

Allen, Matthew G. (2018). *Resource extraction and contentious states: Mining and the politics of scale in the Pacific Islands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Pivot. 148pp. hbk, ISBN: 978-9-8110-8119-4. US\$54.99; kindle, ISBN: 10: 9811081190. US\$ 52.24.

Matthew Allen makes an important contribution to the field of small states and territories in his case study of mining activities in sub-national territories in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Noting the close relationship between violence and the extraction of resources which appear to be intensified in islands, he poses the central question of his book: “is there something peculiar about islands...that make them unusually or exceptionally potent spaces for the contentious politics that attend extractive enclave economies?” (p. 6).

“Islandness”, the “socio-spatial” relations to which this gives rise, extends the discussion beyond familiar explanatory frameworks of “resource curse and extractive resource”. Allen argues that the bounded space of an island, which is experienced most intensely in tiny sub-national jurisdictions, themselves constitutionally attached to multi-island states, provides a clearer picture of the internal tensions at play in colonially constituted territories and states. The central idea is that the extractive sectors on these islands have resulted in violent encounters not experienced at the same level in the sector on the mainland. He notes that Bougainville (PNG) and Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands) were sites of two of the most serious armed conflicts in the Pacific since WWII. He argues that it is important to understand how the scale of these islands worked with longer historical processes and underlying inequalities, to intensify conflict.

The discussion is framed around concepts of islandness, the politics of scale and governable spaces. Allen focuses on several case studies to explore these: the Panguna mine in Bougainville, an island territory of Papua New Guinea; the Gold Mine Ridge in Guadalcanal, the nickel mine in Isabel and Choiseul, and bauxite mining in Rennell: all islands in the Solomon Islands group.

While arguing that the importance of an island as a tool of analysis is its bounded geography that makes contradictions and tensions more visible in the mining sector, Allen suggests that scale was an important corollary for understanding their intensity. As his comparison between the scope of conflicts on the PNG mainland and Bougainville suggests, it is not islandness itself that was most important, but scale. Scale operates at different levels. In geographic terms, the large size of the Panguna mine and its negative environmental effects on the entire island, which extended its negative consequences beyond the small number of customary title holders to the overall population, was significant in explaining the conflict. Environmental concerns and exclusion associated with mining were also present in Choiseul and Isabel.

At the socio-political level, mines exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities and “relative deprivation” which intensified conflicts. Channels of inequality included geography with different economic outcomes based on land fertility (in Bougainville between the more fertile northeast versus the southeast); isolation and uneven insertion into the economy (Weather Coast of Guadalcanal); and the commodification of customary land which increased tension around competing land ownership claims and marginalized women and youth (Bougainville and Guadalcanal). This relative deprivation was also evident in ethnic tensions towards “migrants” from other islands as seen in conflicts in Bougainville between the local Guale and migrant settlers

from Mailaita; and the perception that residents of Guadalcanal were worse off than other Solomon Islanders. Inequality was also perceived in the relationship with the central government and the island provinces, with decision-making around the mines occurring at the center, which also reaped more financial gains, leading to the mobilization of “island-scale” identities in favor of secession (Bougainville) or greater political autonomy (Guadalcanal). Allen describes islandness as the “container” which exacerbates these contradictions, while scale, both as narrative and politics-- was a fluid category that could be reconfigured and deployed strategically by a range of actors.

The other analytical frame Allen deploys, “governable spaces”, amplifies the internal fissures within these small islands, with conflicts resulting in the creation of no-go zones controlled by different forces, as was evident in Bougainville. This undermines the assumption of homogeneity associated with notions of the island as a natural boundary suggesting that islands themselves can be or become fractious spaces.

Allen’s attempt to expand the analytical lens for discussing the mining sector in non-industrialized countries by focusing on the geographical feature of islandness and the particular and unexpected ways in which it responds to, and is in turn affected by, large extractive industries, brings a welcome complexity to these debates. The cases underscore the potential for extreme conflicts as large mining projects located in small spaces exacerbate internal tensions within islands, intra-island tensions within states, and between the island and the “mainland”. These insights become increasingly important given the role that mining has played in state formation in the region and is expected to play as governments embrace this economic model of governance as against the alternative visions of “protecting” the land, environment and people.

While Allen’s focus on islandness and scale makes important analytical contributions, it leaves important aspects of the industry either ignored or underexplored. One of the main instances of this is the role of the external. While there are many references to external actors - owners of mines; colonial powers; regional powers such as Australia; the World Bank; among others - there is no explicit discussion of how they constrain the development options of these states or work to undermine their coherence. How does the role these external forces play out, both historically and contemporarily, in shaping the political, social and economic terrains of these islands to be read into this story of space? Can it also speak to their structural integration into the capitalist world, which is mentioned in the historical context but not explicitly explored in the contemporary period? How do the stories of these mines connect with broader global production processes and power imbalances? The picture of exclusion and uneven benefits these case studies reveal suggests an avenue for greater reflection on how these states can benefit from their resources. While Allen discusses the *Bougainville Mining Act 2015* as a way forward for addressing some of the tensions of uneven benefits explored, he does not address the broader questions of who benefits most from these activities and what is the balance of profits between the companies and their shareholders versus the people of those territories.

Despite these limitations, Allen’s insights into how mining exacerbates tensions in small islands are important and hold lessons beyond the Pacific. The extractive sector is expanding globally in spaces previously considered marginal, including islands. Nor is the multi-island state unique to the Pacific. Many island states have island dependencies with their own peculiarities and identifications that can lead to conflict and exacerbate secessionist tendencies. Allen makes the

important observation that conflicts around resources in the Pacific stem from an abundance of, rather than too little, natural resources; a reality that is hardly acknowledged in the literature on small states, which focuses on their limited resource base, and requires different analytical lenses.

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