
Come nearer, focus on one dot of an island.¹

In this line from a poem included at the end of the foreword to *Frontiers of the Caribbean*, as in the entire publication, the economic and political realities of St. Vincent and the Grenadines are placed at the center of the global experience. Historian and creative writer, Philip Nanton writes lyrically about St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

With this work, he aims to provide readers with “firstly, an alternative paradigm with which to re-examine the Caribbean; secondly, a cross-disciplinary analytical tool—that of frontier study—that integrates and straddles the disciplines of history, geography, literary studies, and social and cultural analysis, with a view to opening up new avenues of discussion about the Caribbean and other frontier societies; and thirdly, a work offering a close examination of an under-researched multi-island Caribbean society, St Vincent and the Grenadines” (p. 5). More specifically, he argues that “the purpose of this book ... is to challenge the suggestion that the Caribbean frontier had a brief life and then was over” (p. 26).

In using St. Vincent and the Grenadines as a test case to discuss the notion of frontier societies, Nanton engages with some of the “local differences” that are at the center of an existence not always understood, in his estimation, by postcolonial studies as it has developed in the western academy.

The first chapter begins with a meditation on the violence hidden not too far beneath the vaunted calm of the region. In St. Vincent, and in the Caribbean more generally, Nanton suggests, the constantly shifting boundaries include attitudes toward both religion and herbal medicine, as well as toward migrants, those who live on the shifting boundaries between home and away. He takes a long look at the historical situation out of which the region developed, tracing changing attitudes and patterns through the 1960s, political independence, “open” economies vulnerable to “world economic trends,” and the emergence of marijuana as what might be described as an alternative staple with a liminal status. This is one sense, Nanton argues, in which frontier retentions remain common throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. As another aspect of frontier identity, he lists the offshore services industry, “whereby Caribbean jurisdic-

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¹ Philip Nanton (first published in 1992 as “I”).
tions offer their services to the global financial community” (p. 17). He argues for “the legitimacy of the term’s continued use in a variety of arenas across the Caribbean region” (p. 19), and provocatively analyzes frontier personalities such as St. Vincent’s prime ministers and marijuana growers. Some chapters have the feel of creative nonfiction, and Nanton suggests that Chapters 5 and 6 specifically offer a frontier analysis that brings together different genres of writing, namely historical travel writing, politics, the novel, monologue, poetry, and autobiography.

Quite apart from what Nanton describes as the frontier character of the society and its individual representatives, the text itself might be described as having a “frontier” identity, in the sense that he discusses the term. It collapses boundaries between disciplines as it seeks a new way of being in its discussion of various aspects of Vincentian realities and personalities.

Nanton argues for the specificity of the term “frontier” where the Caribbean experience is concerned, and leaves readers considering whether the Caribbean frontier that he describes is more European than American. In this effort, also, the writer is a frontiersman, exploring new territory as he moves between the travel writer’s metaphors and the theorizing of the literary critic. In the end, although he lets us see his struggle, the writer (appropriately, in my estimation) doesn’t choose, establishing himself as a scholar and SVG as arguably a frontier nation, a notion of the frontier that emerges from the island nation’s history and its (and his) lived reality. There is a definite borderland/frontiersman tone to this publication.

In his writing and analysis, Nanton engages with Fredric Jameson and Walter Mignolo, borrowing from Mignolo to discuss what really is the frontier in the SVG situation. “The study addresses those who, in Mignolo’s phrase, see themselves as having no option but to challenge the power-centre and take an alternative direction” (p. 32). The writer embraces frontier identity as he argues for analysis of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as modern frontier societies. The penultimate chapter, which discusses the “shifting rural and urban frontiers in St Vincent,” offers an evocative description of geography and population distribution, suggesting that “territorially small though St. Vincent may be, [there is a] frontier between (‘wild’) hinterland country” and more accessible urban space (p. 95).

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