

Steven Hillebrink (2008) *The Right to Self-Determination and Post-Colonial Governance: The Case of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba*, The Hague, The Netherlands and Cambridge, TMC Asser Press and Cambridge University Press, hardback, xvii + 355pp + bibliography. ISBN: 978-90-6704-279-6. £65.00stg or US\$130.00.

This collection of essays by Steven Hillebrink is an outcome of a research project undertaken at Leiden University, where the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) remains a world leader in interdisciplinary, postcolonial, social science research. The text connects with the author's wide experience as a senior civil servant with the Dutch Government. This is indeed a rare privilege to be able to read, in English, an up-to-date, well crafted book that deals with the mainly legal, juridical, political and diplomatic challenges associated with governing a clutch of sub-national island jurisdictions that share a similar predicament to the United Kingdom's own Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The *ensemble* of history, geography, economy and environmental factors that impinge on each particular jurisdiction are invariably unique; and yet the Hillebrink volume is one book that joins a select literature which is now looking at the patterned similarities in 'island-mainland' relations that is developing within federalism, paradiplomacy and international political economy.

The focus of the book is on what used to be called the Netherlands Antilles: a set of six small islands (five and a half, actually) that were Dutch colonies in the Caribbean and which, unlike Suriname and Indonesia, have preferred not to seek full independence, and remain part of a confederal arrangement called 'The Kingdom of the Netherlands'. (We note here that the Netherlands, in turn, is a founding member of the European Union.) Aruba was the first of these islands to seek and obtain *status aparte* (separate status as a 'country'), which was granted in 1986; of the rest, Curaçao, and the Dutch half of Sint Maarten are nearing the end of a lengthy constitutional process to obtain a somewhat similar status. The remaining three – Saba, St Eustatius (Statia) and Bonaire – are now to be 'integrated' as special municipalities of The Netherlands.

The book grapples with the position of these islands under the rubric of international law, and more particularly as it pertains to the relationship between their 'good governance' and the self-determination of their citizens. Exactly what kind of political animals are these territories? They have been colonies, and they have the right to decolonize. But they are not listed amongst the United Nation's list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Does that mean that have they been completely decolonized? Are their informed peoples free to 'choose' to remain in 'colonial subordination'? And how does one make sure that they are fully and properly informed? Since these polities are nested in a multi-layered jurisdictional structure, what are the respective obligations and modalities between each of these levels? And who gets to decide, sanction or veto any changes in their respective relationship? With six small jurisdictions preferring to steer clear of each other (there is, for example, no love lost between Aruba and Curaçao); and with populations having voted for a diverse range of constitutional options in respective island-based referenda over the past few years, the situation is enough to challenge any jurist. While many of the parties involved now appear to have agreed that the population of each island has the right to self-

determination, what exactly this right entails “remains a point of contention” (p. 267). And so it is likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

Yet, Hillebrink rises admirably to the occasion. The book engages the reader; it is critical, meticulously annotated (with extensive footnoting) and richly comparative in scope. It provides a sustained argument about the meaning of postcolonialism in contemporary times. It is also refreshing to read a discussion of the situation of the Cook Islands, New Caledonia and Puerto Rico, three sub-national island jurisdictions under the purview of New Zealand, France and the US respectively. In spite of glaring differences, they are selected and presented as the best comparable examples to the Dutch cases. Companions in jurisdictional messiness?

The ‘in-betweenity’ of such places as the Cooks, New Caledonia and Puerto Rico is awkward, because “... it creates a real or imagined responsibility of the metropolis for the internal problems of the territory, which is resented by some, and considered insufficient by others” (p. 347). Hillebrink also identifies the issue of international responsibility for wrongful acts (of omission or commission) entertained by sub-national jurisdictions as a “general problem” (p. 134).

Various puddles of sub-national jurisdiction have emerged as the strong tide of 20th century decolonization has ebbed. These range from former colonies and associated territories to special regions or autonomous zones. These sub-national (mainly island) jurisdictions survive and operate within legal arrangements that are often perplexing, and can be easily dismissed as anachronistic. Many have locally-elected governments that exercise full control over domestic affairs; and yet, they operate within the purview and oversight of a larger, sovereign state. Where however, does one draw the line between ‘self-rule’ and ‘shared rule’ in the context of multi-level jurisdiction? Who, for example, is exactly responsible for the non-payment of debts by a territorial government, its default of contractual (domestic or international) obligations, a lack of local law enforcement, or the maltreatment of aliens in its territory? Concerns by the metropolitan state about its sub-national territory typically include the general quality of governance; level of corruption; judicial policies; offshore financial dealings and (post-September 11, 2001) terrorist financing and border security. The right balance remains elusive and ‘turf wars’ are normal.

No other type of territory has been so affected by the colonial endeavour as have islands. The smaller islands of the North Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Caribbean Sea were the first territories to be colonized in the European Age of Discovery; they have suffered the colonial burden most intimately and thoroughly, and have been the last to seek and obtain independence, if at all. When Suriname (Dutch Guyana) was making preparations to achieve full independence in 1975, the leader of the Suriname National Party (and prospective Premier) Henck Arron, contacted his counterpart in the Netherlands Antilles, Juancho Evertsz, and asked him whether he would lead his islanders to join Suriname into full sovereignty. The answer: “If you allow yourself to be hung, it does not mean that I will do the same”.

What John Connell calls ‘a lingering pause’ in the assumed irreversible path to full sovereignty has now lingered enough to become itself the subject of keen academic and policy inquiry. Hillebrink’s volume joins those of Betty Sedoc-Dahlberg, Lammert de Jong (in collaboration with Douwe Boersma and separately with Dirc Kruijt) as well as Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers as one the few, recent, English-language, academic publications that authoritatively reviews the evolving Dutch island Caribbean, and makes an important contribution to both island studies and federalist scholarship.

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~~Calbert H. Douglas, guest editor (2006) *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April). Special Issue: Small Island States and Territories: Sustainable Development Issues and Strategies – Challenges for Changing Islands in a Changing World. Wiley InterScience, pp. 75-147.~~

~~Volume 14, No. 2, of *Sustainable Development* is a suite of seven articles brought together by guest editor Calbert H. Douglas to focus on diverse dimensions of island sustainable development. Douglas provides the reader with content related to island sustainable development issues and strategies, sustainability indicators, tuna fisheries and issues pertaining to management of commons, tourism, social development, solid waste and energy. This is a broad array of content indeed.~~

~~Douglas leads off the special volume with an editorial. The author identifies key issues related to global change and its interactions with good governance and vulnerability to hazards. He also speaks to assumptions regarding the effectiveness of multi-scale regulation (e.g. federal) on diverse subcultures where many islands retain their own strong identity. There is also discussion of uneven development in scenarios of scarce resources and increasing demand. What he does well himself, and through his collection of manuscripts, is to lay out the stresses that human and biophysical change place on islands, and gaps in capacities that make assessment and adaptation to change challenging. He wisely underscores the conflicts that can arise between stereotypical sustainable development frameworks, and local priorities among people with immediate needs and little buffer against changes in conditions. He is correct to keep coming back to specific points related to hazards and governance. And the reader is enlightened regarding island economic issues throughout the volume.~~

~~Understanding that there are limitations in space in the volume, there are a few areas regarding small islands that are still likely to deserve greater treatment. These critiques are provided based on my specific experiences and observations in the Western Pacific, which is noted for its remote tropical locations, relative disconnect from the industrialized world, and cultural diversity.~~