ISLANDNESS AS NARRATIVES OF RELATION

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ABSTRACT: This article uses literature on islands and islandness, coloniality, creole identity, indigenous ontology and settler studies to abstract a typology of islandness. The article frames islandness as a product of narratives of relations within and with islands that produce Autochthonous, Settler and Creole islandnesses. The article engages with islands as sites of relational spatialities, following Vannini and Taggart (2013). Those relational spatialities are understood to be produced by, and reproduced through, intergenerational narratives. Using Australia as an illustrative reference, the article identifies themes related to each type of islandness, not as universals but as examples of a type. The article concludes by proposing that the typology can be engaged in validating the variety of islandness narratives that emerge from the process of collective identification within island spaces.

KEYWORDS: islandness, narratives, relationality

Introduction

Using available literature, I articulate a typology of islandness based on narratives of relations on and with the island. These narratives are understood as Autochthonous, Settler and Creole. While a single island is used to provide an illustrative reference, the typology, as conceptualised, does not describe geopolitical or racialised types. The single island illustration, however, allows for the appreciation of the ways in which the different experiences of islandness (re)produce each other and are maintained through postcolonial intergenerational narratives. Using the experience of island colonisation as a narrative frame, this paper engages three primary experiences of islandness produced within the island. Island experiences provide the basis for the production of narratives at the community and individual levels, and the narratives in turn (re)produce the quality of islandness experienced by the respective communities of islanders. This approach to understanding islandness establishes the experience of islandness as relative and relational to community narratives of being in and with the island, and other islanders. The work engages with Nadarajah and Grydehøj's (2016, p. 443) call "to address the full range of island perspectives…in a manner that is both progressive and reflexive." The article acknowledges that islands as objects of coloniality are capable of producing multiple islandnesses and can therefore be engaged as spaces of pluriversality or "multiple reals" (Escobar, 2020). By understanding islands as spaces for producing relations and ways of being and knowing, this work also engages with the island as a space of entangled ontologies (Pugh & Chandler, 2021).

This article is organised around three main sections. This first section presents islandness as a product of narrative relations, through a discussion of islands as relational and

narrative spaces. In the second section, the typology is presented along with the islander positionality that informs my thinking. The third section illustrates the typology using Australia as an illustrative reference. The final section summarises the article and identifies the potential research value of the typology.

Islandness as relational

There are numerous ways to think about islands and islander experiences, as evidenced by the growing literature on island studies. Embedded within many of these ways of thinking and representing islands is the notion of an essential or material quality of 'islandness', shared by islands and islanders alike (Cohen & Sheringham, 2013; Conkling, 2007; Royle & Brinklow, 2018). There is general acceptance that there are common characteristics that are produced from the boundedness and relative isolation of islands that this quality of islandness creates for islanders. However, while there is general agreement on the existence of islandness, what islandness is, is not always clear (Hay, 2006; Hayward, 2016). References to islandness are presented in ways that appear both vague and all-embracing, islandness being that 'thing' that is produced from the experience of islands. There is often reference to a shared ontology among islanders, reinforced by the differences between the native-born and the converted (Brinklow, 2015; Conkling, 2007; Lowenthal, 2007). Conkling (2007) describes this understanding of islandness as a sense of being that transcends culture. For him, it is a "metacultural phenomenon" derived from "the heightened experiences that accompany the physical isolation of island life … a sense that is absorbed into the bones of islanders" (Conkling, 2007, p. 200).

Such references to islandness across the literature reflects an essentialism that Baldacchino (2018, p. xxiv) refers to as "a facile and passionate conviction that islands (and their inhabitants) are naturally … different from mainlands (and their people)". Baldacchino (2018), p. xxv), alternatively, subscribes to a materialist understanding of islandness, as "all that constitutes an island … boundedness, smallness, isolation and fragmentation, along with their 'amplification by compression'." However, as Baldacchino (2018, p. xxx) himself admits, islands are spaces and places that are "experienced, constructed and interpreted," and therefore any notion of islandness must take this nuanced understanding of being into account. Vannini and Taggart (2013) address this issue of nuance by understanding islandness as a practice relative to each island. They take "a dwelling perspective" (Vannini & Taggart, 2013, p. 227) to the understanding of islandness, engaging with non-representational theory to understand islandness as a product of practices and performances – the experience of being of and in the island. In adopting this approach, Vannini and Taggart (2013, p. 228) de-essentialise islandness, framing islands as "relational spatialities." From this perspective, the material reality of islands, the boundedness, size and relative location, are not the determining factors of islandness but the resources that islanders engage as they navigate "journeys that distinguish some islanders from mainlanders, and islanders from other islanders" (Vannini & Taggart, 2013, p. 238). As such:

> *islandness consists of [the] islander's sense of place, of the island's ways of being, of acting, of moving around, or resting, of encountering others … islandness [is] an open project, subject to the creativity of those who fashion it together by assembling different resources with different techniques and purposes*. (Vannini & Taggart, 2013, p. 238)

Vannini and Taggart (2013, p. 236) provide an understanding of islandness as a product of "the multiple ways through which relations among inhabitants, and between islands and their dwellers are practiced." Pugh and Chandler (2021, p. x) engage with islandness as a "generative force" for thinking through the Anthropocene. They explore the ways in which islands and islanders have been positioned in relation to the Anthropocene and argue that the ways in which writers have been thinking with islands has been generative of relational thinking (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). They produce a schema of relational ontology that captures islands as both constitutive and generative of relational entanglements, affordances and feedback effects (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). The paradigm of relational onto-epistemologies assumes that all phenomena are a consequence of relations. This provides for an iterative relationship to exist between knowledge, relations and experience, which extends beyond human interactions, occurring within and with spaces (Dépelteau, 2018; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). In this way, space and time are understood as active nodes in the relational knowledge-making network. Within this paradigm, all nodes, human and non-human, conceptual and material become interconnected within "a living social and physical web of reality … the biotic web of the natural world, the social web of human life, the epistemological web of knowledge production and the civic web of the political domain" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 85).

This article takes forward the perspective of islands as spaces of relational entanglements (Pugh & Chandler, 2021) or, as Vannini and Taggart (2013) propose, relational spatialities. Islands are therefore understood as constitutive and generative of the experiences and practices of islanders (human and non-human) in relation, and islandness as the affect and state of being produced by the set of experiences and stories of relations marked on the island and its inhabitants. Relations on islands are engaged through the perspective of coloniality. Coloniality, as constitutive of the values of domination, exploitation and accumulation (Maldonado-Torres, 2016a, 2016b), is understood as informing the relations between islanders and the island, among islanders, and between the island and the wider world. Coloniality produces: a set of actors in relation, the colonised and the coloniser; a period of relations, pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial; and an approach to being, colonial, anticolonial and decolonial – the latter being understood as an aspirational rather than an achieved or achievable state of being (Nadarajah & Grydehøj, 2016).

Islands as narrative spaces

Islands are not only relational spaces, but also narrative spaces (Ryan et al., 2016). The concept of narrative is used in this article to think with and about islands, islanders and islandness, on the basis that experiences of relations, in this case, colonial relations, are made sense of and repackaged as stories (Andersen et al., 2020; Chater & Loewenstein, 2016; Popova & Cuffari, 2018). Scholars across various disciplines, with few exceptions, agree that our realities are framed by and understood through our stories (Bruner, 1991; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Kincheloe, 1997; McAdams, 2011). Ontological debates notwithstanding (Chen, 2015; Strawson, 2004; Williams, 2009), within the social sciences the concepts of narrativity and storying have emerged as important for understanding the way people make sense of and perform their lives (Andersen et al., 2020; De Fina, 2015). These stories about who we are and how we are to be in the world emerge from our experiences, as well as our knowledge of other people's experiences, and are often attached to the places and spaces within which these experiences occur. Experiences are translated into narratives that inform understandings of, and orientations within the

world. These narratives in orienting us in relation to the world provide the basis for interpreting subsequent experiences and, in so doing, simultaneously operate as producers and products of our experiences in the world. Our stories are therefore important for locating us – philosophically, psychologically, geographically, and culturally (Somers, 1994). Narratives are relational, ambiguous, often contradictory, and implicate identity by providing the perspectives for intersubjective reflection (Anthias, 2002), allowing various permutations of self-identification, categorisation, self-understanding, social location, commonality, connectedness, and groupness to emerge from a multiplicity of available narratives (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Hyvärinen, 2020).

Narratives orient us to and within our societies (McLean & Syed, 2015). However, individuals do not simply adopt narratives as prescribed, but instead internalise and negotiate with a variety of available narratives (Bamberg, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2016; Hyvärinen, 2020; McLean & Syed, 2015). It is the process of narrative engagement and negotiation which facilitates the production of alternative or counter narratives (Hammack & Toolis, 2016; Hyvärinen, 2020; McLean & Syed, 2015). Alternative narratives may differ from, or openly resist, the mainstream narratives, either because of conceptual or philosophical dissonance or because an individual may be unable to successfully fulfil the requirements of those narratives (McLean et al., 2018). The process of narrative negotiation may therefore result in counter narrativity or narrative alignment, with each contributing to the perpetuation or evolution of narratives within and across generations.

Islands are narrative spaces not only because they are spaces about which stories are generated, but because they are spaces within which stories emerge, are preserved and are contested – and, in so doing, transform space into place (J. A. Agnew, 2011; Low, 2016). Narratives, as products of experience, reflect the accumulated knowledge and shared understanding among a people of what determines survival and success, and are also adaptive and have the ability to change over time through processes of negotiation, resistance, and new experiences. In the context of islands and islandness, each island can therefore be understood as a narrative space – a space within which beings collectively generate and preserve narratives of their experiences of survival and existence.

Approach to the typology and researcher positionality

This article is based on a review of literature, specifically literature on islands and islandness, coloniality, creole identity, indigenous ontology and settler studies. Using the literature, I reflect on the different ways in which different groups have experienced coloniality, the island and the colonisation of islands. These experiences present different ways of storying relations with and within the island, producing narratives of Autochthonous, Settler and Creole islandness, and combinations thereof.

In keeping with the call within Island Studies for researchers from islands to study islands from their own perspective (Baldacchino, 2008), I locate myself physically, socially, and culturally within the Creole island experience, and it is through this experience that I process my understanding of the literature on islands. The analysis contained in this paper is based on my initial work in undertaking my doctoral research, which explores narratives of Creole islandness within processes of governance. The three types of islandness emerged from my own experience as a Caribbean student in New Zealand, and my reading of island studies literature, specifically the compendium *Islands in History and Representation* (Edmond & Smith, 2003). The stories in the volume identify different

island experiences, from Atlantic islands, to "cane-land isles," to Pacific islands (Edmond & Smith, 2003, p. 43). I was introduced to "autochtony [sic]" by Beer's (2003, pp. 40–41) contribution to the volume, where she explores the likelihood of the inhabited island, given that "human populations of small islands are more likely to be fleeting and discontinuous than settled or originary." The entire volume echoes with the story of the settler, whether it is the utopian Swedenborgians on the island of Bulama (Coleman, 2003), the Anglo-Argentine identity of the Falklands/Malvinas (Dodds, 2003), or the mutinous settlers of the Pitcairn islands (Smith, 2003). And then there are stories that I could immediately relate to, such as Vergès' (2003) reflections on creolisation on Réunion Island. From these readings, patterns began to emerge from the different colonial, pre-colonial and postcolonial stories of islands and islanders.

As I further explored the concept of Creole islandness, the pattern became even clearer, that in reading a characterisation of the colonial Canarian society (Hernández, 2019) to another Caribbean islander, they believed the characterisation most accurately described their own island society. There was something in the storying of the relations of, and on, the island that resonated across geographical regions. There was a similarity of actors, environment and interactions that generated similar narratives of being, albeit, in different geo-political regions. Therefore, while Vannini and Taggart (2013, p. 238) propose that there are "as many different forms [of islandness] as there are islands," I propose that each of those forms can be considered relative to the three types of islandness outlined in the remainder of this article.

In the following sections, three sets of islandness narrative themes are abstracted and synthesised from the academic literature, and illustrated using examples from the literature in relation to a single island. As abstracted and synthesised elements of narratives, references to the island, and the islanders, as either Autochthonous, Settler or Creole generalise narratives. The narratives presented are, as a consequence of their abstracted and synthesised nature, a simplification of complex and nuanced experiences. To quote Clifford (2020, p. 212), "[n]o single analytic language can exhaust what is at stake in these complexly rooted and routed experiences." However, by placing these three abstracted narratives of islandness in relation to each other, an attempt is made to contextualise the different ways the same material environments and interactions may be experienced through different narratives of relation.

Islandness as narratives themes

Stories of ancestral arrival (or emergence) reveal how islanders define themselves in relation to the land, and the resulting value that the land holds for islanders in relation to their history, their present and future. This means that narratives of being and belonging are often entangled with those of rootedness and origin. This has the potential for creating what Ingold (2000, p. 135) refers to as the tension between being "of" and "on" the land.

Using Australia as an illustrative reference, the following section presents the ways in which different groups within the same island understand themselves in relation to the land and other islanders. Australia provides a useful example to explore different ways of being on an island, despite the arguments that it is more correctly an archipelago with over eight thousand islands (Stratford et al., 2011). It might also be an unsuitable exemplar of island relations since it is also a continent, and island studies is particularly

interested in the distinction between insular and continental phenomena, with Australia being classified as continental (Royle & Brinklow, 2018). I, however, embrace McMahon's (2016) and Perera's (2009) analysis that it is the boundedness and insularity, manifested in the relationship with the shoreline, that most defines Australia in the imaginations of inhabitants and non-islanders alike. Australia is home to the 'people of many countries' (Kwaymullina, 2008), referenced here as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Australia is also a Settler state, a space of contemporary coloniality and a history of white nationalism (Jordan, 2018; Jupp, 2002; Lake, 2004). And Australia is home to the Australian South Sea Islanders, descendants of Pacific Islanders who laboured in the sugar and cotton plantations, some by choice, some by force, but all under conditions considered by their descendants to have been a form of slavery (Banivanua-Mar, 2007; Corowa, 1976; Davis, 2020).

A description of the experiences and perspectives of these three groups of people and their relationships within and with the island space are presented as an illustration of the narratives of Autochthonous, Settler and Creole islandness.

Autochthonous islandness

Within the literature, the term Indigenous is used more frequently than Autochthonous to refer to islanders whose ancestral settlement of the island predate imperial incursion. Autochthony obtains its meaning from "self" and "soil" (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005, p. 386), while Indigenous has a meaning of "first inhabitants" (Gausset et al., 2011, p. 136). Autochthonous is, however, used in this typology as 'indigeneity' lends itself to representing a relationship of marginalisation of an originary community in relation to a colonising community (Grydehøj et al., 2020). Indigeneity is significantly about the distribution of power, and is used to reflect colonial and neo-colonial relationships between settler communities and communities of pre-colonial ancestry (de la Cadena & Starn, 2007). While the language of Indigeneity is important in the conversation about displacement and decolonial justice (Tuck & Yang, 2012), the focus of this article is less on their colonial and post-colonial marginalisation, and more focussed on the worldview of such groups, the foundations of which pre-date colonisation. Though, it is also important to acknowledge the extent to which notions of precolonial identity have been used to undermine the practical requirements of reparation (Merlan, 2020). The term Autochthony also has its difficulties, having been appropriated by ethnonationalist groups (Bräuchler & Ménard, 2017; Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; Zenker, 2011), and used in the literature to refer to an ideological belief "that a territory belongs to those who were there first" (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013). This latter use of the term reflects a legalistic ownership-rights perspective, which is not the meaning being engaged in this article. Rather, Autochthonous is used to reflect a narrative identity based in a cosmology of shared genealogy between the human and non-human environment.

Autochthonous islandness is based on a story of the island communities having been birthed from the land, reflecting rootedness and connection. Rootedness in this sense does not mean stasis, but a clear point of orientation from which to navigate the world (Fredericks, 2013). This point is important, as within the narrative of Autochthonous islandness, islanders have become constrained by the containment of people within borders that never existed prior to European imperial expansion. While the notion of belonging which is understood as the basis for rootedness is not particular to the concept of Autochthony, the locus of belonging for the Autochthonous islander is understood as a

primordial connection to the land (Geschiere, 2009). Autochthonous communities create narratives of origin based on genealogical continuity within the geographic area of the island, which can be thought of as spheres of kinship (Salmon, 2000). There is a sense that the community, ancestors and non-human life are all connected within a symbiotic relationship in place.

Fredericks (2013) writes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, making the point that despite living in urban spaces, many are still deeply connected to their Country. As Fredericks (2013, p. 6) writes about the stereotypes and misconceptions of what it means to be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, she embraces the sense of "Country as central to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity," Country being that "place of origin in spiritual, cultural and literal terms." She references writers featured in the anthology, *Heartsick for Country: Stories of Love, Spirit and Creation* (2008), highlighting sentiments of 'I am my country' and 'I still belong to country. It is bred into me…'. The point is consistently made that the connection to, or relation to, the land exists irrespective of whether Autochthonous islanders are living on their ancestral land or not. This is a sentiment that exists despite "processes of colonisation … [which] have dispossessed and displaced Indigenous peoples" (Fredericks, 2013, p. 7). The introduction to *Heartsick for Country* describes Australia as a land of many countries. The introduction describes the people of those countries as being "descended from the creation beings," and as a people who "can still follow the paths [of their ancestors] and feel and honour their presence" (Kwaymullina, 2008, p. 7). Dudgeon and Bray (2019, p. 1), also writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, talk about "interconnected axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies of kinship." Dudgeon and Bray (2019) point out that these kinship relations extend beyond the family and community to the land, invoking Salmon's (2000) kincentricity, and making the point that "to talk of Indigenous genealogy … is to talk about reciprocal connections with the land" (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019, p. 8). Ancestral stories form the base of the cultural laws and systems that inform relations with human and non-human entities, present and past (Robin et al., 2022). These stories, reflecting sacred knowledge, are known generally as Dreaming Law and reinforce the importance of the relationship of care and responsibility between the islander, their Country and the next generation (Robin et al., 2022).

Narratives of Autochthonous islandness identify the human community of the island as existing in mutuality with the environment, whether they are on or off the island (Ka'ili, 2017). An important narrative theme of Autochthonous islandness can therefore be understood as mutuality. In being 'from the soil', Autochthonous islanders define a relationship to the non-human world as kin (Salmon, 2000). Autochthony becomes a way of being in, and with, the world based on a knowledge of self and community in co-evolution with the land, sea and skies.

Settler islandness

The term Settler is no less politically inflected than is the term Indigenous. Despite the term implying immobility, its usage belies a universal right to movement (Clarsen, 2015). The attempt is therefore made to separate Settler from Settler-Colonial; the latter being specific to a community produced through imperial expansion, and the former reflecting a general motivation of a group (or individual) outside of the specific context of imperial

expansion. As Clarsen (2015) points out, Settlers do not generally move for the purpose of exploitation; they move to make a new home.[1] Importantly, the Settler seeks to create, or become part of, a new society different from the one that they are leaving. The European logic of settlement is also founded in the concept of the phases of civilisation, wherein farming, settlement and property rights mark a turning point in human progress, eclipsed only by commerce (Banner, 2005). The Settler, therefore, is also able to stake claim to the island based on their ability to transform the land, producing and creating new ways of being for the island as well as for the Settler – the awakening of potential in both the land and the Settler (Veracini, 2007).

Settlers operate in the space of a knowable ancestral identity outside of the island; as such, there is an ancestral memory of a time and place off the island. Arrival on the island and subsequent relation to the land is understood in the context of legal possession. This does not make attachment to the island any less meaningful, simply different. In addition to belonging as relative to ownership, Veracini (2007) highlights the idea that settlement represents a beginning, a 'rebirth'. Veracini (2007) conceptualises this as a form of historylessness that does not accord as much value to the land's pre-settlement history, as settlement becomes the 'beginning' which distinguishes the new life of the settlers from their ancestral past (Higgins, 2017). In this context, the land becomes a blank slate upon which to write a new story. Benson and O'Reilly (2016) understand this in relation to the role of place in the (re)construction of migrant identities, with the location of immigration being valued on the basis of its potential natural and cultural difference in relation to the location of emigration. It is this difference, usually underscored as exotic or bucolic, that romanticises the land of settlement (Higgins, 2017). While Veracini (2007) writes about first generation settler colonials in Australia and their descendants, Benson and O'Reilly (2016) and Higgins (2017) study 'contemporary settlers', or lifestyle migrants. This reading of Settler islandness therefore places initial settler colonials on a continuum with contemporary lifestyle migrants with similar motivations.

In the context of European settlement of lands occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the legal property claim underscored identification with the land, to the extent that one can refer to a pre- and post-Mabo[2] period when referencing Australian Settler sensibilities of belonging (Horáková, 2020; Potter, 2019), with the post-Mabo period requiring the acknowledgement of pre-Settler history. Horáková (2020) reviews post-Mabo Australian literary texts to identify sentiments of belonging and indicate "possession of place" as an enduring theme alongside landscapes of freedom. Garbutt (2011), identifying as Anglo-Celtic, explores Settler belonging, and highlights the definable and personally experiential nature of the relationship with the land. He refers to "a landscape of places redolent with family stories … childhood and teenage years … personal history and experience" (Garbutt, 2011, p. 15). More specifically, Garbutt (2011, pp. 22–23) defines his connection to place as formed through "labour … and dwelling," the installation of self within space. Garbutt (2011) explores the concept of the local, and in particular the 'settler-local', as existing within relations of power within place which

[1] This should not be understood to gloss over the violence, dispossession and displacement, material, psychological and epistemic, that is practiced as Settler-Colonialism. The distinction being made between the motivation and the practice attempts to separate the political and administrative effects of settlerism from the motivating narratives.

[2] The 1992 Australian supreme Court case Mabo v. Queensland which established the legal basis for land claims of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and led to the 1993 Native Title Act(NTA). (See: Carstens, 2019; Strelein & Tran, 2013).

underpin frameworks of 'them' and 'us'. Garbutt (2011) incorporates the work of Edward Relph (1976, quoted in Garbutt, 2011, p. 56), who referred to the work of settlers as authentically making place "through their own labour [as an] … expression of hope, of total involvement and of responsibility for the decision to emigrate." Potter (2019) also looks at the ways in which belonging is constructed through an analysis of literary texts produced by non-Indigenous Australians from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. Potter (2019) shows the parallel between political and literary imaginaries by referencing an Australian politician who emphatically pronounced that "[l]ike most Australians, I worked for my land, no one gave it to me" (Hanson, 1996, quoted in Potter, 2019, p. 15), alongside the work of a writer, whose character laid claim to his land on the basis of "hard work and self-reliance," asserting that "No one handed me anything […] I had to fight my whole life to get it" (McGahan, 2004, quoted in Potter, 2019, p. 16). Potter (2019, p. 146) references imaginaries of "the making of Australia" and "visions of a land 'open' to development," which have sought new expression in the presence of increasingly destabilising narratives which became resonant in the wake of the Mabo decision.

The Settler chooses to be on the island. Despite their ancestors possibly not having much choice in relation to needing to leave their land of origin, there is agency identified in relation to their existence within the island. This becomes the intergenerational story that is negotiated by descendants. The Settler's relationship to the island is therefore driven by the narrative themes of choice and determination. However, as Wolfe (2006) indicates, it is not unusual for the Settler, over time, to adopt a version of the Autochthonous narrative to legitimise right of place, as a means of establishing autonomy from the jurisdiction of Settler origin, or as a means of establishing rights relative to those who would seek to displace them (Blair, 2017).

Creole islandness

The term Creole as an analytical tool is widely contested (Boswell, 2013; Chivallon, 2008; Malouf, 2007; Palmié, 2006). The term is used as an ethnic reference in Mauritius and islands of West Africa (Boswell, 2006; Kohl, 2012), as a cultural reference in Réunion and the Seychelles (Choppy, 2020; Tibère, 2016), and a symbol of a false nationalism that invisibilises the injustices maintained against descendants of the formerly enslaved (Thame, 2017). For the purposes of this paper, however, Creole refers to communities birthed within the island from allochthonous origin, whose primary ancestors were without the political status of either the dominant or originary groups within the society. These are primarily communities with intergenerational cultural and genetic inheritances that are multiple, emerging from socio-economic relations patterned on the plantation (Burnard, 2015; Clukey & Wells, 2016), and based in a history of exploitation, violence and racialised disempowerment (J. Davis et al., 2019).

The narratives of Australian South Sea Islanders (ASSI) are explored as an example of Australian Creole Islandness. Davis (2020, p. 32) refers to the group as 'Children of the Sugar Slaves', identifying theirs as a story of "colonial exploitation and victimisation", survival and flourishing against the odds. As Moore (2015) indicates, this narrative reflects a collective memory which conflates time periods and experiences of Pacific Island labourers, some of whom were known to have been forcibly recruited, and kidnapped,

but others of who are considered to have willingly migrated to fulfil Australian labour needs of the time.[3]

Davias (2016, p. 63) surveys literary works of Australian South Sea Islanders who trace their origin from various islands across Melanesia to reveal "stories of displacement, survival and adaptation." Davias (2016, pp. 63–64) engages Deleuze and Guattari's imagery of the rhizome with expansive and unpredictable roots to describe the experiences of Australian South Sea islanders to reference the "loss of their island, their uprooting, dispersion and re-rooting in another place." Davias (2016) identifies spaces of meaning for Australian South Sea Islanders as having been defined by the experience of their ancestors. While the plantation, a space of racialised power relations defined by violence and hostility, was their first introduction to the island, many Pacific Islands labourers who survived the experience[4] and were able to remain in Australia were eventually able to create spaces of family and community alongside other indigenous and non-indigenous Islanders. However, as Davias (2016) points out, this did not disconnect them from their islands of origin. Through storytelling, many Australian South Sea Islanders maintained the imaginaries of the homeland and the experiences of the plantation, and transmitted these across generations. These stories existed alongside silences and exclusions, as they suffered discrimination and pressures to assimilate. Davis (2020) writes of cultural identity defined in multiplicity as she outlines her mother's ancestry that could be traced to several different Pacific islands and their unique cultural heritage. The ancestral islands became places of orientation for new generations, creating dual belongings between the place of one's displaced ancestors and the place of one's birth. Australian South Sea Islanders emerge as caught between spaces informed by "the sturdy traditions of Australia's white settlers, [and] campfire tales of village freedom and canefield bondage" (Davias, 2013, p. 37). This provides Australian South Sea Islanders with an ability to position themselves as not just Australian, but part of a "broader Melanesian geographical area and kinship [which] looks out from Australia, and not inwards to a traditional understanding of a nation" (Davis, 2020, p. 133). From Davis' (2020) documentation of oral histories, the land was an ally in the Islanders' survival. They could grow food, farm animals, build shelter, and create spaces for communal meeting and caregiving. The land as the plantation was a site of trauma but, on escape, spaces were found that provided respite and sustenance. There is, therefore, an ambivalent relationship which emerges from the readings, which Davis (2020, p. 82) attributes to "the complexity and uncertainty of our very existence, with no sense of really belonging in either the islands or in Australia." There is a tension of identity between Australia and the islands of their ancestors, concurrent with a growing identification with a wider global community of descendants of formerly enslaved people (Moore, 2015).

[3] There are contending scholarly positions on whether the Australian importation of labourers from the Pacific Islands should be understood as slavery, based on the regulated nature of the practice, the use of contracts and the payments that were made, notwithstanding some evidence of abuse and illegality (Moore, 2015). However, as Banivanua-Mar (2007, p. 180) notes, the existence of voluntary migration did not negate the experience of trauma, as Pacific Island labourers existed with "blurred dualities… [being] colonized and dispossessed but not indigenous, aliens and displaced but not immigrants, bonded and enslaved but not slaves, and agents and autonomous but not free." A 1993 federal government Commission report attempted to address the discrepancy by noting that "slavery is more than a legal concept, it is a way of describing how two groups relate…" (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Australia, 1993, p. 13).

[4] Mortality rates among Pacific Islands labourers were between three and five times the rate of white Australians (Banivanua-Mar, 2007).

The ASSI relationship to the island is based in the experiences on the island, the communities endured, and the communities created. It is a relationship that is based on a "pride in their ancestors' resilience and determination to endure and make better lives for their descendants" (Fallon, 2015, p. 133). However, it is also a relationship based on a sense of being neither Indigenous nor immigrant-settler, despite being both (Dick, 2015; Fallon, 2015), with that fact informing the way community members are related to within the island, materially and psychosocially. The sense of difference exists alongside a sense of the right to belong to the island, a right to be Australian (Davis, 2020). Their claim to the island is based on the 'blood, sweat and tears' of ancestors which created wealth for others and the decades of discrimination and marginalisation experienced by the community in the island (Davis, 2020).

The narratives of Australian South Sea Islanders inherited by their descendants were primarily defined by the themes of exclusion, disrespect, hardship, trauma, survival and self-determination (Davis, 2020; Dick, 2015; Moore, 2015). A sense of kinship-based belonging emerged as they created a community for themselves within Australia based on a pan-Melanesian transnational conceptualisation of identity, bounded by the experience of intergenerational injustice and ancestry, and not by the shores of the island (Dick, 2015).

Narratives of Creole islandness reflect multiple themes, primary of which are survival and resilience, afforded through adaptation (Boswell, 2013; Degia, 2018; Philpot et al., 2015). Other important themes include in-betweenness – of being neither and both at the same time. This has been embedded in a narrative of impurity reframed as hybridisation (Boswell, 2005, 2006; Eriksen, 2020; Hall, 2015). A reframing that has evolved into a valorisation of difference (Murdoch, 2017; van der Werf et al., 2018). Within the islandness discourse, all islanders are considered to understand themselves as different, with their sense of uniqueness being a significant aspect of their island identity (Burholt et al., 2013). However, Creole islandness narratives of difference and distinction are not simply metaphorical, but historically produced and embodied (Mohammed, 1998).

Summary

Error! Reference source not found. synthesises the primary narrative themes of the three types of islandness. *Creole islandness* is underscored by the narrative themes of difference and adaptation, which reflect difference in relation to allochthonous progenitors, and difference in relation to existing autochthonous inhabitants (where they may exist), while adapting knowledges from their ancestors to support survival in their environment of birth. *Settler islandness* is understood as choice and determination, in part fuelled by concepts of modernity, progress and advancement. In this frame, claims to belonging are earned through experience and material efforts, while *Autochthonous islandness* is expressed as transcendental and unconditional belonging within the island based in mutuality and continuous genealogy between the islander and the land.

The three islandness profiles described are intended as examples of types that can be found across islands with a colonial past. The nature of experiences and the dominance of narratives will result in some types having greater representation than others. The three narratives of islandness reflect relationships to and within the island and allow all islanders to experience a deep sense of belonging.

Islandness type	Primary narrative themes	Relation to the island
Creole	difference, adaptation	The island is lived and survived. Claims to the island are based on the islander being an authentic product of the land, adapting knowledges from ancestors to support survival.
Settler	choice, determination	The island is experienced and claims to belonging are earned through material efforts.
Autochthonous	mutuality, coevolution	There is a continuous genealogy between the islander and the land. Belonging within the island is transcendental and unconditional.

Table 1 – Typology of islandnesses

As indicated in an earlier section of this article, the typology presented reflects generalised simplifications of nuanced experiences. The typology and the examples are presented to place the discussion on islandness within the context of sociohistorical experiences within and with the island when engaging with islands and islandness. Island communities are understood to be varied, as different communities define themselves around the narratives of their own experiences of the island, and individuals negotiate these various narratives to form their own sense of islandness. However, similar experiences create similar narratives across islands. Therefore, Settler islandness may be experienced across Australia in similar ways as it is experienced in Newfoundland, but may also resonate with islanders in Mauritius. Creole islandness narratives may resonate in Réunion as much as in Guadeloupe, but may also be identified in small communities such as the Australian South Sea Islanders in Australia. However, though not explored in this article, but conceptualised as part of the typology, is the result of negotiations between narratives that would allow islanders with an ancestry of Settler islandness to evolve a narrative of Autochthony, descendants of Creole islanders to evolve a Settler islandness narrative and Autochthonous islanders to evolve a narrative of Creole islandness. Rather than clearly bounded types, narratives of relation, like all narratives, are negotiable. This means that islandness cannot only be experienced differently by different communities on an island, but differently by an islander during the course of their life on an island.

Conclusion

Somers (1994, p. 606) writes that it is "through narrative and narrativity that we constitute our social identities", that we locate ourselves and are located." As she further points out, these social narratives are "rarely of our own making," as everything we know, and everything we are is "in part a result of numerous cross-cutting relational story-lines" (Somers, 1994, pp. 606–607). By compiling narratives of islandness within constructs of postcolonial identities, the intention is not to reinforce essentialist notions of cultural categories but to think through ways that many of these narratives cut across cultures making them culturally unspecific. Using the example of a single island may have undermined that intention somewhat, but it is hoped that in the abstracted narratives the commonalities to communities across many other islands were clear. Understanding islandness as narratives of relations is not particularly innovative, and the three types

described are mostly taken for granted in the literature, with the exception of the Creole, which is often referred to as 'everyone else' or the 'multicultural category' (Queensland Government, 2014), if it is acknowledged at all. There are other ways to typify worldviews, many of which address orientations and values related to sustainable development (Boutilier, 2005; van Opstal & Hugé, 2013) which only partially address the coloniality that is fundamental to the production of the categorisations. The approach taken in this article has focused on moving away from the dichotomy of 'modern' and 'traditional' worldviews, towards narratives of relation; to the land, the Other and systems of coloniality. I have also focussed on narratives of relation to frame islandness in a way that takes account of the varieties of island identities that are produced, and which need to be engaged in discussions on islandness. Islandness as narratives of relation provide different ways of seeing and understanding the island and the islander. The typology of islandness provides a basis for systematising and de-homogenising islander narratives of being across and within islands, and facilitating the valuation of narratives of different groups as part of the process of collective identification within island spaces.

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