

**Godfrey Baldacchino (ed.) (2013) *The Political Economy of Divided Islands: Unified Geographies, Multiple Polities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 256 pp., £63 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-137-02312-4.**

This is the first collection of essays to focus on the political economy of divided islands, its uniqueness perhaps due to the fact that there exist only ten of such contested territories worldwide. As Baldacchino explains in the introduction, the fascination for ‘divided islands’ might depend on the ways in which they challenge geo-political imagination. Whereas we simply accept that continents are divided and administered by several nation states, “a finite and self-evident island geography smoothens the nurturing of a sense of identity that is contiguous with territory” (p. 3). Thus the very idea that an island could be divided and shared among competing powers appears alien to common-sense logic.

To be sure, there is a wealth of interdisciplinary research concerning divided cities that happen to be on contested islands – Belfast and Nicosia – yet the focus is never on the insular context, but rather on the nature of the ethno-national conflicts that shape these internal divisions, rendering these cities comparable to other ethno-nationally contested cities on *terra firma* (Calame & Charlesworth, 2009). By highlighting the specificities brought about by the very ‘islandness’ (p. 20) of these empirical cases, this edited book extends and enriches a timely discussion on the territorial aspiration of nations. In particular, the book accounts for the specific socio-political, historical, and economic conditions of islands to explore cross-border exchange dynamics and the political economy of fractured territories that are imagined as self-contained and spatially enclosed.

The first two chapters offer an introduction to the topic of divided islands. Chapter two summarises the main intent of the book, which is to foster a dialogue between the flourishing literatures on border and island studies. More specifically, the book critically engages with the concept of *bordering*, which moves away from understanding the border as a taken-for-granted line, and to favour a novel engagement with borders as sites of exploration that are in a state of becoming. As Brambilla (2015: 19) aptly puts it, “borders are not neutral lines of separation between nation-state sovereignties, but they simultaneously define membership and exclusion, marking the boundary between rule and its exceptions.” Within this conceptual framework, the various chapters of the book attempt to look at different borders as sites of political contestation, social engagement, and reproduction of norms by examining how they react to the movements of goods and people, and how these flows render island borders as porous or solid.

Chapters three to twelve account for the empirical cases of Cyprus, Ireland, New Guinea, Borneo, Timor, Usedom/Uznam, Hispaniola, Saint-Martin/Siin Maarten, Tierra del Fuego, and Bolshoi Ussuriiski/Heixiazi. An additional chapter is dedicated to Great Britain, “the fractured island.” This chapter, written during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, explores how an imagined Scottish secession would have affected the future of the British islands.

These ten islands differ greatly in size and location. The history of their contestation often interweaves with colonial and post-colonial dynamics, which also shape the very socio-economic and political relationships within each island and externally to their former colonial empires and the rest of the world. Some of the islands are fractured along geographical borders that became checkpoints, although for the large majority of these islands the border is not visible; there are no walls. Rather, perceived variations in the language spoken, the architectural landscape, and the provision of infrastructure signal and embody these divides. In the case of Usedom/Uznam, the border even ceased to exist when Germany and Poland both embraced the EU cross-border cohesion policy, making the internal division on the island they share redundant. Yet, local inhabitants still maintain their differences, separated by language, culture, laws, and with low levels of social intermingling.

There is a consistency to be praised across the book that makes light work for the reader in comparing the provided examples. Each chapter begins with a historical overview on the genealogy of the division and it discusses points of difference and contact among the island's segments. The introduction is followed by a critical analysis of the border within the specific context of the island in question. A third section is dedicated to the exploration of cross-border trade and island political economy. This is the central lens that allows the various authors to reflect on how borders open and close to foster (economic) exchanges thus facilitating trade and challenging existing political and social divisions.

What becomes evident is that cross-border trade represents for islanders a major source of income (from manufacture to tourism and agriculture). In fact, it is often the border that facilitates exchanges because of the economic and tax benefits coming from special agreements for trade in divided islands or pacts for mutual cooperation and cross-border development among ruling authorities, signed also to prevent new conflicts. Overall, it is fair to say that often these borders have ceased to be sites of conflict, becoming instead the spatial depositories for financial loopholes. But does economics really trump nationalism, as Sözen wonders for the case of Cyprus (p. 110)? Can economic gain settle territorial, cultural, and social aspirations of the contending parties in cases where the conflict has been particularly violent, as in Cyprus or Northern Ireland? It is perhaps here that new research is needed to explore the extents of such claims.

It would be also interesting (especially considering the interdisciplinarity of both island and border studies) to add anthropological voices to such an important discussion in order to investigate how people, traders and those excluded from trading benefits, understand and make sense of the border in their everyday lives, how they account for the history of the division, their identity and heritage. If we take the border as more than a line and as a site of social and political contestation and reproduction where identities are formed and challenged, then we also need to account for the ways in which membership and exclusion make and re-make these institutional boundaries. How does inclusion or exclusion from trade affect

insular social dynamics? While the book departs from challenging the very idea that islands are homogeneous territories often imagined as political, social, and economic continuums, the ways in which islands are accounted for is often according to the same logic: what about the differences in experiencing these islands from within? For instance, the roles played by smugglers and other modern-day privateers, who seem to become extremely visible characters – even if never fully portrayed – in these islands' economies, are never fully explored. How do grey economies grow within established trade agreements throughout divided islands? How do smugglers make, re-make or subvert borders by refusing to obey to the rules imposed by territorial regimes? How does violence (as the heritage of the conflicts that affected these islands) affect – or even instantiate – specific economic relationships?

Overall, this is a very welcome book that contributes to extremely important and ongoing discussions. It will appeal to a broad readership including specialists in the fields of conflict studies, divided and contested states, border researchers, and island experts as well as curious neophytes. The richness of the empirical material, as well as the wide canvass provided by the number of case studies, makes this book a highly enjoyable source of information about divided islands and a vital first step towards a fuller understanding of the place of islands within wider (and more conventional) political geographies.

### *References*

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Calame, J., & E. Charlesworth (2009) *Divided Cities Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

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