

Come visit, but don't overstay: critiquing a welcoming society

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to conceptualize and illustrate how some island societies – in spite of their apparent openness, vibrant tourist economies and generally welcoming disposition – develop exclusionary attitudes to a range of immigrants, resulting in effective limits to their much vaunted hospitality culture.*

Design/methodology/approach – *In the context of a global review, the paper reports a qualitative study of immigrant experiences and perceptions from 2005 empirical survey data, as well as the personal observations of the author on Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest and only fully island province.*

Findings – *While the bonding social capital of island communities tends to be strong, their bridging social capital tends to be weak. Other aspects of island life – including perceptions of smallness, affirmation of island identity, high population density, gentrification, the threat of invasion and the fear of the other – impact on the interaction of the "come heres" with the "from heres". The paper shows divisions in islander attitudes between (short-term stay) tourists and (longer-term stay) immigrants in sharp relief.*

Research limitations/implications – *This analysis queries research assumptions about service, hospitality and tourism and provides a conceptual framework for the dynamics of visitation to island destinations.*

Practical implications – *These findings critique service quality, relationship management and attitudes to potential clients.*

Originality/value – *The paper connects immigration research to attitudes to tourism, using an island studies lens as its analytical tool and provides an insightful view of the contested dynamics of place, notions of hospitality and exclusion.*

Keywords *Islands, Invasion, Prince Edward Island, Welcoming society, Come from away, Tourism, Immigration*

Paper type *Case study*

1. Prologue

I've built walls.
A fortress deep and mighty.
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.
Its laughter and its loving I disdain.
I am a rock, I am an Island (Simon and Garfunkel, 1965).

Islands have become the quintessential and most evocative tourist locales (Baum, 1996; Baum *et al.*, 2000; King, 1993; Gössling and Wall, 2007). They are amongst the world's most penetrated tourism destinations (McElroy, 2006). Small populations, limited land area, limited land to coast ratio, and typically high population densities exacerbate their penetrability. No wonder that some islanders have reacted negatively to tourism, even though they realize that the industry is a crucial contributor to their economic well-being

(Boissevain, 1996). Revealingly, both the irritation index (or irridex) developed by Doxey (1975) and the self-destruct theory of tourism proposed by Holder (1988), were developed from fieldwork in the island Caribbean.

Most islanders have developed a sanguine accommodation to short-term visitors, who arguably add value to the local economy. With the increasing popularity of cruise ship tourism, the meaning of short-term visitors has taken a new meaning in recent years, and redefined in terms of hours. However, these same islanders can find themselves generally uncomfortable, suspicious, if not hostile to longer-term sojourners. These can even include returning islanders who often find out that they may have become foreigners in/to their own island, and treated with some suspicion by the entrenched locals (e.g. King and Strachan, 1980). The dynamics of weak bridging social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000) or weak social ties (Granovetter, 1973) come into play to exclude, often subtly, these longer term sojourners from integrating fully into the island way of life, acting also as tacit mechanisms for confirming and locking their status as visitors and therefore implicitly encouraging them to leave and relocate. The effects of gentrification (Clark *et al.*, 2007; Marjavaara, 2007; Jackson, 2007), and the threat of invasion, ride over and feed into the fear of the other, developing a nervousness between the insiders who are from here and the outsiders or others who are from away (King and Connell, 1999). These tensions emerge from ethnographic studies of such island communities as Grand Manan Island (in New Brunswick, Canada) and Whalsay (in Shetland, Scotland) (see Marshall, 1999, 2003, and Cohen, 1987, respectively).

This paper fleshes out these dynamics with particular reference to an island jurisdiction even as its provincial government promotes a proactive immigration strategy to increase its population (PEI Population Secretariat, 2008). Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest and only fully enisled province, and since 2003 is the author's home.

2. Definitional messiness

For all their beguiling geographical simplicity, islands are notoriously difficult to define. An island is not just any piece of land surrounded by water, since minimal and maximal size thresholds, tidal effects and the presence of any fixed links are considerations which invariably play a role in determining the validity of certain candidates for that status (e.g. Depraetere and Dahl, 2007; Baldacchino, 2007). An even more daunting raft of ambiguities concerns the definition of islander. While many do take pride in the fact of having been born and bred on a particular island, most of today's islanders can trace their lineage to ancestors who were not.

Even before the wave of European colonization, life on many islands, especially the smaller ones, was often only possible, paradoxically, because of the ability to leave them (Newitt, 1992, p. 11). Moreover, most islanders increasingly spend time off their island: in other parts of their island territory (in the case of archipelagos); and, increasingly, in metropolitan (and continental) heartlands for work, business, shopping, education, adventure, self-discovery, escape, exile and/or settlement. Emigration is often the only viable exit option to the pervasive and stifling totality, monopoly and intimacy of the local socio-cultural environment (Baldacchino, 1997). Few islanders have never been away; and, at any point in time, a significant percentage of an island population may be away at its respective metropole (Lowenthal, 1987, pp. 41-3).

Migration characterizes islands and islanders (Connell, 2007, p. 455). Islanders have a higher propensity to migrate to developed countries (Connell and King, 1999). For various island households, migration becomes a strategic resource, since offspring sent away can be expected to inject remittances, in cash or in kind, into the home economy: in some instances (such as Cape Verde, the Philippines, Samoa and Tonga), these fiscal injections are significant contributions to the island jurisdiction's gross national product (Ahlburg and Brown, 1998). In more recent times, thanks to the general popularization of air travel and the improved security of international and cross-boundary travel – albeit with some dramatic exceptions – migration to and from islands has taken a different tack, since people can now enjoy the increasing possibility of living in, and also becoming a citizen of, more than one place/country. That some 90 countries allow dual citizenship is indicative (CBC News, 2006).

Of course, this also means that the definition of an islander is increasingly blurred. Currently, eligibility to vote, if also defined by physical presence, is contestable. The life histories of small islanders, meticulously documented, reveal a complex juggling of the pros and cons of home and away. Isaac Caines, from the Caribbean island of St Kitts (profiled in Richardson, 1983, pp. 54-55), Kawagl, from the Melanesian South Pacific ([Brookfield, 1972, pp. 167-168](#)), and Marshy, a Jamaican street vendor ([Wardle, 2002](#)), all demonstrate an uncanny skill in the economies and temporalities of scope (as against scale), which include entrepreneurship and flexible specialization, both at home and abroad.

These islanders are examples of today's nomads or transnationals, a specific pattern of de-territorialized and cross-boundary migration that challenges the concept of the temporality and spatiality of homeness ([Duval, 2004](#); [Hatziprokopiou, 2004](#); Vertovec, 2001) as well as the boundaries and sovereignty of states. They are glocals, being both global and local in orientation (Connell and King, 1999, p. 2; Jolly, 2001), exploiting both roots and routes ([Clifford, 1997](#); DeLoughrey, 2007). As with many contemporary knowledge professionals who move around wherever their work may take them (e.g. Ó Riain, 2000), the island periphery as a finite place is reinvented and reimagined as a platform for sorties into the wider world. As, for example, in Newfoundland and Labrador:

With the call of big money jobs in Alberta, thousands of workers from the province have taken to commuting back and forth across the country, for weeks or months at a time (Porter, 2007).

3. Islander engagement with visitors

Strange therefore, that islanders may acknowledge the virtues of mobility as they apply to themselves, but disapprove once they are applied or extended to others. Strange that they may value their own glocality (after [Robertson, 1995](#)), but then can become concerned, fiercely nationalistic or xenophobic when considering others as glocal by spending considerable time on their own island turf. Such an intrusion is an (other) invasion: seen as unfair and unjustifiable, and a threat to the fragile island fabric. This is a fragility enhanced by unease with globalization, a love-hate relationship with their inevitable cultural and economic openness, and a real concern with the implications of additional sojourners in the context of what is seen as a zero-sum resource game.

And so, resident islanders tend to enjoy and sustain a mythology that suggests a clear and pure local identity. They could easily share such an affinity with those others who have emigrated from the island periphery and who revisit the island under some guise or other: as tourists, as secondary residents, as retirees. Former islanders who have made their home elsewhere but visit their former island home, as well as non-islanders who shuttle between island and non-island homes, can all be easily considered as tourists, especially when they behave as such. These tourists will also stand out from the general tourist noise: they tend to spend more time visiting and staying with locals, they are more reluctant to frequent commercialized tourist products as well as shun hotels and motels. The duration of their stay is typically longer, and they are environmentally friendlier. Still, sooner or later, they will leave. As long as they leave their money in the host economy, their presence is tolerable. At worst, they raise the price of property and may displace permanent residents by their demand for retirement or second homes: some island jurisdictions (such as Åland, Bermuda, Galápagos, Jersey and Malta) have legislation in place meant to prevent such from happening, or to mitigate its impact; while others (especially in the South Pacific) are shielded from this dynamic because of the communal ownership of land ([Baldacchino, 2006a, p. 858](#)).

Tourists tend to be defined by their relatively short stay in the country of visitation. Once the length of stay starts to increase, and tends towards becoming open-ended, then such sojourners tend to be shifted by the locals to another category: that of newcomers, settlers, or those come from away (CFA). Here the paper turns to illustrate some of these insider-outsider dynamics in a specific island context.

Of course, geography and history conspire to render islands differently suited for migration. On the basis of the typology suggested by Warrington and Milne (2007), island settlements

have featured prominently as sites of deliberate repopulation strategies; island entrepôts have acted as magnets for significant incoming and circulating population movements and diversity; while island fortresses appear better suited at keeping newcomers away. Connell and King (1999, p. 3), echoing Churchill Semple (1911), observe that islands which find themselves at important crossroads – in a nodal location – tend to attract immigrants and may thus be challenged by overpopulation; whereas those which find themselves isolated, on the periphery, may find themselves better adept at sending people away and may suffer stagnant, ageing and or declining populations in the outcome.

In this paper, reviews a peripheral island exemplary: Prince Edward Island. An Islander can be born, and only be born, on PEI – once an islander, always an islander. There is no other way of securing that status; and, once secured, the standing cannot be lost. Anyone else is a CFA (come from away). This is a practice rampant in Atlantic Canada, of which PEI is one of four provinces, as well as parts of the North-Eastern USA. The practice documents a host clannishness that, while not meant to be malicious or exclusionary, nevertheless can turn out to be so in its consequences, thus effectively shuts out, and thwarts immigrants from settling down and integrating in their new island community. An awareness of such a dynamic is important for a more holistic understanding of destination management strategies.

4. Failing to plug in

There is no such thing as a former Islander. When you are Island-born, you are one forever, no matter where you have to exist when you are not fortunate enough to be here (Dobson, 2008).

Like the other three Atlantic Provinces of Canada (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia), PEI finds itself experiencing a very particular kind of immigration. Canada as a whole accepts some 250,000 immigrants annually; but less than 3 percent of these move to settle in the Atlantic Provinces; and of those who do, around half soon relocate west. Atlantic Canada is thus almost immune to the immigration phenomenon. Its mono-cultural fabric – White, Anglophone, Christian, Heterosexual (Baldacchino, 2006b, pp. 15-75) – left largely undisturbed. The condition makes for what Anthony D. Smith (1991) describes as an *ethnie*: a pre-national, ethno-cultural group that shares a collective name, a myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity.

In contrast, and reinforcing this cultural framework, Prince Edward Island is increasingly in the sights of Americans from New England priced out of beach houses at home. A dream house with 900 feet (272 metres) of seafront sold on PEI in September 2004 for a relatively affordable US\$229,000: around Cdn\$300,000 or €200,000 at the time (Tutelian, 2006). This increased demand from an affluent market is expected to exert upward pressure on the cost of property, especially that of secondary homes and coastal cottages. Already 15 percent of waterfront properties are owned by foreigners, even though the latter pay a higher property tax than all-year-round residents. The current credit crunch may bring a reprieve, but this is likely to be temporary.

In the autumn of 2005, I (myself a CFA) conducted a qualitative survey of recent settlers to Prince Edward Island: recent meaning those who had moved to the province with a view to settling there since 1998 and before 2003. The survey's main objective was to move beyond faceless statistics, identifying the real-life stories and narratives of why people had chosen to move to PEI, had chosen to stay, or else were planning to leave. Within three months, a snowballing strategy had identified 320 respondents who agreed to complete a questionnaire (either web-based or in hard copy) or else consented to being interviewed by the principal investigator or by trained graduate students (Baldacchino, 2006b).

A settler is not, however, the best way to describe the survey respondents. A fair amount of messiness was lurking in the survey database. To the frustration and chagrin of the social scientist, immigrants tend to constitute a fluid, mobile category. Some settlers, clearly, were not intent on settling. Some had come to settle on Prince Edward Island, left, and then decided to come back again. Some, especially the more affluent or entrepreneurial, were

living for one, two, four and up to eight months in the province, mainly in summer, every year. Other settlers reveal a willingness to consider moving to other destinations, if the right opportunity presented itself. Just over 11 percent of the 320 respondents to the 2005 study claimed to be actively planning to leave PEI (Baldacchino, 2006b, p. 7). Indeed, referring to 1991-2006 inter-census data, PEI has the second lowest provincial immigrant retention rate in the country: 51 percent of immigrants to PEI leave the province for good within two years of getting there. This proportion estimated to swell up to 75 percent in the case of refugees (Smith Green and Associates, 2001, p. 6).

A total of 35 of the surveyed recent immigrants to PEI have articulated the reasons why they claimed to be actively considering leaving the Island (no pre-selected categories were available in this exercise). The data below provide some interesting insights as to the welcoming capacity of the Prince Edward Island community (with its total population of 140,000 on 5,660 km²) and what is needed for an island periphery to hold on better, or longer, to those who do make the move to settle there (see Table I).

Surprisingly, the most common single explanation for the desire to relocate from the Island alleges that islanders are close-minded. Perceptions are that PEI society is a patronage driven, cliquist, conservative society in which who's your father is a more important detail than objective and certifiable skill and merit in advancing career and social mobility, privacy is eroded and gossip is rife. By virtue of not being part of this intricately webbed community – part of the survival package of islanders in the face of globalization – immigrants cannot, or are not allowed to, fit in. This condition may also be one of the reasons why they are forced to self-employment (Baldacchino and Fall, 2008). They feel distrusted and discriminated against; valued just for the money they inject into the local economy, and welcomed only as long as they are temporarily servicing the local labor market, starved of human resources:

I feel that, unless one is from PEI, he or she is looked down on. I have felt this while trying to gain and maintain employment. I have had employers tell me that they have received calls complaining about the hiring of someone from away in positions (respondent no. 100).

PEI doesn't treat people as persons who have potential or ability; they treat people as sub-categories, such as a daughter of this politician or important member of this party, etc. [...] So, people who came from outside have no possibility to get jobs, benefits or social trust (respondent no. 134).

Social life here is nearly non-existent; people are casually friendly, but most don't want you to invade their space. I have made one friend from amongst Islanders; all the others are from away (respondent no. 166).

I have found my extra education and skills of no value here. A case of not what you know but who's your Daddy [...] I have also found that Islanders are superficially friendly and welcoming. There is great prejudice to people from away that grows increasingly wearing as time goes on [...] (respondent no. 269).

Table I Reasons for actively planning to leave PEI

<i>Answers to Question 22: Are you actively planning to leave PEI? If Yes, why are you planning to leave PEI?</i>		<i>No. of responses</i>
<i>Reasons</i>		
Social	The close-mindedness of islanders and their attitude with regards to "Come From Aways"	20
Economic (1)	High taxes and more expensive cost of living (including bridge toll); unsuitable (e.g., seasonal) employment; relatively low wages and salaries	16
Economic (2)	Limited job prospects, impossibility to specialize and other career limitations	11
Cultural	Limited cultural programme and absence of multiculturalism	3
Other	Health care, education, insurance, winter, family, unspecified	10

Notes: Respondents = 35; various respondents offered more than one reason

Source: Baldacchino (2006b, pp. 40-1)

While some of these reactions are to be expected, the extent to which the clannishness of the host community acts as an obstacle to integration and an inducement to leave for those who do not belong is probably surprising. Those who come from away and settle best in peripheral areas may be actually those who were born and/or bred in those regions anyway, and who can connect with family and friends. Still, even though they may come without a history, they may find themselves easily dragged into that sterile, stifling partisan pettiness that may have been one of the reasons for their departure from the island in the first place (*The Economist*, 2003).

Apparently, for those who do take the risk and try and come over to settle in the periphery – including a growing swathe of urban refugees (Forsythe, 1980) – what is necessary is a better coming to terms with the intricate social network and *gemeinschaft* (community) type societies (after Tönnies, 2001), in which those who live on islands (as in remote rural communities) often grow up without much choice or notice, but which create serious difficulties of integration for those who are not from here. This condition can lead to tensions and conflicts in local politics involving those immigrants who stay nevertheless, but is just as likely to lead to exasperated newcomers, sooner or later, packing their bags and moving on, and thus reinforcing the uniformity of the local cultural space. Indeed, peripheral communities tend to be more mono-ethnic and mono-cultural than mainstream ones, making outsiders stand out even more. A strong cultural norm of sameness (Government of Prince Edward Island, 1999, p. 56), while rightfully celebrating distinctive identity, history and culture, becomes less open and attractive to those who are, are seen to be, or are made to feel, different.

Thus, island communities may be, and typically may think of themselves as being, very friendly and welcoming to visitors – and especially so in the context of a tourism industry. Yet, visitors may find connection and engagement with these communities problematic if they decide to extend their stay . . . perhaps indefinitely. As one respondent to the 2005 study insightfully opined:

Islanders seem to welcome people who come to visit for a short time and then leave with open arms, but are very guarded about people who come to stay (respondent no. 215).

5. Conclusion

Many choose to settle in Prince Edward Island because of the quality of life, slower tempo, affordable housing and friendly people. (PEI Population Secretariat, 2008)

The *topos* of an island appropriately conveys the complex relations between a given identity and the estrangement from this same identity (Bongie, 1998, p. 18). In its double identity of openness and closure, an island is on one hand rooted in tradition, isolation, culture and history; a place of refuge engulfed in claustrophobia whose only escape is exile (ex-isle). Still, at the same time, the island is well routed and connected to the world beyond via trade, migration, tourism, and biotic, cultural and material imports. Without these, the island life forms simply would not survive (Clifford, 1997; Baldacchino, 2004). While an island's geography speaks severance and insularity, its history speaks contact and articulation (Warrington and Milne, 2007). Much islander nervousness traces to this inescapable, difficult-to-admit dependency on what lies beyond the horizon.

Whether perched on cross-roads or peripheries, islanders must reconcile themselves to bearing glocal identities. Manifestations of xenophobia, banal nationalism, cultural idiosyncrasies, tight social bonding, superficial welcoming dispositions, even the invention of tradition, are perhaps attempts at reclaiming space otherwise felt to be fragile and susceptible to invasion and adulteration. No wonder islanders get nervous when those who come from away do not just come for a visit, but overstay.

Island fortresses today no longer try to repel the golden hordes (Turner, 1975). Instead, they welcome visitors as key contributors to their economies, obliged as many of these islands are to a dependency on external revenues. Hotels and restaurants have become major employers in many small island economies. The construction and real estate sectors have also thrived from this exogenous interest in places small, enisled and peripheral.

And yet, ebullient hospitality appears to have its limits. Islanders do not take to their new role in the global tourism industry passively, and not always kindly. Their acquiescence to play the economic game and reap its fiscal benefits can be contrasted by an uncanny (even if involuntary or implicit) ability to create inviolate social, cultural and even physical spaces in which the ubiquitous foreigner will not enter, or linger. Local languages and dialects, tight social networks and family-based community life are some of the strategies that present a modicum of localism, even whilst thoroughly penetrated by the global tourism industry, and its demands for service-oriented happy natives:

And a rock feels no pain;

And an island never cries (*I am a Rock, I am an Island*, Simon and Garfunkel, 1965).

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