

practices and experiences along the coasts and islands of three continents. His captivating chapter on 'Islands in the making of Atlantic civilization' genuinely extends and deepens this way of understanding the making of the modern world.

Weaving mercantile and political empires out of the peninsulas and islands of the Atlantic (and beyond, in waters that Gillis speaks of but that his subtitle excludes) did not eliminate the oniric power of the island, which became a space for utopian dreaming from More's early sixteenth-century initiation of the genre through countless novels, tracts and settlement schemes, well into the twentieth century. Isomania still seeps into all manner of unexpected corners of our imaginative lives: it continues to frame our ideas of the exotic, as advertisers and reality show script writers know well; it has long excited the severe world of the scientist, as Gillis' discussion of Darwin, Wallace and Margaret Mead reveals, and as my own biogeographical colleagues' enthusiasm for insular ecological 'hotspots' constantly reminds me. Mixing the contradictory narratives of utopian hope and mournful loss, the island remains a powerful imaginative paradox.

From the immensely fertile geographical, historical, ethnographic and poetic materials offered

by the island, John Gillis weaves a highly readable account. Its principal weakness is theoretical rather than stylistic: by conflating an historical narrative of islands and 'Europe' with a phenomenological account of isomania, each is somewhat weakened. On the one hand, without much more detailed historical evidence I remain unconvinced by the imaginative 'stages' through which he suggests islands have passed in European culture. On the other, a convincing phenomenology of 'island' would surely pay greater attention to its elemental physicality, disallowing Gillis' linguistic latitude for insularity that stretches to the medieval city and the monastic forest clearance, while acknowledging and exploring, for example, the significance of mist, cloud and sea fog whose shrouding of actual islands must play an enormous role in sustaining their grip on our waking dreams. Gripes aside, by indulging his own isomania, John Gillis offers us a powerful and timely reminder of how important islands have been and remain in mind and in life.

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The United Kingdom Overseas Territories: Past, Present and Future. *David Killingray and David Taylor* (eds). London, Overseas Service Pensioners' Association (OSPA) in collaboration with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS), Occasional Paper No. 3, 2005, pp. iv + 142pp + index. (ISSN: 1742-4992; ISBN: 185507-1363). £15.

Most publications have either an ISSN or an ISBN number. This one has both. In much the same way, its subject matter is neither fish nor fowl, continues to confound critics, while it effectively reaps the best of both worlds. We are talking about what have, since 2002, been called the UKOTs – a disparate collection of fragments of empire, comprising a total populace of less than 200 000 souls; all those inhabited being islands, except for Gibraltar.

OSPA and ICS have teamed up to present an intriguing collection of nine essays about a set of small, subnational island or enclave jurisdictions that, in the absence of any clear agenda or desire for fully fledged independence, navigate the fuzzy waters of autonomy and self-determination. The British examples are not alone in so doing; the book gives us an inkling of the somewhat similar status of

such places as Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles as well as the French *Départements ou Collectivités d'Outre Mer*; and there are other territories still, mainly small islands, in association with large, putative patrons: for example, the Keelings (with Australia); the Cooks (with New Zealand) the Faroes (with Denmark) and Puerto Rico (with the USA).

The excuse for taking a close and critical look at the UKOTs has been the passage of the *Overseas Territories Bill* through the British Parliament in July 2002. The Bill, in its turn, was a consequence of the commitment of the UK's Labour government to review (again) the standing of the relationship between Britain and its fragments (already signalled in its 1999 *White Paper*), in the light of domestic issues (such as the question of the nationality of UKOT citizens) and international ones (such as assuring 'good governance' in the post-11 September 2001 security scenario and the OECD and G7 drives to clamp down on harmful offshore tax practices).

It may have been one piece of legislation, but it purports to cover an assorted coterie: affluent and economically diversified Bermuda – with 60 000 residents, now the most populous UKOT; the successful

finance centre of Cayman; the Falklands, claimed by Argentina; Gibraltar, the rock claimed by Spain; forlorn Pitcairn, the only Pacific UKOT, tarnished by a child sex abuse scandal; Montserrat, rocked in the 1990s by violent volcanic eruptions; the uninhabited (except for temporary scientists) British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands; remote Saint Helena – strongly dependent upon grant-in-aid – and its former [don't laugh] 'dependencies' of Tristan da Cunha and Ascension (the latter must be the only jurisdiction in the world administered by a television company); the British Indian Ocean Territory and its shameful story of the deportation of their indigenous *Ilois* population; Anguilla which had seceded from St Kitts-Nevis; the heavily tourist-penetrated Caribbean havens of the Turks and Caicos and the British Virgin Islands.

This may be a ramshackle collection of territories which, however, has some strong economic cards up its sleeve. Seventy per cent of those living in the dependent territories, we are told (p. 17) have living standards that are higher than those of the UK itself. They survive by providing a range of services to international clients, many of which – particularly offshore finance and tourism – exploit their international relations status as 'quasi-states'.

The book is, as to be expected, much more convincing in charting the past than foretelling the future. The past comes across as a series of frustrating attempts by the metropole to come to terms with the moving target of its imploding periphery, especially frustrating with colonial subjects having no sense of nationalism and refusing to accept sovereignty. The story is, sadly, one of benign neglect for most of the time, until dramatic events – such as the almost quaint rebellion of Anguilla from the clutches of St Kitts-Nevis in 1969, the Argentine invasion of *Las Malvinas* in 1982, and the dramatic explosion of the Soufriere Volcano on Montserrat in 1995 – struck a chord with the British public and obliged the British Government to consider some action. Grand designs in political engineering –

such as concocting federated states – made no headway and had to be revised or withdrawn in the wake of clear discontent from the grass roots.

And the grass roots can certainly voice their displeasure. The Anguilla secession had demonstrated how public opinion tends to support the underdog in any unequal contest (brilliantly exploited by the Icelanders in their 'cod wars' with Britain). The threat of 'collateral damage' restricts the room for manoeuvre available to the big players, and the quasi-state status of UKOTs can grant them direct access to the machinery and assemblies of international and regional organizations: the Hon. McKeeva Bush, 'First Minister' of the Cayman Islands, must go down as the first head of a subnational island jurisdiction to address the United Nations General Assembly in June 2003 (p. 39). Ironically, in the same speech, with its obvious symbolism of sovereignty, Bush underlined the fact that the Cayman Islands had no wish for independence (p. 42–43).

As for documenting the tensions of the present, the book does well to highlight the strains between elected politicians (who must coddle a very approachable electorate) and appointed representatives of the British Crown (typically, the Governor). 'Turf wars are normal' (p. 20). One must remember that, in a world gripped increasingly by multi-level and intersecting governance, the UK is itself obliged to respond to decisions taken by such bodies as the OECD, the WTO or the European Union. How to square ultimate responsibility for good governance with already devolved executive powers is a sensitive and difficult issue.

Overall, a very good and worthwhile read about an area which remains surprisingly under-researched, given its relevance to a world of increasingly integrating economies and splitting polities.

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Islands of Women and Amazons: Representations and Realities. *Batya Weinbaum.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999). ISBN 0292791267
This ambitious and wide-ranging study explores material across a very long historical and a very broad geographical sweep. Batya Weinbaum argues that the myth of Amazons and of separate communities of women living apart on islands has had diverse and often contradictory meanings. She

does not attempt to shape her findings in one direction, towards a liberal or conservative reading. But she does underpin her entire assemblage of examples by her belief in archetypes. The advantage of this is that it allows her to investigate nuanced similarities and differences among texts and practices as far distant from each other as the *Odyssey* and the Mexican Marian island, *Isla Mujeres*, dominated (and to some degree formed) by American tourism.