

Response to the editorial on ‘Hearing Voices’

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Dear *Island Studies Journal*,

In his recent editorial, ‘Hearing voices: colonialism, outsider perspectives, island and Indigenous issues, and publishing ethics’ (<https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.54>), Adam Grydehøj misrepresents the position we take in our 2016 article ‘Critiquing the SNIJ hypothesis with Corsica and Hawai’i’ (<http://www.islandstudies.ca/sites/islandstudies.ca/files/ISJ-11-2-MS357-Androus+Greymorning.pdf>). A similar misrepresentation appeared in Grydehøj’s 2016 piece, ‘Navigating the binaries of island independence and dependence in Greenland: decolonisation, political culture, and strategic services’ (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.09.001>). In both cases he makes only general reference without citing specific passages: We write to request that he support his characterization with specific reference to the content of our article, or that he correct his statements. We elaborate in detail below.

We would like to acknowledge that both of us have met Adam, and that Zachary has gone on to work with him in other ways, while also continuing to collaborate with Neyooxet on a range of projects. All parties, in private correspondence, have reiterated their commitments to open scholarly exchange, their disavowal of any sense of maliciousness or nefariousness on anyone’s part, and their willingness to tolerate dissenting opinions. With that said, our intention here is not to open a discussion on the relative merits of our positions or on positionality itself. We are simply requesting either a direct citation or a correction.

In 2016, Adam cited us in passing as an example of scholars who “privilege narratives that cast pro-independence movements as the sole custodians of indigenous [sic] heritage” (p. 104). In his 2018 editorial, he further explained his position:

These authors argue that the empowerment provided by the kinds of creative practice of nonsovereignty advocated by some in island studies is illusory because any submission to metropolitan power structures denies an inalienable Indigenous sovereignty that demands political independence.

Although asserting an important point, Androus and Greymorning’s (2016) perspective ultimately narrows the scope for legitimate exercise of Indigenous sovereignty, with the argument boiling down to an insistence that Indigenous islanders are free to make any choices they want—just so long as their choices are the right ones (p. 5).

Clearly, Adam sees our position as one in which the only acceptable outcome for any given small island is independence, regardless of other considerations. In point of fact, we make no such claim; instead, we stress that narratives of choice *that fail to distinguish Indigenous from other island populations* need to do exactly that before any conclusions can be reached as to the relative benefits of affiliation versus independence. This is consistent with our main point, to

which we return throughout, namely that the SNIJ hypothesis privileges a narrow range of economic and demographic factors to the exclusion of social and cultural factors, while simultaneously failing to account for real differences between Indigenous and other island inhabitants. We have carefully re-read our article and cannot find any instance in which we state a position favoring independence over affiliation, or vice versa. Instead, we explicitly acknowledge the possibility of sovereignty leading to affiliation, and implicitly maintain that the question of affiliation's benefits over independence *remains unresolved*:

The key shortcoming of the SNIJ hypothesis is its failure to account for the ways in which Indigenous sovereignty has been abrogated by a colonial legacy that continues to inform present political arrangements. **As the authors of the SNIJ hypothesis rightly point out, sovereignty does not necessarily lead to independence. But an arrangement short of independence does not necessarily represent a legitimate case of self-determination** on the part of the sovereign groups involved (p. 460, emphasis added).

In our Introduction we propose that the question of independence versus affiliation remains unanswered, and we acknowledge directly that in any given case one or the other may be preferable:

We agree that a discussion of affiliation versus independence is worthwhile. Our contention, that such a discussion requires an acknowledgment of the difference between Indigenous and other occupants of small island territories, should not be taken as a position that the SNIJ in itself is not a meaningful unit of analysis relative to independent small islands. Instead, **we contend that evaluating the benefits of affiliation versus independence needs to take into account the differences between Indigenous and other island occupants** (p. 449, emphasis added).

We frame this in terms of our main point, to which we return repeatedly throughout the article, namely that “the core shortcoming of the SNIJ hypothesis is its failure to distinguish between Indigenous and other populations in surveying the benefits of affiliation over independence” (p. 448). Rather than claiming that Indigenous islanders are free to make any choices they want, as long as they choose independence, we are claiming that, in Corsica and Hawai'i at least (and we make sure to acknowledge that “we cannot speak to other small island contexts” (p. 457)), the extent of Indigenous islanders' freedom to choose anything at all is determined by the metropolitan state:

Corsica currently enjoys little more practical autonomy than any other part of France. **Referenda addressing modification of its organization as a territorial community can be held, but the French state reserves the right to render them non-binding** (Daftary, 2008, p. 300).

The “Procedures for Reestablishing a Formal Government-to-Government Relationship with the Native Hawaiian Community” published in the Federal Register allow for any form of governing body to be developed entirely at the discretion of the Native Hawaiian community. While the form of governance is at the discretion of the Native Hawaiian population, **the Procedures are clear that the governing body will be subject to the plenary authority of the U.S. legislature...**The issue of whether this sort of situation, modelled on the legal relationship between the U.S. government and North American Indigenous groups, is in the interest of Hawaiians has been divisive. Historically Indigenous North American s have suffered at the hands of this legal relationship; on the other hand,

there is currently nothing in place by which Native Hawaiians have any sort of dedicated political representation. Whatever the outcome, one thing is clear: **any such arrangement falls far short of sovereignty, and arguably even self-determination, if the entire enterprise falls under the authority of the U.S. legislature** (pp. 458–459, emphasis added).

We offer no judgment as to what relationship with the metropolitan state people should choose; instead we are pointing out that, in these cases, the metropolitan state limits the range of available choices. Sovereignty may demand self-determination, but self-determination surely does not demand independence. It is inaccurate to claim that we say otherwise.

Sincerely,
Zachary T. Androus
Florence, Italy

Neyooxet Greymorning
18 June 2018

Dear Zachary T. Androus and Neyooxet Greymorning,

Thank you for taking the time to set forth and clarify your intentions with regard to your 2016 paper on ‘Critiquing the SNIJ hypothesis with Corsica and Hawai’i’. I am happy to accept that you possess better knowledge of your own position than does anyone else. It has never been my aim to distort or misrepresent your position, and if I have done so, I wholeheartedly apologise.

Sincerely,
Adam Grydehøj
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