EDITORIAL NOTE

ATLANTIC ARCHIPELAGO

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Islandness is a prominent trope in the British Isles. Imagining Britain as 'an island' matters in discourses on national identity in England and Scotland (Abell et al. 2006), framing Britain as an island nation (Wodak 2018). Similarly, in the case of Ireland, Hayward (2009) finds that redefining the 'island of Ireland' is part of political discourse around European integration and Irish nationalism. The histories of Scotland, Ireland and Wales are often told in relation to the metropolitan centres of Great Britain. Islandness matters in another sense in this context, when smaller islands – such as Aran, Orkney or Shetland – are relegated to the peripheries. They become, as Ardener (2012 [1987]: 524) puts it for Western Scotland, areas 'in which canonical levels of remoteness are to be found'.

The ubiquity of islandness and the ease with which it is invoked 'contrasts with the apparent difficulty of remembering the complexity of our interrelationship' as an archipelago (Carden, this issue). Emphasising the latter, scholars have suggested the term 'Atlantic Archipelago' (Stratford et al. 2011: 117) to refer to 'England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales and more than six thousand smaller islands' (Miguel and Stephens 2020: 22). It is this Atlantic archipelago that our Special Issue engages with. Taking us from Ireland to Shetland and to Europe, from Shetland and Orkney to all over the world, to and from the islands that make up Shetland, and around the archipelago of small islands at the English-Welsh border, the contributions to this Special Issue emphasise connections, mobilities, encounters and multiplicity. They find new ways of thinking our archipelago without taking metropolitan Great Britain as the centre point. In doing so, they follow recent turns towards islandness in these geographical regions (Burnett et al. 2021). At the core of their articles are concepts of islandness and notions of archipelagic thinking. Before introducing the contributions, we therefore want to briefly sketch out these central terms.

Islands, Islandness and the Archipelago

Islands have been central figures in Western discourse (Hay 2006), and they have played a prominent role in the history of anthropology (Ma 2020). From the Torres Strait expedition, to Margaret Mead's work in Samoa, to Malinowski's stay on the Trobriand Islands, islands are at the core of classical texts by Western anthropologists. Ma suggests that they drew anthropologists' interest because they were seen as 'relatively isolated from their mainland, which helps to preserve a variety of "exotic customs"' (Ma 2020: 3). Islands aligned well with a more static and bounded view of place and cultures. In this sense, these histories of thought revolved not just around thinking *about* islands but thinking *with* islands. This remains the case in island studies, though islands have now shifted to embodying

interrelation rather than boundedness. In a recent volume, Pugh and Chandler (2021) marvel at the prominence of islands in policy making, activism, art and scholarship. They argue that islands are both important places to think from, and to think with, in the context of the Anthropocene:

> *[The island] is a powerful symbol of such forces as global warming, rising sea levels, the fallouts of nuclear proliferation, ocean acidification, the waste of consumerism, ongoing colonialisms, changing ecologies and evolutionary pathways, disruptive weather patterns, including intensified hurricanes and cyclones, and much more besides.* (ibid. ix)

The word 'island' immediately brings an image to mind – perhaps that of a child's drawing of a half-circle protruding from the ocean, crowned with a palm tree. However, as these introductory words have perhaps already suggested, defining what makes an island is far from straightforward. As Edmonds and Smith point out, 'islands are the most graspable and the most slippery of subjects' (2003: 5). Consider, for instance, the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (asp. 12), which defines an island as 'a naturally formed area of land that is surrounded on all sides by the sea (ignoring artificial structures such as bridges), and is above water at high tide'. At first, this definition seems obvious – land surrounded by water – but the mention of (artificial) connections and the tides unsettle it.

In making the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions for island communities, for instance, 'artificial structures' mattered to the Scottish Government. While they eased restrictions for the islands in general in winter 2020, they specified that '[i]slands with road links to the mainland, however, will not be included in this relaxation' (Scottish Government 2020). Is an island with a road link less of an island? And what about Hilbre island – the archipelago at the English-Welsh border that Roberts and Andrews (this issue) take us to? It sits above water at high tide but is connected to the mainland by sandbanks at low tide. Does that make it an island only some of the time? Finally, the Scottish Islands Regions report (Scottish Government 2023) raises yet another issue when it mentions 'Mainland Scotland' in the section about Scottish islands that are excluded from discussion. If land surrounded by water is enough to qualify an island, what is *not* an island?

It is no surprise, then, that the field of Island Studies has struggled to define its object (Hay 2006). However, the ambiguity, relativity and shifting meanings of the term 'island' hold potentials, too. Though they may invoke images of isolation, thinking about 'islands' immediately points to relations between places, be that in discourse, imagination, stories or mobilities. Thus, one of the main concerns in Island Studies has been to challenge notions of islandness as bounded and static (Foley et al. 2023; Ronström 2021: 271) and to 'instead emphasise mobile, multiple and interconnected relational forms' (Pugh 2018: 94). It is in this way that islands have become prominent in Anthropocene thinking, as mentioned above.

Analysing the interrelations that make islandness can take various forms. For instance, Vannini and

Taggart examine connectivities by focusing on mobilities and 'kinesthetic performances' (2013: 228), highlighting that islands are done and not given. When islands are conceptualised as bounded entities, the sea is what separates them from each other and from the mainland. As we turn our focus to mobilities – for instance, ferries (Vannini 2012) – the sea instead affords possibilities for connection and movement. Foley et al. (2023) suggest that the importance of such connections in making islandness necessitates reflection on the experiential side of im/mobility. Travelling by boat, by plane or driving, afford different experiences of place. Therefore, they argue that 'the physicality and sociality of islandness [...] are commonly defined subjectively' (ibid. 10). These experiences of islandness entail not just practices but also ideas, imaginations, and representations.

The contributors in this Special Issue follow these lines of thinking. They examine the making of islandness on (to and from, and around) our Atlantic archipelago as processes grounded in shifting historical, cultural and social contexts. It is the emphasis on movement that often leads them from thinking about islandness to thinking archipelagically. Pugh (2013) points out that in a world of movement, the form of the archipelago is gaining importance. The notion of archipelagic thinking stems from literary studies. Grounded in experiences of postcolonial politics and creolisation, the Caribbean scholar Glissant uses the archipelago to emphasise relationality, multiplicity and unpredictability. Openness is central here: Glissant and Joris (1999: 120) argue that 'cultural regions, beyond the barriers of nationhood, are islands – but open islands, this being their main condition for survival'.

Archipelagic thinking unsettles ideas of boundedness, singularity, and relations between peripheries and centres. Stratford et al. (2011: 118) point out that island studies traditionally focused on relations between islands and mainlands, sea and land. However, archipelagic thinking emphasises island-to-island relations, unsettling the Anglocentric geographies of periphery and centrality in these islands (Kerrigan 2008; see also Hannibal, this issue; Carden, this issue). This flat ontology locates sites of agency as distributed along a polycentric network rather than gathered in a clustered central power. Thinking archipelagically foregrounds 'how island movements are generative and inter-connective spaces of metamorphosis, of material practices, culture and politics' (Pugh 2013: 10). The archipelago becomes a model of a 'world in process' (Deleuze 1997: 86). It draws attention above all to movement – shifting oceans and islands, changing configurations, and mobilities (Edmond and Smith 2003).

Our contributors trace these movements – the spatial stories that trace lines in the sand around Hilbre Island (Roberts and Andrews); the migration and labour networks that link Ireland and Shetland (Carden); the social life of natural resources in Ireland's island, coastal and mainland communities (Power); the handknitting that connects Shetland islanders to each other and to places further afield historically and contemporary (Hannibal); the trading networks in the 17th and 18th century that place Shetland and Orkney at the centre of a web spanning around the North Sea and extending to colonial trade (Schiefer and Halterman); the ferry mobilities under pandemic restrictions that shifted experiences

of insulation and isolation on a Hebridean island (Bosbach); and the circulation of transnational activist imaginaries, strategies and vocabularies in post-Repeal Irish abortion politics (Eades).

Overview of Contributions

The first contribution takes us on journeys between Ireland and Shetland. Siún Carden analyses the two as 'archipelagic neighbours'. Engaging with the herring fishing industry and North Sea oil, she draws out the connections between Ireland and Shetland through archival and ethnographic material. In her article, islandness takes on various forms. At one point symbolically tied to national identities, it also counters the isomorphism of nation, culture, and place. Islandness reveals both processes of distancing and of forging connections. In case of Shetland, 'islandness' entailed placing the Shetland Isles at a distance from the Gaelic-speaking highlands and islands in Scotland as well as from Ireland. However, Carden points out that over centuries, people have moved between these islands. It is these mobilities and networks of labour that become part of making Ireland and Shetland's archipelagic connection. Thus, '[i]slandness is brought into consciousness through quotidian mobilities, whether of post-Brexit goods crossing the Irish Sea or of workers following well-worn routes between "home" islands' (Carden, this issue).

Grania Power's contribution returns the focus on Ireland, although the emphasis on mobilities and labour networks remains at the forefront. Drawing on fieldwork carried out on Lettermore, one of several islands in Galway Bay, Power examines how the exchange of natural resources such as peat turf shape island identities and relationships. By thinking archipelagically, Power highlights the ways in which these islands' material resources are pooled and transmuted into a highly flexible gift economy – one that she describes as a 'pool of help'. In this way, Power's interlocutors are able to combat the conditions of material scarcity and vulnerability that have long characterised local conceptions of 'islandness', thereby achieving a level of both socio-economic and cultural resilience.

Paula Schiefer and Bart Holterman take us back to the Northern Isles and back in time. They draw out webs of historical trade connections with Shetland and Orkney at their centre. Their article focuses on the *Looking in from the Edge (LIFTE)* project and museum exhibition at the German Maritime Museum in Bremerhaven. Schiefer and Holterman note that nowadays, considered from the Scottish and Norwegian mainland, Orkney and Shetland seem to be islands at the edge of the map, the latter often placed in a box that highlights its remoteness. Looking at trade and seaways in the 16th and 17th century, though, these archipelagos are at the centre of a web that connects Iceland, the Faroes, Scandinavia, the British Isles and Germany and Netherlands, as well as linking to colonial trade routes. Islandness, in their study, draws attention not to remoteness or isolation, but 'emphasises connection, exchange, and cross-cultural influences on individuals and communities across the North Sea' (Schiefer and Holterman, this issue). Such a view unsettles established distinctions between peripheries and centres.

Staying up North, Claire Hannibal's article considers island-to-island ways of being and knowing on the over 100 islands that make up the Shetland Isles. Focusing on hand knitting, she draws out historical and contemporary connections of mutuality and exchange. Under the cashless truck system, knitters in the 18th and 19th century developed exchange relationships that stitched the archipelago together. These relationships linked the women who knitted and dressed garments among each other, often involving extended travelling, and connected them to male – sometimes German and Dutch – merchants. These archipelagic practices of connection and exchange rendered considerations of remoteness from the metropolitan centres of Great Britain largely irrelevant from the late 1900s until about 1950. Thus, Hannibal highlights that the remoteness we might think of as a given is 'both a relative and [...] a relatively recent condition' (Saxer 2019: 189). Moreover, she shows that these archipelagic relations of hand-knitting continue to matter more recently in the Shetland Wool Week that draws both tourism and forges local connections.

Leaving Shetland behind, Les Roberts and Hazel Andrews take us to the Hilbre Islands, an archipelago of three islands off the west coast of the Wirral peninsula at the English-Welsh border. Their article is an exploration of practices and stories that make up Hilbre's specific form of islandness. It highlights that islands and practices of islandness are inextricably linked to imagination, mythologies, stories and histories. These shape the island not as a bounded spatial form. Rather, 'paying attention to the documented taskscapes that constitute the elemental doingness of islandness throws into sharper relief the spatial production of island imaginaries and the mythopoeic tapestry that stretches out beyond the island' (Roberts and Andrews, this issue). In a landscape of shifting sands and tidal marshes, crossing to the islands is possible on foot. Introducing us to the spatial stories (De Certeau 1984) of the writer Ann Cleeves, the legend of Constable Sands, and the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the authors trace lines in the sand around the archipelago. They show that islandness is made not just by what happens on but around these islands.

Back in Scotland, Christina Bosbach moves us through a year of fieldwork spent on the Hebridean Isle of Coll during the COVID-19 pandemic in four poems. Attending to shifting practices and experiences of Coll's islandness, the poems draw out the particular connotations that islands took on during the pandemic. Images of isolation (Foley et al. 2023: 5) and insulating narratives of retreat and refuge (Burnett 2023) both clashed and resonated with the ongoing mobilities that connected islanders to each other and to the mainland.

Connections and tensions are also at the heart of Leah Eades's photo collection, which examines how notions of islandness and (trans)nationalism are articulated in contemporary Irish abortion politics. By illuminating the cross-border solidarities that shape post-Repeal protest logics, Eades's images invite us to think abortion politics archipelagically. Together, they reveal ideas of enmeshment and interconnectedness within the transnational circulation and vernacularisation of activist strategies and

imaginaries.

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