

## Imagining the Archipelago

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**Speaker:** Assoc Professor Elaine Stratford  
University of Tasmania

**Chair:** Professor James Sidaway, Department of Geography, NUS

**Date/Time:** Friday, 23 October 2015, 3.30pm – 5.00pm

**Place:** Earth Lab (AS2 02-03), Department of Geography, NUS

### Abstract

To think about America has been to think primarily in continental terms. The dominant element in that hemispheric space comprises, in literal terms, the continental United States, its lacustrine islands and eyots or river islands, as well as Alaska, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, Guam, the US Virgin Islands, the Northern Marianas and American Samoa. These islands provide a significant exclusive economic zone under the UN Law of the Sea Convention, as do statistically designated minor outlying islands such as Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Wake and the Midways, Johnston and Palmyra Atolls, and Kingman Reef. In addition, America includes near-shore islands such as Matinicus, Nantucket, Long Island, Manhattan, Staten Island, Martha's Vineyard, Oak Island, the Isle of Palms, Hilton Head Island, Sugarloaf Key, Marco Island, Grand Isle, the Channel and Farallon Islands, and Whidbey Island. America also takes in other forms of insular association: the Philippines or Okinawa or Diego Garcia—the British territory that doubles as a US military base. Finally, America is accounted for in other and varied connections that invoke the idea of the archipelago, among them trade routes, alliances and animosities, cables or satellites, and the several themes that are explored in this collective work.

What, then, might it mean to decenter American continentalism and imagine this complex space archipelagically: as a geographical imaginary comprising island states and isthmuses; the confetti of empire; liminal archipelagraphs; ocean spaces; and continental coastlines and near-shore islands? How might the idea of the archipelago enable us to think in terms of figurative and literal assemblages, or mobilities, and multiplicities, thus opening possibilities for new ways of thinking along the fluid borders of island, archipelagic, oceanic, and hemispheric studies?

### About the Speaker



**Elaine Stratford** is the Interim Director of the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment at the University of Tasmania, Australia and Associate Professor in Geography. In the latter field, Elaine works in the borderlands between cultural and political geography and island studies, and some of her work is focused upon (a) documenting how islands and archipelagos have been and are mapped, conceived and represented, and (b) gauging how island peoples plan for complex challenges such as climate change in ways that engender resilience and provide opportunities to flourish.

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