

BOOK REVIEW

James J.A. Blair, *Salvaging Empire: Sovereignty, Natural Resources, and Environmental Science in the South Atlantic*

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Alexander Stoeger

Saarland University

In the tumultuous currents where environmental science and colonial history converge, James J.A. Blair, from the perspective of cultural and environmental anthropology, embarks on an insightful and comprehensive exploration of the British overseas territory of the Falkland Islands. *Salvaging Empire* introduces the Falkland Islands as a cultural amalgam of colonial interests, influenced by past and present efforts to retrieve from the dangerous sea and rough land what is necessary to survive economically and culturally.

Drawing from extensive visits to the Falklands and Argentina, which continues to assert its claim to sovereignty over the islands, Blair intertwines critical reflections on early short-lived settler accounts, British utilization of Gauchos and Scottish shepherds, the Falklands War, and contemporary oil discussions. In each of the seven chapters, the author seamlessly intertwines first-hand conversations and observed events with a broader discussion that spans colonial, social, cultural and environmental issues. Therefore he extends the book's arguments beyond the confines of the remote Falkland Islands while avoiding the pitfall of treating the archipelago as a mere trope for discussing broader concepts.

The book is structured into three sections – 'Dispossession', 'Wreckage' and 'Survival' – reflecting the way Blair characterizes the Falklands' geographical, environmental and colonial circumstances. The metaphor of a shipwreck contrasts with the 'Falkland way of life', a blend of colonial nostalgia and a distinctive approach to self-defined indigeneity and self-government unique to the Falklands.

Each chapter commences with an episode from the author's interactions with inhabitants, ranging from discussions with the senior local historian Joan Spruce, mapping colonial stone corrals to uncover the islands' past, to encounters with individuals like Flavio, a homosexual Chilean abattoir crew member whose temporary work permission prevents him from becoming part of the islands' community. This personal touch is followed by a methodical reflection on the chapter's approach. Each chapter focuses on a different approach, including anthropology, colonial studies, environmentalism and human geography, allowing Blair to discuss his material without bending it. This results in a rich and versatile portrait of the Falklands, with a concise summary at the end of each chapter providing a sense of finality for readers who may choose to focus on specific areas of interest.

Following a rough chronological order, the first section introduces readers to the history and geography of the Falkland Islands, posing the challenging question of who colonized first. Blair explores the various European settler projects that shaped the islands' history, from early sailors who used the islands as a stopover on their lengthy journeys to French and British businessmen attempting to exploit the islands' wild cattle

herds. Despite the absence of indigenous peoples during this phase, Blair argues that colonial attempts to engage indigenous people from Tierra del Fuego and Argentinian Gauchos have had a lasting impact on the islands' history and the self-understanding of their predominantly British inhabitants. Chapter 1 focuses on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial efforts by discussing the fate of O'rundel'lico, the indigenous man abducted by Robert Fitzroy on the HMS *Beagle* who later returned to his home on the South American coastal region and functioned as a negotiator for his people with white settlers on the Falklands. Chapters 2 and 3 reflect these circumstances by discussing how traces of these historical developments still shape the islands' landscapes as well as the immigration policy and hierarchy between true islanders (referring to themselves as 'Kelpers'), immigrants and 'undesirables' (skilled workers who are merely tolerated because of their seasonal contracts and ethnicity).

Section 2 delves deeper into 'shipwreck ecology' (p. 100), focusing on environmental history and the possibilities of oil to facilitate the Falklanders' financial independence. Chapter 4 critically discusses the connections between settler advantages, the exploitation of offshore crews and shepherds and the discovery of commercial amounts of oil in the North Falkland Basin in 2010. This discovery led to confrontations with global ecological and economic interests, reigniting the long-standing conflict between Britain, the Falklands and Argentina. In Chapter 5, the author explores the transient implications of offshore oil infrastructures offered by various oil companies to the Falklanders. It examines how the inhabitants' initial optimism regarding self-funding of military protection transitioned to a discerning scepticism with regard to ecological consequences for the islands weighed against the anticipated financial dividends.

The last section presents an anthropological and geopolitical analysis of the activities of naturalists and Falklanders to preserve the islands' biotopes, accompanied by a new understanding of their role on the islands. Chapter 6 discusses how penguin preservation on the Falkland Islands, which are called the Malvinas by the Argentines, and the Argentine concept of the Pampa Azul (Blue Pampa), a wide-ranging, government-sponsored scientific initiative, which might be regarded as an attempt to occupy the South Atlantic under the pretense of research interests, politicized scientific endeavours and conservation efforts. Chapter 7 illustrates how post-war Falklanders began to regard themselves as trustees of the islands, striving to restore pre-settler flora and fauna in a new understanding of environmental stewardship.

Blair's book provides a comprehensive and rich insight into a case that attracts attention due to its complex colonial and ecological past and present. His metaphor of shipwreck salvaging as a way of living from one external event to the next leads to the final argument in the concluding chapter, where he reflects on the ambivalence of Falkland settlers and their 'settler indigeneity' (p. 195). Following the argument of previous chapters that the Falkland Islands have been subject to circumstances as well as to the people living in the South Atlantic, Blair regards settler colonialism on the islands as an event rather than a structure.

Salvaging Empire is an in-depth study of the Falkland Islands approached from various angles. Each chapter elegantly and convincingly employs a different approach, ranging from anthropology to environmental science and colonial studies. Readers get the impression that Blair wrote this book while standing among the Falklanders, making it equally fascinating for those interested in this extraordinary location and those intrigued by environmental and colonial history. Despite its complex topic and wide variety of approaches, the language and mix of descriptive narration of episodes and reflective discussion of consequences make it a joy to read. Whether a seasoned scholar or a casual enthusiast, one will find oneself captivated by the intricacies of Falkland history and the broader implications of empire in the modern world.