

REVIEW ESSAY:

Islands in Between: Martín García and other Geopolitical Flashpoints

Godfrey Baldacchino
Island Studies Program
University of Prince Edward Island, Canada
gbaldacchino@upei.ca

Abstract: The ‘in betweenity’ of islands is an ongoing problematic in contemporary politics. Given their geographic definition and boundedness, islands tend to be unitary jurisdictions - that means that they are unlikely to be shared by more than one power. In fact, there are just 11 islands in the world whose territory is ‘shared’ between more than one national jurisdiction. Meanwhile, there are still various small islands and other bounded territories whose status is contested amongst different (usually larger) states, including Kinmen (Taiwan), Falklands/Malvinas and Gibraltar. In this context, this essay reviews the River Plate area (between Uruguay and Argentina): historically a point of tension between two major powers in Latin America; and some of that tension has been centered on the islands in the region – particularly Martín García.

Keywords: contestation, Falklands, flashpoints, geopolitics, Gibraltar, islands, jurisdiction, Martín García, shared sovereignty

© 2008 - Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada.

Introduction

"Les Îles de la Manche sont des morceaux de France tombés dans la mer et ramassés par l'Angleterre. De la une nationalité complexe, les Jerriais et Guernesiais ne sont certainement pas anglais sans le vouloir, mais ils sont français sans le savoir" (Victor Hugo – *quoted in Jersey Links*, 2006).

Victor Hugo, the acclaimed French novelist, lived in Jersey (1852-1855) and then in Guernsey, until 1870. His succinct observation sums up not just the character of the Channel Islanders, (located betwixt England and France) but that of many island societies the world over, especially those that find themselves ‘in between’. Islanders may see themselves as essentially of one national sentiment, but external (continental-based) observers may beg to differ. Irrespective of what the local islanders might say or think, is the island of Martín García Uruguayan? Is Mayotte French? Is Aruba Dutch? Is Puerto Rico American? Are the Falklands/Malvinas Argentine? And, where physical geography confronts cultural identity, which of the two should overrule the other? Are the local islanders actually settlers, or worse, squatters, whose views and preferences are irrelevant and inconsequential in deciding the issue of legitimate ownership between rival neighbouring states? Should the islanders in question be ‘decolonized’ for the sake of their interests, rather than remain *status quo* for the sake of their wishes? How can the islands of

the Río de la Plata, and the condition of islandness generally, inform us about such questions?

This paper is a ‘broad-brush’, sweepingly general attempt at analyzing international relations involving contested islands by deploying this concept of ‘in betweenity’; a concept that extends well beyond the location of many islands between larger territories, and at the intersection of their associated histories, cultures and languages¹. More specifically, it focuses on the ‘exclave’ of Martín García in the Río Plata – a small island by any measure, but hopefully rich in its implications for the study at hand². To do so, the experience of various islands ‘in between’ are reviewed, identifying such comparable bones of contention as the strategic implications of exclusive economic zones, shared sovereignty and territorial indivisibility. Judging from such cases as Martín García, it appears that such creative approaches to island governance that include demilitarization and/or depopulation, may be the most likely to mitigate, if not resolve, some currently disputed island regions.

Continental Islands, Oceanic Islands: Flashpoint Cases

Island bio-geographers (*e.g.* Nunn, 1994; Quammen, 1996) tell us that most of the islands of the world can be grouped under two main categories: first, there are the *continental islands*, which usually lie just off a mainland and occupy parts of the same continental shelf. They would have been formed by rising ocean waters which covered coastal areas or cut off peninsulas, leaving only the summits of coastal highlands above water. They are old, lie in relatively shallow water, and would have started with the same species range as the contiguous mainland, and would progressively lose biota with time. Second are the *oceanic islands*, usually in the middle of large swathes of deep ocean, which often result from magma upwelling at the boundary between divergent tectonic plates. Other oceanic islands are formed as oceanic plates move over fixed ‘hot spots’ (plumes of magma or lava welling up from the earth’s crust). Oceanic islands are younger than continental islands, and start with no (human or non-human) living things, which they then gain progressively with time. Many are affected by coral growing activity.

It is the very same geo-physical conditions that place islands as objects of a keen territorial game in contemporary politics.

First, if continental islands occupy parts of the same continental shelf as contiguous mainlands, then such mainland states would expect to exercise control over such islands, quoting geophysical affinity as the main basis of their claim, based on the UN Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone (UN, 1958). Difficulties however arise if and when (1) more than one mainland country exercises a legitimate claim to its “territorial sea”; and (2) should a contested island be inhabited, there may be a preferred identification

¹ ‘The Islands in Between’ is the title of an annual conference exploring the folklore, language, literature and history of the Eastern Caribbean. <http://cavehill.uwi.edu/fhe/Hum/Conferences/IslandsInBetween.htm>.

² Can one utilize the concept of an exclave in the case of an island that lies inside the territorial waters (but not the territory) of another country? According to Muir (1975: 43), an exclave is a piece of land that is: (a) part of a country from which it is physically isolated; and (b) is totally surrounded by foreign territory.

of the islanders with either a particular mainland state – even if located much further away – or for wholesale self-determination.

Second, while oceanic islands are not on continental shelves, and therefore not obvious appendages to mainland states, their location in remote locations, and (except in the Pacific) often without indigenous populations, has made them tempting prizes to countries with imperial aspirations. All the more so if their control endows the continental power not just with a strategic location but also with very large portions of ocean as a component of that power's exclusive economic zone. In international maritime law, an *exclusive economic zone* (EEZ) is a sea-zone over which a state has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources. Generally, a state's EEZ extends to 200 nautical miles (370 km) out from its coasts, except where resulting points would be closer to similar claims of another country. Thus, France is the country with the world's second largest EEZ (after the USA), thanks primarily to its far-flung *départements* and *collectivités d'outre mer*, all of which, except one (French Guiana), are islands. Such a visioning may also dramatically change our understanding of an island's size, its location and its relative proximity to other territories (and their own EEZs).

Islands of Tension

Thus, both continental and oceanic islands can be flash points in a geo-political sense, and can be a source of international and regional tension or conflict (Anderson, 2000). A *flashpoint* is defined here as a "current, dormant, or potential" area of geopolitical instability. There are, for example, at least nine commonly agreed flash points of current geo-political tension in East and South-East Asia, of which all but one (**North Korea**) are islands. These are: (1) the **Kuriles** – occupied by Russia, claimed by Japan; (2) the **Diaoyu/Senkaku** islands – rival claims by China, Taiwan and Japan; (3) **Taiwan** – recognized as a sovereign state by 25 countries; but considered a renegade province by mainland China since 1949; (4) the **Spratly and Paracel Islands** – variously claimed by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei; (5) **Mindanao** – in spite of a treaty, Muslim rebels are still fighting for independence from the Philippines; (6) **East Timor** – former Portuguese colony annexed by Indonesia in 1975, independent since 2002, but intermittently riddled by internal strife; (7) the **Moluccas** (Spice Islands) of Indonesia – scene of violent clashes since 1999; and (8) **Dok-do / Takeshima** – rival claims by South Korea and Japan (Norton Moore & Nordquist, 1998; BBC, 2004; Bong, 2002; Mack, 1997; Zakharchenko, 2008).

Åland / Ahvenanmaa

It was a flashpoint in the Baltic that led to the crafting of the autonomy of the Åland archipelago, a sprawling group of islands between Stockholm and Turku, Finland. The islands were claimed by newly independent Finland; but with its island population zealous to maintain its Swedish culture and language, the League of Nations issued a landmark decision in 1920 which guaranteed the demilitarization of the islands, assigned them to Finland, but obliged the latter to respect the Ålanders' autonomy. Åland (in Swedish) or Ahvenanmaa (in Finnish), with their population of 27,000, have their own parliament and

executive; they benefited from a separate protocol to the treaty of accession when Finland joined the European Union in 1995; and they run a successful cruise ship industry that exploits their geographic and political in-betweenity as a duty free zone (e.g. Lindström, 2000).

Hans Island / Hans Ø

The Arctic as a region could become much more important if climate change and global warming makes it accessible to more human activity; there are concerns by at least five directly interested coastal sovereign states as to how they might stake and settle their Arctic claims via the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). One particular dispute involving a small island may well turn into a test case on sovereignty claims in the region.

Hans Island (in English), Tartupaluk (in Inuktitut) or Hans Ø (in Danish) is a small, uninhabited, barren knoll measuring just 1.3 km² (0.5 square miles), located in the centre of the strait that separates Canada's Ellesmere Island from northern Greenland. In 1933, the Permanent Court of International Justice declared the legal status of Greenland in favour of Denmark; but the status of Hans Island was then not addressed. Decades later, Denmark has claimed that geological evidence points to Hans Island being part of Greenland, and therefore that it belongs to Denmark by extension of the Court's ruling. However, during negotiations between Canada and Denmark on Northern maritime boundaries in 1973, Canada claimed that Hans Island was part of *its* territory. Full borders were drawn between Canada and Greenland in 1973, except for a stretch of 875 metres – Hans Island lies bang in the middle of this stretch. After some symbolic landings and 'tit-for-tat' flag raising and flag bashing, the three governments (Greenland included) have agreed to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In a flash of semi-serious imagination, a contributor to a Canadian newspaper has suggested turning Hans Island into a military prison, which, among other things: "would stake our claim to the island, keeping the pesky Danes out for good" (Riehm, 2006).

Indivisible Islandness

Perhaps one would be inclined to suggest a simple Solomon's solution to such concerns: divide the island(s) involved equally between the contenders. This may appear not to be too difficult, especially for a place like Hans Island; even though UNCLOS and the potential for EEZ complicate the issue. Indeed, one suggestion for a negotiated settlement briefly considered in the aftermath of the Argentine take-over of the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982 was to treat the 200-island archipelago (about which more to follow below) in a somewhat similar fashion as liable to partition, assigning West Falkland to Argentina and East Falkland to Britain (Freedman, 2007: 188).

However, carving up an island is an abhorred proposition. Unlike mainlands, all of which are carved up into various political units, islands seem to suggest a natural indivisibility. The finite island geography of an island smoothens the nurturing of a sense of identity that is contiguous with territory – and can make some conflicts even more difficult to resolve

(Anckar, 2005; Baldacchino, 2005; Srebrnik, 2004). There are just over 85,000 islands in the world with a surface area greater than 0.1km² (Depraetere & Dahl, 2007: table 2). Yet remarkably, out of these (and excluding those that are either depopulated or otherwise under contestation), only eleven are shared (*de facto* or *de jure*) between more than one jurisdiction, and in some of these cases, not without resistance by those who would see them eventually under unitary control: **Borneo** (divided between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Sultanate of Brunei) and **Cyprus** (divided between the sovereign state of Cyprus, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the UK Sovereign Military Bases, but excluding the UN buffer zone) are currently the only islands in the world to be divided between *three* countries). Then, there is **Hispaniola** (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), **Ireland** (United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland), **New Guinea** (Indonesian West Papua and Papua New Guinea), **Sebatik** (Indonesia and Malaysia), **Saint Martin/Sint Maarten** (France and the Netherlands), **Tierra del Fuego** (Argentina and Chile), Timor (Indonesia and Timor Leste), **Usenam/Usedom** (Germany and Poland); and, as of 2008, the island of **Bolshoi Ussuriysky** on the Sino-Russian border - all divided between two countries. *De facto*, one may add **Sri Lanka**, with its east and north effectively under separatist control (Royle, 2001: 150-1; The Economist, 2008).

An Island in Between: Martín García

The situation of the River Plate – with such islands as Juncal, Flores, Gorriti and Lobos – is a clear reflection of the evolving turbulent politics of the region. This section focuses on the history of the island of **Martín García** (co-ordinates 34°11'S, 58°15'W). The island (0.7 square miles, 168 hectares, 500 acres or 2 km²) which is today part of Buenos Aires province, Argentina, rises 27 metres above sea-level and has a population of 200. It is situated near the confluence of the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, a mere 1 km (0.62 miles) *inside* Uruguayan waters, about 3.5 km (2.1 miles) from the Uruguayan coastline, near the small city of Martín Chico, but 33.5 km from Tigre, on the Argentine coast (*see Figure 1*).

In the early 19th century, independence movements sprung up across South America, including Uruguay (then known as the *Banda Oriental*, or 'Eastern Strip', referring to the area east of the Uruguay river). Spanish-Portuguese rivalry was tense, and Uruguayan territory was contested between the nascent states of Brazil and the Republic of the River Plate (Argentina). Brazil annexed the area in 1821 under the name of *Provincia Cisplatina*, but a revolt began in 1825, after which Uruguay became an independent state with the Treaty of Montevideo in 1828, this new country acting very much as a buffer territory between Spanish Argentina and Portuguese Brazil.



Figure 1: The River Plate Region/ Río de la Plata, South America, showing the international boundary between Argentina and Uruguay (dotted line).

Source: <http://www.lapshin.org/cultivar/N19/PIC/Rio-de-la-Plata.jpg>.

Isla Martín García is also known as *the Gibraltar of the River Plate* (an observation to which we shall return later). It has historically been a strategic control point in the estuary of Río de la Plata, near the mouth of the Uruguay and Paraná rivers, between Argentina and Uruguay. In March 1814, it was taken from the Spaniards by the forces of the Argentine admiral William (Guillermo) Brown.

Given the navigability of the Río de la Plata, the strategic significance of the small island was so important that anyone who controlled it would practically dominate all maritime activity in the delta, thus challenging trade in the region which, in the 19th century, was still mainly carried out by sea. For this reason, a treaty for the Free Navigation of the Rivers Paraná and Uruguay was concluded between the USA and Argentina in July 1853. Article 5 states that: the high contracting parties, considering that the Island of Martín García may, from its position, embarrass and impede the free navigation of the confluents of the river Plate, agree to use their influence to prevent the possession of the said island from being retained or held by any State of the river Plate, or its confluents, which shall not have given its adherence to the principle of their free navigation. (Treaty of 1853: Article 5). Three years earlier, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento had written *Argirópolis*, a treatise arguing passionately for a consolidated, strong Latin American state that would straddle both sides of the Río de la Plata. The new state's capital would be located appropriately on Martín García (Sarmiento, 1850).

Prisoners from the Indian Wars of 1879 were interned on the rocky island, which was also a place of exile for various presidents of Argentina, including Marcelo T. de Alvear (in 1932) Hipólito Irigoyen (twice in the 1930s), Juan Perón (1945, before his election), and Arturo Frondizi (1962-63). In the early months of World War II, Argentine authorities briefly incarcerated crew members from the German battleship *Graf Spee*, scuttled off Montevideo in December 1939. The island was also used as a detention and torture site during the 1976–1983 military dictatorship. An agreement reached by Argentina and Uruguay in November 1973 - known as the River Plate Treaty - signed by Juan Domingo Perón and Juan Maria Bordaberry - on the management of the estuary and the river border of the two countries affirmed Argentine jurisdiction over Isla Martín García (which is actually on the Uruguayan side of the boundary), ending a century-old dispute between the two countries over the island. According to the terms of the agreement, Martín García was to be devoted exclusively to a natural reserve. Thus, this small island, has been a military outpost, a penal colony and is now a National Historical Monument and Flora and Fauna Reserve, as well as a popular holiday site for a day outing or a weekend getaway in the delta of the Río de la Plata. Border tension between Argentina and Uruguay has flared again, but not because of this island: in May 2006, Argentina instituted proceedings before the International Court of Justice against Uruguay claiming that Uruguay has breached a bilateral treaty obligation to consult with Argentina before taking action on a pulp mill project affecting the River Uruguay, which partially constitutes the joint boundary of the two South American countries. If completed, this would be the world's biggest cellulose mill project (Bekker, 2006).

Islands in Between

Kinmen

Reference has already been made to the case of Taiwan, the focus of a nervous military build-up in Eastern Asia, involving Taiwan itself and mainland China, with the USA, Japan and Russia having an interest in the balance. Taiwan is itself an archipelago of various islands (like the Matsu and Penghu group); one of which is the Kinmen group. Some of these islands are located less than 1 km from the mainland of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and more than 200 km from 'mainland' Taiwan. Kinmen was heavily bombed by the PRC in 1958 and an invasion has been feared since. In the tense current atmosphere between 'the two Chinas', Kinmen has served as an unofficial meeting point, a 'no man's land', where either party feels comfortable to meet discreetly and discuss issues of common concern (Hung-Ta, 2004). Perhaps Martín García performs the same function, should that ever be necessary, since it is a likely meeting place for Argentines and Uruguayans.

Gibraltar

Perhaps the case of Martín García provides some more insights, since the resolution of the dispute to the mutual satisfaction of both sides in 1973 suggests that solutions to island

contests by mainland claims *are* possible; moreover, in this particular case, the transformation of the island into a pleasure zone was a key concession by Argentina³.

That Martín García is known as the Gibraltar of the River Plate is a reminder of the real Gibraltar, a rock of just 6.5km², with a population of 28,000, located at the tip of Southern Spain. It is one of only two of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories which is not a geographical island⁴, but it is very much an island in any other sense⁵.

It has already been argued that international relations abhor divided islands. Hans Island, Kinmen Island and Martín García Island have not been divided, and are not likely to be so in the future. Yet, there are a variety of ways in which islands *can* be divided. Britain and Spain had been discussing innovative solutions leading to some form of joint or shared sovereignty over Gibraltar, starting in the late 1990s. Unhappy with these developments, the Government of Gibraltar took its own initiative and organized a referendum on November 7, 2002, where the people of Gibraltar were asked the following question:

"On July 12, 2002, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, in a formal statement in the House of Commons, said that, after 12 months of negotiation, the British Government and Spain are in broad agreement on many of the principles that should underpin a lasting settlement of Spain's sovereignty claim, which included the principle that Britain and Spain should share sovereignty over Gibraltar.

Do you approve of the principle that Britain and Spain should share sovereignty over Gibraltar?"

With a turnout of 87.9%, 98.5% of the electorate voted NO (Gibraltar web-site, 2006). Since then, the Government of Gibraltar has been involved in talks involving the United Kingdom and Spain that purport to discuss the future of that territory.

Falklands / Las Malvinas

The Gibraltar situation reminds us of another UK Overseas Territory whose status is disputed by a Spanish-speaking nation. In the case of the Falkland Islands (in English) or Las Islas Malvinas (in Spanish), the United Kingdom and Argentina are the respective claimants. In spite of their many differences, Gibraltar and Falklands/Malvinas make the subject of an interesting comparison. Both are sub-national island jurisdictions with a fair degree of autonomy; both have been/remain overseas territories of the U.K. for many years; both have been taken over by the UK in a debatable manner; both are the subject of persistent protests by their contiguous mainland power, with both submitting claims based on territorial integrity; and both having the local residents speaking English and staunchly

³ In much the same way, the transfer of sovereignty of the Åland Islands to Finland via a league of Nations Resolution in 1920 was accepted by Sweden also because the islands were to be demilitarized (Rotkirch, 1986).

⁴ The other being the British Antarctic Territory.

⁵ Indeed, with Gibraltar's border with Spain shut between 1969 and 1985, Gibraltar become even closer to an ideotypical "island" (e.g. Burke & Sawchuk, 2007).

pro-British in their loyalties. The two case studies are also significant because much of the sovereignty arguments do not hinge only on the lands in question but also on the use of the territorial seas surrounding the actual physical territories (Fawcett, 1967; Bossano, 1994; Dodds, 2002). Ironically, the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) which granted Gibraltar ‘in perpetuity’ to Britain, also confirmed Spain's control of South American territories, including the Falklands/Malvinas. Argentina explicitly mentions ‘Las Malvinas’ as part of its territory in its 1994 constitution, along with the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands.

Of course, one aspect which contrasts Gibraltar with the Falklands/Malvinas is the different comfort levels that Britain, and its government, have felt about such imperial remnants. The UK had been extremely sensitive and jealous of its Southern European fortress: Gibraltar was only 2 hours flying time from London and there was talk of integration with the UK in the 1960s⁶; whereas the Falklands was a remote island colony that wanted to remain British but was a low strategic priority during the Cold War. Britain was actually reducing its military-scientific presence in the South Atlantic region when Argentina launched its ‘recovery campaign’ in 1982. The British Government’s indifference changed when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher decided to launch a powerfully iconic and nationalist campaign to “liberate the Falklands”, appealing to the Falklanders’ staunch Britishness and island character (Dodds, 2002). Britain consolidated its military infrastructure on the islands after the campaign, with a new base at Mount Pleasant Airport (fully operational by 1986). A new constitution came into force in 1985, giving the islands greater autonomy. The discovery of huge spawning grounds for two types of squid - *Illex* and *Loligo* (the latter better known as *calamares*) – in Falkland waters opened up opportunities for economic diversification. In 2001, the Falklands’ and Argentine governments issued a joint statement to close their *Illex* fishing season early, thus giving the stock a chance to recover from over-fishing. Tourism has also grown to some 3,000 a year, while some 40,000 cruise ship passengers sail through Stanley annually on their way to Antarctica (*The Economist*, 2002; Royle, 2006). The possibility of tapping oil and gas deposits in the surrounding waters led to Falkland Oil & Gas Limited (FOGL) being formed in May 2004 to invest in an offshore oil exploration programme, covering approximately 33,700 km² south and east of the Islands (FOGL, 2006). While all these initiatives suggest a growing economic prosperity to the islanders, the Argentine government considers the decision to issue such licenses for hydrocarbon exploration, apart from other licenses for fishing, to be illegitimate and an extension of colonialism. This in spite of an agreement between Argentina and the UK in 1995 which was meant to defuse licensing and sovereignty conflicts (under the so-called sovereignty umbrella) that would dampen foreign interest in exploiting potential oil reserves. Also in 1995, Argentina agreed to no longer seek settlement of the matter by force. In June 2003, the ‘Falklands dispute’ was brought before a United Nations committee, but the UK has since refused to resume these negotiations on the islands’ sovereignty – on the basis that it has agreed to respect the ‘wishes’ of the Falkland Islanders for as long as that community wants (*La Prensa Latina*, 2006).

⁶ In February 1967, the *Integration with Britain Party*, hitherto a “pressure group”, formed itself into a political party under the leadership of Bob Peliza.

Until Argentina agrees to consider possible innovative governance options other than the simple reversion of the Falklands/Malvinas to its sovereignty, Whitehall is not likely to open any negotiations with Buenos Aires (*e.g.* COHA, 2007).

Shared Sovereignty?

Interestingly, there has been a strong case made recently for ‘shared sovereignty’ in principle: situations in which authority would be shared by external and internal actors (Krasner, 2005). The actual experience ‘on the ground’ has not been very common, and remains contentious: Bosnia and Kosovo are the best, recent examples. The model has been proposed as a solution to ‘the Cyprus Question’ and to the ‘Jerusalem Question’. One location where a condominium appears to have worked well, and for 74 years (1906 – 1980), has been in a Pacific island archipelago: the Anglo-French Condominium of New Hebrides / Nouvelles-Hébrides, now the Republic of Vanuatu.

Meanwhile, the ‘sovereign’ states of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands have, since their ‘independence’, assigned their defence and security (and thus perhaps in practice also their foreign policy) to the USA in the context of a Compact of Free Association (CFA) whose fiscal generosity basically under-writes their economic (and possibly even political) viability (*e.g.* Underwood, 2003): they might not have entertained independence without that financial lifeline. Even with those generous financial guarantees, the Northern Mariana Islands decided to break away from FSM and struck a separate deal with the USA, with the latter’s full encouragement. The islanders secured for themselves Commonwealth status with the USA (1985) and US citizenship (1986) (Anckar, 2003: 118). Same as with Guam, Puerto Rico and American Samoa, the US controls their foreign policy, in exchange for pledging to defend these territories from any “foreign aggression” (Fowler & Bunck, 1995: 117).

‘Shared sovereignty’ is not immune from its own spate of difficulties, however. Even after three referenda, Puerto Rico continues to grapple with what status it wants for itself (Ramos & Rivera, 2001). The CFA between the USA and Palau was only approved after eight referenda (World Guide, 2008). The Svalbard archipelago, although part of the state of Norway, is the subject of the Paris Treaty of 1920 that allows its signatories, apart from Norway, the right to establish settlements on its soil; such a right has been exercised by Russia. The latter has however also recently claimed that such rights extend to seabed oil and gas exploration within Svalbard’s EEZ. The Norwegian Foreign Minister has argued that other Paris Treaty signatory countries (like Russia) are not entitled to engage in oil and gas-related activities in Svalbard waters without Norwegian consent, simply because the area is part of the Norwegian continental shelf (BarentsObserver.com, 2008).

Conclusion

In spite of international borders attempting to be precise, they can at times prove fuzzy and somewhat ambiguous spaces. No wonder they are liable to dispute. The *CIA World Factbook* states that the convergence of the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay borders is an “unruly region”, a “locus of money laundering, smuggling, arms and illegal narcotics

trafficking, and fundraising for extremist organizations”. Moreover, a dispute between Brazil and Uruguay over Braziliera Island in the Quarai/ Cuareim River leaves the precise tri-point with Argentina in doubt (CIA, 2006). We should not be surprised: borders, in spite of conventional wisdom and official intent, are often porous, permeable features: they are liminal spaces with osmotic properties, important tools in a contemporary game of economic prosperity, military strategy or national security. Even here, islands ‘in between’ can play a key role.

Rather than an unfortunate geographic status of insularity and marginalization, insular in-betweenity can harbour opportunities. Former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams (1964: 122) had also commented on the island of Tobago as being in a state of “betweenity”, transferred from country to country, changing national flags and political allegiance with consummate ease. Dale (2004: 13) defines ‘in betweenity’ as the condition of operating in a cultural grey zone, ‘between’ cultures.

While islands clearly remain nervous flashpoints in global geopolitics, some have benefitted from well-crafted governance arrangements that have facilitated bilateral cooperation and prevented hostilities between claimant states. The large number of sovereign island states and of sub-national island jurisdictions (e.g. Baldacchino & Milne, 2008), for example, offers a handy population of historical or contemporary exemplars of *de jure* and *de facto* federacy arrangements – some clearly works in progress – that may have been designed not just to satisfy local islander interests and aspirations for self-determination, but also to allay the fears and concerns of wary contiguous powers.

References

Ankar, D. (2005) ‘Decentralization in Microstates: Where, How and Why?’, *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 31, Nos. 1-2, pp. 109-120.

Ankar, D. (2003) ‘Lilliput Federalism: Profiles and Varieties’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 107-124.

Anderson, E.W. (2000) *Global Geopolitical Flashpoints: An Atlas of Conflict*, Chicago IL, Fitzroy Dearborn.

Baldacchino, G. (2008) ‘Thucydides or Kissinger? A Critical Review of Smaller State Diplomacy’ in T. Shaw & A.F. Cooper (eds.) *Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.

Baldacchino, G. (2004) ‘Autonomous but not Sovereign? A Review of Island Sub-nationalism’, *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 31, Nos. 1-2, pp. 77-89.

Baldacchino, G. & Milne, D. (eds.) (2008) *The Case for Non-Sovereignty: Lessons from Sub-National Island Jurisdictions*, London, Routledge.

BarentsObserver.com (2008) 'Norway challenged by Russian plans in Spitsbergen waters', August 5, <http://www.barentsobserver.com/norway-challenged-by-russian-plans-in-spitsbergen-waters.4500045-28235.html>.

BBC (2004) 'Indonesia Flashpoints: The Moluccas', *BBC News*, June 28, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3812599.stm>.

Bekker, P.H.F. (2006) 'Argentina-Uruguay Environmental Border Dispute before the World Court', *ASIL Insight*, (American Society of International Law), Vol. 10, No. 11, May 16, www.asil.org/insights/2006/05/insights060516.html.

Bong, Y.D. (2002) *Flashpoints at Sea? Legitimization Strategy and East Asian Island Disputes: Japan, China, Russia, Korea*, unpublished dissertation, Penn Library, University of Pennsylvania.

Bossano, J. (1994) 'The Fight for Self-Determination: Joe Bossano at the United Nations', Gibraltar, Reference Documents about Gibraltar and its Political Struggles, www.gibnet.com/texts/jbun1.htm.

Burke, S.D.A. & Sawchuk, L.A. (2007) 'Reproductive Choices in Gibraltar: A Case Study of a Community in Transition, 1960-1996', *Canadian Studies in Population*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 149-178.

CIA (2006) *World Fact Book*, Washington DC, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ar.html#Issues.

COHA (2007) 'Argentina and the Falklands/Malvinas: Could the Conflict with Great Britain have been Averted?', Washington DC, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, <http://www.coha.org/2007/08/argentina-and-the-falklandsmalvinas-could-the-conflict-with-great-britain-have-been-averted/>.

Dale, B. (2004) 'Anthropology as a Comparative Project: Some Recent Challenges', Norway, Faculty of Social Science, University of Tromsø, 16pp., <http://homepage.mac.com/brigtale/.Public/proveforelesning.pdf>.

Depraetere, C. & Dahl, A.L. (2007) 'Island Locations and Classifications' in G. Baldacchino (ed.) *A World of Islands: An Island Studies Reader*, Charlottetown, Canada and Luqa, Malta, Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island and Agenda Academic, pp. 57-106.

Dodds, K. (2002) *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire*, London, IB Tauris.

Fawcett, J.E.S. (1967) 'Gibraltar: The Legal Issues', *International Affairs*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 236-251.

Freedman, L. (2007) *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: War and Diplomacy*, London, Routledge.

FOGL (2006) Falkland Oil & Gas, www.fogl.com/fog/corporate.php?sec=0&sub=1.

Fowler, M.R. and Bunck, J.M. (1995) *Law, Power and the Sovereign State: the Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty*, University Park PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Gibraltar web-site (2002) *The 2002 Referendum: November 7, 2002*, www.gibnet.com/texts/ref2.htm.

Hung-Ta, C. (2004) 'Cultural Landscape in the Island with the Status of the Borderland: The Case of Kinmen', paper presented at the 8th 'Islands of the World' Conference, Kinmen Island, November.

Jersey Links (2006) 'Some useful links about Jersey- the British Channel Island where I live', www.localdial.com/users/localhero/jersey_channel_islands.htm.

Krasner, S.D. (2005) 'The Case for Shared Sovereignty', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 69-83.

La Prensa Latina (2006) 'British Measures on Malvinas Illegitimate', Buenos Aires, June 27.

Lindström, B. (2000) 'Culture and Economic Development in Åland' in G. Baldacchino & D. Milne (eds.) *Lessons from the Political Economy of Small Islands: The Resourcefulness of Jurisdiction*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, pp. 107-120.

Mack, A. (1997) 'Troubled Waters: Island Flashpoints in Northeast Asia', *Asia Pacific Magazine*, No. 8, December.

Muir, R. (1975) *Modern Political Geography*, London, Macmillan.

Norton Moore, J. & Nordquist, M.H. (eds.) (1998) *Security Flashpoints: Oil, Islands, Sea Access and Military Confrontation*, New York, Martinus Nijhoff.

Nunn, P.D. (1994) *Oceanic Islands*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Quammen, D. (1996) *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*, London, Hutchinson.

Ramos, A. G. & Rivera, A.I. (eds.) (2001) *Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean*, Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Riehm, M. (2006) 'Fantasy Island', Letter to the Editor, *The Globe and Mail*, June 3, A14.

Rotkirch, H. (1986) 'The Demilitarization and Neutralization of the Åland Islands: A Regime 'in European Interests' Withstanding Changing Circumstances', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 357-376.

Royle, S.A. (2001) *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity*, London, Routledge.

Royle, S.A. (2006) 'The Falkland Islands' in G. Baldacchino (ed.) *Extreme Tourism: Lessons from the World's Cold Water Islands*, Oxford, Elsevier, pp. 180-191.

Sarmiento, F.D. (1850/2000) *Argirópolis*, edited by www.elaleph.com, www.unsl.edu.ar/librosgratis/gratis/argiropolis.pdf.

Srebrnik, H.F. (2004) 'Small Island Nations and Democratic Values', *World Development*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 329-342.

The Economist (2002) 'Virtue Rewarded: Conservation in the Falkland Islands', London, The Economist Intelligence Unit, January 17.

The Economist (2008) 'The Cockerel's Cropped Crest'. London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, July 26, pp. 49-50.

Treaty for the Free Navigation of the Rivers Paraná and Uruguay, concluded between the USA and Argentina, July 10, 1853, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/argentina/argen01.htm.

UN (1958) Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, April, New York, United Nations, http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8_1_1958_high_seas.pdf

Underwood, R.A. (2003) 'The Amended U.S. Compacts of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands: Less Free, More Compact', *Working Paper No. 16*, Hawaii, East-West Center, Pacific Islands Development Series, http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/compacts/PIDP_WP16.pdf.

Williams, E. (1964) *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, London, Andre Deutsch.

World Guide (2008) Palau: History, <http://sbs.com.au/theworldnews/Worldguide/index.php3?country=154&header=4>.

Zakharchenko, I. (2008) 'The Russian-Japanese Territorial Dispute: Four Islands Divided by Two?', *RIA Novosti*, Russian News and Information Agency, November 7, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20081107/118183288.html>.