

Small islands in international relations scholarship: A dialectic centrality

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ABSTRACT

In the field of international relations (IR), islands are rarely considered, except in specific contexts which seldom involve dimensions conventionally considered important. Most islands, whether sovereign, semi-autonomous, or completely non-self-governing, are relegated to the margins of IR scholars. This article challenges the validity of this marginalization by presenting and examining both sovereign and non-sovereign autonomous islands as international actors. These examples illustrate the great paradox of islands, namely that throughout history, islands have functioned as pivotal points rather than as afterthoughts, and, because of that central role, islands embody syntheses of culture and politics that constitute new identities, and in some cases

unique capabilities. A key example is artificial islands, which illustrate a further overlooked complexity by exerting autonomy free of sovereignty. Finally, islands, especially small island countries, both reinforce and challenge standard IR theories by being at once both self-contained and by necessity integrated globally. All of these characteristics constitute a dialectic centrality, in which islands, self-contained yet marginalized, play a central role in international relations. This article brings these islands collectively to the forefront, with a view to illustrating their currently underestimated importance in the discipline of IR as global actors. This article brings these islands collectively to the forefront, with a view to illustrating their currently underestimated importance in the discipline of IR as global actors.

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Key words: International relations; small sovereign countries; islands; sovereignty; autonomy.

Islas pequeñas en relaciones internacionales: una centralidad dialéctica

RESUMEN

En la erudición de las relaciones internacionales (RI), las islas rara vez se consideran, excepto en contextos específicos, y esos contextos rara vez involucran dimensiones que convencionalmente se consideran importantes. La mayoría de las islas, ya sean soberanas, semiautónomas o completamente no autónomas, están relegadas a los márgenes de la erudición de las RI. Este artículo desafía la validez de esta marginalización al presentar y examinar islas autónomas tanto soberanas como no soberanas como actores internacionales. Estos ejemplos ilustran la gran paradoja de las islas, a saber, que a lo largo de la historia estas han funcionado como puntos centrales en lugar de ideas secundarias y, debido a ese papel central, las islas encarnan la síntesis de la cultura y la política que constituyen nuevas identidades. Las islas artificiales aportan una mayor complejidad pasada por alto al ejercer una autonomía libre de soberanía. Finalmente, las islas, especialmente los países insulares pequeños, refuerzan y desafían las teorías estándar de relaciones internacionales al ser a la vez autónomos y por necesidad integrados en la globalización. Todas estas características constituyen una centralidad dialéctica, en la que las islas, autosuficientes pero marginadas, juegan un papel central en

las relaciones internacionales. Este artículo trae estos territorios colectivamente al frente, con el fin de ilustrar su importancia actualmente subestimada en la disciplina de RI como actores globales.

Palabras clave: relaciones internacionales; pequeños países soberanos; islas; soberanía; autonomía.

INTRODUCTION

Islands are a collective dialectic. They are self-contained; yet they constitute a crossroads for all those arriving at their shores. They are associated with freedom, with water as their only neighbor; yet their inhabitants must be constantly aware of their resource and area limits. Some are quite remote; yet the most isolated connect points of commerce, even in a globalized economy that seems impervious to geography. Moreover, artificial islands defy the same sovereignty they lack by making sovereignty irrelevant for their purposes and the purposes and goals of sovereign states and non-state actors alike. This article challenges the validity of this marginalization in IR scholarship by presenting and examining both sovereign and non-sovereign autonomous islands as international actors. The examples presented herein illustrate the great paradox of islands, namely that throughout history, they have functioned as pivotal points rather than as afterthoughts, and as a result, islands embody syntheses of culture and politics that constitute new identities, and in some cases, unique capabilities.

This article seeks to meet the major challenge of directing more attention from within

IR scholarship towards small sovereign and autonomous islands by presenting a series of examples that underscore the aforementioned collective dialectic phenomenon. Meeting this challenge is congruent with a persistent but still fledgling scholarly endeavor to focus more attention on small sovereign states and autonomous entities in general. This has taken place primarily in the form of single or comparative case studies that focus on the process of legal recognition of small states, individual small state foreign policy and small state participation in regional and international organizations. Early examples include: Duursma's study of the five West European microstates, written in response to the fragmentation that resulted from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia; Hey's edited volume on small state foreign policy behavior; Eccardt's and Klieger's interdisciplinary books on history, culture and politics in Western Europe's smallest sovereign states; and Ingebritsen, *et al.*'s edited volume, which includes reprints of seminal work by Annette Baker Fox, Peter Katzenstein, and Robert Keohane, as well as a comprehensive overview of the history of scholarship on small sovereign states (Duursma, 1996; Hey, 2003; Eccardt, 2005; Klieger, 2011; Ingebritsen, *et al.*, 2006). More recently, Corbett, Veenendaal, and Ugyen have examined the persistence of both democracy and monarchy in the world's smallest sovereign states (Corbett and Veenendaal, 2018; Corbett, *et al.*, 2017). Comprehensive edited volumes such as Baldacchino and Wivel's *Handbook on the Politics of Small States* (Baldacchino and Wivel, 2020) offer more detailed case studies that recognize the strengths as well as weaknesses of

small sovereign countries. These publications and others offer a positive scenario for further focus on small sovereign states; however, the focus remains fledgling in nature.

This marginalization is especially prevalent with respect to small island states. Conversely, this article presents small island countries as central to IR scholarship and as instruments of a dialectic that challenges the basic assumptions on which much IR scholarship is carried out. This ultimately results in a synthesis that balances the conventional tenets of IR with the realities that characterize the categories of small island countries presented herein.

The following pages present examples of the ways in which islands embody this dialectic. First, comments regarding political and cultural identity as experienced in Africa's Atlantic and Indian Ocean islands are presented, with a particular focus on Cabo Verde and Mauritius. Second is the example of Malta, an island republic whose geostrategic importance in the center of the Mediterranean Sea subjected it to a history of bombardment, but which nevertheless also sustains a legacy of wartime victory and the ability to create a grand strategy of foreign policy through neutrality and norm-setting that defies its size as a microstate. Third is the example of several small South Pacific island countries that illustrate the phenomenon of isolation as favorable in times of global pandemic and related threats to a globalized capitalist economy. Fourth is the example of the artificial island of Sealand, which, through its defiance and rejection of the need for recognition as sovereign under international law, offers an alternative to sovereignty in the international system to those

who need or desire it. Finally, the increasingly controversial practice of citizenship by investment as undertaken by the smallest islands of the Eastern Caribbean is examined, thus ironically challenging the boundaries of sovereignty while simultaneously acting in their capacities as sovereign state. Each of these examples represents an area that is seldom addressed in IR, but also presents an area of potential theoretical expansion and enhancement, or a refutation of the basic constructs of IR theories, a phenomenon equally worthy of study.

AFRICA'S ATLANTIC AND INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS: CABO VERDE AND MAURITIUS

African islands have served as points of departure for expansive European powers and as entrepôts on maritime commercial routes, notably those of the slave trade:

From Cabo Verde in the Atlantic to Zanzibar and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, geography and contingency made islands avenues for integrating Africa into wider networks of trade, migration, and empire—sometime against the will of local populations. As centers for exchange and expansion, *these islands historically occupied positions of importance far out of scale to their meager sizes* (emphasis added). (Falola, *et al.*, 2019, pp. 3-4)

Extending 570 km /350 miles west of the Cabo Verde Peninsula off Africa's northwest coast, the archipelago of Cabo Verde encompasses just over 4,000 square kilometers. From the sixteenth into the mid-nineteenth centuries, the islands prospered during the slave trade

under Portuguese colonial control. With the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, Cabo Verde declined economically and witnessed the emergence of what has become a major and continually growing diaspora that slightly outnumbers its population of just under 550,000. In 1951, Portugal incorporated the islands as an overseas department, and Cabo Verde gained independence 24 years later, in 1975.

Historian Richard Lobban highlights the global importance of Cabo Verde, despite its relative unfamiliarity to many:

The Cape Verde [officially Cabo Verde since the date of publication] islands have been both isolated from yet remarkably connected to the major events of world history. Their remote location, hundreds of miles from the nearest continent, has naturally made them vulnerable to neglect, oversight, and abuse. But the islands were also integrally linked to wider events such as the golden age of Portuguese discovery, the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama, the pirate attacks by Francis Drake, and the provision of coal and fuel for the British empire. Cape Verde was critical in the slave trade, and was visited by such famed US ships as *Old Ironsides*. The islands also hosted the American Africa Squadron used by the US Navy for anti-slave trade patrols, and they figured in Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution. In the liberation war fought against Portuguese colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau Cabo Verde played a much more significant role than one might expect. Clearly this was due to the strategic location of the archipelago. Sailors, slaves, colonialists, scientists, flyers and others enjoyed the security of the islands and also found their location convenient for long-range travel to the farthest corners of the globe. (Lobban, 2018, p. 12)

Moreover, Cabo Verde's reach extended to revolution beyond its own independence. The Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cabo Verde (PAIGC), formed by Cabo Verdeans and Guineans under the leadership of Amílcar Cabral, signed an agreement with Portugal providing the framework for a transitional government of Portuguese and Cabo Verdeans together. On June 30, 1975, Cabo Verde elected a National Assembly, and five days later became independent. By late 1980, relations between Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde had disintegrated following the November coup in the former, until the rapport between the two was eventually restored.

Cabo Verde's commercial importance both regionally and to the United States continued into the early nineteenth century, when the archipelago served as a friendly port of call to a young American republic emerging as a maritime power. U.S. captains also recruited crew members from Cabo Verde when embarking from Providence, Rhode Island, or New Bedford, Massachusetts (Lobban, 2018, p. 35). The use of steam power by major shipping companies in the mid-nineteenth century led to an increase in coal and oil development, further expanding Cabo Verde's deep-water ports (p. 36).

The Cabo Verdean identity that evolved during these centuries of interaction is distinct from African, Portuguese, or Anglo-American cultural heritage, precisely due to the island's relative isolation until the arrival, first of the Portuguese, and later of other Europeans. These outside influences resulted in a cultural identity that reflects both smallness and island designation. In addition, and somewhat para-

doxically, the need to separate, at least partially, from the cultures of their European colonizers has reinforced an identity that is truly Cabo Verdean, rooted in the island and manifested throughout the Cabo Verdean diaspora.

In the center of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius has had a parallel influence. Mauritius has been identified as the geographical and intellectual center of the Indian Ocean since the 1960s. It has become the center of a rich heritage of Indian Ocean studies, as well as the historical gateway to major trade routes between the East Indies and Europe (Haring, 2007; Toussaint, 1966; Wright, 2021). More so than Cabo Verde, Mauritius is also a major port of call for cruise ships, a reality that stands in stark juxtaposition to both its historical role in the slave trade and its present socioeconomic inequalities. As Mauritius was uninhabited prior to the arrival of the Dutch in the late sixteenth century, Mauritians have no pre-colonial history to claim as their own (Hawkins, 2007 and 2008). At the same time, the designation of the island as the "Mauritian Miracle" and the "African Tiger," are both references to seemingly positive responses to substantial foreign investment after the third International Monetary Fund (IMF) restructuring program in 1980 and the World Bank's first structural adjustment loan in 1981 (Hand, 2011).

Like Cabo Verde, the Mauritian Creole people and culture have evolved as the ironic dual outcome of oppression and diversification, the latter ultimately yielding a type of cosmopolitanism. For some, especially Creole intellectuals, this cosmopolitanism character-

izes “the politics of Creole intellectuals who, whether during colonial times or in our current postcolonial times, projected themselves onto the world from their particular position” (Verges, 2001, p. 169).

For others, such as anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell, creolization in Mauritius is the product of distortions by outsiders that Mauritians have internalized, thus resulting in a type of homogenization of Creole identity, with the aim of enhancing participation in Mauritius’ pluralistic society (Boswell, 2006, p. xx).

These various interpretations of Creole identity in Cabo Verde and Mauritius point to the microcosmic nature of these and other islands, a key characteristic that IR generally overlooks. The nature of islands is such that their inhabitants experience the opportunities for reflection that self-containment affords, while nevertheless maintaining a constant awareness of their own limits. Furthermore, the undermining of identity wrought by colonization and the slave trade, as well as by enslavement, lends itself to a determination to create and recognize an identity as a means of survival. Thus, the Creole island identity is both strongly rooted and aware of its outside influences.

Part of the reason for IR’s lack of attention to islands in general and the aforementioned identity element in particular is that, until relatively recently, IR theories were centered on the Westphalian sovereign state. Even liberalism, which directly counters the concept of the state as the primary unit of analysis, reacts to realism in a way that overlooks the nuances of culture. Similarly, while Marxism challenges both realism and liberalism with its focus on

class struggle, its argument for universality again marginalizes cultural differences.

Constructivist and feminist theories, both of which are relatively recent and arguably still in formative stages, focus much more on the role of culture, and thus are valuable approaches to a more complex examination of islands, including small island nations, as historically pivotal and present microcosms of diversity and socioeconomic inequalities that mirror so much of the world.

GRAND STRATEGY BASED ON NEUTRALITY AND NORM SETTING: THE CASE OF MALTA

Situated directly in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta has been at the crossroads of empires for centuries, beginning with the arrival of the Phoenicians in 1,200-1,000 BCE. The Order of the Knights of Malta, who established headquarters on the island from 1530 to 1798, endowed the island with a legacy of medical excellence that, along with its strategic location, brought it to prominence during both world wars (Klieger, 2011, pp. 124-125). In view of its strategic importance, Great Britain administered Malta as a colony from 1813 until its independence in 1964, though home rule was granted in 1921. The island’s prominence in military strategy was matched by its reputation for excellent hospitals, a legacy of The Order of the Knights (p. 127). Further exemplifying its strategic importance, two sieges indelibly mark Malta’s history: the Great Siege in 1565, and the Siege of Malta in World War II. In both cases the purpose was the same: to gain control of the Mediterranean Sea. In 1565, the Ottoman Empire at-

tempted to conquer Malta, then administered by the Knights Hospitaller. The Knights were estimated to reach 500 in number with an additional 6,000 foot soldiers when the Ottoman troops attacked the island between May 18 and September 11, 1565. The Knights' success in repelling the Ottoman forces contributed to a reappraisal of the perceptions of Ottoman invincibility. In World War II, Malta became a base from which Axis supply lines to North Africa could be intercepted by using submarines, surface vessels, in addition to aircraft. In 1941, nearly 7,000 tons of bombs fell on the island, and in September 1943, the Italian navy surrendered (Allen, 2017; Bradford, 1999; Klieger, 2011; Rothman, 2007).

Malta joined the United Nations in 1964 and the Council of Europe in 1965. Originally adopting a pro-Western security approach, as of 1971 it began a transition toward the position of neutrality and non-alignment that characterizes its foreign policy to this day. During the Cold War, Malta relied on its non-alignment status to allow it to maintain an equal distance from both the United States and the Soviet Union (Pace in Baldacchino, 2020).

The fact that Malta has been able to assert its strategic neutrality and non-alignment as a grand strategy as it “maintained and maximized by positioning itself as a regional interlocutor (Mediterranean bridge) and honest broker of international conflict” (Briffa, 2018) points to the efficacy that small states can exert, especially if they can optimize favorable conditions. In fact, their smallness and relatively low profile, except in the case of acute crisis such as civil war or natural disaster, can serve them well when implementing a policy that

is, in the words of Briffa, “pursued through institutional binding, soft power branding and utility maximization” (Briffa, 2018).

Still, the importance of context, and the precarity associated with an unfavorable context, cannot be understated. In the words of Malta expert Roderick Pace, “That Malta's neutrality has not been seriously challenged may not owe a lot to these risky arrangements [in establishing neutrality and non-alignment], but to good fortune that its neutrality has never been seriously challenged. The main point is that all courses open to small states have their own unintended consequences and there is certainly no completely safe shelter” (Pace in Baldacchino, 2020, p. 144).

For the benefit of IR scholarship, Malta's experience is valuable, in that it exemplifies different interpretations of power. Powerful sovereign states seek to maximize power in an effort to ensconce and even universalize their global reach, whether militarily, economically, or culturally. Conversely, small sovereign states such as Malta are keenly aware of their limits in this regard. Yet, they are also keenly aware of what they can offer in terms of geostrategic location, a commitment to neutrality, and a willingness to showcase the interests and objectives of their larger counterparts, as long as those counterparts maintain a position of goodwill toward them. Thus, although the grand strategies of small sovereign states are constrained, especially during times of domestic or international turmoil, or other adverse conditions that they are too small and vulnerable to conquer, they can nevertheless transcend some of these obstacles through a stance of neutrality rather than belligerence or aggression (Briffa, 2020).

To date, the field of IR remains dominated by conventional associations of power, including size, economic wealth, and military strength. While these interpretations remain salient, the security experience of sovereign states like Malta shows that they are not exclusive.

In addition to a strategy of neutrality, Malta has effectively navigated its negotiations into European Union membership in a way that has optimized its interests. For example, Malta's approach to gaining EU membership was to use its smallness to justify special treatment (Pace, 2002). Ultimately, it was able to achieve four key outcomes that work to its advantage. First, the EU accepted Maltese as one of its official languages, a substantive refutation of the domestic anti-membership contingent that had campaigned on the premise that Maltese would not be accepted as an official EU language. Second, Malta was permitted to retain permanent legislation limiting the acquisition of secondary residences by foreigners, based on the island's limited land area and high population density. Third, while Maltese citizens have completely unrestricted access across the EU, Malta was able to secure a seven-year transitional arrangement upon accession that allows it to impose safeguards unilaterally on the right of EU citizens to seek employment in Malta. Following the seven years, Malta may approach the EU for a remedy if needed, and restrictions on non-EU nationals may continue. Finally, the EU conceded the administration of a 24-nautical mile conservation zone to Malta in order to help conserve fish stocks. Furthermore, the EU authorized Malta to manage fishing in a designated area beyond the traditional 12-mile zone, which

traditionally has been the exclusive domain of Malta's fishing industry. The EU has also awarded Malta special consideration regarding its agrarian sector, though with the cautionary note that this allowance should not be taken as a precedent (Pace, 2002).

The importance of small island states like Malta to the study of IR rests with their uniqueness and their ability not only to survive but to thrive through adopting different interpretations of power than those normally associated with foreign policy analysis, or with most conventional IR theories. Just as more recent constructivist and feminist theories can prove valuable to understanding the Creole identities of such islands as Cabo Verde and Mauritius, such theories, especially constructivism, can enlighten IR studies in explaining the foreign policy decisions and behavior of such countries as Malta. Unfortunately, again, both smallness and island status have marginalized these countries in IR research and pedagogy. Conversely, increased attention to examples such as Malta can clarify and strengthen these newer theoretical approaches, thus providing a positive response to criticisms that they are not sufficiently refined. Approaching IR in this way underscores the dialectical nature of islands, and also the dialectical relationship between theory and phenomena that theory is designed to explain.

STRENGTH IN ISOLATION: THE SMALLEST ISLANDS OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AND COVID-19

On September 20, 2020, Koryo Tours posted a blog listing 12 countries that to date had

reported no cases of COVID-19. Of these, all but two were small South Pacific islands: the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu, Nauru. Six days earlier, on September 14, 2020, Al-Jazeera had presented a similar list (Prashasti, 2020; von Boom, 2020). Through the height of the pandemic, these small South Pacific island countries harnessed their sovereignty to close borders with little concern about transparency, and to impose restrictions with little resistance from their inhabitants, because they all recognized their extreme vulnerability should even one COVID-19 case emerge. These islands are isolated from each other and much of the rest of the world, but with little in the way of safety valves, either in terms of territory or resources. Although dependent on imports and tourism, the degree to which this is true is far less than for most countries. For example, in its article about countries with no reported cases of COVID-19 as of mid-September 2020, Koryo Tours described the Solomon Islands as “amongst one of the least visited countries in the world,” and Tuvalu, as “often known as one of, if not the, least visited country in the world,” with fewer than 200 tourists annually entering the island. It described Nauru as “a country so small that you can walk around it in one day. Along with Tuvalu, it holds the record for being one of the least visited countries in the world” (Koryogroup, 2020). Territorially, Nauru is the world’s smallest republic and the world’s third smallest country after the theocracy of Vatican City and the principality of Monaco. With a population of 12,704, it is the

world’s second smallest country demographically after Vatican City.

While *isolationism*, especially when practiced by larger countries, is both a very deliberate and much deliberated ideology, *isolation* is normally seen as an unfortunate geographic condition that alienates the isolated from serious IR scholarship. When the geographically isolated do receive IR’s attention, it is usually in response to a perceived or actual crisis. Otherwise, overgeneralization of a given region and a portrayal of its inhabitants as victims are the norm.

For the South Pacific during COVID-19, this portrayal was at least temporarily reversed, as small South Pacific islands turned their vulnerability into resolute endurance through strict and comprehensive lockdowns. Meanwhile, the larger, powerful actors for the most part recorded unprecedented numbers of COVID-19 cases. Furthermore, given territorial and demographic size, as well as high levels of diversity and mobility and more potential for dissent even in countries with strong levels of civic trust, restrictions were either harder to enforce or did not prevent recurrences of the pandemic.

South Pacific islands have dealt with geographic remoteness for centuries, including during colonization. Understanding the role geographic isolation plays constitutes the counterpart to the often-addressed phenomenon of geostrategic location and warrants more research. Another dimension characteristic of many South Pacific islands is a governance for which Westphalian concepts have little relevance. Rather, the demographics of society take precedence over territory, which can

trace its origins to the Westphalian system and has continued to define IR and comparative politics studies.

Marist priest, theologian and scholar Andrew SM Murray has contended that the Aristotelian concept of political society is much more relevant to most South Pacific island nations than the Westphalian template that has formed the cornerstone of IR. As he explains:

In contemporary political and academic discourse, one often hears the terms ‘weak state’ or ‘failed state’. Leaders of Pacific countries are discomforted but also legitimately annoyed when those terms are applied to their own countries. On the one hand, most of these countries are not and probably cannot become the great economic models that are so much a part of the modern world, and that sustain larger and more powerful states. There is often dissatisfaction in such countries with how services are delivered and confusion about what centralized government should achieve for national life. On the other hand, leaders in the Pacific can point out that in their countries people do not for the most part go hungry, or remain unhoused as they might do in Sydney or London or New York. People are connected to their clans and on fertile islands they can easily grow food. Their annoyance is however, justified, because the ‘weak state’ criticism makes the assumption that small states, and Pacific states in particular, should become instances of the Modern European State. (Murray, 2016, p. 1)

While Murray acknowledges the problems with Aristotelian philosophy regarding what constitutes a true democracy, he nevertheless sees the Aristotelian political community, which evolves from the household or family and the village, as a more accurate and com-

prehensible form of political organization than the Modern European State.

This, in turn, presents a major obstacle to IR theory, which for all of the rebuttals and alternatives to realism—and later structural realism—still recognize the Westphalian state as the basic legitimate political unit. Even the liberal world order that upholds the benefits of regional and global integration does so on the basis of sovereign Westphalian states. Marxism and other bodies of critical theory point to class rather than legal or political boundaries as the defining factor of world order; yet the isolation and necessary self-sufficiency of small South Pacific islands causes Marxism and other critical theories also to have limited relevance. Rather, IR needs new theories that reflect systems of governance not based on the Westphalian state.

Particularly applicable to the South Pacific is the *wantok* system, meaning a network of relationships and obligations found especially in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Melanesia, but in other parts of the South Pacific as well. As Murray notes, “The terms ‘*wantok*’ and ‘*wantok system*’ occur surprisingly infrequently in the academic literature. When they do occur, they are often used in parentheses and with reference to difficulties experienced in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, such as failures of development projects or corruption in government. In common speech, however, the terms are ubiquitous and display a wide range of meanings and elicit a wide range of feelings” (Murray, 2016, p. 19). The *wantok* system has found its way into commercial interest and modern technology; *wantok moni* is a method of transferring money

using a mobile phone, and Air Niugini offers “*wantok* fares” (pp. 10-32).

The system is not without problems, especially in the context of rapid change and globalization. Many see it as synonymous with nepotism, and sometimes the outcomes of tradition are harmful. Examples include receiving medicine from a *wantok* instead of a doctor, or cases of domestic violence being excused under the *wantok* system. As Murray explains, “The issue here is change and, in fact, momentous change. A system that worked well for small, closed communities living in tightly defined geographical areas is challenged when it is drawn into a developing political system that embraces many peoples and that has to deal with imported ideas, technologies and economies” (Murray, 2016, p. 21). Therefore, “The political question is, how do you construct a constitution and institutions in a way that recognizes the networks of relationships that are already working in the country?” (p. 25).

The challenge is to understand the philosophical underpinnings of such communities, just as we in the West—and subsequently throughout most of the world for those with access to formal education—have been trained to understand the philosophical underpinnings of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. To do so makes the study of IR truly international, both by including traditional systems of government and governance in pedagogy, and recognizing that those systems themselves are international, with distinct features in different countries, just as our North American and European political cultures shape our better-known systems of government and governance.

SOVEREIGNTY AND ITS CHALLENGES: ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS AND CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT

Despite its status as a cornerstone of international relations and foreign policy, sovereignty has never been sacrosanct. Two types of sovereignty dominate the behavior of countries. The first is the provision of international legal sovereignty, which maintains that international recognition should be accorded only to juridically independent sovereign states. Most sovereign states uphold this principle; however, what happens in a case in which such recognition neither matters to a given entity, nor impedes it from conducting what could be considered foreign policy? The next section on the artificial island of Sealand illustrates this phenomenon. The second type of sovereignty is that based on the Westphalian state system established in 1648, which maintains that sovereign states have the right to exclude intervention from entities outside their borders. This principle, as Krasner and others have shown, has been much more provisional since the nineteenth century, and that provisional nature continues today (Krasner, 1999). While there may be numerous interventions that exemplify this trend, the example chosen for this article is that of citizenship by investment (CBI), especially where the practice began, in some of the smallest sovereign states of the Caribbean region. This section follows that on Sealand.

Sealand

As stated in the previous paragraph, the principle of international legal sovereignty, which

states that only juridically independent sovereign states should receive international recognition from other such sovereign states, as well as intergovernmental bodies and other official entities, is generally upheld. For this reason, recognition counts as a sign of legitimacy in the international sphere. In addition, the refusal to recognize one of two or more entities in conflict, *e.g.*, Taiwan and China, can be used as a tool of coercion. What happens, however, when this type of sovereignty is nullified altogether? Artificial islands such as Sealand offer one example of how this may come about, given the unlikelihood of recognizing an artificial island as a sovereign state. This lack of recognition curtails acceptable international activity. The difference in the case of Sealand, however, is that Sealand's self-appointed head of what he named as a principality essentially disavowed such legal recognition as necessary. Moreover, in the case of Sealand, adherence to the principle of international legal sovereignty on the part of other entities does little to curtail Sealand's self-appointed autonomy. The fact that Sealand is out of Great Britain's legal territorial limits has prevented Great Britain and other sovereign entities from halting its activities. As a result, Sealand has functioned as a hub for extra-jurisdictional activities, as well as for other entities lacking international recognition, the outcome of which is a multiplier effect in which sovereignty has no meaning and thus is not needed to underscore legitimacy.

The entirety of Sealand consists of a man-made platform six miles off the coast of Suffolk, England, which was built by the British during World War II. Since its construction, it has served as a center for unregulated broad-

casting, gambling, and the website domain for the Tibetan government in exile. It is often called a "micronation," defined as "an invented country within a territory of an established nation when boundaries typically go unrecognized on the world stage" (Taylor-Lehman, 2020, p. 1). The term "micronation" distinguishes entities such as Sealand from that of a "microstate," which is recognized according to the principle of international legal sovereignty, often including membership in the United Nations and other world bodies. Taylor-Lehman notes, however, that some consider the term "micronation" inadequate to encapsulate Sealand's scope of autonomous activity (p. 1).

British civil engineer Guy Maunsell designed Sealand, along with other platforms known as the Maunsell Sea Forts, during World War II. Its purpose was to guard the nearby port of Harwich from German attack. During the 1960s, pirate broadcasters occupied the Maunsell Sea Forts, which were abandoned after the war. These pirate radio stations were established to avoid expensive licensing fees in the United Kingdom and were able to garner large audiences and profit from advertising (Klieger, 2011, pp. 197-198).

In 1966, Paddy Roy Bates, a pirate broadcaster who had served as a British army major in World War II, removed the staff that had occupied what was then known as Roughs Tower, later Sealand. On August 14, 1967, the United Kingdom passed the Marine Broadcasting Offenses Act, which prohibited broadcasting from such sea platforms. On September 2 of the same year, Bates declared Roughs Tower independent, named it the Principality of Sealand, and appointed himself as its monarch

(Klieger, 2011, p. 198). Despite Bates and his son Michael being summoned to court on weapons charges, since they had fired warning rounds in defiance of the United Kingdom's attempts to remove them, the court ultimately ruled that Sealand lay outside the United Kingdom's territorial jurisdiction.

As for Roy Bates, he stated that the principality was founded on the "principle that any group of people dissatisfied with the oppressive laws and restriction of existing national states may declare independence in any place not claimed to be under the jurisdiction of another sovereign entity" (Sealandgov.org, cited in Klieger, 2011, p. 198). Bates further engaged the old "law of the high seas" to support the basis of Sealand's alleged *de jure* status, and furthermore contended that court action and official negotiations on the subject of Sealand, both in Germany and the United Kingdom, constituted *de facto* recognition (p. 198). The Territorial Sea Act of 1987 extended the United Kingdom's territorial sea boundary from three to 12 nautical miles. Sealand almost immediately followed suit by extending its own territorial waters 12 nautical miles, and further claimed that its sovereignty was established prior to the change in the British law. Therefore, enforcement of the new law by United Kingdom forces would be considered a violation of Sealand territory and an act of war (p. 200).

Beginning in 2000, Sealand became more involved in unregulated broadcasting, including use by the Tibetan government in exile, since the Dalai Lama was prevented from undertaking political activity while in exile in India.

On June 23, 2006, a fire destroyed Sealand's offices and primary power generator; however, by 2007, damages were repaired, and the platform was offered for transfer, on the premise that a principality cannot be sold. To date, the Bates family continues to administer the island as a sovereign principality.

Sealand's narrative is one of self-appointed autonomy through action. As analyst Roy Smith has explained, "Sealand was founded on territory that was in genuinely international waters and has endured since 1967. All the while, the Sealanders have fought to keep those claims alive in ways unmatched by most other micronations" (Smith, 2008, p. 270). The question for IR scholarship is, to what extent is self-asserted autonomy a direct refutation of legal sovereignty, such that the latter loses importance in affirming international legitimacy? If Sealand's only questionable activities are those that may be resolved by confirming its location outside the United Kingdom's legal control, and if the artificial island does not intervene in the affairs of sovereign states, and in fact offers to such entities as the Tibetan government in exile a way to carry out what could be called national activities, should Sealand not receive more substantive attention in IR?

Returning to the scope of the article, Sealand's designation as an island, especially a small island, forms the basis for such proactive autonomy. Sealand does not compete for territory; on the contrary, it stands as an anomalous rejection, at least for its own purposes, of the prerequisites in international law to be declared a sovereign state. Sealand eschews the benefits, such as membership in international organizations that this status would allow,

and furthermore has the capacity to extend its own alternative to governments in exile or any entity that is unable or unwilling to conform to these standards of international law. Yet, as long as it is not found guilty of human rights violations, illicit trafficking, or violence, it is unlikely to be confronted. It maintains control of its own destiny by rejecting the framework within which most sovereign states operate, and thus conducts its affairs apart from, but not necessarily in violation of, most international norms. As *Atlantic* journalist Ian Urbina has expressed it, “Britain once controlled a vast empire over which the sun never set, but it’s been unable to control a rogue micronation barely bigger than the main ballroom in Buckingham Palace” (*Atlantic* 2018, p. 201).

As IR analysis usually begins with sovereignty as its point of departure, non-sovereign entities have become an afterthought and are assumed dependent on sovereign states—a clear example being overseas departments. Sealand rejects sovereignty for itself, and therefore, the value of sovereignty also becomes marginal and even nonexistent. Self-endowed autonomy thus supersedes sovereignty in importance, and autonomy occurs through action rather than recognition by others.

CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT IN THE SMALL ISLAND COUNTRIES OF THE EAST CARIBBEAN

Citizenship by Investment Programs (CIP or CBI) are a means whereby a sovereign country grants citizenship to a non-citizen in exchange for a significant economic contribution. CBI programs are of three types: financial donation, real estate, and investment. Donations

are typically deposited in the recipient country’s treasury or a national development fund for the purpose of underwriting development projects. The real estate option, which tends to appeal most to individuals, involves the purchase of property that may be sold after a time agreeable to both parties. The investment option normally covers the purchase of a redeemable financial investment as government security. All Caribbean CBI programs are distinguished from those of Europe by the absence of a residency requirement. More than 20 countries engage in CBI; this article focuses only on the five smallest islands of the East Caribbean region, namely, Saint Kitts and Nevis, the first to adopt CBI, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Lucia, the last to adopt CBI.

More research on CBI is definitely warranted. A recent comprehensive, investigative journalistic analysis of CBI by the Caribbean Independent News Agency has concluded that, despite overall economic benefits, transparency and accountability continue to be key areas of concern. Information on the number of applicants for, and recipients of, citizenship and its benefits varies according to individual islands, but is inadequate overall. Questions surrounding the pressure for greater transparency and accountability include: (1) the extent to which names of applicants may be publicized, as well as to whom they should be publicized, without jeopardizing the program; (2) the criteria to distinguish what can be considered public revenue from direct foreign investment; and (3) the terms of mandatory disclosure from audits and the frequency with

which financial reports should be submitted to the countries' legislatures (Gonzalez, 2022).

Despite the lack of sufficient oversight and regular audits, the importance of CBI funds to small Eastern Caribbean islands is undisputed, a reality that leaves the region in a precarious state following the European Union's (EU's) warning that CBI programs should be terminated. To allay the EU's concerns at least partially, as well to manifest a public display of solidarity with Ukraine, Caribbean countries have stopped CBI applications originating from Russia and Belarus. CBI funds comprise as much as 40 percent of some islands' overall revenue; still, the degree and manner in which the citizens of those countries benefit from the revenue remains a subject of concern and controversy. For example, Saint Kitts and Nevis, which pioneered CBI in 1984, has been criticized for containing loopholes in its CBI legislation, which result in only a few cases proving profitable, especially in real estate, where some applicants receive their passports prior to completion of projects (Gonzalez, 2022). Similar concerns have arisen regarding CBI in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Dominica, all of which depend heavily on CBI funds for infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and in the case of Dominica, a major airport. Allen Chastanet, the former Prime Minister and current Opposition leader of Saint Lucia, the last of the Eastern Caribbean islands to adopt CBI, stated that the deeply embedded nature of CBI in the Caribbean region left Saint Lucia with little choice but to follow suit:

Whether St. Lucia had a CIP or not, it was in the CIP, because we were a part of the

Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) union, and we had St. Kitts (and Nevis), we had Antigua (and Barbuda), we had Dominica, we had Grenada, so for many years there were examples of persons coming from China who got citizenship in Dominica and by virtue of being a citizen in Dominica, had free access to our market, so in essence, we were already in the CIP program. When we opened it, what we wanted to do was different (Gonzales, 2022).

That difference was the introduction of an assessment by an independent auditing firm as part of its reporting process. However, to compensate for a potentially lesser appeal, Saint Lucia lowered its entry cost. Chastanet has further recommended that all of the Caribbean region's CBI programs be placed under the administration of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as a means of further increasing credibility with the European Union. Saint Lucia also became the first in the region to include a government bond investment option.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The preceding pages have presented several examples of the way in which small island countries, as well as artificial islands, form a dialectic that is valuable—indeed, necessary—to a more complex and comprehensive study of IR. By virtue of their geographical location and resources, including peoples whom colonizers enslaved and traded, African islands such as Cabo Verde and Mauritius are microcosms of conquest and subjugation, but also the birthplaces of multiple identities

and a Creole cosmopolitanism. Thus, they are *antithetical* to the concept of islands as self-contained entities off the coast (literally) and on the sidelines of larger powers. The *synthesis* of this dialectic is a recognition of centers of commerce that have also evolved into centers of culture and cultural exchange. Malta's centrality has evolved somewhat differently, but again, Malta poses an antithesis to conventional concepts of power as rooted in size and military or economic strength. Although Malta's geostrategic importance brought it to the forefront during wartime (including at its own expense), even more noteworthy was its legacy of first-rate hospitals, which ironically were established by an order that eschewed territory and property ownership as more of a hindrance than an asset. Malta thus epitomizes a synthesis of norms and strategic neutrality as the ultimate outcomes of its use as a military base, and those outcomes are the cornerstone of Malta's grand strategy, which fundamentally departs from the premise of most grand strategies that emphasize that an increase of military and/or economic power is necessary to optimize national interest. The small islands of the South Pacific pose yet another antithesis, that of a sovereignty based more on Aristotelian concepts of society than on Westphalian legal demarcation. Functionally, this concept serves these islands particularly well in times of pandemic and accompanying global economic downturns, as they not only benefit from remoteness and isolation, but have independent survival systems in place. This is not to suggest that this arrangement will sustain these islands in the long term, for they are as interconnected to the global economy as their counterparts.

Rather, it presents yet another synthesis, an example of a larger concept of sovereignty than conventionally discussed, and also introduces the concept of geographical isolation as a potential asset, depending on regional and global context. International implies connected; yet at times the disconnected is also salient.

Finally, two challenges to sovereignty are the creation and operation of artificial islands and the practice of citizenship by investment (CBI). The former is an antithesis to conventional IR by essentially dismissing the need for sovereignty as defined by international law. Rather, self-appointed heads of artificial islands such as Sealand establish a type of sovereignty by exercising autonomy. This, of course, can present great risks to international security, but at the same time, in a world in which non-state actors are increasingly proliferate and active, artificial islands can also present an antidote to harmful non-state activity. Similarly, CBI both contributes greatly to small island economies and also circumvents the classic tenets of citizenship that help to maintain international order. Both artificial islands and CBI are based on norms that do not require traditional sovereignty to operate. In this way they are clearly antithetical to current IR, yet their potential synthesis has yet to be realized.

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