Islands and despots

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This paper challenges a conventional wisdom: that when discussing political systems, small is democratic. And yet, can there be paradises without serpents? The presumed manageability of small island spaces promotes and nurtures dispositions for domination and control over nature and society. In such dark circumstances, authoritarian rule is a more natural fit than democracy. By adopting an inter-disciplinary perspective, this paper argues that small island societies may be wonderful places to live in, as long as one conforms to a dominant cultural code. Should one deviate from expected and established practices, the threat of ostracism is immense. Formal democratic institutions may and often do exist, and a semblance of pluralism may be manifest, but these are likely to be overshadowed by a set of unitarist and homogenous values and practices to which many significant social players, in politics and civil society, subscribe (at least in public).

Keywords: authoritarianism; democracy; despotism; dystopia; homogeneity; particularism; small islands; small states; Tycho Brahe; unitarism

Preamble: Tycho and Hven

All is changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born. (William Butler Yeats, 2002: *Easter 1916*)

Small islands[1] lend themselves to near absolute human domination. They can be bought, sold, leased or bequeathed to special individuals, who can then transform them in accordance with their interests or whims, noble though these may be. It was in such circumstances, in 1576, that Frederick II, King

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of Denmark, allocated the island of Hven (now part of Sweden) as a 'fief' to astronomer Tycho Brahe as his home and base for his many scientific activities. Frederick II signed a document conferring:

> to our beloved Tyge Brahe, our land of Ven ... with all our and the crown's tenants and servants who live thereon, and with all the rent and duty which comes from it ... to have, enjoy, use and hold; free and clear, without any rent, all the days of his life. (Thoren, 1990: 105)

This island, and Uraniborg castle in particular, was a prototype fully integrated research facility, and a research centre of the highest order for its time. Tycho's plans also involved considerable social upheaval on Hven, however. The project drafted the local peasants and fishers as cheap construction labour, 'harnessed in the service of science', for at least eight years. As the undisputed ruler of his fiefdom, Tycho was entitled to two workdays a week, from sunup to sundown, per week from each of the 40 farms on the island ... without pay (Thoren, 1990: 106, 112). The islanders were certainly not amused (Christianson, 1999: 43; *also reviewed in* Mosley, 2001). Tycho acted very much as the undisputed 'Lord of Uraniborg' (Thoren, 1990):

> [H]e aimed to restructure the production of Hven in order to support a superstructure of scholars, scientists and servants. (Christianson, 1999: 37)

Over the winter of 1578, some of the peasants on Hven abandoned their farms and left the island in order to escape the onerous and unceasing work details and on 10 April 1578, the King, at Tycho's request, issued an open letter forbidding the peasants from leaving Hven (Thoren, 1990: 132).

A land fit for kings, lords and governors?

> I am monarch of all I survey,
> My right there is none to dispute,
> From the centre all round to the sea,
> I am lord of the fowl and the brute. (Cowper, 1782)

Tycho's behaviour may not have been extraordinary in its historical context: the use of *corvée* labour on public works projects was then still practised. It does however confirm the observation by McCall (1996: 1–2): 'continentals covet islands ... while islanders themselves and their way of seeing things are not much appreciated'. A few decades earlier, Thomas More had represented the ideal commonwealth of *Utopia* as an island in order to have its bounded and exclusive geography align with the perfect and sublime nature of its political project (More, 1516). But such a place is perhaps also nowhere to be found:

'utopia' translates as 'nowhere' in Greek. In its harmonious state, Aldous Huxley's *Island* is doomed and can only be betrayed (Huxley, 1962). Imperial and capitalist greed found personification in Robinson Crusoe, who surveyed the island on which he was shipwrecked 'with a secret kind of pleasure to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country' (Defoe, 1719: 102). As told by Defoe, apart from being the gripping story of a rugged survivor, the actual tale of Robinson Crusoe, 'is also one of conquest, slavery, robbery, murder, and force' (Hymer, 1971: 29). 'We've got an island all to ourselves', muses Peterkin in *Coral Island*. 'We'll take possession in the name of the king; we'll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries' (Ballantyne, 1858/1867: 27–28). Such statements belie the racist superiority and dreams of conquest of early Robinsonnades (e.g. Loxley, 1990; Dash, 1998), but also the less-eagerly critiqued tendency towards despotism. The craving to control continues today, with Farhad Vladi selling islands (Vladi Private Islands, 2011); and Dubai selling the constructed islands of 'the Palm' and 'the World' archipelago off its coast (Jackson & Della Dora, 2009). In such explicitly exclusive environments, fellow humans – if they exist – tend not to be peers; but rather slaves, servants or followers.

This paper

With their beguiling simple geography, small islands invite us to consider them as comprehensible and manageable totalities (e.g. Lowenthal, 2007: 206–207). Yet, even as we yearn, plot and dream of how we will make or change our island, the island will change us, teasing out some despotic streaks. 'Can one be but a Governor on one's own island?' (Redfield, 2000: 12; also Weaver-Hightower, 2007). Perhaps, as 'Lord of Uraniborg', Tycho is the rule(r): he is neither the exception nor a historical anachronism.

Much of the literature, realist and metaphorical, is replete with examples of individuals that are 'changed, changed utterly' by their island sojourns. As 'seedbeds of fertile imagination' (Lowenthal, 2007: 203), islands help to unleash and encourage the indulging of atavistic desires for power and control, encouraging humans (usually men) to think that their island world is an enticing *tabula rasa*; for all seasons and for all tastes. Which is why, then, anything goes. This sounds like a recipe for a natural collapse into patriarchal authoritarianism.

And yet, if one reads the specific political science literature, this extols small, often island, jurisdictions as paragons of democratic behaviour. Can both propositions, can both utopia and dystopia, be true? Which is it to be: the idyllic setting of Jack, Ralph and Peterkin on *Coral Island* (Ballantyne,

1858/1867), or its macabre response, *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) where Jack triumphs over Ralph?

Small size, islands and democracy

In a recent article titled 'Small is democratic: but who is small?' the author's two opening sentences are unequivocal:

> Research on … government suggests that small states are more likely to be democratic than large states. Indeed, an abundance of findings support this belief. (Anckar, 2010: 1)

Summarising the literature in the field, Srebrnik (2004) contends that small country size, coupled with islandness, has been shown to be conducive to democracy and 'good governance'; that smallness reinforces popular rule; and that considerable evidence suggests that a significant feature about small jurisdictions has been their ability to maintain democratic political systems (*also* Hintjens & Newitt, 1992). Anckar *père et fils* contend that remoteness, islandness and small size are likely to spawn a feeling among society members that they are alone in the world and thrown upon their own resources: and so, 'a spirit of fellowship and community' would naturally follow (Anckar & Anckar, 1995). With few exceptions, we are told that the political systems of small island states are all highly democratic in nature:

> The small island countries of the international community are a welcome antidote and contrast to the anarchy, autocracy, internal warfare, militarism, violence and state collapse which is a feature of all too many larger, mainland states. (Srebrnik, 2004: 339)

In a tradition dating back at least to Plato and Aristotle, we are warned that the *polis* should not be too large that its citizens are not able to assemble and discuss politics (Taylor, 1960; Aristotle, 1996: xvi). Rousseau – who, by the way, delighted in islands as havens for the solitary recluse (Rousseau, 1776–78/1979: 103–104) – and Montesquieu argued that smallness was a precondition to the development of the liberal state, since only small size guaranteed that citizens maintained an emotional attachment to the public good, had the opportunity to participate in direct democracy, and could exercise effective scrutiny over their government (Rousseau, 1900: II: 88; de Montesquieu, 1949: VIII: 16–17). A much reduced political distance between the voter and the voted makes citizens more politically aware and offers them better chances for reciprocal communication; while the ethnic and cultural homogeneity more likely to pertain to small polities arguably leads to increased community cohesion

(Lijphart, 1977: 66; Sutton, 1987: 17; Anckar, 2002: 386–387). Small-scale social structures are personalistic and informal; the overall pattern of social interaction is more cooperative, and thus small social systems mitigate political conflict, encourage elite cooperation and increase the stakes of citizens in the regime (Ott, 2000: 111–124). The 'insulation' of small states from the international system allows them to avoid getting involved in warfare and hence fosters a sheltered climate, conducive to democratic politics (Faris, 1999: 8– 9, 24). Being more ethnically and linguistically homogenous, small social systems exhibit characteristics that tend to favour the maintenance of democracy (Clague *et al*., 2001: 23 *et seq*.). For Schumacher (1973), small federated states are 'desirable' because they are more human and can practise direct democracy. According to Clark (2009: 607):

> Small island states fare remarkably better than their larger continental counterparts in practising democracy ... some studies suggest that small size may be associated with greater solidarity and equality, and therefore fewer and less disruptive free-rider problems and violent conflicts.

Again, combining smallness and islandness, Dommen (1980: 931) argues that island countries are 'particularly fortunate' and their politics 'friendlier', 'more benign' and 'freer of internal violence'; but then asks, tellingly: 'why, then, do so many people emigrate?'

The short answer is that small is not always beautiful (*pace* Schumacher, 1973; Murray, 1981). In small social systems (though not exclusively), personality politics can override other considerations and can lead to patron–client relationships, nepotism, corruption and pork barrel politics (Benedict, 1967: 8; Wood, 1967: 33–34; Lowenthal, 1987: 38–39; Bray and collaborators, 1991: 22; Peters, 1992: 128–129; Ott, 2000: 37–42; Wettenhall, 2001: 181; Srebrnik, 2004: 334–335). Executive government is believed to be in a much more powerful position in small polities, since it is all pervasive, ubiquitous and impossible to avoid, thus undermining whatever checks and balances may be present or desirable (Singham, 1967; Sutton, 1987: 12; Sutton & Payne, 1993: 592–593). Strangely enough, it is the very same sociological features attributed to small size and scale, epitomised in island communities – strong social networking, clannishness, high bonding social capital ... – that provoke the turn towards despotism.

When one scrutinises the key theoretical contributions towards understanding the socio-political and economic origins of dictatorship and democracy, small island jurisdictions are not taken into consideration (e.g. Moore, 1966; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005). The argument usually involves an emerging industrial bourgeoisie playing a pivotal role; yet, most small island territories have completely side-stepped an industrial phase in their development,

leapfrogging from primary to service economies, and so such an argument cannot possibly apply to most of them (Baldacchino, 1998). Instead, we are more likely to read about democracy as practised on small island states as a carryover from colonial practice (e.g. Hintjens & Newitt, 1992; Barrow-Giles, 2011). Indeed:

> There is a strong tendency either for the larger (metropolitan) state to impose its governing patterns on the smaller; or for the smaller to seek to emulate those patterns in a fairly unreflecting way. (Wettenhall, 2001: 167)

Parliamentary democracy is one such 'governing pattern'. For example, when Britain relinquished its colonies in the Caribbean, it left in place political institutions and norms based on the Westminster model of government. Political analysts have drawn largely positive assessments of the efficacy of this Westminster template in producing stable democratic polities in the region, in contrast to other, larger and continental, ex-colonial states (e.g. Domínguez & Worrell, 1993; Payne, 1993). The template's core conventions, as, for example, measured by Washington DC-based Freedom House (2011) – parliamentary supremacy; competitive, regular and free, multi-party elections; a non-partisan civil service; civil rights and freedoms – have remained largely in place in most small island states. The same can be said with regards to the governance index published by the World Bank (2011), and based on six composite indicators: political stability and absence of violence and terrorism; voice and accountability; effectiveness of government; regulatory quality; rule of law and control of corruption. However, the presence of formal democratic institutions need not align with democratic practice. It may also be easy but naive for external observers to praise small island social systems for formally displaying democratic institutions; whereas the locals may report, witness and experience otherwise.

A different discourse is gaining ground of late: the Westminster model in the Caribbean context has its obvious limits. Divisive and monopolistic 'winner takes all' politics, long periods of one-party domination, rubber-stamp parliaments, corruption and the entrenchment of patronage systems are some of the more significant characteristics (e.g. Clegg & Pantojas-Garcia, 2009; Barrow-Giles, 2011). Should such distortions of democracy be readily seen as outcomes of the international drugs trade, rising crime levels, economic downturn or of globalisation generally; or are they also exacerbated by the circumstances of political geography?

In a qualitative study of the emergence of party politics on the Caribbean small island state of Grenada, Singham (1968) outlines the emergence of an authoritarian-cum-charismatic leader in the context of democratic institutions. The 'hero' with a working class background can emerge to politicise 'the

crowd', manipulate its emotions and appeal to its loyalty. There are various examples of 'big men' in small island politics, and not just in the Caribbean: larger-than-life politicians-cum-father figures and folk heroes who exercise almost total control over decision making in a jurisdiction for many years, while the formal institutions of democracy persist (e.g. Klomp, 1986). Such political actors are skilful at deploying a neo-colonialist island nationalism that presents them as mythic Davids contending bravely, and against all odds, with alien Goliaths: think Claude Wathey in Dutch Sint Maarten, Dom Mintoff in Malta, as well as Joe Smallwood and Danny Williams in Newfoundland, Canada (van Bakel *et al.*, 1986: 191–192; Boissevain, 1994; Cadigan, 2009).

Beyond the paradox

And so, to return to the key question: are small, often island, states and territories beautiful or ugly? Can one reconcile these two seemingly contradictory observations? This paper argues that small island societies may be wonderful places to live in, *but only as long as one conforms to the dominant culture*. Should one deviate from expected and established practices, the threat of ostracism is immense. Democratic practices and supporting institutions may exist and operate, and a semblance of pluralism will be manifest, but all these are likely to be overshadowed by what Dahl and Tufte (1973: 92, *more below*) refer to as a 'single code': a set of homogenous values – be they religious, partisan, sectarian, racial and/or linguistic – to which significant social players conform and subscribe (at least in public). Confronted by the pervasive and stifling totality, monopoly and intimacy of the local, small scale, socio-cultural environment (Baldacchino, 1997), the options (*after* Hirschman, 1970) are: loyalty and conformity (via commitment or perfunctory compliance); protest to a higher authority (where that exists); or displacement and exile (or, better, 'ex-isle': Bongie, 1998). Shand (1980: 4) perceptively observed:

> Though it has been argued that small size is advantageous in that small [often island] states will have greater social and political coherence, and hence be easier to administrate, than larger states (e.g. Knox, 1967), there is little evidence however that this is true.

Bray (1992: 26) avoids addressing the paradox, preferring instead to posit that the 'heaven and hell' scenarios are the characteristics of two different, and mutually exclusive, sets of small societies:

> The societies of *some* small countries are harmonious *because everybody knows everybody else very well*, and individuals find ways to reduce or avoid conflict. But the societies of *other* small countries suffer from bitter

> tensions because the scale is restricted and *people know each other too well*.
> (emphasis mine)

Bray supports this argument with a sketch that separates these two worlds by a solid diagonal line (Figure 1). And yet, this is a naive proposition: small island societies can move from situations of harmony to conflict, and/or vice versa, and on multiple levels of engagement. And, at any point in time, some members of a small society can be in conflict with others, while others can get along. At what point does the virtue of knowing someone very well become the vice of knowing someone too well? The separation that Bray postulates between these two state types is meant to emerge, uncritically, from the same condition: that of excessive familiarity.

   This neat schizophrenia can absolve external observers from trying to fathom, and come to terms with, domestic politics and factionalism, in much the same way that tourists can enjoy a holiday in an island resort that is suitably insulated from the turmoil outside its guarded gates (many examples come to mind): a case of double insularity. In 'paradises', like the Cook Islands, arguably the Pacific's best kept secret (http://www.ck/), 'corruption and various financial scandals came to light' (Crocombe, 1979; Aldrich & Connell, 1998: 267). In St Helena, proposed as a prototype society of equals by the East India Company, the experiment went horribly wrong: 'the levelling constitution and egalitarian identity of St Helena proposed on the pages penned in East India House were crumpled and torn within a few years' (Royle, 2007: 3). On Tristan da Cunha, there was hatred between some families who
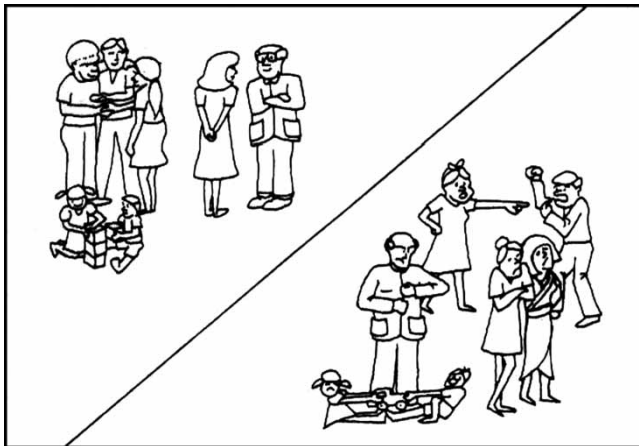

Figure 1.   Bray (1992: 26). Artwork by William Pang, University of Hong Kong. Reproduced with permission.

did not intermarry for generations – Glasses never wed Cotton or Greens – despite a lack of potential spouses (Royle, 1997).

A more plausible and critical approach is to combine these two extreme positions into a behavioural model that explains why small, 'gold fish bowl societies' (Lillis, 1993: 6) can appear to be harmonious, and yet experience internal divisions. In a rare comparative qualitative review, involving the nature of politics in the Faroes, Isle of Man, and Malta – by all measures, three democratic, small island jurisdictions – Richards (1982: *passim*) alerts us to

> ... deep conflicts; of big government and a largely absent role for an organised opposition; and of the softening effect of brokerage networks that connect and bridge any parties in tense conflict ... Deep factionalism can co-exist with strong pressures for conformity and compliance ... [G]roup conflicts are less frequent; but more explosive and charged, and more likely to impact on the whole community, when they occur.

In what is perhaps the best known attempt to develop a positivist appreciation of the linkage between size and democracy, Dahl and Tufte (1973: 92) propose a 'paradigm' that suggests a number of distinct yet inter-related propositions: the members of smaller systems are more homogenous; the incentives to conform are stronger; those who openly dissent are fewer (and may be tempted to consider exile, thus reinforcing the dominant culture by default); the chances that group conflicts involve personal conflicts are higher; and the processes for dealing with conflict are more *ad hoc* and less institutionalised. In their own words, as a political system gets smaller:

> ... variations in behaviour are fewer, a higher percentage of the population adheres to a single code, the norms of the code are easily communicated by word and example, violations are visible, sanctions are easy to apply by means of both gross and subtle forms of social interaction, and avoidance of sanctions is difficult. (Dahl & Tufte, 1973: 92)

So, once again, the conclusion is that group conflicts in small scale environments are rare but explosive and likely to polarise the whole community when they happen (*also* May & Tupounuia, 1980: 423; Sutton, 1987: 13–14).

A shocking revelation of 'serpents in paradise' has been provided by Birkett (1997) and Souhami (2007) in relation to Pitcairn, the last remaining UK overseas territory in the Pacific, and the world's smallest overseas territory by population (around 50). Instead of an idyllic picture, the news that came from Pitcairn and gripped the news headlines in 2004 reported extensive child abuse: six men were found guilty of rape and indecent assault (Fletcher, 2008). A detective inspector involved in the operation explained the situation lucidly, and reminds us of *Lord of the Flies*:

> There was a culture passed down from family to family, and a group of men who perpetrated abuse on every girl they could. Their fathers and grandfathers were doing exactly the same things. ... Was it because of isolation? Or was it just because they could? I don't know the answer. Maybe the truth is that if you leave people to their own devices, without any recourse to outside authority, a male-dominated structure will emerge and the whole community will just become animalistic. (Robert Vinson, *quoted in* Harvey, 2004: 17)

Serpents can take various forms. Cohen (1977: 306), writing about the small community of the island of Whalsay, in the Shetland Islands off Scotland, comments about how 'public argument is rare, partly because it is consciously avoided and partly because of the careful formulation of assertive statements'. Christensen and Hampton (1999) describe the way in which Jersey, a small subnational island jurisdiction that enjoys generous measures of self-government, could be deemed to have had its state become captive to private global capital and the powerful offshore finance industry in whose service the Jersey economy and government now work.

Island paradises: 'Hell for Dissidents'

The citizens of small island jurisdictions are often portrayed as resilient communities; unsurprisingly, they command high levels of bonding social capital (Baldacchino, 2005), defined as 'networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings, that facilitate co-operation within and among groups' (Helliwell, 2003: 9). Their political system is corporatist, harbouring an executive government that is watched as closely by a scrutinising and politically savvy public (Kersell, 1985: 377), as much as it oversees, and interferes in, all local goings on.

The intense public scrutiny of the political system extends to the social. A complex web of acquaintances, contacts and networks emerges among societies where there is role *diffusion* (individuals agree, or are obliged, to work beyond their job description); role *enlargement* (individuals have more space for innovation at work because of leaner hierarchies and often absent superiors) and role *multiplicity* (where individuals 'wear many hats' and practise polyvalency) (Baldacchino, 1997; also Benedict, 1967; Boissevain, 1974; Anckar, 2008: 437). Such a tangled web of particularism (Benedict, 1967) extends to all social members and is at once both clannish (escalating and roping in allies in conditions of conflict), and mollifying (even the worst of enemies would have common friends or would personally know individuals whom they both trust). This clannishness is powerful, protective and resourceful: small is beautiful, but to those who belong. In the eyes of the Whalsay island community, it is simply and crudely 'the interference of outsiders' that

causes problems (Cohen, 1977: 305); the rest of the world is the permanent enemy of the Whalsayman (Cohen, 1978).

Writing about Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada, David Weale looks back at his childhood and speaks about the intensive social interaction which fostered a 'communal togetherness' (Weale, 1992: 10), but which also doubled as a 'straitjacket of community surveillance ... a heavy harness of opinion and expectation thrown over the vitality of human inclination' (Weale, 1992: 9, 10). This togetherness is driven by 'a strong cultural norm of sameness' (PEI Population Strategy Panel, 1999: 56), fleshed out in robust and resilient communities disproportionately made up of white, Anglophone, Christian and heterosexual members. Recent immigrants to PEI are concerned that Prince Edward Islanders thrive in an exclusive culture that could make its members clique-ist, even racist, with respect to 'come from aways' (Baldacchino, 2006: 74). Canada's two island/mainly island provinces – PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador – are the most culturally homogenous provinces in the country and the ones which attract, and retain, the least proportion of recent immigrants to Canada (Baldacchino, 2012). Island paradises can be 'hell for dissidents' (Thakurta, 2006).

Dramatic exceptions

Any alleged causal and positive relationship between size, geography and democracy would need to be able to convincingly explain some dramatic departures from expected behaviour. Furthermore, such behaviour need not be presumed to be exclusive to small island states: this paper is fighting against the uncritical assumption that small island polities are spared the democratic departures and tribulations of larger countries.

First, there is the 'collapse of good governance and democratic crises in a number of small, often island states', as indicated by coups, partisan and/or ethnic violence in recent decades in such places as the Comoros, Cyprus, Fiji, Mauritius, the Solomons, Tonga and Vanuatu (Baldacchino, 2005: 35); and the 'riches to rags' story of Nauru (Connell, 2006). One cannot forget such places like Equatorial Guinea, a small (and part-island) country which is 'nominally a multiparty democracy, [but where] elections have generally been considered a sham' (BBC News, 2010); and is one of the world's top twelve, most corrupt countries (Transparency International, 2006). President Obiang Nguema, the 'God of Equatorial Guinea', was re-elected in 2009 with 96.7 per cent of votes cast (Reporters without Borders, 2010). In the Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda (population 100,000) 'operated under a form of arbitrary rule [during the Bird Sr and Jr regime] with some degree of political intimidation. Transparency and accountability were subordinated to the impulses of a personal mode of leadership'(Cooper, 2011: 70; also Payne, 1999). While in

the Turks and Caicos Islands (population 30,000), Premier Michael Misick, 'the king of sleaze', resigned following an inquiry that found 'information in abundance pointing to a high probability of systematic corruption or serious dishonesty'. Misick, a lawyer, also performed the roles of minister of tourism, civil aviation and planning, plus being an estate agent, law firm consultant and a director of property firms (The Independent on Sunday, 2009).

Second, the absence or weakness of political parties, even of a political party culture, is telling. There are six other, rather small states (island and non-island) – though some with populations larger than one million, which either restrict or do not even allow political parties to operate: Bahrain, Bhutan, Djibouti, Qatar, Swaziland '... and, for obvious reasons, Vatican City' (Anckar, 1999: 38–39). Klomp (1986) explains how personalities readily trump policies, institutions and ideologies in the Dutch Caribbean. Meanwhile, the story is similar, but for altogether different reasons, in the insular/small state Pacific. Anckar (1999: 39) observes that there are no political parties in Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu. If one accepts that 'the success of democratisation is in part dependent on the existence of institutionalised parties and party systems of government' (Smith, 2003: 148), then the more categorical conclusion would be that 'democratisation has failed in the Pacific islands' (Rich *et al.*, 2006: 25).[2] In one other Pacific island jurisdiction (Samoa), universal suffrage is a very recent (1991) development (So'o, 2006: 198). Even so, only *matai* (chiefs) can run for office.

Third, one continues to come across statements that 'the impact of size on democracy is increasing over time', and that 'islandness emerges as the relevant physical determinant of democracy' (Anckar, 2008: 454). While such statements have sought to be more nuanced – by bringing in the role of Christianity, for example – they remain largely gross assessments of small state behaviour undertaken by non-participant observers, 'looking in from outside'.

Conclusion

Neither small size nor islandness are predictors of democracy. Small island states and territories can deceive in their alluring attractiveness: there may be many more Dr Moreaus out there than we may care to realise (Wells, 1896). Consensual practices and unitarism may indeed prevail in such locales: '[s]mall island residents simply know that they must get along' (Richardson, 1992: 195). Granted; but perhaps one should not wax lyrical about such expressions of harmony and solidarity, and leave them unchallenged. Rather, one could be better prepared to also acknowledge and investigate their darker origins and implications.

Political scientists would do well to emulate research in organisational sociology that has offered some insights into the unitarist power dynamics and

undisputed leadership that prevail in very small firms (e.g. Scase, 1995; Baldacchino, 1999a, 1999b). There too, 'small isn't beautiful' (Rainnie, 1985). There may very well be democratic deficits on small island jurisdictions that transcend institutional structures and practices, and may even provide vital clues as to why so many islanders and other small state citizens decide, or are obliged, to emigrate and settle elsewhere. Perhaps it is precisely because they promote a strong sense of fellowship and community that small island residents tolerate 'big man' politics and non-democratic practices.

This paper's intent has been largely provocative and demonstrative; it does not prove that small island states and territories are non-democratic and are rather autocracies in disguise; only piecemeal (albeit suggestive) evidence has been proposed with this in mind here. Rather, this paper argues that small, often island spaces continue to be gripped by a powerful but naive mythology, one that presents them as invariably harmonious polities; such 'getting along' needs to be more seriously questioned and more deeply critiqued.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. This paper will not engage with ongoing debates about what is a 'small island' or a 'small state' (on this particular topic, see Baldacchino, 2011). It reviews island jurisdictions, both states and self-governing territories, that have resident populations of one million or less. Pitcairn (population around 45) is often acknowledged as the world's smallest island jurisdiction; at the other end, the cut-off point could be Mauritius (with a population of 1.3 m), Jamaica (2.7 m) or even Singapore (5 m).
2. The 'if' is important: Anckar and Anckar (2000) have argued in favour of democracies without political parties.

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