

Sébastien Chauvin, Peter Clegg and Bruno Cousin (Eds.) (2018). *Euro-Caribbean societies in the 21st Century: Offshore finance, local elites and contentious politics*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge. Hbk. £115. xiii+199pp. ISBN: 978-1-85743-869-7.

Chauvin, Clegg and Cousin have put together a useful collection of studies on overseas territories in the Caribbean. Like all collections, it is uneven and, sadly, its EU origins exclude the United States territories, which would have extended coverage beyond the Dutch, British and French territories that are included. A map too would have been helpful for readers less familiar with the region. While the book balances coverage of the remnants of the three ‘colonial powers’, two of the four chapters on the British territories cover the Cayman Islands (and there is barely a line on other UK overseas territories) while French Guiana (Guyane) – very much an anomaly here – Martinique and Guadeloupe otherwise get their own chapters.

Most chapters reveal a ‘colonial particularism’, with the worst offenders in the French chapters, whose authors – rather like the French state – have largely failed to notice that Martinique and Guadeloupe are part of an island chain. Only Wouter Veenendaal on the Dutch municipalities and Peter Clegg on the UK’s territories point to parallels and differences elsewhere in the Caribbean, let alone beyond. Likewise, none of the authors have compared these territories with islands of comparable size but different status. Dominica and St Kitts barely rate a mention. The book has no concluding chapter; hence; differences and similarities must be teased out from the individual chapters.

That said, there are some very valuable analytical chapters. The first part of the book covers recent political changes in the three clusters of territories, few of which are of great significance to their administering powers, despite seemingly constant review processes, at least for the UK and Dutch territories, invariably directed from above. Consequently most UK territories acquired new constitutions in this century with somewhat more ‘local content’. Dutch territories were reformulated in 2010 with the Netherlands Antilles umbrella disappearing and the three smallest of its component islands (Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius) becoming Dutch municipalities, formally decolonised through integration, while the somewhat larger Sint Maarten and Curaçao became ‘autonomous countries’ (joining Aruba, which has held such a status since the mid-1980s). While the French territories have largely remained content with their ‘integrated’ status as French *départements*, they too did not escape fragmentation as both Saint Martin (one half of a small island; the world’s smallest shared populated jurisdiction) and Saint Barthélemy ‘seceded’ from Guadeloupe to rid themselves of what they perceived to be Guadeloupian dominance and establish more direct relations with Paris. They became ‘collectivities’, another of the baffling number of designations accorded to the various Caribbean territories.

Peter Clegg opens the substantive chapters with one more sequel to his now 20+-year-long series of studies assiduously dissecting trends in the British territories, as they succumb to hazards, finance and corruption and the vacillations of Whitehall. His chapter elegantly brings the story up to the potentially disastrous impacts of Brexit, now unleashed on the territories (who were not, of course, consulted on the matter). Justin Daniel reflects on questions of identity in Martinique and Guadeloupe where diversity is somewhat subsumed within *département* status, but there is a constant and anxious differentiation between being a ‘native born citizen’ and being a *metropolitain* that is both symbolic and practical. This differentiation permeates several of the chapters, but especially Roy Bodden’s on the Cayman Islands, where ‘belongers’ are outnumbered by relatively recent migrants from elsewhere, and are marginalised politically. Bodden, a Caymanian and former Minister of Education, reflects on the consequent tensions and argues that ‘voluntary colonialism’ has spawned an identity crisis and division: on one hand, expatriates who have acquired ‘belonger’ status, but are

considered mere ‘paper Caymanians’ by the native born; while, on the other hand, the latter’s ‘entitlement culture’ is derided by the expats.

That schism is elaborated on in May Hen’s innovative chapter examining how these distinctions have come about in the finance sector, and how this key economic pillar is dominated by outsiders. Recent UK attempts to remove such distinctions legally have been resented locally and are seen as ‘modern colonialism’. Chelsea Schields takes a more social perspective on these discontents in focusing on the reaction in the islands to the imposition of marriage equality legislation by the Netherlands, which incidentally resulted in quite new coalitions of interests. In the UK territories, similar pressures to recognise same-sex marriage, and broader LGBT issues, have been resisted. William Vlcek offers a more conventional approach to the global governance challenge of the finance industries in these subnational territories. These various chapters examine the antecedents for the UK pressures and how they were morphing into a widespread local distaste for, and resolve to resist, any imposition of the trilogy of same sex marriage, removal of belonger status and tighter regulation of the finance industry.

Alongside the inevitable presence of the colonial powers, there are two distinctive features about this book’s approach. First, is its focus on the expanded role of the EU for all the territories discussed here. The second, and inevitably, is Brexit, whose uncertain but dark shadow hangs over the book, provoking many nervous asides about the problems that will arise not merely for Gibraltar but in almost forgotten islands like Anguilla.

Matthew Bishop and Genève Philip launch themselves into acronym heaven, to discuss the growing role of the EU, in financial provisions, trade and citizenship issues, that has involved greater protectionism for Caribbean OTs, inelegantly titled EU ‘outermost regions’. Peter Clegg takes up the tale in detail for the UK territories. These are largely views from above. The book focuses much more on attempts by metropolises to regulate offshore finance, all manner of political and legal shifts, and outbreaks of corruption rather than through discussions of local politics. The ‘contentious politics’ of the sub-title are more those of Brussels than of *Pointe-à-Pitre* or George Town. Offshore finance gains its own chapter whereas tourism has a single line in the book. Agriculture and fisheries fare no better; yet development grants and farm subsidies are part of the Brussels experience.

Lammert de Jong, Ron van der Veer and Wouter Veenendaal all discuss political shifts in the new Dutch municipalities and the role of public opinion, to reflect on the constant battle between hearts and minds, most evident in the smaller Dutch territories, that resent the perceived recolonisation of the islands. Both Bonaire and Sint Eustatius have sought to redress the change and gain greater autonomy. However Veenendaal demonstrates how such aspirations have been dashed through polarised and hostile relationships between political parties and excessive clientelism, denying the municipalities a sense of unity of purpose; to the frustration of politicians and senior civil servants in The Hague.

Effectively, ‘civilising missions’ live on in a new guise. Schields’ chapter reveals how social issues are increasingly more important in the OTs and draws attention to the complexity of population structure even, or perhaps particularly, in quite small places.

Guy Numa offers a new perspective on strikes and economic costs, and the burdens of everyday life in Guadeloupe and Martinique, and Audrey Célestine takes this further to provide a perspective on businesses in the 2009 economic crisis in Martinique. Both offer perspectives on the complex interrelationships of class, ethnicity and privilege, and thus the certainties of frustration over uneven development. Monopolies are entrenched and the 2009 strikes in both Martinique and Guadeloupe against *pwofitasyon* have largely failed to restructure economic

development. Gérard Collomb and Edenz Maurice take the theme of ethnicity further in their analysis of French Guiana (Guyane) and argue that *créolisation* is more important than integration, but that process has reached an endpoint where it no longer represents cohesion, a function of unusual migration complexities. In the only territory with an indigenous population, diversity is increasing as Amerindians make their mark, and immigration is exceptional. Ethnicity is complicated by substantial migration from Brazil, Suriname and Haiti, and complex local ethnic differences, in one of the most artificial economies in the region. In the French territories especially questions are thus raised over seeming material wealth, the relative deprivation of integration and thence the continued emigration to the metropole.

Overall, the book effectively examines the series of changes that have impacted these territories in the 21st century, from changes in nomenclature, to relations with mother countries and with the EU. For any understanding of post-colonialism and decolonisation in the Caribbean, the book is invaluable. It also points to the slow shift to greater autonomy, usually demanded in the territories, rather than encouraged from afar. It also emphasizes how, in tropical islands six thousand kilometres from the metropolises, frustrations and resentment over finance, and all manner of social and economic concerns, are seemingly inevitable.

The complications and follies of Brexit had yet to emerge when the book took shape. Another follow-up is necessary to record its implications – potentially significant for Anguilla especially – if not for the French *départements*. In terms of chronology, the Introduction ends with the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma, that led to the obvious recognition in most territories that, dilatory though some colonial powers were, especially the UK, in providing assistance, the territories under their purview were invariably better off than their independent neighbours, as post-hurricane Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda can attest. In some ways, this is the leitmotif of the book: that there is something of an enviable ‘best of both worlds’ scenario, but where the material benefits of ‘negotiated dependency’ may have come at the expense of sacrificing local culture on the double altar of Europeanisation and globalisation. Other social scientists might point to the need for a complementary understanding of where local people fit into grander narratives about constitutions and international finance, alongside a constant reflection on hearts and minds. These tiny fragments of empire will be around for a long time and, in an age of populism and civilisationism, as Brexit shows, there may well be hard times ahead.

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