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BOOK REVIEWS

Sébastien Chauvin, Peter Clegg and Bruno Cousin (Eds.) (2018). *Euro-Caribbean Societies in the Twentieth Century. Offshore Finance, Local Elites and Contentious Politics*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge. Hbk. £115. xiii+199pp. ISBN: 978-1-85743-869-7.

Godfrey Baldacchino
University of Malta

Alberti and Goujon (2019) propose a composite index of formal sovereignty as an alternative to the binary classification of 'sovereign versus 'non-sovereign', then using the index to undertake a comparative, quantitative analysis of a sample of 104 small island jurisdictions. This index considers different degrees of sovereignty, as identified (and crudely measured) through six different attributes of sovereignty: diplomacy, executive power, legislative power, judicial power, defence capability and monetary authority. The results suggest that the binary classification based on United Nations (UN) membership or non-membership is significantly flawed, if not mistaken: some territories which are not UN members may have a higher sovereignty score than some UN members.

That (even small) islands and remote territories tend to be self-administered is a function of geographical expediency. Beyond that, each and every jurisdiction could tell its own story, describing a particular and dynamic core-periphery

relationship with its current or former metropolitan power, regional hegemon/s, or simply the largest unit in its archipelagic or regional neighbourhood. Whether sovereign or otherwise, that relationship will be driven by “contentious politics”: *realpolitik*, happenstance, perceived opportunities or threats.

Nowhere is this dynamic better visible than in the island Caribbean: a relative small area – just about the size of the Mediterranean sea – that plays host to at least 13 sovereign states (if we include the Bahamas) – all UN member states – plus various other subnational island jurisdictions. To continue with the critique of binary classifications, the two lists are messy and not mutually exclusive: Tobago is a sub-national jurisdiction of Trinidad & Tobago; Nevis of St Kitts-Nevis; and Barbuda of Antigua and Barbuda. Moreover, some islands are recognised as distinct but within a unitary national imaginary, and therefore they may constitute a distinct electoral region, but no jurisdictional power and little else other than rhetoric: Carriacou and Petite Martinique in Grenada; Union and Bequia in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Ten of the 13 sovereign island states are former British colonies, originally imagined as one grand West Indies Federation, quickly abandoned to the forces of island-based and driven ethno-nationalism. The other three, the largest and most populated countries in the set, are Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, former colonies of Spain and France.

Among the non-sovereign rest, we find remnants of the European empires of France (the island departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the French half of Saint Martin, St Barthelemy, plus the sort-of-insular French Guiana); the United Kingdom (Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos, Montserrat) and the Netherlands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, St Eustatius, the Dutch half of Sint Maarten). (Arriving late on the Caribbean scene is the United States, with its own island interests: Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. But – unlike De Jong and Kruijt (2005) – this volume only covers Euro-Caribbean societies, and so these territories do not feature in the book’s purview.) Instead, we have the inclusion of French Guiana, whose social and economic trajectory is rather distinct from that of its Caribbean island neighbours.

Strangely, the book completely avoids the largest industry in the region – tourism – deciding to focus instead on offshore finance, local elites and the messy politics of island-mainland relations. The Caribbean is the world’s best

branded tourism region and it has done very well from this industry – some would say, too well, leading to environmental challenges; the tourism sector is mature and organically woven into the fabric of these islands' economies. Their governments have not needed any special subsidies or any special market concessions to get this industry going on the right footing. The European dimension of the subnational jurisdictions in the region make them especially appealing to low-risk travellers keen to enjoy the Caribbean surrounded by the comfort of familiar languages, customs, food and music.

The situation is very different in the case of finance. The appeal of low tax regimes as a net competitive advantage to these small (mostly island) jurisdictions has been overshadowed by pressure from the world's industrialised nations to shame these locales as 'tax havens', siphoning off funds that would otherwise be taxed in their home countries and beefing up their respective government's coffers. Small territories have scrambled to prevent reputational damage and get their finance sectors in line, within sacrificing their valid contribution to their economy and labour markets. Governance arrangements have shifted and morphed to handle and cope with this 'crisis' along with various others: the global financial crisis of 2008 (Chapter 6); the collapse of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010 (Chapter 2 and 12); looming 'Brexit' in the UK (Chapter 5); rampant poverty, inequality and perceived injustice in Martinique and Guadeloupe (Chapters 7 and 8); and the destruction, and post-destruction recovery programmes, of many islands after being subjected to a hurricane. With a shared legacy and history of slavery, the (post)colonial condition in the island Caribbean remains a paradox, fraught with overtones of imperialism and exploitation. The autonomy of sub-national jurisdictions (SNJs) is the ping-pong that is thrown this way and that in some kind of "post-colonial sovereignty game" (Adler Nissen and Gad, 2013) with European governments loathe to provide unconditional finance; and Caribbean governments angry at so many strings attached; at oligopolistic and monopolistic commercial interests that distort competition and raise costs to consumers; or at post-disaster recovery efforts offering too little and/or arriving too late. While, in the wings, the European Commission in Brussels exercises its own outreach politics (Chapter 4).

An amalgam of cultural sociology and political geography, this book is yet another attempt at providing a snapshot of the unfolding situation. Unlike most

previous attempts (e.g. Clegg, 2013; Hintjens & Hodge, 2012; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2003), the 'three solitudes' – British, French, Dutch – are maintained. But, this time – same as with Sutton (1991) – within the covers of the same book, and drawn together in a strange harmony by the connecting theme of Europe and the EU. Indeed, 'Offshore Europe' is the theme of the book's editorial introduction. Part I dwells on the changing governance arrangements for the overseas territories (OTs); while Part II offers a few (very selective) case studies that delve into the manner in which local elites in these OTs have been impacted by change.

Some examples are notable in their absence. The extreme case of luxury tourism, and resulting blatant inequality, that unfolds in French St Barthélemy, its own French Overseas Collectivity since 2007, is sadly excluded from consideration, even though it is well known to this book's editors (Cousin & Chauvin, 2013). And we are only offered – in Chapter 1 – passing references to the BVI and Montserrat; plus a paragraph on Anguilla, which successfully lobbied against its independence as part of a tri-island state of St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla.

Comparisons are odious; but they are inevitable. The citizens of the British, Dutch and French in the Caribbean overseas territories have regular interactions with friends, relatives and compatriots in London, Amsterdam and Paris; they share news and stories with their metropolises; their quality of life and expectations are also measured by perceived inequalities with their mainland cousins. But this is also an attempt to selective comparison: OT residents do not necessarily want to adopt the legal and civil codes of their European counterparts. Attempts to do so by the respective European governments are quickly branded as imperialist and neo-colonialist. The move to legalise same sex marriage, abortion and assisted suicide (euthanasia) in the Dutch Caribbean (Chapter 13) met considerable resistance and was interpreted as an act of deep irony and revisionist historicism: after the notions of hyper-sexuality that were avidly promoted in the colonial period. Hence the apt choice of the term 'Euro-Caribbean': allowing OT citizens to claim one identity or the other, according to exigency and opportunity.

Within the basket of cases considered, the British OTs would score highest on the 'formal sovereignty index'; the French OTs least. What, however, they certainly share in common is no interest in breaking loose from their integration

with their erstwhile colonial masters. Referenda have rejected independence by huge margins (Baldacchino, 2004). Proud of their levels of self-determination, these small jurisdictions have been morphed from plantations into artificial economies that are driven by external transfers (aid, remittances, rents, off-shore finance). We are not likely to see any new independent state in the Caribbean for some time yet.

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