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INSULARITY, POLITICAL STATUS AND SMALL INSULAR SPACES

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Abstract

This article focuses on islands and archipelagos around the world and considers their field of study. It aims first to trace the outline of the geographical object and its limits. Rather than attempting to provide a positive definition of an island, the article posits a category of small insular spaces. Next, by providing a thorough analysis of the notion of insularity, the study demonstrates the limits of certain physical determinisms. I propose a typology of insularities in order to open lines of inquiry and provide indications as to the levels of development and integration of small insular spaces in a world economy. However, the trends laid out in this typology should by no means be expanded into rules or laws relating to the relative influence of insularity. The position of islands in the world system does not take precedence over their relative position in relation to the main island or an industrialised home country. The influence of political status on the levels of development will also be examined.

Key words

Insularity, political status, typology, human development, determinism

Introduction

This article reflects upon a geographical object that is simultaneously elusive and apparent and upon its field of study. Indeed islands, in spite of their obviousness, raise a number of questions. The first of these concerns being the limits of the object in question. Rather than attempting to provide a conclusive definition of an island, I will instead try to identify a category of **small insular spaces**. From the Caribbean to the Pacific, the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, these are the spaces upon which most researchers base their analyses when they refer to islands. In order to understand these small insular spaces, it is important to premise our arguments on certain concepts and notions which circumscribe these objects (such as insularity, islandness or insularism) and to use typology to develop the concepts of contiguity, connectivity and discontinuity or, indeed, metrics, enclosure and peripherality. For the purposes of this study, I will confine my analysis to consolidating the notion of insularity and its links with physical and human determinisms. Given the variability of the supposed or confirmed effects of insularity, I will try to sketch out the outlines of a typology ranging from hypo-insularity to hyper-insularity. Finally, the importance of political status will be addressed, so as to ascertain whether islands have a specific political status and whether this affects their development levels.

1. A Working Definition for Small Insular Spaces

> *Islands are profoundly paradoxical and ambivalent. Everything turns into its opposite. This is why it is difficult to grasp their essence, to define them and pin them down. You constantly fluctuate between 'basic banality' and the inexpressible. When you think you have them in your sights, they move away: some islands are poorly moored; they are boats that drift and escape you.* (Meistersheim, 1988: 108 – author's translation)

Dictionaries and encyclopaedias typically give the following definition for an 'island': 'a body of land entirely surrounded by water'. However, while this definition is universally adopted, the limits circumscribing islands have not been defined. The authors of a work on geographical words add that an island offers "an intermediate size, between an islet and a continent" (Brunet et al, 1993: 168). This is not much help, really: what are the limits of an islet or a continent? In a more recent study, Brunet (1997) ventures to reply to the question of which is the biggest island in the world. From his reflections, it appears that New Guinea, with its 785,753 km², represents the frontier beyond which we can no longer use the term island. Brunet incidentally also provides the lower limit for an island, which is apparently 0.5 km². So, one might say, New Guinea: why not? But, similarly, why? According to Doumenge (1984), whose calculations are based on a coastal index (the relation between coastal length in kilometres and the island's area in square kilometres), New Guinea is a continental island (coastal index under 1/60), for the same reasons that Madagascar or Borneo are. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (1983), developing insular states have a population of under 400,000, or sometimes under 1 million inhabitants, and a surface area of less than 700 km², or sometimes over 4,000 km². This definition, based upon economic viability criteria, considerably limits insular incidence, and places Bahrain or St Lucia at the uppermost limit of developing insular states. In his study of the history of islands, Huetz de Lemps (1994) focuses on small islands, the limits of which he defines as around thirty thousand km² and under 1 million inhabitants. According to Péron:

> *An island is deemed to be small when each individual living there is aware of living within a territory circumscribed by the sea. An island is deemed to be "big" when the society in general is aware of its insularity, while individuals may be unaware or forget that they live on an island.* (Péron, 1993: 3 – author's translation)

This definition relies upon the fields of representation, vision, experience and islandness. Bonnemaison refers to the "good island", whose characteristics are born of its bipolar insularity:

> *a 'good island' is a mountain surrounded by a coastline which can serve as a harbour. Thanks to this 'good coastline,' separation from the rest of the world is less abrupt. Thanks to the mountain, the island has inland depth, which allows for a degree of diversity.* (1990: 121 – author's translation)

Bonnemaison's (1990) definition of islandness noticeably differs from and complements those found in research published in English (such as Baldacchino, 2004b; Baldacchino and Milne, 2008; Campbell, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Neemia, 1995; Royle, 2001; Selwyn, 1980; Stratford, 2008). He defines the concept as follows:

> *insularity is isolation. Islandness is separation from the rest of the world and thus describes a space that is not part of space, a place that is not part of time, a naked place, an absolute place.* (ibid: 119)

Bonnemaison further states that islandness "is an integral aspect of the field of representation and metaphor; it relates not to facts but to vision" (ibid). These theories follow on from work carried out by Moles (1982) and Moles and Rohmer (1982), who recommend that the phenomenological function associated with the topological concept of insularity should be identified. His term 'islandness' derives from his philosophy of centrality, which corresponds to the vision islanders have of their island, whereby they locate it in the centre of the world and in the centre of *their* world. When reasoning according to this notion of islandness, one moves beyond a Cartesian philosophy of space as an expanse to analyse the subjective and the affective, space as it is experienced but also as it is inherited. As far as this last aspect is concerned, it is difficult to assess how important a role it plays in the ways islanders represent the space they inhabit. One example is that of the feeling of isolation that, even today, is still deeply rooted in islanders' collective unconscious. This feeling is handed on from generation to generation, even though aeroplanes and information technology have now been in existence for decades. In other words, although isolation nowadays is almost always a mere state of mind, it nonetheless continues to be perceived by islanders as a key characteristic of their daily life. Moles attempts to explain this phenomenon as follows: "In spite of the overwhelming effect that aeroplanes have had on our means of transport, that effect is too recent to have influenced our deep-rooted perceptions of space" (1982: 282).

The difference between islandness and insularity is reminiscent of the distinction made by geographers between space and territory:

> *Space is a physical reality that is mainly shaped by production dynamics. It could be posited that the space produced by the world system or the world economy can be explained by the interaction of centres and peripheries and that it is primarily a functional unit determined by economics. This vision is in fact a result of spatial organisation. Researchers, working outside the space of the world system, have found its opposite: territory. Territory can be defined as the opposite of space: it is conceptual and often even ideal, whereas space is material. It is firstly a vision of the world, before being a means of organising it; it arises from representation more than from function, but that does not mean it is devoid of structures and realities. It has its own configurations, which vary according to different societies and cultures, but in fact it is based more upon cultural, historical and political analyses than upon specifically economic ones.* (Bonnemaison, 2000: 129-30 – author's translation)

A parallel could be drawn between, on the one hand, space and territory and, on the other, insularity and islandness. Islandness could be defined as the sum of representations and experiences of islanders, which thus structure their island territory, whereas insularity could be viewed as the particular physical characteristics that define insular space. And Moles has fun defining "the technical specifications for the ideal island" (1982: 284). It thus appears that, whether the terms are viewed as absolute (cf Brunet 1993 and the largest island) or relative (Doumenge 1984, UNCTAD 1983, Huetz de Lemps, 1994, Péron, 1993, Bonnemaison, 1990, 1997), analysing islands poses a number of problems for those trying to pin them down with a restrictive definition. In

spite of the evidence provided by the geographic object, there is no universal limit to that object. It all depends upon the perspective one adopts, be it cultural, political, economic or social. In his study, Brigand (2002) refers to the definitions of islands used by international organisations along the lines of UNCTAD. It is interesting to note that for UNESCO, the limits of an island are adapted according to the aims of the relevant research programs. Thus, for the purposes of a study of insular ecosystems, an island (described as '"minor') is "approximately characterised by maximal surface area of 10,000 km² and a population of fewer than 500,000 inhabitants" (UNESCO, 1997: 5). For another study into hydrology and water supply, UNESCO sets the limit for a small island at 2,000 km² (1999: 3). In 1990, UNESCO created a unit responsible for relations with small member states, (Section for Small Islands and Indigenous Knowledge) most of which were islands with developing economies. These small states were chosen according to the following criteria: surface area of under 10,000 km², population of fewer than 1 million and Gross National Product (GNP) of approximately US$2,000 per capita.

It is also apparent that definitions of islands sometimes evolve. This is particularly obvious as regards the United Nations (UN), which in 1958, after various conventions on the sea held in Geneva, defined an island as "a naturally-formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide" (UN, 1958: article 10). The Convention on the Law of the Sea was signed on December 10, 1982 at Montego Bay by 119 sovereign states, but only came into force on November 16, 1994, following its 60th ratification. The aim of the Convention was to ensure increasing appropriation of maritime domains by coastal states. The paradoxical result of its implementation has been to provide increased profits for the wealthiest nations (France, the United States of America and the United Kingdom own the three largest Exclusive Economic Zones [EEZs] in the world), rather than achieving its initial aim—that of helping the poorest states—as they had requested (Taglioni, 2007a). In fact, developed nations showed considerable hostility towards the Treaty's implementation and only ratified it at a late stage (France, Japan and the Netherlands in 1996; the UK, Spain and the Russian Federation in 1997; Canada in 2003; Denmark in 2004; Switzerland in 2009) or indeed, in the case of the USA, have yet to do so. As a result of this situation, the number of claims and disagreements between states has increased. In anticipation of these claims, the 1982 Convention specifies that, "Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf" (Part VIII, Regime of Islands, Article 21). In fact, this shift towards a more restrictive definition has not stood in the way of the French islet of Clipperton, which is 'marooned' in the North Pacific, and benefits from a maximum EEZ of 431,015 km². Only 5 km² in area, the tiny island is uninhabited, and this arrangement therefore violates the 1982 Convention. The island is also the object of a territorial claim by Mexico.

The European Union's point of view, which is an institutional one, also provides a definition of islands. Eurostat, the European statistics agency, has attempted to define the statistic limits of the 25 members of the Islands Commission. According to Eurostat, an island is a land mass of at least 1 km² in surface area, permanently inhabited by a statistically significant population (over 50 inhabitants), separated from the European continent by an expanse of water of at least 1 km², with no permanent link to the continent; furthermore, it must not house the capital city of a member state. This last point will doubtless require revision now that Malta and Cyprus have integrated into the EU, unless it is decided that the Republic of Malta and Cyprus are not islands…

It is thus evident that when attempting to 'materialise' islands using figures as simple as the maximum population level or surface area, one is immediately confronted with the

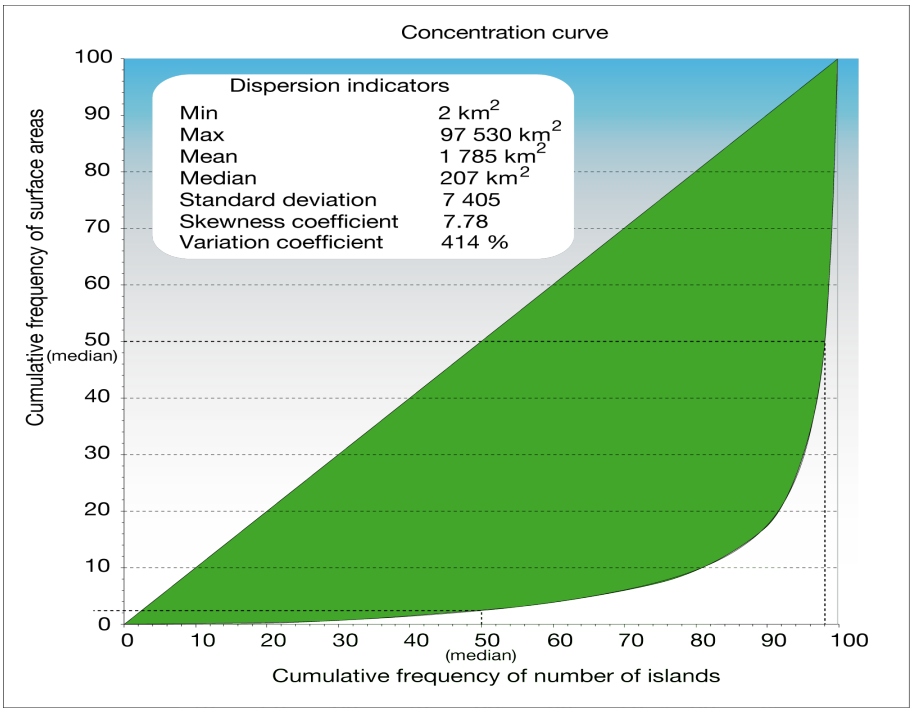
highly arbitrary nature of the concepts used. However, is this not the case for any geographical object? After all, who can establish the exact borderline separating hills from mountains, for instance? The definition of a hill given in Brunet's (1993: 115) work on geographical words is as follows: "Relief of moderate dimensions, more or less extensive, which generally appears as part of a group. Relative altitude is also quite low, around 50 to 500m" (author's translation). The entry for mountain reads: "A relief mass of significant altitude, although the term is a relative one: the Montagne Noire is under 1,200m, the Montagne de Reims is 283m high" (337 - author's translation). These two definitions clearly reveal the imprecise nature of such borderlines: the Montagne de Reims could be deemed a hill. (Similarly, one might wonder why the cut-off point for measuring infant mortality is set at the age of one year: why not 18 or 24 months? One might equally enquire why the criteria used in France for calculating the youth index are set at over 19 years and under 60 years: are we no longer young once we are over 19? Are we necessarily old once we are over 60?)

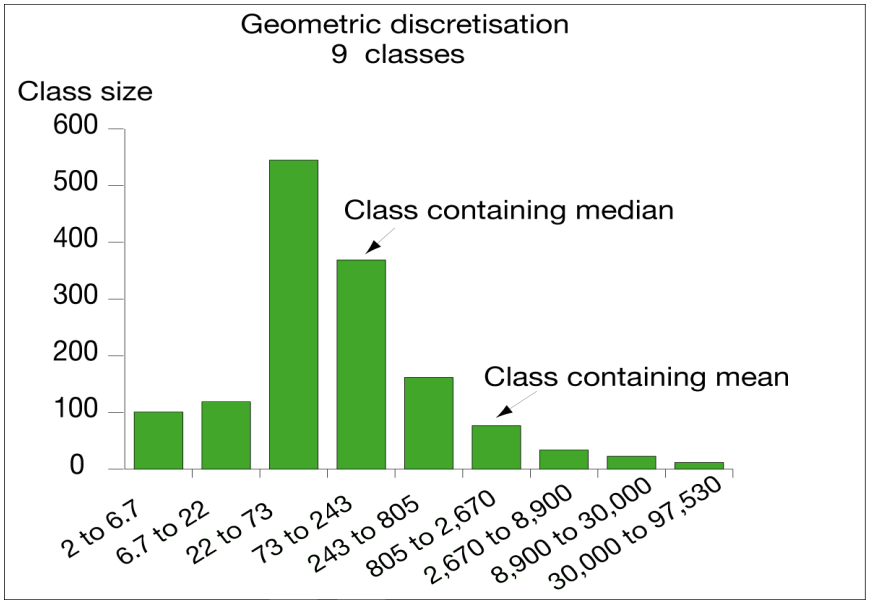
Ultimately it is, as I surmised, extremely difficult to establish scientific data that would enable us to define islands and their limits with any certainty. Given the impossibility of reaching any definite agreement as to the limits of islands, I can however, instead give a definition of what I have chosen to call small insular spaces:

> **land masses surrounded on all sides by water, comprising a single piece of land less than 11,000 square kilometres and with a population of under 1.5 million inhabitants.**

The maximum limit of 1.5 million people is that used by the World Bank to define small states, i.e. small economies. The maximum limit of 11,000 km² allows inclusion of the archipelago of Fiji and its largest island, Viti Levu, which is 10,531 km² in size. The minimum criteria for an island, below which entities are included within the category of the islet, will here be dependent upon whether the island is inhabited or not. Some might consider this definition questionable. However, if we attempt to render our criteria with greater statistical rigour, the results prove unconvincing. To demonstrate this, I offer an analysis of the surface area of 1,434 islands, where surface area is established and known. The surface areas in question range from 2 km² (Farallon de Pajaros and the Maug Islands in the Northern Mariana Islands, Herm in the Channel Islands, and Mehetia in the Society Islands) to 97,530 km² (Mindanao in the Philippines). This extensive sample of islands covers all the seas and oceans of the world and is taken from 'UN System-Wide Earthwatch' a database set up by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[2] Statistical analysis[3] of this data (see Figures 1a and 1b) leads to the following observations:

- The variation coefficient (414%) underlines the staggered nature of the series.
- 50% of the islands (717) have a surface area below 207 km² and, more importantly, 8% of the largest islands cover 80% of the cumulative surface area.
- Standard deviation is very high because maximum and minimum levels are extremely far apart.
- Discretisation into nine categories reveals unimodal distribution concentrated upon islands with surface areas of between 22 and 75 km².
- The skewness coefficient is well above 0 and reveals the numerical over-representation of small islands (surface area between 2 km² and 3,000 km²).
- There are very few islands with a surface area of over 11,000 km², as they account for less than 5% of the sample.





Figures 1a and 1b - Graphs showing concentration levels for a sample of islands worldwide with surface areas between 2 km² and 97,530 km²

It is apparent that none of these points is really very significant and for the time being I will therefore pursue this study using the criteria initially set out above for small insular spaces. Once again, for empirical reasons, the only exceptions that could logically be made would concern Jamaica (2.8 million inhabitants) and New Caledonia (where Grande Terre covers 16,648 km²). Although they do not comply with the criteria used, this State and territory have the same preoccupations as other small insular spaces. In using this definition, we are led to study several hundred small insular spaces around the globe. However, we can specify that small insular spaces include, in particular, 32 independent states[4]—mainly archipelagic ones—(see Figure 2), as well as several dozen overseas localities that are, to differing degrees, linked to or integrated within continental or archipelagic states. Small insular spaces are almost exclusively concentrated in the Caribbean basin, the insular Mediterranean, the south-west Indian Ocean, insular Oceania and, to a very marginal degree, in the North Atlantic (Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe) and the Persian Gulf (Bahrain).

2. Insularity and Determinism

According to Péron, "the specific nature of insularity arises not from one or several characteristics, but from multiple interactions between heterogeneous elements" (1993: 235). The author thus introduces the notion of a system, which is indeed fundamental to understanding insularity. However, the idea of a system implies that insularity is as variable as the factors are numerous or few and as their interaction is strong or weak. The extremely difficult task that remains is thus that of managing to put into perspective the factors that define insularity and the links between them. According to Brunet, "insularity is to be defined using objective, external, empirical appreciation, based upon measurements where necessary" (1993: 281). However, as regards two of the key factors in insularity—small size and isolation; we know how hard it is to carry out a satisfactory quantitative assessment.

The epistemological uncertainty surrounding insularity and islands is by no means a new phenomenon and a chronological reading of the works written by our 'forefathers' (in Tissier, 1984), reveals the following statements:

> *It is thus impossible to give a simple definition of insularity because a definition should conciliate contradictory general characteristics. We must study the diverse aspects of human existence on islands, and not claim to establish an illusory unity from this diversity.* (Vallaux, 1908: 110 – author's translation)

> *In other words, we need to ask whether there is, whether there can be, for anthropogeography and—in its wake—for history, a category labelled 'islands' which would be valid irrespective of circumstances.* (Febvre, 1922: 227 – author's translation)

> *In this instance also, if we were to try and find an imperative, a law of islands influencing men and human societies, we would find only variety and diversity.* (ibid)

	Area Km^2	Population 2009
Nauru	21	13,000
Tuvalu	26	12,000
Marshall Islands	181	68,000
Cook Islands	237	20,000
Niue	259	1,700
Saint Kitts and Nevis	269	40,000
Maldives	300	360,000
Malta	316	404,000
Grenada	345	102,000
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	388	118,000
Barbados	431	279,000
Antigua & Barbuda	440	71,000
Seychelles	455	81,000
Palau	488	21,000
Saint Lucia	616	170,000
Bahrain	665	698,000
Micronesia	701	108,000
Tonga	747	123,000
Dominica	750	73,000
Kiribati	811	105,000
Sao Tome and Principe	1,001	193,000
Comoros	1,862	690,000
Mauritius	2,045	1,300,000
Samoa	2,935	182,000
Cape Verde	4,030	455,000
Trinidad and Tobago	5,128	1,230,000
Cyprus	9,250	1,100,000
Jamaica	11,424	2,800,000
Vanuatu (1)	12,190	210,000
Bahamas (2)	13,942	325,000
Fiji (3)	18,333	905,000
Solomon Islands (4)	28,370	580,000
Total	**118,956**	**12,147,700**

Figure 2 - The 32 small island states in the world, ranked in increasing order of size (islands whose names feature in bold type are island states; the others are multi-island states)

Notes:

1. The largest islands in the Vanuatu archipelago are Espiritu Santo (3,955 km^2), Malakula (2,041 km^2) and Efate (899 km^2).
2. The largest islands in the Bahamas are North Andros (3,439 km^2), South Andros (1,448 km^2), Abaco (1,145 km^2) and Grand Bahama (1,096 km^2).
3. The largest islands in the Fiji Islands are Viti Levu (10,531 km^2) and Vanua Levu (5,587 km^2).
4. The largest islands in the Solomon Islands are Guadalcanal (5,354 km^2), Malaita (3,836 km^2) and Choiseul (2,970 km^2).

Blache also comments, "is there a geography of islands that is not an enumeration, a convenient classification?" (1948: 5 – author's translation) and, as Tissier admirably puts it, one is "struck by the monographic giddiness which a work like that of Aubert de la Rüe so aptly reflects" (1984: 65 – author's translation).

Perhaps we could define insularity according to its effects upon fauna and flora on the one hand, and upon human society on the other? Many authors, particularly naturalists,[5] have demonstrated certain physical characteristics specific to insular environments according to the islands' size and distance from continents. Certain factors, such as endemism, highlighted by Doumenge (1985), allow us to identify the degree of isolation within an island, according to the rate of endemism amongst the plant and animal population. Doumenge, like others before him, (in particular Wallace, 1881), specifies that:

> *the spread of all terrestrial species is directly linked to distance. Increased distance leads to a rapid decrease in the number of species present during the population process. This decrease is the norm from continental fringes towards the centre of oceanic basins.* (Doumenge, 1985: 303 – author's translation)

Brigand adds that:

> *the process of animal and plant population on islands is like an obstacle course: the further the island is located from the immigrant species' original location, the lower the chances of population. The rate of immigration increases along with the surface area of the island. It decreases along with the distance from the colonising species' point of departure and also, progressively, as the number of established species rises, due to phenomena of predation and competition between species.* (Brigand, 2002: 25 – author's translation)

It is thus agreed that there are "physical characteristics specific to insular environments: coastal morphology, relief creating multiple microclimatic zones, the variety of landscapes within a reduced area, biological endemism[6] and the fragile nature of ecosystems" (Benjamin and Godard, 1999: 56 – author's translation). From this point of view, the genetic classification of islands put forward by von Richthofen in the 19th Century is valuable, because the taxonomy he suggests allows us to understand the natural dynamics, as well as a certain number of human activities which take place on islands.[7]

The above points concerning the effects of insularity on animal and plant population processes have been accepted for a long time now. It is a rather different state of affairs if we try to determine valid influences exerted by insularity upon insular societies. Defining potential human or economic characteristics presupposes that insularity is a geographical concept that influences humanity to such an extent that it could be said that 'the island maketh the man'. This is, of course, unthinkable, unless we blindly revert to a determinism based upon 'origins', which geographers have found it hard to dispose of over the past few decades (see Thumerelle, 2001). It could nonetheless be postulated that island dwellers are more deterministic than continental inhabitants or, at the very least, that they convincingly pretend to believe in the absolute influence of insularity on

their development conditions. This is perhaps the impression they convey when they indulge in insularism to excess (Meistersheim, 1988; Taglioni, 2010b).

While determinism of any kind must be ruled out, one suitable compromise would be to consider insularity as "the dynamic relationship that has evolved between an insular space and the society living within it" (Pelletier, 1997a: 21 – author's translation). This would provide a middle ground between a deterministic and simplistic absolutism and a form of denial consisting in stating that islands are perfectly similar to any other geographical object. It could therefore be stated that insularity does not systematically generate a specific type of problem. By observing this we do not deny the fact that the islands are more or less enclosed or that they possess physical particularities as a result of their size and isolation. However, these characteristics are never absolute, nor do they give rise to development issues that could be seen to inevitably place islands in a position of isolation or marginality in relation to the world system.

Finally, it is possible to consider insularity by according it a highly symbolic importance, rendering the term a generic one. This approach is what leads commentators to state that the world is an archipelago or that the planet is an island. As early as the first century, the geographer Strabo referred to the world as an island:

> *We may learn both from the evidence of our senses and from experience that the inhabited world is an island; for wherever it has been possible for man to reach the limits of the earth, sea has been found, and this sea we call 'Oceanus.'* (Strabo in Létoublon, 1996: 10)

According to Bonnemaison, the world "can be viewed not as a single space but as an archipelago" (1997: 129 – author's translation). This is indeed what incites Knafou (1996: 40) to state that "insularity tends to convey less and less explicitly the idea of a difference." As for Herodotus, in the 5th Century BC he viewed the five oases of the Libyan Desert (Baharia, Dakkhla, Farafra, Kharga and Siwa) as an archipelago of the blessed (Hérodote, 1967: 26). Ostap Guerchenko, a retired geologist, expressed the same idea when he discussed the great mining town of Norilsk (population 207,000), which lies 400 km north of the Arctic Circle:

> *During the Soviet period, Norilsk was a closed town. All its inhabitants had arrived when they were young and had grown up there together. They had all become the same, as if they had been cast from the same mould. And they wanted no newcomers. It was as if they were on an island.* (in Despic-Popovic, 2003, n/p – author's translation)

Ultimately, it appears that insularity can be measured more exactly between a main island and its satellite islands than between a main island and the continent. Generally speaking, the main island—or the island state in cases of mono-insularity—is well integrated into international air and maritime transport and information networks. It therefore does not suffer that significantly from insularity. For secondary islands, on the other hand, the main island is generally a vital lifeline. Gay (1999: 81-83), studying various themes, provides a clear demonstration of the impact that insular constraints in French Polynesia have on secondary islands, which are viewed as peripheral even to the periphery; as Benjamin and Godard have asserted "[a]ll other things being equal, Papeete is like a Paris for French Polynesia" (1999: 62-63). We can, and should, also note that the effects of insularity vary according to how well integrated the main island is into a mother country in the Northern Hemisphere. If we continue to observe the insular

Pacific, the inhabitants of the Marquesas are in a more enviable position than those of Santa Cruz. The online network stretching from Paris to the Marquesas via Tahiti is far more beneficial to development, even for the islands at the end of the line, than that leading from Guadalcanal to the Santa Cruz islands. As well as distance/time and distance/cost ratios, which are vital to understanding the concept of remoteness, there thus also exists a distance/political status ratio, which I will address in more detail in the last part of this study.

3. From Hypo-Insularity to Hyper-Insularity: A Tentative Typology

I will now try to establish a typology of insularity. This classification will be based upon the following criteria: institutional status of islands; their geographical architecture; and the level of development as per the Human Development Index (HDI), as defined by the UNDP. Admittedly, this Index does not properly reflect regional disparities as regards development, a fact which necessarily has an adverse effect upon the subtlety of this analysis as far as multi-island states and territories are concerned (Taglioni, 2005, 2008, 2010a). The same problem also applies to continental countries, as the HDI is not calculated for small entities such as regions. This is in fact one of the shortcomings of the HDI, but until HDI data is available at a regional level, the Index offers the best means of grasping human development. For territories that are dependent upon a mother country, characterisation of development levels is based upon various sources, as well as my personal fieldwork observations (particularly with regard to the Caribbean islands, the Mediterranean, the South-West Indian Ocean and Melanesia). As regards the question of status, I will distinguish between independent states and those that are under the domination of a mother country. In assessing geographical architecture (Taglioni, 2005) this article will consider political entities that are either mono-insular or multi-island, generally with a main island and secondary islands. Finally, the classification carried out within the framework of the HDI, based on three categories (high, medium and low human development), offers an acceptable approach to the question of development.

After addressing these criteria, I will identify a typology comprising three categories and seven possible types of situation (Figure 3). We will thus move from hypo-insularity (Nicolas, 2001), which could be defined as the continentalisation of insular phenomena under the effects of integration and assimilation of an insular territory to a continental mother country, to hyper-insularity[8] (Pelletier, 1997b), which can be termed 'double insularity'. This typology offers a number of lines of inquiry and indications as to the level of development of small insular spaces and their integration into the world economy. Islands in the hypo-insular category appear to be better integrated in the workings of the global economy than the others. Thanks to their high level of development or their solid political or economic integration within an industrial mother country, they share the same characteristics as other states and territories in the developed world. In such cases, lack of territorial continuity is compensated to a considerable degree by good sea and air access and connectivity with the rest of the world economy or with an industrialised mother country therein. In contrast, islands that fall into the hyper-insularity category generally lie beyond the established exchange flow of goods and persons, as well as the transport networks and maritime and air traffic routes that structure global space. Generally speaking, these islands—secondary members of an archipelago—have only very limited leeway as regards political, economic or social initiatives, and they are consequently peripheral to the global economy. Access is sometimes limited to a regional airport or port and their connectivity does not extend

beyond relations with the main island, whose own development situation is unstable. For islands that are 'merely insular', much depends upon their economic, political and regional environment. It appears, for instance, that the Lesser Antilles Islands experience a far less restrictive form of insularity than that experienced by Oceania. This typology is purely indicative in value and the main trends it shows should by no means be transformed into rules or laws as to the importance of insularity. The absolute position of islands in the world system does not take precedence over their relative position to the main island or to an industrialised mother country.

Figure 3 - Diagram showing a typology of insularity in small insular spaces

4. Political Status and Development in Small Insular Spaces

Taking the above definition of small insular spaces into account does not imply that one prejudges their political status, which can vary from full and acknowledged sovereignty to institutional dependence. In the first instance, I will use the term 'microstate', and in the second, 'microterritory'. There is also a more questionable third category, that of 'micronations'. One key question is that of determining whether islands have a specific political status and whether that status influences those islands' development. The answer to the first question can be found in the unique diversity of political statuses present in insular environments, given that at the present time the 'confetti' remaining from insular empires are the only islands not to have acquired independence. Indeed, they do not necessarily wish to do so, and shared sovereignty may well be an appropriate response to their evolving status. This is the question I shall now address, taking a parallel approach to the relations between political status and development levels.

4.1 Microstates: A slow move towards recognition

Things have changed considerably since Wainhouse declared that independence was "an extravagant and inadequate solution for small territories" (in Blair, 1968: 6). Between 1960 and 2002 all small insular states have been accepted into the UN. Only the Cook Islands and Niue, which have autonomous governments and are in free association with New Zealand, are not recognised as fully independent and therefore cannot sit as UN members. Admission to the UN reflects full, unrestricted recognition of the existence, as a state in its own right, of a geographical entity with a minimum population level of around 12,000 inhabitants for Tuvalu and a minimum surface area of 21 km² for Nauru. Doumenge (1985) has shown that in the 1960s the proliferation of insular microstates raised the problem of their economic and political viability. Finally, the years passed and between 1969 and 1984 numerous groups of experts from international organisations produced reports arriving at a rather self-evident conclusion: microstates exist and have a place on the world stage.

In 1985, Doumenge noted that the average economic volume of those admitted to the UN showed a marked downward turn between 1964 and 1973, and 1974 and 1983. This decrease can now be confirmed, based on the wave of admissions that occurred between 1991 and 2002, of states whose average Gross National Product (GNP) was no higher than US$ 0.1 billion. This final wave,[9] which really established insular microstates, only concerned insular Oceania and the next-to-last[10] 'confetti' of empire in the region. It should also be noted that Timor-Leste entered the UN as soon as it acquired independence in May 2002. The financial and diplomatic efforts made by the UN to reach a solution to the conflict between Timor-Leste and Indonesia and begin reconstruction of the country demonstrate that small nations are nations like any others in the eyes of international law.

O'Driscoll (2000) introduced a distinction creating a new category of microstates, those whose international sovereignty has not been recognised bilaterally or multilaterally by other actors of global public order:

> *Most frequently recognised microstates are members of the United Nations.*[11] *In contrast, non-recognised microstates have not (yet) obtained the same status officialising their position. We should specify that*

> *recognition or non-recognition of a microstate (and of states, also) bears no relation to its validity: recognition of a microstate (or of a state) is a matter of political opportunity whereas its validity is based upon the meeting of objective criteria. Hutt River*[12] *or Taiwan are not officially recognised, but that does not prevent them from existing.* (O'Driscoll, 2000: 12 – author's translation)

Within this group of microstates, the relationship between surface area and GNP per capita is not borne out by the facts. Nor is the possible connection between demographic mass and GNP per capita. There is a range of widely varying situations and correlations cannot be made but political status is a factor in development levels.

4.2 Microterritories: A paradox of history

The expression insular microterritories is used in this study to refer to insular spaces that depend, to varying degrees, on an often very distant mother country. Indeed, it is notable that there is almost no continental territory in existence that belongs to a mother country without being territorially linked to it[13]. This observation reinforces the idea that the sea, whose actions generate a form of discontinuity of natural frontiers, is conducive to the existence of microterritories. The majority of such insular microterritories are the last remnants of European colonial empires; the end of networks (Baldacchino, 2004a, 2006, 2010; Taglioni, 2007a, 2009a). These associate entities are today scattered throughout the world's seas and oceans and they all have very different statuses with regard to national, European Community and international law. The article will proceed to examine a few examples, taken from France, the UK, the Netherlands, the USA, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and Chile.

If we consider only French overseas territories, there are three different categories of status under national law. The first group is that of overseas regions comprising a single department, commonly called the DOM (overseas departments): Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana, La Réunion and Mayotte. The second category, a rather heterogeneous one, is that of overseas collectivities, including Saint Pierre and Miquelon in the North Atlantic, Saint Martin and Saint Barthelemy in the Lesser Antilles, Wallis and Futuna in the South Pacific and, finally, French Polynesia, which is also in the South Pacific. The third category, known as that of *sui generis* collectivities, is equally heterogeneous, as it brings together, on the one hand, New Caledonia in the South Pacific and, on the other, the French Southern and Antarctic Territories (TAAF), to which the Scattered Islands in the Mozambique Channel are administratively attached. It should be noted that the number of different institutional statuses of French overseas areas undoubtedly contributes to weakening governance, for the desire to adapt the Republic to each specific territory leads inevitably to the watering down of public policy in the field of human development. During the round table discussions on French overseas territories which took place in 2009, with only limited success, the question of the profusion of different statuses was examined attentively, since it is one that may well present as many solutions as it does problems. For overseas territories of the UK, the status of colony still exists. The colonies are, however, mainly autonomous and each has an executive council and a legislative parliament (a legislative chamber and a legislative council which is elected by direct suffrage). This is comparable to the status of the island of Tokelau, which is administrated by New Zealand.

Until October 10, 2010, the Netherlands Antilles constituted an autonomous region of the tripartite Kingdom of the Netherlands. Aruba was the second component in the Kingdom, and the Netherlands was the third. Since October 10th 2010, the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles has given rise to three new entities, as the federation of the Netherlands Antilles, comprising five islands, was split into two new federal states (Curacao and Sint Maarten) based upon the model of Aruba, and three municipalities (Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius-also called Statia), with the latter forming part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but with special status. The overseas areas of the Kingdom of the Netherlands are an interesting case, highlighting how difficult it is for multi-island political entities to resist the temptation of separatism or autonomy; indeed this difficulty sometimes appears greater than that of dealing with a tutelary power (Taglioni, 2005).

American territories are members of the United States Commonwealth and their executive is led by a Governor, elected under universal suffrage, with legislative powers that are held by a Senate, which is also elected by universal suffrage. However, this does not mean that there are no fundamental problems for these American territories. Puerto Rico offers a striking example, as dissatisfaction with the island's status has led to increasing political tension over the last few years. The Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands are autonomous communities of Spain, just like the fifteen other such communities the country comprises—Andalucía, Catalonia, Galicia, Rioja, and so on. The Azores and Madeira are autonomous regions of the Portuguese Republic, each region having legislative and executive assemblies. Greenland and the Faroe Islands are both autonomous regions of Denmark, although the first has had increased autonomy since June 2008 and may acquire independence in coming years. Easter Island and the archipelago of Juan Fernandez can be considered overseas territories of Chile, and are provinces of the region of Valparaíso.

In view of these few examples, it appears that – with the exception of the French ones - all have more or less clear autonomy. Although relations with the mother country or even within archipelagos are often complicated and even difficult, nevertheless legislative and executive autonomy seems to be the minimum requirement for governance in spaces that are peripheral to their mother country. This is perhaps what is lacking in those French overseas areas, such as overseas departments, which have not yet attained a level of decision-making sufficient to allow for more tranquil relations with the French authorities. Indeed, if New Caledonia and French Polynesia currently have less fraught relations with the French government, it is because these two overseas collectivities have acquired or are acquiring a high degree of autonomy, which goes some way to allaying the claims and deep wounds left over from the past.

As noted above, the relationship between surface area and GNP per capita or population and GNP per capita is not valid for microstates. This observation is equally accurate as regards microterritories, which present varying global and per capita GNP without any obvious connection to surface area or population. However it is very clear that the average GNP per capita indicator of microterritories is far higher than that of microstates. In most instances, this should no doubt be seen as reflecting financial transfers and solidarity on the part of the mother country towards its associated territories. This is particularly relevant as regards New Caledonia, with its nickel mines, or the Cayman Islands (which are British), where there are more offshore companies than inhabitants. This rather general view is one contributing factor explaining why microterritories are reluctant to claim their independence at a time when the world economy is ever more interdependent and sensitive to the global political situation.

Moreover, some statuses offering internal autonomy are far more attractive and reassuring than independence, with its uncertain outcome (Taglioni, 2009a). A notable example of this is the institutional status of the Åland Islands, a small archipelago with a population of 27,000 situated at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia. There are over 6,000 islands, of which 80 are inhabited, with a total surface area of 1,524 km². The main island, Åland (Ahvenanmaa) is 720 km² in size, and contains the capital, Mariehamn, as well as most of the population of the archipelago, which also bears the island's name. The archipelago is one of the six provinces of Finland, the country to which it has been attached since Finnish independence in 1917. However, the population is mainly Swedish speaking and only a small minority speaks Finnish. Following a lengthy international legal battle, the law on autonomy, passed on December 28, 1951, gave the archipelago considerable legislative and administrative powers. The status of the Åland Islands is comparable to that of Faroe (population 49,000; area 1,395 km²), which has also been more or less independent within the constitutional monarchy of Denmark since a Parliament was set up on March 23, 1984. These two archipelagos could serve as a model for many archipelagos and continental regions that do not fully identify with a mother country and which claim, more or less violently, their right to be different (sometimes going so far as to question the nation states under whose supervision they are placed). Their status, which gives rise to the ambiguous notion of shared sovereignty (Agniel and Faberon, 1999; Baldacchino, 2004a; Baldacchino and Milne, 2008), highlights the fact that states no longer have a monopoly on sovereignty. New Caledonia, with its distinct New Caledonian citizenship, provides another good example. Should they wish, this hybrid form, which lies somewhere between sovereignty and independence, could be a model for other microterritories whose institutions are still evolving, such as the Cook Islands and Niue—which are in free association with New Zealand—the American Virgin Islands or the British colonies of Anguilla and Montserrat. Shared sovereignty could also provide an answer for autochthonous populations in large nation states such as Brazil, Canada, South Africa or Australia. It undoubtedly offers a valuable alternative between sovereignty and independence.

4.3 Micronations: More virtual than real

The study of the notion of micronations has been developed by the French Institute of Micropatrology,[14] an association dedicated to the study of the world's small countries. Its late President, Fabrice O'Driscoll, wrote a work in 2000 listing over 600 unrecognised microstates and undisclosed micronations. By micronation, the author means:

> *a very small nation, ie an organised human collectivity, generally under the authority of a government and shared laws, but outside a specific space. Micronations do not exist within a defined or limited territory and some of them reject any such claims.* (O'Driscoll, 2000: 48 – author's translation)

This de-territorialisation of politics leads to a break with codes and offers the imagination full opportunity to express itself on the subject of a world that some would like to be different. In most cases, micronations are virtual (O'Driscoll, 2000; Lasserre, 2000; Fuligni, 1997) and owe their very existence to the possibilities provided by the Internet. One clear example is that of the Holy Empire of Reunion, a Brazilian parody of the French overseas department.[15] Small spaces appear to be more permissive than vast continental areas. They can quite easily be placed in the category of 'anti-world' areas, which are in opposition to constraints of all sorts, be they financial, sexual, drug-related or penitential, and in favour of experiments of all kinds carried out away from

prying eyes. As a result, it seems easier to 'adopt' them: such is always the inevitable effect of the principle according to which 'small is beautiful'. This is why micronations are generally no larger than a few square kilometres in area.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this study the specific nature of the island as a geographical object remains open to question. But is this not an artificial problem? Town planners experience difficulties when trying to define a town but that does not prevent towns from existing or planners from studying them. We should avoid focusing too narrowly upon the object, as Moles (1982) and then McCall (1994a) or Depraetere (2008a) do when they refer to a science of islands (nissology). The key theme is not in fact islands, but rather insularity, islandness, insularism and the interrelated topics of isolation, contiguity, connectivity, discontinuity, enclosure and peripherality (Taglioni, 2007b). "Admittedly, the prerequisites to the construction of the field of study interfere with the construction of the object," but that must not give rise to "confusion between the object itself and methods for apprehending the object in question" (Pelletier, 2005: 17 - author's translation). It is to this end that, besides providing a possible definition for a category of islands that can be termed small insular spaces, I have tried to apprehend insularity and its variability, as well as the possible influence of political status on levels of development in small spaces characterised by insularity. However, it is impossible to prejudge and generalise the supposed effects of insularity, whatever form it may take.

End Notes

[1] I have discounted both extremes (by excluding extremes) of the sample in order to ensure improved homogeneity. Below 2 km² there are several hundred islands. Above Mindanao (97,530 km²), there are 17 states and territories: Iceland (101,826 km²); Cuba (105,805 km²); Luzon, Philippines (109,965 km²); North Island, New Zealand (111,582 km²); Newfoundland, Canada (115,220 km²); Java, Indonesia (132,187 km²); South Island, New Zealand (145,836 km²); Sulawesi, Indonesia (180,680 km²); Ellesmere, Canada (183,964 km²); Great Britain, United Kingdom (209,331 km²); Victoria, Canada (220,548 km²); Honshu, Japan (225,800 km²); Sumatra, Indonesia (443,065 km²); Baffin, Canada (503,944 km²); Madagascar (587,713 km²); Borneo, Indonesia-Malaysia-Brunei (748,168 km²); New Guinea, Indonesia-Papua New Guinea (785,753 km²).

[2] http://islands.unep.ch/Tiarea.htm

[3] On the study of surface area/frequency relationship and surface ranking, see Depraetere (1990-1991).

[4] Of these 32 states, 28 are considered to be Small Island Developing States (SIDS). These are the 32 without the Cook Islands, Malta, Cyprus and Jamaica (which is not a small insular state according to the definition used by the World Bank).

[5] "The problem of insularity is not a purely verbose question for naturalists" (Blache, 1948: 7). This phrase serves as a reminder of our verbose tendencies as human geographers.

[6] On insular endemism, see also the remarkable illustrated work published by the Museum d'Histoire naturelle (Vigne, 1997).

[7] Gay (2000) for instance has demonstrated the important role played by the physical milieu upon tourist development of tropical islands.

[8] Pelletier specifies that, "The small islands situated around the periphery of the central Japanese unit of islands, the *ritô*, are characterised by what I would call 'hyper-insularity.' Alongside the relationship between Japan and the continent there is thus a second relationship between an isolated island or islands and the central island or islands (*Hondo*)." (1997b: 134).

[9] The states concerned were the Marshall Islands (1991), Micronesia (1991), Palau (1994), Nauru (1999), Kiribati (1999), Tonga (1999), Tuvalu (2000) and Timor-Leste (2002).

[10] The only remaining confetti are New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, Pitcairn, Tokelau, Guam, the Northern Mariana and American Samoa.

[11] To date, the Holy See (Vatican City) is the only recognised state not to be a member of the UN.

[12] The case of Hutt River, a micro-state in Australia, is clearly described by O'Driscoll (2000: 94-97). See also Lasserre, 2000.

[13] Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, eg Cabinda, Kaliningrad, Alaska and some other small enclaves.

[14] This association continues the work begun by the International Micropatrological Society set up by Frederick Lehmann in 1973.

[15] The website of the Holy Empire of Reunion is at:
http://micronations.wikia.com/wiki/Holy_Empire_of_Reunion

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