

GETTING WET

A Response to Hayward's concept of Aquapelagos

GODFREY BALDACCHINO

University of Prince Edward Island <gbaldacchino@upei.ca>

Abstract

This brief rejoinder explores some of the nuances of the archipelago as they connect and contrast with Philip Hayward's suggestions (elsewhere in this issue). In particular, it charts three sets of navigational forays into the implications of a stronger appreciation of the marine in island(er) lives.

Keywords

Archipelago, aquapelago, maritimity, ocean, sea

Preamble

Already back in 1988, while reviewing a series of World Bank publications about the economic development of various small island states, Antony Dolman expressed a concern about how orthodox development strategies did not appear to be working in these jurisdictions: "prescriptions embodying more of the same are unlikely to offer a way out" (Dolman, 1988: 176). Instead, one requirement for a redefined approach was for island governments and development planners to "extend their decision making horizons from the land to the sea" (ibid); many of the concerns of island states, he cogently argued, whether food and nutrition, energy, industrialisation, imports and exports, migration, tourism and transport – and, today we may add, the threats accompanying sea level rise – cannot be properly defined or understood except in terms of relationships with the waters that surround them. It is such or similar integration that we are advised to consider and adopt, a confluence of land and sea, rather than a debilitating and artificial dichotomy, even an oceanic erasure, that has characterised some island studies scholarship (Hayward, 2012). Land-based is land-biased. We really need to get wet.

Hayward proposes a new term, *aquapelago*, to capture this essence of an imbricated land-sea universe, so aptly described by Hau'ofa (1993); and just as vividly illustrated more recently by DeLoughrey (2007) in her comparative review of Caribbean and Pacific literature: blood, sperm, sea(water) – all liquids – envelop, contain and connect, providing foundational markers for islanders' histories and genealogies, scripting what she calls an "archipelagraphy". While Hau'ofa emphatically uses the prepositions 'in' and 'with' to describe the richness of the relations of Pacific islanders/Oceanians and

the sea, islanders often stick to their land bias by describing their positioning 'on' islands, definitely privileging land over water (Ronström, 2011).

In this short rejoinder to Hayward, submitted by invitation, I explore some of the nuances of the archipelago as they connect and contrast with Hayward's suggestions. This to continue the debate that was encouraged in an earlier paper (Stratford et al., 2011), and which Hayward takes up with gusto.

Back to the archipelago

Julien Bousac created a map that envisages Eastern Palestine/the West Bank as a series of islands: this he calls "an archipelago" (Bousac, 2009). But, once we examine the proper meaning of the term, this appellation is – perhaps deliberately - incorrect. And that is what makes this map powerfully strange: it captures an incongruous assemblage that is riven and fragmented by what are at best foreign, at worst hostile, manifestations of the state of Israel - checkpoints, flags, border patrols, Jewish settlements, concrete walls - rendered totally invisible on this map as water. Hence water reverts to that foreboding and dangerous medium, reminiscent of Biblical floods, storms, sinking ships and tsunamis. The result is a tacit and emotional response that considers the described entity as unnatural and macabre: and this is probably the emotional response encouraged by the French artist. For archipelagic peoples, after all, one of their key attributes is that they consider the waters surrounding their component islands as being within their boundaries and as an integral part of their economy, history, heritage and identity (Lewis, 1974: 138). As argued by Hodgson and Alexander (1972: 46), an archipelago comprises an "internal sea" which manifests a historically established intimacy of association with the several contiguous island populations. Island societies are *aquacultures*, in the etymological meaning of the term.

Various writers from/about islands – I will mention here Joël Bonnemaison (1994), James Clifford (1997), Karen Fog Olwig (1993) and Margaret Jolly (2001) – are keen to emphasize the rich yet messy co-presence of the values of roots/trees and routes/boats. Other characters, like the fictional Aljaz Cosini and William Buelow Gould in the novels of Tasmanian writer Richard Flanagan (1994, 2001), are decidedly amphibious; species crossers. Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott reminds us uncompromisingly of where island histories lie in his 1980 poem 'The Sea is History':

*Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.*

This domesticity of, and affinity with, the surrounding marine is a key attribute of 'the archipelago state'; it conflicts with claims to the free access of the high seas established under international maritime law (LaFlamme, 1983: 361). With this in mind, I would argue, *pace* Hayward, that we really do not need a new concept to internalise the multiple ways in which the waters fold into island life; or the islands fold into ocean life: the archipelago still deftly clinches it. Islanders are not just land-lubbers, but Argonauts of their respective seas (after Malinowski, 1922).

Looking Ahead

I do however wholeheartedly agree with Hayward that this focus needs to have an expanded project. Our nagging (and continental?) hesitation to submit to the sea reduces our willingness and disposition to privilege maritimity, even in the case of island societies, where it presents itself as most self-evident. We would subconsciously relegate the significance of the sea to the dark threats of sea level rise, or to the fiction of Kevin Costner in *Waterworld* (1995), or to the Seasteading Institute's (2012) anarchic projects for the affluent elite... all definitely not mainstream initiatives.

There are various ways in which this project can move forward; allow me here to propose three.

The first is a broader recognition of 'maritime continents'. If archipelagos are fluid cultural processes dependent on changing conditions of articulation or connection, then some candidates clearly stand out from the background noise. While Indonesia may have its reasons to claim exclusivity – it is certainly the world's largest archipelago nation, by population - I would hazard to extend the term to various other assemblages, and thus offer an alternative ontology; a different perspective towards their conceptualisation, representation and critical analysis. Hayward (2012) invokes Tasmania, Newfoundland and Japan as suitable examples. I can certainly throw in the Philippines and Greenland into the mix. McMahon (2010) reminds us that Australia itself is an archipelago, with its own "internal sea". The power of the Caribbean archipelago in defining collective identity and a shared sense of diaspora is another notable example of the cultural relevance of archipelagos (Vannini et al. 2009). Matthews and Travers (2012) assemble a fine collection of papers exploring the pivotal link between Britishness and islandness. Meanwhile, the early European history of what became North America privileged its coasts and islands: both Canada and the United States were configured as islands and coasts before they were continentalised (Vannini et al. 2009: 125-127).

The second is that indicated by the slow but steady successes of indigenous people to reclaim the sea, and marine rights, as part of their title. Hayward (2012) does well to remind us of such successes in the case of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. On Prince Edward Island, Canada, where I have lived since 2003, the Mik'maq First Nations have traditionally foraged for food on and off the island, and in the surrounding waters, a nomadism that reflected seasonal cycles and contributed to resource sustainability: no sharp distinction between land and sea here. A regional network now seeks to protect this habitat from pollution, contamination and the consequences of climate change, mainly by influencing policy (AFNEN, 2012), but title claims may follow. Various such governance initiatives are underway across the globe, and not just on islands, bolstered since 2007 by a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007).

The third extends our analysis to the non-human. Recent decades have been marked by the normalcy of the rights claims of not just indigenous people, but of women, minorities, immigrants, children, people with special needs. I believe it is only a question of time before we start extending rights to other living species. Whales and dolphins have been proposed as recipients of the same "human rights" to life and liberty because of mounting evidence of their intelligence (Doyle, 2010). *The Economist Magazine* (2009) boldly published the obituary of Benson, a carp, where only humans have been featured. Perhaps we are on the way to recognise the agency of fish (and other living creatures), on land, underground, in the air, as much as in the sea. In such a case, we

Baldacchino - Getting Wet

approximate a universe of actants, rather than human subjects and a miscellany of objects; a “parliament of things” (Latour, 1993). Islanders can easily lead the way.

Back to DeLoughrey (2007). She knows that we need being reminded and prodded out of our snug continental complacency: the ocean *inhabits us*: living things are made up essentially of water; all living things emerged evolutionarily from the sea; we inhabit Planet Ocean, not Planet Earth; and what today is blood in our veins would have been seawater eons ago. This is the stuff of one grand cycle of liquid consummation: the sea which gives life, takes it away, and connects us all. Creation is an archipelago.

Bibliography

Atlantic First Nations Environmental Network website (2012): www.afnen.ca/home.html

Bonnemaison, J (1994) *The Tree and the Canoe: History and Ethnogeography of Tanna*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

Bousac, J (2009) 'L'archipel de Palestine orientale', in *L'Atlas, un monde à l'envers*. Paris: Le Monde diplomatique, online at: lawrenceofcyberia.blogs.com/photos/maps/palestine-archipelago.html - accessed March 2012

Clifford, J (1997) *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

DeLoughrey, E (2007) *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

Dolman, A.J (1988) Collective book review, *Development and Change* v19 n1: 173-176

Doyle, A (2010) 'Human rights' urged for whales and dolphins, Reuters news service item, May 23, online at: www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/23/us-whales-idUSTRE64M0UC20100523 - accessed March 2012

Flanagan, R (2001) *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish*, Sydney: Picador

Flanagan, R (1994) *Death of a River Guide*, Sydney: McPhee Gribble

Fog Olwig, K (1993) *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis*, Reading: Harwood Academic Publisher

Hau'ofa, E (1993) 'Our Sea of Islands' in E. Waddell, E Naidu, V and Hau'ofa, E (eds) *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva: University of the South Pacific: 2-16

Hayward, P (2012) 'Aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* v6 n1: 1-10

Hodgson, R and Alexander, L (1972) *Towards an objective analysis of special circumstances: Bays, rivers, coastal and oceanic archipelagos, and atolls*. Kingston: University of Rhode Island Law of the Sea Institute

Baldacchino - Getting Wet

- Jolly, M (2001) 'On the edge? Deserts, oceans, islands', *Contemporary Pacific* v13 n2: 417-466
- LaFlamme, A.G (1983) 'The archipelago state as a societal subtype', *Current Anthropology* v24 n3: 361-362
- Latour, B. (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Lewis, V (1974) 'The Bahamas in international politics', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* v16 n1: 131-152
- Malinowski, B (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Matthews, J and Travers, D (2012) *Islandness and Britishness: A Global Perspective*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press
- McMahon, E (2010) 'Australia, the island continent: how contradictory geography shapes the national imaginary', *Space and Culture* v13 n2: 178-187
- Ronström, O (2011) 'In or on? Island words, island worlds: II', *Island Studies Journal* v6 n2: 227-244
- Seasteading Institute (2012) 'The Ocean is the next frontier of human civilization', online at: www.seasteading.org/ - accessed March 2012
- Stratford, E, Baldacchino, G, McMahon, E, Farbotko, C and Harwood, A (2011) 'Envisioning the archipelago', *Island Studies Journal* v6 n2: 113-130
- Unattributed (2009) 'Benson, England's best-loved fish, died on July 29th, aged about 25', *The Economist* August 3rd, online at: www.economist.com/node/14209766 - accessed March 2012
- United Nations (2007) 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', online at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf - accessed March 2012
- Vannini, P, Baldacchino, G, Guay, L et al (2009) 'Reterritorializing Canada: Arctic ice's liquid modernity and the imagining of a Canadian archipelago', *Island Studies Journal* v4 n2: 121-138