Peter Clegg & David Killingray (eds.)

The Non-Independent Territories of the Caribbean and Pacific: Continuity or Change?

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Some 15 percent of all Caribbean citizens live in nonsovereign territories. While in some quarters there is still a tendency to think of these remnants of empire as outdated anomalies, it makes more sense to view these “not yet” fully decolonized places as a lasting part of the political landscape of the Caribbean. Transitions toward full independence are nowhere in the making. Large majorities in all non-sovereign Caribbean territories are firmly opposed to it, and all metropolitan powers accept that they cannot unilaterally impose a transfer of sovereignty—with this difference that the British and Dutch are still in the region because much to their regret they could not find a way out, while American and French politicians have long felt that a continuation of their presence in the Caribbean served their own interests as well.

There are various constitutional arrangements for nonsovereign territories. Full integration into the metropolitan polity, the model of the French *départements d'outre-mer*, is one option. Another model is a high level of local autonomy exercised within a larger constitutional framework in which ultimately the metropolis has the last word; this is the case for Puerto Rico, Curaçao, Aruba, and “Dutch” St. Maarten. Finally, there are non-self-governing territories, most of these British Overseas Territories, but also the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Not coincidentally, most of these territories are islands, small in both size and population. With the exception of French Guiana (Guyane), all Caribbean nonsovereign territories are islands—in fact, Guyane has historically functioned very much in isolation from the South American mainland on which it is located, as if its coastal strip was an island looking outward mainly to continental France. Both small-scale and geographical isolation entail a range of vulnerabilities for these territories, whether they are located in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, or even at the edge of Europe (Gibraltar). Still, average standard of living in these “not yet” fully decolonized places is far above the general regional standards precisely because of the direct or indirect advantages of their constitutional status. Hence the general lack of interest in full independence.

Over the past decade or so, several monographs and a number of edited books have been published on these “confetti of empire” (e.g., Adler-Niessen & Pram Gad 2013, Baldacchino & Milne 2009, Clegg & Pantojas-García 2009, De Jong & Kruijt 2005, Oostindie & Klinkers 2003, Ramos & Rivera 2001). Whatever the differences among these studies, they all tend to focus not on the absence of pro-independence movements, but rather on the tensions between,

on the one hand, the metropolitan urge “to minimize the contingent liabilities” (jargon coined at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office) arising from the enduring postcolonial relationship and, on the other, insular discomfort and at times resentment with the way these relations have been modeled and function.

The Non-Independent Territories of the Caribbean and Pacific is yet another contribution to this field, focusing mainly on the British Overseas Territories (OT's). “British” chapters include a historical overview of British decolonization and the emergence of the remnant category of OT's (by David Killingray), a review of the limited results of reform under New Labour (Peter Clegg), two rather more political contributions on the present situation written by authors close to the present coalition government (Ian Bailey and Ian Hendry), and discussions of offshore finance centering on the British OT's (with Mark Hampton & John Christensen being far more pessimistic than William Vlcek). The book also presents analyses of recent developments in the Dutch and French non-sovereign territories (by Lammert de Jong & Ron van der Veer and Nathalie Mrgudovic, respectively), as well as a discussion of recent changes in EU policies (Paul Sutton), and a general review of “self-governance deficits” (Carlyle Corbin).

In all, the book offers a useful overview of the full range of dilemmas in these postcolonial arrangements of nonsovereignty, though it focuses mainly on governance and economics, leaving the crucial dimensions of migration and transnationalism as well as identity and culture largely neglected. For the uninitiated, the book offers some useful introductions. However, readers with a longer interest in these issues will not find much new here. This is not surprising. Peter Clegg and several of the contributors also wrote essays in the other publications cited above, and there is a lot of overlap among the authors in these various works (the present reviewer included). Perhaps we are coming to a point of diminishing returns; the dilemmas are spelled out time and again, as are the piecemeal reforms, the unresolved challenges, and the lingering conflicts.

The Non-Independent Territories of the Caribbean and Pacific is a useful reminder that none of this is going away by itself and that metropolitan governments should nurture no illusions about it. And yet one would have wanted the editors to dig a bit deeper and to offer a more systematic comparison of the pros and cons of the various models of nonsovereignty that have been adopted, both from a metropolitan perspective and as seen from these various nonsovereign territories. Only Carlyle Corbin attempts to do something like this, in his systematic discussion of democratic deficits in the various models. Not all will share his assumptions, including his apparent doubts about the

sincerity of metropolitan concerns for good governance, nor his implicit confidence that a broadening of the limits of nonsovereignty is desirable. Even so we can appreciate his development of systemic indicators for “Preparedness for Self-Governance” as an invitation to a good debate on the future models of nonsovereignty.

Ironically, whereas Corbin seems particularly interested in broadening the options, editors Clegg and Killingray end the book a few pages later with more sobering and most likely more realistic observations, arguing that a “further extension of autonomy” is unlikely, and that the real task is to make do with “the [various] constitutional systems, which are imperfect compromises between countries and territories with different interests” (p. 196). For them, there is no alternative to “the present efforts of the metropolitan powers to re-engage with their territories” (p. 197). One of the ironies of this late chapter in (post)colonialism, of course, is how often metropolitan governments need to be reminded of lingering responsibilities for which there are few rewards.

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