

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Island Geographies

Essays and conversations

Edited by
Elaine Stratford



Island Geographies

Islands and their environs – aerial, terrestrial, aquatic – may be understood as intensifiers, their particular and distinctive geographies enabling concentrated study of many kinds of challenges and opportunities. This edited collection brings together several emerging and established academics with expertise in island studies, as well as interest in geopolitics, governance, adaptive capacity, justice, equity, self-determination, environmental care and protection, and land management. Individually and together, their perspectives provide theoretically useful, empirically grounded evidence of the contributions human geographers can make to knowledge and understanding of island places and the place of islands. Nine chapters engage with the themes, issues, and ideas that characterise the borderlands between island studies and human geography and allied fields, and are contributed by authors for whom matters of place, space, environment, and scale are key, and for whom islands hold an abiding fascination. The penultimate chapter is rather more experimental – a conversation among these authors and the editor – while the last chapter offers timely reflections upon island geographies' past and future, penned by the first named professor of island geography, Stephen Royle.

Elaine Stratford works at the University of Tasmania, Australia, where she is Professor and Director of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, and is affiliated with the Discipline of Geography and Spatial Sciences in the School of Land and Food.

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To the memory of Kate Stratford [née Whalley] (1925–97) and Will Stratford (1926–99), from whom the editor first learned both the value of higher education and the warmth emanating from collaboration.

‘Islandness is an intervening variable that ... contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways.’ (Baldacchino, 2004, p. 278)

‘... there are many reasons why islands are and should be of growing interest to geographers.’ (Mountz, 2014, p. 8)

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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1 Introduction	1
ELAINE STRATFORD	
2 The deep Pacific: island governance and seabed mineral development	10
KATHERINE GENEVIEVE SAMMLER	
3 Islands and lighthouses: a phenomenological geography of Cape Bruny, Tasmania	32
THÉRÈSE MURRAY	
4 Too much sail for a small craft? Donor requirements, scale, and capacity discourses in Kiribati	54
ANNIKA DEAN, DONNA GREEN, AND PATRICK D. NUNN	
5 An island feminism: convivial economics and the women's cooperatives of Lesbos	78
MARINA KARIDES	
6 Nature and islands: rethinking the cultural heritage of New Zealand's protected islands	97
DAVID BADE	
7 'The good garbage': waste-to-energy applications and issues in the insular Caribbean	114
RUSSELL FIELDING	

8	The returning terms of a small island culture: mimicry, inventiveness, suspension	132
	JONATHAN PUGH	
9	Conversations on human geography and island studies	144
	ELAINE STRATFORD AND AUTHORS	
10	Retrospect and prospect	160
	STEPHEN ROYLE	
	<i>Bibliography</i>	169
	<i>Index</i>	192

Illustrations

Figures

2.1	Select Pacific Island nations: land and territorial areas	18
2.2	Territorial contiguity in the Pacific created by EEZ jurisdictional borders	21
2.3	Proposed mining sites, New Zealand's EEZ and ECS marine territory	24
3.1	Cape Bruny Lighthouse	34
3.2	Skeleton	42
3.3	A bridge across space and time	44
4.1	The Republic of Kiribati	57
4.2	Erosion on the coastline adjacent to the Taborio-Ambo seawall, Kiribati	71
6.1	New Zealand: location of select islands	99
6.2	Rangitoto as seen from Auckland, New Zealand	107
6.3	The first volunteer-planted forest of Motutapu, located at the Home Bay Valley	112
7.1	Locations of St Croix, St Barthélemy and surrounding islands	116
7.2	A section of the 'Jepp chart' showing the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport in St Croix	123

Tables

4.1	Physical investments from KAP II (2006–11)	71
5.1	Lesvos women's cooperatives: village, year initiated, and membership	87

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Stephen Royle studied geography at St John's College, Cambridge University and undertook his PhD at the University of Leicester, UK. He taught geography at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland from 1976 to 2015, retiring as Professor of Island Geography. He wrote the chapter for this book whilst Visiting Professor at the Kagoshima University Center for Pacific Island Studies, which reflects his island travels – some 843 of them visited to date. Royle's books include *A Geography of Islands* (2001), *The Company's Island* (2007), *Company, Crown and Colony* (2011), and *Islands* (2014). He was a founder member and is treasurer of the International Small Island Studies Association, and serves as book review editor for *Island Studies Journal*. Royle was elected as a Member of the Royal Irish Academy in 2008.

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1 Introduction

Elaine Stratford

In 1972, having lived in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for over a decade, my parents felt called to New Zealand – my father, Will, to undertake his doctorate in education at the University of Otago, my mother, Kate, to establish a tertiary-level speech pathology training course in Christchurch. It was the second time they had been drawn to those islands. The first such occasion, in 1950, involved three £10 passages – for them and my brother William – and a long voyage from their home in the British Isles via the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Panama Canal, and south through the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand's North Island. There, they made their way to a small hamlet called Mokauiti, 'as the crow flies' about 89 kilometres (56 miles) from the Waikato regional capital of Hamilton. In that remote place, and for just over three years, Will was the sole teacher in a two-roomed school, and Kate minded both William and my sister Caroline, born (literally) at the school in 1952 – so remote the settlement and so muddy the roads that the doctor could not get through in time to deliver her. But in 1953, the family returned to the north of England, later adding sister Nicola to the mix, before realising that life in the UK remained parlous in the reconstruction period following World War II. So they headed off again, this time to the backblocks of rural Saskatchewan, and to the embrace of another hamlet, Porcupine Plain. The changing needs of pubescent children, and more varied opportunities to practise teaching and speech pathology then enticed them to Saskatoon, 280 kilometres (173 miles) away where, in time, I arrived.

Growing up, I listened avidly to conversations about those adventures: my parents' very different homeland villages nestled in the beech forests of Buckinghamshire and the moors of Yorkshire; their meeting in London after the war; and the compulsion to seek better lives elsewhere; the delights and mishaps of ocean travel; life in the forested hills of New Zealand; and the sense of being happily enisled on the prairies – an observation I heard again from Minnesotan islophile Bill Holm (2002), for whom prairie settlements were islands in grainy seas. And then, in 1972, the impulse to move returned, the decision made – New Zealand, the sequel. But with the two older children – now young adults – opting to stay in North America, just four made the trip south in two stages. First, my father, sister Nicola, and I left autumnal

Saskatoon in the August of 1972, destined for Dunedin and a Canada Council PhD scholarship for him, but taking over a month to get there via four Pacific islands. Then my mother joined us nine months later having secured the aforementioned post in Christchurch.

Thus it was that in August 1972 I found myself standing at some point on the coast in Vancouver, where views of the Pacific are sweeping, and I looked up at my father asking where this vast ocean ended. Where we are going to live, he said, at the other end of the Earth ... and he teased me about learning to walk upside down. And I recall days and days of smiling islanders, warm sun, 'mocktails' with maraschino cherries speared on kitsch paper umbrellas, palm trees and swimming pools, coconuts and yams, the novel taste of fresh seafood, the roughness of coral and grittiness of sand, and a sense of delight at being able to walk around an island in one go and take in what I thought was its entirety. The seashore, that liminal space between, then fascinated me; it still does. The odd mix of fantasy and verisimilitude between what I could see with my own eyes and what I could see in paintings by Gauguin in the museum in Tahiti or old maps on the walls of a small museums in Samoa ... this, too, captivated me.

Formative though these times were, their significance was made more powerful by one experience had during 12 days in Nandi, the importance of which was to take years to register. By the time we arrived in Fiji, my sense of wonderment had been tempered by a visceral understanding that my mother was a long way from me and would be so for some time; that older siblings, too, were 'gone'; and that I was going somewhere 'foreign' to live, and would I like it? Little wonder that I took to the Fijian maid, Mary, who was about my mother's age and who quietly tolerated my following her around the bungalows at our little resort, one hand of mine softly gripping her crisp uniform or white pinafore. Not really apprehending the idea of a 'rostered day off', I felt forlorn when, for two days in a row, Mary did not appear, but gladdened when sister Nic, to me wise at 14, suggested we walk around the district and see if we could find her. And so we went rambling and, indeed, we found Mary on the outskirts of the settlement, in an area of ramshackle buildings made of corrugated iron and chip- and cardboard. Mud puddles pockmarked the pathways, small children in scant clothing played in dark doorways, and my new patent leather shoes and floral dress seemed entirely out-of-place. I now have a clear recollection of feeling deep unease – later it would register as the question *how could I live the way I did and they in this way?* It felt deeply wrong, although at that time I could not articulate why. Later, in uncomplicated fashion, I thought about 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Later still, I learned to question the ethical basis that initially compelled me to give superordinate value to my life and its privileges; then recognise the need to consider certain cultural and spatial *relativities*; and then acknowledge the *absolute* injustice of the deprivations I witnessed that day.

In retrospect, I think my lifelong engagement with geography began during that trip south from Canada to New Zealand, but it took years to emerge as a

conscious and political focus; years during which another move was made to the island-continent, and to Adelaide, where I completed my schooling and enrolled in courses at both Flinders and Adelaide Universities – majoring in geography and visual arts, teaching, and taking a PhD in environmental studies. And then, in 1996, I made one final move with my own growing family to my first (and current) substantive academic position at the University of Tasmania, in the island state of the island-continent; my home for two decades now. It was here that my commitment to human geography – and especially to questions of how we flourish over the lifecourse – finally connected with my fascination with islands, which in truth and to that point had been the stuff of childhood memories.

From early 1997 to the present time, I have increasingly focused upon island studies and its relationship to human geography, and my work has come to be informed by a desire to consider the challenges faced by island peoples. Some of these – such as the relative poverty in which Mary and her family lived – are not unique to islands, but perhaps they seem pronounced in small land- and seascapes. Some of them seem particular to islands – though I am never fully persuaded I know with unshakeable certainty which ones. Perhaps for me the most obvious of these challenges has been the effect of sea-level rise on areas of land so small that centimetres rather than metres of change have significant effects – not least for island children in the future (Stratford *et al.*, 2013; Stratford and Low, 2015).

During the intervening years, I have been fortunate to attend many of the biennial conferences of the International Small Island Studies Association, and to be involved in organising or participating in island sessions at geography conferences in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. From such collaborations have come many insights and just as many questions, and these have gained expression in, for example, a journal special issue (Stratford, 2013), a book series entitled ‘Rethinking the Island’ (Rowman and Littlefield International), and this present collection of essays and conversations.

Most recently, undertaking a ten-year review of the content and impact of the *Island Studies Journal*, I discerned that the field is characterised by high levels of interdisciplinarity, which is evinced by significant input to the journal from those based in economics and management, earth and environmental sciences, and anthropology, and archaeology, among others. Yet those ‘authors primarily identifying as geographers, or affiliated with, geography departments in higher education organizations are most numerous’ in the journal (Stratford, 2015, p. 145). At the same time, the preponderance of geographers writing about islands is, I suggest, quite straightforward: as Royle notes later in Chapter 10, geographers have been, and many remain, primarily concerned with exploring place, space, and environment. Explicitly many of us are also fascinated with questions of scale, the impact of movement and stasis and states in-between, and with the particularities of the *human* in geographical materialities and imaginaries. The island, the archipelago,

islandness, the effects and affects of land and of water, and of movements vast, large, and small – such matters are both profoundly geographical, and central to the essays that follow.

This edited collection began as a series of papers in three sessions at the 2014 conference of the Association of American Geographers held in Tampa, Florida. It results from the generosity and disciplined focus of each of the contributing authors – those present at the Tampa meeting and those who joined us after the fact and helped round out the offerings. As editor, I have been particularly keen to capture the reality that our conversations with each other have extended beyond the boundaries of the conference venue, and include many emails to-and-fro about the original proposal, drafts of chapters, and our shifting thinking about our ways of ‘doing geographies’ and understanding islands over the ensuing period.

Taken individually these essays have, I think, useful contributions to make to the scholarship of island geographies. Collectively they are, I hope, greater than the parts. If one were to read through them at a sitting, as I have done (and on more than one occasion, of course) obvious and prevailing themes and issues emerge. Across the chapters some of them are geographical, and pertain to space, place, and environment – as Royle revisits later in the work. Some relate to scale and to questions about what happens in, between, and across territory, micro-site, site, locale, region, sub-national jurisdiction, or nation-state. Some themes and issues concern certain mobilities, frictions, proximities, distances, and flows – not least in the exercise of powers that are individual, collective, commercial, or sovereign, juridical, informal, or tacit. Others relate to questions of identity, indigeneity, settler status, gender, race, class, socio-economic status, political bent.

And as I read and reread the lists I have written above, and as I think about their function, which is to labour for indexical and categorical purposes, I am struck again by Baldacchino’s assertion, invoked and tested in several of his works, that islands are not simply intervening variables but amplifiers and intensifiers also. Therefore, I discern that more nuanced ideas also emerge from engaging with the essays, which variously consider how island geographies tend to create different networks, assemblages, relations, gatherings, bridges and, in addition, diverse ruptures, boundaries, gaps, and absences. These ideas are to be found in each of the works in varied ways as the authors productively struggle with some of the historically (and confounding) key concepts in island studies: size, isolation, remoteness, boundedness, insularity, openness, access, identity, marginality, dependence, self-sufficiency, and resourcefulness.

Nine chapters follow, and in different ways and to varied extents, the authors engage with the themes, issues, and ideas that I have outlined above. Of these chapters, seven are essays by established and emerging scholars in human geography and allied fields for whom matters of place, space, environment, and scale are key, and for whom islands hold an abiding fascination. One

chapter is rather more experimental – a conversation – and one is a perspectival offering that reflects upon island geographies’ past and future, penned by the first named professor of island geography.

As might be expected by readers, the order of appearance of chapters is not arbitrary, and involved my having thought about key geographical concepts such as space, place, and environment as well as others including scale, locale, and region. For me, it was important to start with the seas. Emphasising the ocean as elemental, central, delineating in studies of island geographies is important, and certainly indebted to insights provided by Hay (2013) and Hayward (2012), at least in part in response to work I have done with colleagues on how to think about the island and the archipelago (Stratford *et al.*, 2013). The first writes: ‘if there is enough substance to the notion of islandness to justify a coherent intellectual preoccupation called “island studies”, it must have to do with water, the element common to all islands, and, more specifically, the sea’ (Hay, 2013, p. 211). Consider, then, the suggestion that an intelligible view of islandness requires critical acceptance that there are certain island psychologies that integrate containment, remoteness, and isolation, and that ‘must have to do with the element of the sea [as a] primary condition’ of islandness (Hay, 2013, p. 209).

The second works to explain his call for a neologism, *aquapelago*, on the basis that ‘it is possible to argue that the word “archipelago” islands as land masses to be useful as a designation for is now too heavily associated with concepts of regions in which aquatic spaces play a vital constitutive role’ (Hayward, 2012, p. 5). Thus consider, too, his description of island studies as:

research into island communities – social entities that have both an insular condition, being surrounded by sea, and, usually, a connectivity, produced by the use of the sea as a means of navigating between islands and/or mainlands. Island communities ... are innately linked to and dependent on finite terrestrial resources and constantly react to and work within the transitional zone between land and sea, in the form of the shoreline and adjacent coastal waters and more distant and deeper marine environments. These are the defining aspect of their geographical and geo-social identities.

(Hayward, 2012, p. 1)

Hence in Chapter 2, Katherine Sammler explains how economic motivations and technological advancements have made possible deep seabed mining and the removal of precious metals from the sea floor, which may increase toxicity and turbidity in the water column. Sammler speculates that Pacific island nations may gain the most from developing their spatially significant Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Among such nations, New Zealand recently approved steps for mining its seabed ironsands, and will allow its Defence Force to arrest and detain anti-mining protesters in its EEZ. Stakes are high for state and corporate interests, and for those arguing the legitimacy

of these resources as a public asset. Institutional nascence and untested mining technologies come together to produce a dangerous socio-ecological experiment. Drawing on insights from political geography, the chapter considers the question how are conventional environmental governance schemes being reconfigured to confront ocean resource governance, and to what extent are issues of economic fairness and environmental impacts being addressed?

Sammiller's concerns are with deep oceans, their resources, and their effects on island and archipelagic nations. In turn, in Chapter 3 Thérèse Murray has as her immediate focus an iconic coastal structure: the lighthouse at Cape Bruny, Tasmania. Murray's analysis – embracing land, water, weather, and lives – brings to mind work by Hester Blum (2013, p.151), who has argued that 'the sea should become central to critical conversations about global movements, relations, and histories'. Surely the material and symbolic influences of the lighthouse could be elemental in the conversations Blum invites – for, as Murray demonstrates, along with its grounds, keepers, and others this structure exemplifies the relationships of people to place, of ships to shores, and of islands to imperial expansion across the globe. Taking an aspect of Martin Heidegger's thought regarding the relationship between building and the gathering of the world into places as a launching point, Murray seeks to gain insight into whether and how the essential nature of built structures becomes entwined with places (and, indeed, with the mobilisation of place). Drawing broadly on phenomenological approaches to qualitative research in human geography, the work tracks various individuals' perceptions, experiences, and insights, and simultaneously explores the lighthouse and the place in which it stands, advancing a series of geographical reflections on the profoundly important relationships between bodies of water, islands, and lighthouses.

In Chapter 4, other questions about bodies of water, infrastructure projects, island peoples, and continental aid agencies concern Annika Dean, Donna Green, and Patrick Nunn. There, with specific reference to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati – an archipelago straddling the Equator – they examine islands' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, and consider the ways in which the administration of climate finance can lead to compound injustices. They acknowledge that the peoples of small island developing states and – specifically – Pacific island populations have done little to cause climate change but will face significant, sometimes crippling, adaptation and mitigation costs. In response to such inequity, governments in developed countries have agreed to mobilise climate finance to enable adaptation and mitigation. Yet Pacific island governments have faced difficulties accessing such finance or, and in the case that Dean and her colleagues discuss, have faced challenges dealing with the allocation of funds in the terms provided by donors. Addressing such issues, Dean and her colleagues draw on empirical data collected during fieldwork in Kiribati. Their work considers a three-stage project funded by the World Bank and finds that perceived lack of capacity among Kiribati's recipient populations is a

key challenge. The authors posit that, by holding a tight rein over project-based external finance, donors run certain risks: draining capacity; disempowering and demoralising the I-Kiribati; and entrenching a postcolonial paternalism that ironically could undermine resilience to climate change. Such modes of project delivery and their impacts seem to compound and add to the original injustices of climate change, outcomes that the authors suggest now warrant a radical rethinking of climate finance in island places.

Marina Karides considers another situation in which radical changes are likely required. In Chapter 5, Karides develops a framework for island feminism and argues that richer critical understandings of islands depends on appreciating and assessing the gendered experiences and organisation of island communities. For Karides, island feminism refers to the intellectual sensibilities of island place and constructs of gender and sexuality, and she views them as interlacing forces that shape economic, social, and ecological life, and cultural and political conditions that apply to islands. Island feminism reappropriates narrow understandings of ‘island women’, and is informed by the dynamic interplay of culture, place and space, and identity as these manifest in what Karides calls convivial economic practices. Responding to what she sees as significant gaps in island feminist scholarship, and drawing on field work and interviews conducted on Lesbos, Greece, between 2008 and 2012, Karides offer a case study of 11 of the women’s cooperatives on the island. Her aim is to constitute what she calls a nissological feminist geography to highlight island economic strategies that have secured, and could continue to bolster, financial well-being and provide for the survival of island communities.

The vulnerability of other peoples, and of particular forms of cultural heritage in natural protected areas, is the focus of Chapter 6. Writing about these matters by reference to New Zealand’s offshore islands, David Bade describes how, in the 1890s, certain of New Zealand’s islands were designated as nature sanctuaries. One hundred years later, numerous ecological restoration programs were actively underway on near-shore islands in New Zealand. According to Bade, it is clear that islands have played a central role in natural heritage conservation in New Zealand – their separate, bounded, and isolated characteristics have made them appealing as places where native flora and fauna can be protected from human activity on the mainland – but Bade asks what have such features meant for the cultural heritage on the islands? To consider this question, Bade explores natural heritage conservation and the conservation of cultural heritage using two island case studies in Auckland’s Hauraki Gulf. Both Rangitoto and Motutapu islands have a history of Māori occupation and settlement, as well as of early European industry and farming, and military use during World War II. Rangitoto was designated as a reserve in 1890, and is largely considered a ‘place of nature’ due to its volcanic appearance and extensive forest, while Motutapu is largely farmland and undergoing ecological restoration to become ‘natural’. By means of such focus, this chapter draws on ideas of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’