of the Island environment. Economic policies and imperatives have an extraordinary impact on the Island environment: the relatively large-scale monoculture of potatoes in PEI is one such example. There are increasing concerns about farming practices, including the intense use of fungicides, insecticides and nitrates and the intensification of soil erosion, as noted in Liao’s chapter. There have been attempts to find solutions to some of these key problems; meanwhile, fish kills, which are now seemingly an annual occurrence, underline the interconnectedness and the fragility of our environment. Code (1991: 6) calls for “new ecological thinking” and she has convincingly argued that the transformative possibilities of “ecological thinking can be realized by participants engaged in producing a viable habitat and ethos, prepared to take the burdens and blessings of place, identity, materiality and history, and to work within locational possibilities and limitations”. New ecological thinking, as Code argues, is integral to place, personhood and human relationships.

Sub-National Island Jurisdictions, it has been noted, often benefit from the largesse of metropolitan centres. And while this is true, John Eldon Green suggests that metropolitan centres also benefit from their relationships with islanders. In his words, we are “smaller but smarter”. He argues that islanders see the ramifications of policy rather quickly, a point that is underlined in Liao’s paper on island environments. Interaction between metropolitan centre and SNIJ is not generally recognized as reciprocal; and it would be beneficial to unpack the representation of dependency with which the latter is often saddled. We might also want to rethink the elements of that dependency. The most notorious, of course,

is seasonal employment and the reliance on employment insurance that has been often associated with PEI and other “have not” provinces in the Atlantic region. Participation in full-time work signifies modernity in contrast to seasonal work that is often depicted as a residual practice from times past. Could we not read seasonal work and the preference for seasonal work as a resistance to full-time employment that means taking a year round job at low wages? Could we not link seasonal work to the generous time, voluntary effort, and community bonds that have so long characterized PEI? It might be useful to re-think the specificities of the “dependency” in the context of the generous and community-minded social capital that characterizes many islands as Groome Wynne has pointed out. At the same time we cannot speak of a singular Island community – there are many communities on the Island, particularly if we expand the parameters to include the ecological approach privileged in Liao’s paper and Code’s ecological thinking.

The policy issues in all of the case studies raised a number of pertinent questions at the June 2007 seminar when the papers were first presented. What do we educate young people to do? What are the underlying social, cultural and economic factors which contribute to people leaving islands? Can islands continue to rely on tourism? How can we market tourism? What are the effects of enhanced security concerns for islanders and islands? What is the impact of geo-political agendas on islands and their autonomy and plans? How can we gain better access to information in the Province? The questions and related discussions suggest that there is much more to be said and done.

The papers in this collection are all concerned with policy. It is important to think about policy as a cultural artifact and a process shaped by the contingency of history, emergent contradictions and above all else, the exercise of power. When we make policy, we redraw boundaries and redistribute resources. Policy-making is a deeply conflicted and complicated process, aspects that are often obscured. What are the processes and mechanisms to identify, to resolve or at least to mediate such conflict? Were they lost, or are they yet to be created? Perhaps it is something we might ask elder islanders; we might also endeavour to forge connections with various other interests groups who have typically been left outside of policy making processes: non-governmental organizations, women’s groups, environmental groups, First Nations, youth, Acadians, “newcomers” or immigrants, our most recently arrived islanders. Dwellers of islands have often felt the sting of exclusion and

we must be wary of inflicting exclusion by recognizing that boundaries are at best temporary and most certainly always porous. Collaboration is important, as anthropologist Anna Tsing (2005: 13) notes, for it moves discussion beyond the standoff between opposing interest groups and creates new interests and identities through the friction generated by difference and connections.

Policy crafts change, and ideally policy is inclusive and responsive, and we must be aware of both new and old exclusions. Policy must also be enacted, enforced and respected if it is to be effective. This is particularly clear in the rising concern about environmental degradation in PEI. That profound change can occur almost imperceptibly over time was illustrated John Eldon Green's example of religious differences in PEI. They no longer have the same social and political weight they once carried. What then, are the new points of difference and alterities? Social networks can unravel or be reconfigured with change and it is important to recognize that change is not necessarily lineal and/or progressive. A more nuanced understanding of change assesses losses as well as gains and the unintended consequences of change. A key point about policy formulation is that nothing is inevitable. Exploring how global processes (capitalism, modernity, development and the systems of governance) articulate with the local cultural practices of islanders allows us to trace the changing contours of global processes while, at the same time, chart the resilience of cultural and social forms at local levels. Islanders devise imaginative practices and inventive language to negotiate the changes in an ever globalizing world. New cultural practices and new economic exclusions emerge, and understanding change charges us with tracking both continuities and discontinuities; and, notably, the spaces between... *always* the spaces between.

It is in this context that I think of the small rural community where I grew up in Grand Tracadie, PEI. When my maternal grandparents lived there, the community had a library at its social centre where people gathered informally every week. It was but one of the many sites of community building and bonding as well as bridging with the outside world. There is no longer a library and most people don't remember that there ever was one there, unless they have had long conversations with their elders about the past. The disappearance of this particular, small rural library with its local librarian resonates at this time when we consider our concern about literacy levels in PEI. Ideas concerning modernization tend to reinforce teleology and impose an opposition between tradition

and modernity. Islanders are often represented as positioned between traditional and the modern practices in ways that do not relay the complex relationships existing between these categories.

I am often struck by how cosmopolitan PEI has been in the past. As Kathleen Stuart notes in her paper, PEI's prosperity in the 19th century was created by flourishing transatlantic trade flows that encompassed Newfoundland, New England, the Caribbean and Great Britain. When these rich sea connections with the outside world in the past receded, the construction of the railroad after confederation provided hundreds of kilometres of railway linking Island communities and enabling travel within the Island. Local theatre productions, as my mother recalls, circuited the Island via the railway. Practising plays and performing them around the Island was a favourite winter pastime for rural Islanders. Joining confederation changed the direction of trade flows and the nature of the Island's external and internal relationships, or the bonds and bridges as identified by Groome Wynne. The idea of local or alternative modernities (Gaonkar, 2001) is now used to suggest how modern forms are localized in particular and varied ways. Examining island jurisdictions with history in mind underscores their diverse experiences with modernity and their relationships to other places such as mainlands and metropolises.

That cultural practices continue to be local phenomena, even when they are shaped by global cultural processes, lends interest in studying SNIJs. How have these islands localized modernity? Localizing global processes means that cultural change takes place within a field of culturally available possibilities. Such social actions can dissolve or reinforce the boundaries of social institutions and culture. While changes attached to the ongoing processes of modernity and globalization are significant, we can also make a case for continuities as well as ruptures. New ways of configuring islands allows us to map islanders in dispersed and contested sites. The category of sub-national island jurisdictions provides a spatial constellation within a particular global community of islands; with this repositioning of islands, their potential is amplified and their dependency displaced. All the contributors in this collection have pointed to the importance of relationships at various levels. Kathleen Stuart in her presentation succinctly summarized the way forward: rethink geography; protect the environment; introduce opportunities of scale; devise alternatives; take charge and privilege immigration and creativity.

Since 1991, I have been traveling and conducting ethnographic research in the South Pacific where there are thousands of islands and atolls

and scores of archipelagoes. I am often asked by islanders whom I meet, “To which island do you belong?” This question always intrigues me for it so clearly represents a departure from continental thinking. Their presumption of islandness generates thinking about island spaces and places. We on PEI frequently use the contrast of mainland and island; we track location for it draws a picture of place and a narrative of sameness and difference that involves lineage, class, occupation, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and ecologies. Humans everywhere weave a rich narrative of place and personhood but these narratives are often found to be quite striking on islands where there is “significance to place, particularity, imagination and interpretation” (Code, 1991: 5). Imagining and re-imagining PEI and capturing the longing for relatedness that encompasses humans and nature, as L. M. Montgomery first did a hundred years ago in her fiction, remain crucial. However, the confidence of place-based identities and the quality of our relationships like our island soil can be eroded: creative and meaningful policies cultivated with respect and a knowledge of the past can be part of the buffer that supports and enhances diverse and lively communities of island life.

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