

THE COMING OF AGE OF ISLAND STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents insights into the emerging academic field of 'island studies', defined as the interdisciplinary study of islands on their own terms. This exposé is undertaken in two ways: conceptually, by means of a critical and judicious review of the literature across a number of disciplines; and analytically in relation to what is probably the most popular scholarly piece of non-fiction based on an island society written to date – *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead.

Key words: Island studies, Margaret Mead, Samoa, identity, externality, islandness

THEORISING ISLANDNESS

There remains today much scope for unpacking what is meant by *islandness* – a word that is preferred to the more commonly used term of *insularity*. The latter has unwittingly come along with a semantic baggage of separation and backwardness. This negativism does not mete out fair justice to the subject matter.

At face value, an island's 'signature' is its obvious optic: it is a geographically finite, total, discrete, sharply precise physical entity which accentuates clear and holistic notions of location and identity (Brunhes 1920, pp. 160–161); it exacerbates species interactions in conditions of relatively higher densities (Caldwell *et al.* 1980); and induces a more acute competition for more limited, and less diverse, resources (Kirch 1986, p. 2). Smaller size emphasises further these notions and dynamics of specificity. Such a condition harbours a tendency towards monopoly provision, economies of scope and lower thresholds of intimacy (Baldacchino 1997). It also engenders rapid spillover and multiplier effects:

Approach to a single, isolate problem leads extraordinarily rapidly to all parts of the

complex more quickly and completely than we have observed elsewhere (Bowen-Jones 1972, p. 59).

and

On continents, economic and political changes evolve over decades; on islands, a ship appears on the horizon, a seaplane lands in a harbour, a European explorer arrives, and a single day changes everything forever (Clarke 2001, p. 46).

The discrete essence of islands is often deemed to be their key distinguishing feature. Such an endowment has promoted many to speak of islands and island societies as 'laboratories' – such as Suggs (1961, p. 194), Sahlins (1963), Friedman (1981, p. 275) and Bayliss-Smith *et al.* (1988, p. 284). However, this analogy is often taken too far, 'especially if boundedness is confused with closure . . . a facile but unwarranted assumption' (Kirch 1986, p. 2).

There is another, second characteristic which is as central, though less self-evident, to islandness as the first. It is that condition which acts as the filter, broker and interface of/for the island with the rest of the world. On a mainland,

externalities – be they exports, emigration, remittances, epidemics, environmental or military interventions – are typically things apart; hence the name. On an island, in contrast, they are much more significant, often central. Ask anyone attempting a census on a small island. Such a condition of ‘hypothermia’ (Baldacchino 2000), ‘vulnerability’ (Briguglio 1995) or ‘volatility’ (Easterly & Kraay 2000) continues to fuel strong arguments about the economic non-viability or otherwise of small island territories. In fact, many non-sovereign island territories are financially better off than their sovereign counterparts (Read 2004; Bertram 2004) and they defend their status of ‘upside-down decolonization’ (Hoeft & Öostindie 1991).

The relative importance of *locality* (the first feature) with respect to *externality* (the second feature) decreases, all things being equal, with decreasing size of the island’s habitable area and resident population.

However, things are not that simple. First, the allegedly insulating function of the sea with respect to an island merits scrutiny, since acknowledging the relevance of externality means that an island is, as a matter of principle, not sealed unto itself. Rather than designating the sea as a boundary in the Euclidian sense of the word – that is, as a sharply dividing linear entity between matter and non-matter – it is pertinent to adopt a fractal perspective. Mandelbrot urges us to consider how the reality of nature is one of irregular continua, of anything but perfect figures:

Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles and bark is not smooth (Mandelbrot 1983, p. 1).

Islands are not islands, in the sense that they are not closed unto themselves. Rather, island territories have an economic and cultural hinterland that lies elsewhere (Streeten 1993). Indeed, for many island jurisdictions, the sea remains their key economic resource (Dolman 1988).

Second, just as boundary is fractal, locality is ephemeral. The spatial separateness and ‘geographical precision’ of small islands certainly appear a priori to bestow them with the potential for a stronger sense of self-pride and identity (Weale 1992, pp. 81–82). Conventional wisdom

equates insularity with community and from there goes on to assume the almost automatic existence of an island-based and island-driven national identity which finds expression in xenophobia, administrative autonomy or claims for political sovereignty. So, a typical assertion – traceable certainly to Kuznets (1960) – would be that the geographical isolation and compact socio-political universe of small island territories is ‘likely to promote feelings of fellowship and a sense of community’ (Anckar & Anckar 1995, p. 220). But this is not necessarily so: the world has its own enduring set of ‘divided islands’ (Royle 2001, p. 151; Baldacchino 2002a); while it is possible to consider even non-archipelagic island states which are not (yet) nations but are internally ruptured by proto-nationalist *ethnies* (Srebrnik 2000; Baldacchino 2002b).

Furthermore, what *exactly* is locality? It is not restricted to the spatial. The cultural and historical landscape of an island can be manufactured, in much the same way that a community can be ‘imagined’ into existence via political intent (Anderson 1983). Such a ‘production of locality’ (Appadurai 1996, p. 180; Keating 1996, p. 47) is quintessentially relational, confronting a depository of knowledge and shared history (of oppression, colonialism, dependency, ethnic or religious specificity, messianic destiny) of an island to that of a, typically larger, possibly global, community or threat (Saussol 1991). The identification with, and assertion of, a specifically *island* identity – of a situational feature as a meaningful component of the *weltanschauung*, or life-world, of an island people – is a matter of an at times deliberate, at times subconscious, juxtaposition:

In other words, islanders are not necessarily people who are geographically surrounded by the sea, but a people *who say* that they are geographically surrounded by the sea, or that they belong to a human group which is so (Hache 1998, p. 47; my emphasis).

Thus, an island’s administration may be seen to act as a ‘mainland’ by the inhabitants of smaller, outlying islands, enhancing the latter’s sense of island identity;¹ while the political, economic and/or cultural elite of an administratively autonomous island within a larger, mainly non-island, state may similarly resort to island

'localism' as a strand of 'agonistic pluralism' (Stratford 2002) to explain its relationship to 'the mainland'.² An island community which is *too* isolated may not be, nor needs to be, conscious of its own islandness (Péron 1993, p. 19, 2004). The conception and expression of island identity, as well as its size, are part of an ongoing dialectic between the geographic and the political.

Thus, a key feature of the 'signature' of the island condition is the apparent contradiction between 'openness and closure' manifest in, and on, all islands (Villamil 1977; Kirch 1986; Péron 1993, p. 16). Smallness emphasises this inescapable combination:

[I]slanders are constantly reminded that their way of life and their identity have much to do with insularity and isolation on the one hand, and with migration and mobility on the other (Connell & King 1999, p. 2).

Acknowledging the dependence on the external while enjoying such a sharp sense of territoriality – the co-presence of the values of *roots* and *routes* (Clifford 1997; Jolly 2001) is the source of 'separation anxiety'³ for many islanders; in its disquieting turbulence, the articulation of this dialectic is a consistently powerful feature of island life.

THE WOMAN AND HER WORK

But, let us now replace the conceptual, wide-ranging and comparative analysis of the previous section with an in-depth cross-examination of one woman and her most famous *oeuvre*: an equally and complementarily useful frame of reference to the subject of island studies.

Readers are not to feel unduly embarrassed if the title of this paper reminds them of Margaret Mead (1901–78) and that first book of hers, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, published in 1928, which made her a celebrity. So powerful is the hold of this woman on the literature that the phrase 'coming of age' seems effectively copyright material. Indeed, Mead's stature as the grandparent of (certainly American) anthropology seems assured: and it has been claimed that her *Coming of Age in Samoa* remains the most famous anthropological (and perhaps island-based) work written to date (Freeman 1999, p. 194). The tenacity of her wide appeal over more than 75 years begs explanation, if not

deference. It is in its contribution to island studies – the study of islands on their own terms – that Mead's work is critiqued below.

Not much here will be drawn from Mead's substantive work on kinship, household, religion, personality development or sexual relations. Rather, her work is being revisited with an explicit 'island imagination', although Mead was not interested in islands per se. In this, she represents what is still the norm in island-related literature today. Mead was rather intent on identifying those groups of people 'working out experiments on what could be done with human nature' (Mead 1973, p. 9). She was alert to how 'firearms or alcohol, evangelism or tuberculosis' were effectively reducing the diversity of human civilisation (Mead 1973, p. 10). Islands were useful and convenient settings towards the pursuit of her investigation into the effects of 'modernity'.

Mead was overtly critical of the pseudo-liberating forces of modern/western civilisation; and while she consistently reaffirmed her belief that 'primitive', untouched societies were simple, such simplicity did not correspond to inferiority: rather, such societies had powerful and timely lessons for North American culture and society:

[I]solated on small Pacific islands, in dense African jungles or Asiatic wastes, it is still possible to find untouched societies which have chosen solutions of life's problems different from our own, which can give us precious evidence on the malleability of human nature (Mead 1973, p. 11).

The lessons had to do with the variability and flexibility of human nature: and this lies at the heart of Mead's ideological positioning. She was out to refute the claims of psychoanalysis, taking the world by storm at the time of her writing, precisely because they abnegated choice. She set off on her South Pacific research, guided and influenced by the likes of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict who were contributing to the academic defence of cultural conditioning against genetic predisposition; of gender over sex; of nurture over nature; of freedom over predestination. Showing how social structures and processes were happening differently in different parts of the world would be clear evidence of 'the possibilities of the human spirit'

(Mead 1973, p. 10). Such conclusions were not only attractive in a purely technical sense; but they also resonated with an American society concerned with the tension between individual freedom and social restraint.

Mead is striking as an early critic of what one could today glibly call globalisation. Her quite remarkable foresight is concerned with the threat of loss of cultural diversity and its being superceded by a rabid modernity. In spite of the latter's alluring trappings, she asserts, the modern need not and does not have all the answers to human and social problems or 'maladjustments' (Mead 2001, p. 149): crime, repression, sexual segregation, neurosis, depersonalisation, anxiety, armed conflict. Mead, almost messianically, admonishes her society for its failings to temper its laxity, for being overgenerously 'charged with choice' (Mead 2001, p. 147), for stigmatising casualness and rewarding frenetic competition. Furthermore, she accuses 'Westernization' for carelessly and shamelessly exporting its discrepancies to societies and cultures that had their own, distinct, identity.⁴ When looking back, she insightfully argues that her Manus subjects from Peri, on the Admiralty Islands:

do not yet belong . . . to the age of the air, when the world becomes one great highway, and in any inn along the way there must be room and welcome for each and every guest (Mead 1956, p. 458).

She pre-dates McLuhan's concept of 'the global village' (McLuhan 1964, p. 93) hands down by quite a few years.

Part of Mead's exceptional leap to fame was due no doubt to her ability to offer island societies as such 'excellent contrast material' to the condition of her, then mainly North American, readers.⁵ No better contrast could be selected: her Ta'ù islanders in what is today American Samoa were remote, primitive, uncontaminated by culture contact, untouched by progress, unexplored by science. The 'strangeness of the scene', mused Mead's mentor Franz Boas, and 'their peculiar attitudes . . . set off in strong light our own achievements and behaviour'.⁶ The islanders were also small in number – just 600 in 7 villages. In fact, later on she was to refer to, and perhaps coin, the term 'an island system' to represent a cultural niche which was

specific, yet compact and homogenous in its smallness and imputed simplicity (Mead 2002, p. 150).⁷ A complete and naturally bounded social world was literally waiting to be documented and illustrated. A small yet fully furnished 'laboratory' only needed a skilful technician to get the tantalising job done. As notes Jean Guillemin in her preface to Mead's *Kinship in the Admiralty Islands*:

Positioning herself among the natives, often in bare feet and cotton frock, was an intense, non-reproducible experiment which, once done, she could write up with clarity and confidence (Mead 2002, p. xii).

Mead's appealing humanity takes on a decidedly sensuous hue, however. There could not have been a more mentally seductive concoction (Freeman 1983, 1999, p. 195). The imputed sexual freedom and promiscuity of the Samoans was quickly and uncritically assimilated as another variant of free love and sensuality in tropical paradise, deemed endemic to South Pacific islanders and confirmed by a long procession of scholarly, and not so scholarly, prose (Connell 2003; Tcherkézoff 2001). The magnetic attraction of such unsullied fantasies continues: in 2001, the box office hit *Castaway* (starring Tom Hanks) was filmed on Monuriki Island (Yasawa Group, Fiji) while separate rounds of the TV-serialised crowd puller *Survivor* were filmed on the islands of Pulau Tiga (Malaysia) and Nuku Hiva (Marquesas Group). Such dispositions for mythic understanding (Gabilondo 2000, p. 99), encouraged as they are by the tourism industry, preclude efforts to see islands as actual sites where something important might be learned (Lowenthal 1988, p. 7).

LESSONS

The identification of *Coming of Age in Samoa* as simply portraying a sexual utopia is certainly unfortunate. It diminishes Mead's achievements that remain remarkable in the context of her time.

First, Mead took the crucial and risky step of deciding not to write to a strictly professional audience. Though her own professional status was still then insecure, she wrote her first two key texts in non-specialist language for a

non-specialist audience. She took the plunge of being an interdisciplinary generalist rather than the specialist, blending her knowledge of psychology with that of anthropology. As she declares in the 1973 Preface to *Coming of Age in Samoa*:

I can emphasize that this was the first piece of anthropological fieldwork that was written without the paraphernalia of scholarship designed to mystify the lay reader and confound one's critics (Mead 1973, p. xxiv).

Mead's diction and style is decidedly flowing, reminiscent of fiction. She is also emphatically human, intent on celebrating her folk and giving them a real, heroic personality.

Second, Mead is also quite avant-garde, daring to resort to girls, women and children as her research subjects. These had been 'largely invisible to earlier [mainly male] researchers', notes Mary Catherine Bateson, Mead's daughter (Bateson in *Preface* to Mead 2001, p. xi).

Third, Mead was also ingenious enough in studying small island places for their suggestive answers to very big questions. She was keen not just to learn *about* islands and islanders, but *from* them. 'Mead didn't go to Samoa just to study Samoa. Rather, she wanted to understand the whole human race' (Pipher 2001, p. xviii). Extrapolating beyond the small and specific island condition may have come about for at least three different reasons. First, it may have been an unwitting or haphazard stumbling in the course of what may, at first sight, appear to be insignificant island-based, island-specific fieldwork – such as Darwin's finches on the Galapagos islands (Darwin 1859/1979) or Wallace's birds-of-paradise on the Aru Islands (Wallace 1975). Second, though rarely, we have the purposeful descent on a specific island for observations of an extraordinary and extra-insular relevance, such as Simberloff and Wilson's controlled experiments among the mangroves of the Florida Keys (Simberloff & Wilson 1969). Last, and admittedly, it may be an approach that one resorts to, out of the mundane obligation to secure a publisher – as Mead herself may have done⁸ – since publishers are usually interested in sales volume.

These approaches to island research and their emergent data are, however, not without their dangers.

First, they assign their perpetrators a *false sense of control* over the situation, and especially so in relation to the small island 'case'. The savage or primitive state of its occupants and its tantalisingly simple 'pattern' present a unique opportunity for authoritative and definitive scholarship by external 'experts'. *Veni, vidi, vici*, in a flash. The island motif offers all too easily – in historical fact as much as in literary fiction – the space and focus for absolute territorial appropriation and cultural domestication.⁹ Mead falls for this enduring island image as a mythic space which permits 'mastering nature through reason' (Loxley 1990, p. 143): she lumps her Samoans among her virtual bag of trophies after just less than six months of often interrupted and fairly unsystematic fieldwork, on not more than 68 young women aged 9 to 20. She defends her methodology, claiming that: 'the analysis of a simpler civilization is more possible of attainment' (Mead 2001, p. 7).

Since, as she articulates at greater length in her later book, *Growing Up in New Guinea*:

it must be remembered that, in a culture . . . with only a sex division of labour between individuals . . . without any priesthood with a great body of esoteric knowledge, without any method of keeping extensive records, the cultural tradition is simple enough to be almost entirely contained within the memory of an average adult member of the society. An investigator who enters such a society with ethnological training which makes it possible to refer the phenomena [of the local culture] to convenient and well-understood categories, and with the immense superiority over the native of being able to record in writing each aspect of the culture as it is learned, is in an excellent position for research in a comparatively short time (Mead 1973, p. 212).

Nevertheless, these are gross generalisations that fail to recognise that small islands may harbour small but otherwise total societies, and the absence of specialisation, literacy or a priestly elite cannot be assumed to be the equivalent of simplicity. The notion of a small island as a 'natural laboratory' is a pernicious one, and the results of any ethnographic work entertained therein can only be particular, and hardly privileged (Geertz 1973, p. 23). Mead's arguments

present a fine case of *ex post* justification for the clinical execution of 'quick-fix' fieldwork by an external expert.

Indeed, contemporary scholarship allows us to argue confidently that islands, smaller islands in particular, harbour dynamics and tendencies which are idiosyncratic (e.g., Baldacchino & Milne 2000). Mead herself (inadvertently?) hits upon at least one such characteristic: the intensity of gossip and the lower threshold of intimacy in small, fairly bounded communities. She exclaims:

How little privacy any one has . . . all of an individual's acts are public property . . . there is a very general cognizance on the part of the whole village of the activity of every single inhabitant . . . The oppressive atmosphere of a small town is all about them; in an hour, children will have made a dancing song of their most secret acts (Mead 2001, p. 88).

A second, related point concerns the *status of research subjects*. If the external expert is knowledgeable, and the subject matter primitive, then we are faced with a situation where small islanders become a 'looked at' reference group. The locals come alive only as hopeful respondents to the preset research template of the foreigner. As another anthropologist, Raymond Firth, nonchalantly remarks, following first contact with the natives of primitive Polynesia: 'I wonder how such turbulent human material could ever be induced to submit to scientific study' (Firth 1983, p. 1). Being only 'turbulent human material' cheats many islanders of the possibility of defining themselves and of articulating their own concerns and interests. Small islanders continue today to suffer being objects of the gaze of non-islanders: not only of social researchers, but also of other academics, consultants, journalists, film-makers, tourists. Islands are 'so splendidly splittable into Ph.D. topics' (Spate 1978, p. 42). Island stuff is either romanced, rendered as coy subject matter: seen only, and fleetingly, through rose-tinted glasses (Smawfield 1993, p. 29); or otherwise trivialised and subsumed within a paradigm of structural deficiency (Hau'ofa 1994).

Reference to primitives and savages is today neither fashionable nor politically correct; nevertheless, access to research funding, fellowships,

refereed publications and publishing houses remains privileged. Many small islanders would wish to write, naturally and specifically, about their own small island; yet, such quite legitimate concerns are often not seen to command enough market potential by gatekeepers and those who matter. Such conditions collectively conspire to thwart much indigenous small island scholarship. How many indigenous Samoan, Seychellois or Nevisian authors can we recall? By default, we must learn of the former Gilbert Islands from an Arthur Grimble (Grimble 1956); of Tahiti from a Frederick O'Brien (O'Brien 2002); of American Samoa – still tantalisingly paradisiacal in July 2000 – from *National Geographic* (Chadwick 2000).

Third, *comparative studies* of small island data or research material has been a fairly rare event, and only facilitated with the onset of information and communications technology in the late twentieth century. Mead must also be credited with her own, brief yet pioneering foray into comparativist island research, when she visited the Manus tribe in the Admiralty Islands, north of what is today Papua New Guinea. Notes on the kinship system of the island people of Baluan, Lou and Pak are provided as an appendix, and based on admittedly fleeting observations: two days, one day, a few hours respectively (Mead 2002, pp. 150–156, 159–161). This research strategy contains enormous promise, now that it has appeared on the horizon of logistic and financial possibility. Many of us would today salute Edward Dommen's insight in editing the 1980 special issue of *World Development* Journal, dedicated simply, but powerfully, to islands (Dommen 1980). It came out practically in step with Shand's masterly monograph of developmental issues in South Pacific and Indian Ocean islands (Shand 1980). Before that, and more at home in the physical world, we need to acknowledge Wallace's *Island Life* (1880) and MacArthur and Wilson's *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (1967), apart from the more obvious Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Geographer Stephen Royle (2001) reviews some 500 islands in terms of nine key themes. McKee and Tisdell (1990), Baker (1992) and Briguglio and associates (1996) collate different island experiences around specific themes – economic development, public administration and sustainable tourism practices, respectively.

David Quammen (1996) has done admirably well with a gripping series of cameos which factor in such islands as Aldabra, Aru, Angel de la Guarda, Galapagos, Guam, Hawai'i, Komodo, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rakata and Tasmania. The number of publications *on, from, for*; and not just *about* islands is increasing fast in all disciplines.

Of course, the significant must be sifted from the spurious. But intransular comparisons can bear theoretical insights; they can contribute to the extraction of general principles, some of which may not be peculiar only to islands. More boldly, one needs to remind oneself of how islands tend to be advance indicators of what is happening elsewhere; of how islands 'have facilitated tremendous ecological, anthropological and biological theory' (DeLoughrey 2001, p. 29). Quammen (1996) bolsters the evidence in favour of insularity as the flywheel of evolution, the inducer of gigantism or dwarfism, and of global encroaching ecosystem decay. Bertram and Watters (1985) identify the mutually reinforcing features of a MIRAB economy: run not on productive investment, but on a dependency cocktail of *migration, remittances, aid* and public sector *bureaucracy*; Diamond (1975) postulates the 'island dilemma' in conservation planning. Jeremy Boissevain (1974) conceives of social network theory from his fieldwork in a village in Malta. Doxey (1976) constructs his tourism irritation index from fieldwork in Barbados. Sacks (1996) investigates colour blindness in the island community of Pingelap, rather than in a hospital (see also Gabilondo 2000).

Yes: islands are test sites, and not just for plantation economics or for nuclear weapons.

COMPARISONS

What appears as a self-evident fact is that all islands are unique. Yet, in their self-contained difference, they demand comparison:

Islands . . . are unique and therefore they are normal . . . Island species tend to be different. Island communities tend to be different. But throughout the world they manifest their differences in a handful of similar ways . . . Islands are distinct from mainlands in that they represent simplified, exaggerated

versions . . . of exactly those evolutionary processes that occur on mainlands (Quammen 1996, pp. 120, 139).

This means that there is no better comparison for an island than another island. There may also be no better comparison for a mainland than an island, since the processes and dynamics that occur habitually on a mainland may be enhanced and exacerbated in an island setting. Yet, such deliberate comparisons remain exceptional: rather, many islands have been and continue to be looked upon with a larger, continental, typically metropolitan and/or neo-colonial candidate as their backdrop, whenever comparisons are to be made. Islanders are as much party to this perverse relativity as non-islanders.

That *Island Studies* – or Nissology – itself exists today is due to the same phenomenon of globalisation and its consequences. But if *Island Studies* has come of age, it is not to be construed flippantly, anecdotally, in a manner which Mead may have inadvertently or otherwise encouraged – with small islands as pristine, exotic, manageably simple social microcosms or physical laboratories; and small islanders as simple, sensuous, savage natives or passive respondents . . . fostering those conditions which are ideal for insatiably curious Westerners to swoop in, get their data or experience, and rapidly move out, in jet-set mode.

It is high time to make short shrift of such tempting and convenient postulations. *Island Studies* is not the mere study of events and phenomena on sites which happen to be islands – or, for better or worse, *small* islands. Were it so, Lilliput is easily studied and 'taken in', in one gulp, in one look, in one book, before the rapacious onlooker departs, in Lemuel Gulliver style (Swift 1727/1965). Islands do not merely reproduce on a manageable scale the dynamics and processes that exist elsewhere. Islandness is an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways.

Mead's double defence of identity and malleability is worth revisiting. Quammen warns us that we are at the point of losing 'a large portion of the planet's biological diversity', and therefore also 'a large portion of our world's beauty, complexity, intellectual interest, spiritual depth

and ecological health' (Quammen 1996, p. 607). Does not island studies present itself as a legitimate defence of, and for, such assets? Is not the inherent, intrinsic uniqueness of any island, even the smallest, *especially* the smallest, a veritable bastion of hope, however slim, that locality thrives and survives? Geographical boundedness, historical distinctiveness, floral and faunal speciation and endemism, linguistic nuances, cultural specifics, jurisdictional adventurism . . . collectively, the evidence proclaims *islandness* as a commanding paradigm. Our subject matter is – *pace* John Fowles of *The Sunday Times* – starkly and powerfully vital.¹⁰

The main opposition to such an argument is to dismiss the relevance of diversity and locality in the face of a creeping, bland reductionism. In Mead's time, such a threat was mainly seen to lurk in psychoanalysis. Today, genetics, or neurochemistry, are among the overtly, unitary subjugating forces, prescribing solemn uniformity and mono-causality. So is globalisation. Yet, the eponymous global village (McLuhan 1964) would be pitifully monotonous and plastic if and when all its constituent districts, neighbourhoods, streets, houses and citizens looked the same. Perhaps the term 'glocalisation' coined by Thomas Courchene (1995) better reflects a situation of dynamic traffic exchange. After all, globalisation both standardises and homogenises, as well as highlights and invigorates, local initiatives and identities. The global economy provides ample opportunities for disjuncture and difference (Appadurai 1996, Chapter 2). The ability to source unique features or processes from specific islands, connect them to similar ones on other islands, and then analyse the implications of such links, presents promising and rewarding opportunities. That such possibilities exist today is largely thanks to globalisation; they serve to act much like 'excellent contrast material' in their own way.

As we zero in on even smaller, fragmentary components of our planet, we recognise not only that they are endowed with their own holistic and total environment; but that each small fragment is a precious depository of attributes, of relevance to the rest, as well as to the species and the planet as a whole. Island studies grapples with uncovering the patterning of uniformity in a sea of revealing diversity, as well as with revealing the diversity persisting in an age of

encroaching uniformity, the age of the fifth mass extinction since the origins of life on Earth. Locality is threatened by the effects of those same forces which have sensitised us to its existence and have revealed to us its myriad forms. 'Island studies' is, in a powerful sense, the globalisation of locality. The 'signature' of island studies, the 'ecology' of the small scale (Commonwealth Secretariat 1986, p. 6), is the ecology of life itself.

Margaret Mead's Samoans, at least their cousins in the western half of the archipelago, including those on Savai'i and Upolu, secured political independence in 1962. Their singular pride, described by Mead (2001 p. xxvii), has led them as a sovereign people onto the world stage. The island citizens of East Timor have similarly thrust themselves as the world's newest sovereign (half-island) state, on 20 May 2002. Small islanders have confounded both neo-classical economists and hard nosed political scientists, thwarting their deduced notions of non-viability and diseconomies of scale. The over-arching mind-frame may be changing: the islands of the world are being reconstituted as a world of islands. Although bridges make some islanders nervous, those spanning disciplines for the sake of integrating knowledge and synthesising insights should be welcomed with open arms.

Coming of Age in Samoa, in spite of its weaknesses, provides helpful tips in building a methodology for Island Studies: the avoidance of arcane diction; the eclectic power of inter-disciplinarity; the concern with the broad picture; the acknowledgement of men *and* women *and* children as constituent and active members of island societies; the belief in the human spirit; the value of identity.

BEYOND THE LITERAL?

One other insight of Mead must be acknowledged before concluding this paper. Her select sample of locations of human isolates include not just 'small Pacific islands' but also 'dense African jungles or Asiatic wastes' (Mead 1973, p. 11). Although she never studied these places professionally, Mead invites us to be flexible in our definition of insularity. She partakes of a long tradition of scholars that identifies the sea as just one of a series of media which act as

frontiers, as barriers, as obstacles to transfers. Jean Brunhes, Sherwin Carlquist, David Pitt, Russell King and William Newmark have postulated a broader definition of insularisation (Brunhes 1920, pp. 160–161; Carlquist 1965; Pitt 1980; King 1993, pp. 15–19; Newmark 1987). In other words, literal islands, surrounded by water, are only one sort of insular situation in the physical world. Consider a lake (the inverse of a literal island) which is presumably as much of an island for the fish and amphibians that inhabit it; or the effective insularisation of a tree-dwelling species of animal that inhabits a small dot of taiga (a sub-arctic conifer forest) surrounded by wastes of tundra (a sub-arctic treeless plain) (MacArthur & Wilson 1967, pp. 3–4). Is our obsession with only one type of island – the literal, physical type – fuelled by a jaundiced, mainland-driven impression of the sea as ‘the most effective barrier of all’ (Carlquist 1965, p. 4)? What if an expanse of ocean proves easier to cross than a mosquito-infested jungle, a desert or a continental ice sheet? A more supple rendering of the subject matter of island studies could help avoid sterile debates (as to whether, say, an island connected by a bridge to a mainland is any longer an island); on the other hand, purists will be sure to cock an eyebrow. Perhaps this matter is best left to further research.

CONCLUSION

By way of rounding up this paper (which is, in itself, a humble attempt at nissological inter-disciplinarity): one may espy some cause for cautious celebration. Never has there been such a real possibility of studying different islands on their own terms, or of gathering islanders together. Nor has there ever been as much justification, so much urgency, for such a development. Locality has come within global reach. Betwixt the threats of the global village and global warming, of overpopulation and depopulation, island studies has never been more pressing, nor more possible.

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Notes

1. This can be seen in the case of the islands where Kirkwall and Lerwick are situated, with respect to the Orkney and Shetland Isles of Scotland; or in the case of Sicily (Italy) with respect to the Egadi, Lipari and Pelagic islands. See Hache (1988). The same can be said of other ‘unequal dyads’ where one of the islands is the seat of government: Antigua & Barbuda; St Kitts – Nevis; Trinidad & Tobago; Mauritius & Rodrigues; Sao Tome’ & Principe, Malta & Gozo and so on.
2. Prince Edward Island in relation to Canada; Hawai’i in relation to the United States; Åland in relation to Finland; Corsica in relation to France; Madeira in relation to Portugal; Tasmania in relation to Australia. The list goes on.
3. This is a term coined by David Weale, historian and folklorist from Prince Edward Island, Canada.
4. Preface to 1973 edition in Mead (2001, p. xxvii).
5. Mead’s letter to Malinowski, 4 January 1929, in Guillemin (2002, p. xii).
6. Boas, in his 1928 Foreword to Mead in Mead (2001, p. xxi).
7. Mead may have been influenced in this by Gregory Bateson, her third husband and father of her only child, who was a pioneer in the 1930s of ‘systems theory’. He used this as a tool for the analysis of the tribal population of Papua New Guinea – see Bateson (1936). I am grateful to Grant McCall for this information.
8. Her daughter discloses that Mead’s publisher William Morrow had advised her to write ‘more about what all this means to Americans’. See Bateson in Preface to 2001 Edition: Mead (2001, p. xi).
9. *The Tempest* (Shakespeare, 1623/1987) may be the first literary representation of Europe’s colonial encounters in general, and of British

conquest of islands in particular; while *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719/1980) probably remains the most popular, idealised and sanitised account. See critical commentary on this in Hymer (1971/1972) and Loxley (1990).

10. The source is a blurb on the jacket of Quammen (1996). The double meaning is deliberate.

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