Small Island Nations and Democratic Values

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Summary. — When it comes to the practice of democratic politics, do size and insularity matter? A number of studies suggest that small island states are more likely to be democratic than others, regardless of levels of economic development. The Commonwealth islands, especially, have done very well on indices of political and civil rights and have provided the basis for vibrant civil societies. But this research also indicates that in other instances, rigid control exercised by elites may result in nepotism and patronage. As well, ''islandness'' has proved little protection against severe ethno-cultural cleavages and, in small archipelagos, to secessionist movements.
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1. INTRODUCTION: AN OLD DEBATE

When it comes to the practice of democratic politics, do size and insularity matter? Do scale and a geographic trait—a land mass physically detached by water from a mainland—affect governance? Thirty years ago, before most of today's small countries and microstates, the majority of which are islands, had attained independence, Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte addressed this issue in their book *Size and Democracy*. They noted that the classical Greek thinkers—Pericles, Plato and Aristotle, among others—believed that a polis had to be small to be free of tyranny.

> Smallness, it was thought, enhanced the opportunities for participation in and control of the government... Smallness made it possible for every citizen to know every other, to estimate his qualities, to understand his problems, to develop friendly feelings toward him, to analyze and discuss with comprehension the problems facing the polity.

In the age of the Enlightenment, the *philosophes* returned to this theme: For Rousseau, equality, participation, effective control over government, political rationality, friendliness, and civic consensus all necessitated a small state, while Montesquieu argued that the requirements of republican democracy—virtue, self-restraint, obedience to the law, dedication to the common good, loyalty, equality and frugality—were best met in states of modest dimensions (Dahl & Tufte, 1973, pp. 5–7). Rousseau also suggested, in his 1765 *Constitu-*

tional Project for Corsica, that a medium-sized island, such as his eponymous Mediterranean one, was best suited to provide the optimum conditions for peace and democracy. As David Lowenthal reminds us, it was the small state that was then considered the norm in the international system (Lowenthal, 1987, p. 27).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, however, large political entities, even if dysfunctional, came to be seen as unavoidable; they were a means of sustaining large internal markets, economies of scale, a single currency, fiscal equalization, and military security. But all that has now changed. No longer must small peoples remain part of or beholden to larger states in order to benefit from protected markets and military security; their prosperity no longer requires a diminution of their political independence or cultural distinctiveness. While small states do face challenges as well as opportunities in today's world, with its rapidly increasing flows of trade and investment, and some will have to ''adapt, indeed transform, their economies to secure the benefits of globalization and the increasingly open global trading environment,'' (Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Joint Task Force on Small States, 2000, p. 37), these problems should be surmountable without the need for political amalgamation if the proper arrangements, in the form of free trade, common currency areas and collective security treaties, are put in place.

There are, indeed, now more than 50 states in the world with populations of less than two million.

There are numerous definitions of the word ''small'' as a measure of country size. It may refer to area, population, density, economic indicators such as GNP, geographic and physical characteristics, or a combination of some or all of these (Downes, 1988, pp. 75–96). Usually, the term refers to population; though many studies, including some cited below, limit themselves to entities of one million people or less, I have included those with up to 1.5 million people.

As for what constitutes democracy, whatever else it may mean, it should certainly encompass equal rights for all the citizens of a state, and their ability to control their collective destiny by participating directly in decision-making, as voters and as elected office-holders. At a minimum, a democratic political system must incorporate limited, constitutional government and the rule of law; basic political freedoms and civil rights and liberties; regular, fair and competitive elections; an independent legislature and judiciary; military subordination to civilian authority; and a considerable degree of accountability by government and probity in the management of public funds (Wiarda, 2002, p. 163).

Dahl and Tufte (1973) had themselves determined to their satisfaction that rates of political participation did not vary systematically with the size of a country and that citizens of smaller countries did not feel a greater sense of political efficacy than those of larger ones—at least not at a national level. But it should be noted that what they called small countries would today be termed medium-sized: Norway, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands, to name a few. Even so, they did remark that only in smaller-scale political venues could differences in power, knowledge and directness of communication between citizens and leaders be reduced to a minimum and that only in such territories were representatives more likely to hold views like those of their constituents (Dahl & Tufte, 1973, pp. 46–47, 51, 88, 109).

2. RECENT RESEARCH

More recent research, focussing on much smaller states, has reached different conclusions, to the point that a consensus has now emerged that ''small country size has been shown to be conducive to democracy'' (Fry, 2002, p. 86). Dahl and Tufte's book appeared just before the dramatic expansion of democracy that began in 1974 with the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship, and that continued apace in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s, a process which Samuel Huntington characterized as the ''third wave'' of democratization, one that resulted in some 30 countries shifting from authoritarian to democratic rule (Huntington, 1991, pp. 21–26).

Diamond and Tsalik have remarked upon the striking fact that during this past quarter century, some 17 new states with populations of under one million gained their independence, and most of these have become stable liberal democracies. Indeed, close to 75% of states with populations of less than one million were democracies in 1998, compared to less than 60% of larger countries (Diamond & Tsalik, 1999, p. 117). The latest example of course is East Timor. As a study of 45 countries conducted by a Commonwealth Advisory Group in 1997 observed, ''Small states are more likely to be democratic than large states, irrespective of levels of economic development,'' and ''they exhibit an enviable record of political stability'' (1997, pp. 11, 114).

As I noted above, determining whether, and to what degree, a country is democratic is open to interpretation. The Diamond/Tsalik and other studies I will cite here define states as democratic by means of ''freedom scores'' and other quantifiable data that measure various indicators of democracy. These yardsticks, developed by various social scientists, include, among others, the Freedom House index of Political and Civil Liberties, the Coppedge/Reinecke Polyarchy Scale, and the Polity III measure of democracy. This is a very inexact science, as we well know, and subjectivity inevitably influences the methodology that determines the rankings and evaluations; but still, it does at least compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges.

If smallness does, as the classical political theorists long ago suggested, reinforce popular rule, does ''islandness'' add yet another dimension? After all, the proliferation of small island states may be the most obvious example of a resurgent small-scale localism in international politics.

Even at the start of the 21st century, many of the world's smallest and weakest islands remain colonies of one sort or another, whether under

the rubric of "overseas territory," "overseas department," "Commonwealth," "organized territory," "associate state," or some other euphemism. Others govern themselves under "home rule" or other federacy arrangements with larger states (Watts, 2000, pp. 17–37). But, many small islands have attained independence since the 1960s and there are now 31 sovereign island states on the planet with populations of one million or less (including those based partly on islands, such as Equatorial Guinea, or sharing parts of islands, as do Brunei and now East Timor). If Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago, which each have about 1.2 million people, are included, the figure rises to 33. In addition, Bougainville and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are unrecognized *de facto* states. Island countries now constitute 64% of all small sovereign states.

Some academics have dismissed the concept of "island" as a separate category of analysis; for Percy Selwyn, what really matters about small islands is their "remoteness" and "peripherality" (Selwyn, 1980, pp. 945–946). But others have determined that being an island as well as being small is not only salient but makes it more probable that a state will successfully build democracy.

Hadenius (1992) measured the level of democracy in 132 Third World countries on a scale of his own devising, running from 0 to 10. He discovered that for 29 small island states, those with populations of up to one million, the average grade was 7.0, about double that for all other countries. Indeed, of the 28 countries that scored a nine or more, 17 were small island states; seven of these scored a perfect 10. Small islands were indeed "special;" they tended to be more democratic than bigger islands or non-insular states of similar size (Hadenius, 1992, pp. 61–62; 122–127).

Stepan and Skach (1993) reported that of the 93 countries in the world that had become independent during 1945–79, only 15 were still "continuous democracies" a decade later. Of these, 10 were small island states (Stepan & Skach, 1993, pp. 10–15).

In a 1999 study using data from 80 non-OECD countries, Robert Faris also found island states to be substantially more democratic than continental countries. Of the 64 countries that became independent over 1950–80, 18 were small island countries. While only six of the continental states in this group were democracies, this was true of 11 of the islands. In other words, "not only were the majority of

islands democratic, but the majority of new democracies were islands" (Faris, 1999, p. 2). Standard explanations such as economic development, colonial heritage and cultural homogeneity were by themselves insufficient to account for this pattern, his analysis suggested. What then was responsible for this "island effect?" Controlling for numerous other variables, Faris proposed that it was due to their small trading networks and lack of significant investments in security. Their "insulation" from the international system allowed them to avoid getting embroiled in warfare and hence fostered a climate conducive to democratic politics. They exist in the international relations equivalent of a "greenhouse," sheltered from conflict (Faris, 1999, pp. 8–9, 24). Indeed, 16 small island states have no military.

Ott (2000) examined the relationship between state size and the formation and maintenance of democratic political systems. Using a cross-national, quantitative data set on 222 nations for 1973–95, her study observed the effects of smallness, when measured by population size, on a number of variables relating to regime type. She found state size a more useful analytical category than degree of development or geographic location for understanding the prerequisites for democracy.

Ott argued that the small-scale social structure which is prevalent in small states (which she defined as countries with less than 1.5 million people) directly affects the social interaction of individuals through the multiple-role relationships that are created by virtue of small population size; and this in turn indirectly affects their political and economic systems through the impact of such social networks on both elite relationships and on political interaction within the society as a whole. Small-scale social structures are personalistic and informal; the overall pattern of interaction among elites is consequently more cooperative, and this behavior tends to be mimicked by the citizenry as a whole. Small state size therefore acts as an enabling environment for democratization, she maintained, regardless of levels of income, since the social systems mitigate political conflict, encourage elite cooperation and increase the stakes of citizens in the regime. Small states are more likely to be, and remain, democratic, than large ones, across all levels of income (Ott, 2000, pp. 111–124).

Ott also discovered that the probability of being democratic increases further if the state is both small and an island. "Being an island state

is highly correlated with all the democracy indicators,'' she states. Islands were found to be ''very significantly'' associated with every measure of political democracy, even when relatively poor. ''The fact of being an island country has a consistent and positive impact on the likelihood of political democracy;'' and this finding holds true at all levels of per capita income, which ''may explain why some lower income small island countries become democratic despite established associations between lower income and a lack of democratic structures'' in non-island situations. Although she did not pursue the question of why small island states are more democratic than other small-scale polities, noting only that this deserves further analysis, Ott, like Faris, speculates that being insulated from external influences ''may contribute to their ability to implement and maintain democratic regimes'' (Ott, 2000, pp. 127–129, 202).

Clague, Gleason, and Knack (2001, pp. 23, 25–27, 29, 31, 37), using data on the political regimes of 146 countries 1960–94, found significant correlations between small island status and democracy as well. The results of their multivariate analysis demonstrated that small islands, being more ethnically and linguistically homogenous, exhibited characteristics that tend to favor the maintenance of democracy.

Anckar (2002) also maintains that the literature on democracy suggests that small-sized and insular units hold democracy in high esteem. Utilizing Freedom House data on a comparative basis, his study verifies the existence of a strong link between small size and insularity, on the one hand, and democracy on the other hand. Modernization theory alone, which examines levels of income, education and literacy and their political and social effects, is unable to explain ''why small size is such a fertile soil for democratic standard and performance.'' He, like Ott, found that, while the link between wealth and democracy is very apparent in large states, the same pattern does not hold for small islands, where even most low-income states are democratic (Anckar, 2002, pp. 378–380).

Other scholars, too, have attributed the attachment to democratic politics of small island nations to their social cohesion, shared interests, intimacy and sense of community—in other words, to vibrant civil societies. Hache has referred to the ''distinct identity,'' be it linguistic, religious, or social, that the ''relatively clear boundaries provided by geography'' often confers upon people living on islands (Hache, 1998, pp. 51–52). Anckar and Anckar (1995) consider small islands to be places ''imbued with democracy and democratic procedures.'' They tend to be relatively homogeneous, facilitating among their inhabitants ''a high degree of sympathetic identification with each other'' and ''a greater effort to feel others out.'' Their citizens have greater opportunity to participate in choosing their leaders and in decision-making; there are fewer layers of officialdom and ''open channels of communication exist between those who govern and those who are governed,'' resulting in more accountability and responsiveness on the part of governments. Small island states also make considerable use of instruments of direct democracy such as constitutional referenda and popular initiatives.

There is also a perception that not many options exist for small states in a complex world and that cautious and pragmatic political strategies and the presentation of a united front to the outside world best serve their interests. Remoteness also becomes a unifying factor: ''When people live at a distance from the outside world,'' they are forced to become more cohesive in order to solve special problems, and the links between self-interest and that of the nation are more obvious (Anckar & Anckar, 1995, pp. 213, 220–222).

King thinks that islands wield an influence over the character of the people who inhabit them; ''life there promotes self-reliance, contentment, a sense of human scale'' (1993, p. 14). In small-scale jurisdictions, the costs of conflict are higher and more likely to polarize communities. So a basic consensus of values exists which is often lacking in larger entities. After all, as Lowenthal remarks, ''their inhabitants must get along with one another'' and so they develop ''sophisticated modes of accomodation'' (1987, pp. 38–39), or what Bray and others have referred to as strategies for ''managed intimacy.'' These are, they note, ''highly personalised and transparent societies'' (Bray, 1991, pp. 21, 25). In many microstates, the average legislator represents far fewer than 10,000 electors; in Britain, by contrast, the average parliamentary seat contains about 90,000 people; in France, almost 100,000; and in Japan, almost a quarter million. So the higher costs entailed in running for office tends to professionalize politics in larger countries (Diamond & Tsalik, 1999, pp. 127–129).

3. SOME CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRACY ON ISLANDS

Clague *et al.* (2001, pp. 27, 31) have observed that being a former colony of Britain or one of its cultural descendants (the United States, Australia or New Zealand) has had "a powerful positive effect" and significantly increases the probability of democracy in islands. For small island states, this past history usually entailed a lengthy period of "tutelary" introduction to democratic norms and institutions and a non-revolutionary transition to independence. According to Ott, "This gradualist background of small states could be another positive influence on their probability of developing democratic political systems" (Ott, 2000, pp. 69–70, 84).

The Commonwealth has to all intents and purposes become a club of small states: of its 54 members, 25 are small sovereign islands. Since the passage of the 1991 Harare Declaration, it is also committed to the maintenance of human rights and democratic values as a condition for membership. This has posed little problem for most of the small island states in the organization. There has been "remarkable fidelity to multiparty democracy" in some two-thirds of these, notes Lemon (1993, p. 44) and, as Ross has remarked, "They are seldom found reported in the annual reports of Amnesty International and Freedom House as countries with human rights infringements;" virtually all of them have sustained "a credible civil society" and remain politically stable (Ross, 1997, p. 417). Huntington (1991, p. 43) called their success "the last legacy of the British Empire to democratization."

The Commonwealth islands have done very well on indices of political and civil rights and have suffered relatively little civil disorder. The basic framework of the Westminster–Whitehall system of government, including a representative parliament, competitive party system, open and honest elections, the exclusion of the military from politics, and a neutral civil service, has been largely preserved. This greater receptiveness to a European-style political culture can be attributed to their very "islandness" (Sutton, 1987, pp. 17–18). This is especially the case with the Creolized plantation economy islands in the West Indies and Mascarene islands. After all, they are the products of empire; as Domínguez states, "there was no preimperial society to overcome" (1993, pp. 16–17). Due to their history of migration and overseas contacts, these islands are ethnically and culturally often quite distinct from the peoples of neighbouring land masses. Mauritius and the Seychelles are historically and sociologically more similar to, say, Barbados and Trinidad than to neighboring African states—or even to nearby islands such as the Comoros or Madagascar.

Although some in the Commonwealth Caribbean face human rights challenges, islands such as the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, and St. Lucia possess an "impressive record of democratic politics" (Griffith & Sedoc-Dahlberg, 1997, pp. 2, 10). Democracy in this region "has proved to be more effective and durable than in any other in the developing world" (Payne, 1993b, p. 9). As Payne has observed, "Socialized by over three hundred years of British colonialism, the emergent Commonwealth Caribbean elite could scarcely have become anything else other than liberal democracies." There has been a "deep penetration of British influence" and the Westminster system is viewed in the region "not as foreign import but as genuinely autochthonous" and there is reason to believe that liberal democracy "has indeed grounded itself in the political culture of the region." The Westminster model, Sutton maintains, "enjoyed widespread support" and when independence came, it was "consensual and constitutionalist." In internalizing and adapting this inherited political structure to Caribbean conditions "in a creative and distinctive way," one that mixes "British form with Caribbean vitality," the British Caribbean states have been able to sustain functionally democratic political institutions (Clague *et al.*, 2001, p. 37; Payne, 1993a, pp. 57–60, 72; 1995, pp. 47–48; Sutton, 1999, pp. 68–69). This has also benefited women: of the eight island microstates whose percentage of women elected to parliament stood above that of the world average of 15.2% in 2003, five were in the Caribbean (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2003).

Every Caribbean Commonwealth country has experienced a change of government as a result of an election, while the 1979 seizure of power by the New Jewel Movement in Grenada remains the only example of an extra-constitutional *coup d'état*.

Huntington is the latest in a long line of social scientists who has noted that "a strong correlation exists between Western Christianity and democracy;" he calculated that in 1988 Catholicism and/or Protestantism were the

dominant religions in 39 of 46 democratic countries (Huntington, 1991, pp. 72–73). The collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist Eastern Europe has led to an increase in their number. As we know, most small island states fall into this category.

In Europe, Iceland in the North Atlantic and Malta in the Mediterranean are democracies, and internally self-governing entities such as the Azores, Balearic Islands, Corsica, Madeira, the Faroes, and the Isle of Man, should they ever become sovereign states, would no doubt follow suit. These peoples all share a Christian cultural heritage.

The majority of people in Caribbean and South Pacific states, too, are at least nominally Christian by faith. In trying to explain the surprisingly robust democracies of the Caribbean, Domínguez credits their high degree of religious diversity (including the many internally democratic Protestant sects) with providing a basis for political pluralism; he also makes reference to the anti-authoritarian legacy of societies governed by the descendants of slaves. Hadenius also posits this cultural explanation for the relatively high levels of democracy in these island states: for him, the significant fact is that many are disproportionately Protestant (Domínguez, 1993, pp. 9–10; Hadenius, 1992, pp. 118–121, 126, 131).

Cultural, religious and professional associations, grounded in middle-class values, a consequence of the "deep penetration" of colonialism, are all prominent features of these societies; they defend civil liberties, support a critical media and provide political education to the public. Domínguez has also cited the legacy of independent labour unions in the West Indies, an institution of civil society usually lacking in most Third World situations (including, with the exception of Fiji, the Pacific), while Pinkney (1994) reminds us that political parties "with strong, deep bases" enjoyed a long life before independence in the British Caribbean and colonies such as Mauritius (and for that matter Malta); this "generated a greater degree of support and legitimacy for both themselves and the pluralist systems over which they ultimately presided." Parties are, as Sutton points out, "the recognized form of political participation."

These countries have also placed great emphasis on education, health and social welfare, for women as well as men; this has helped decrease fertility rates to levels lower than Third World norms and has reduced population pressure on their economies. Most score very well on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI), which measures average life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, gross school enrollments, and adjusted per capita income in terms of purchasing power parity, all general indicators of the level of human capital formation in a society. The country with the highest HDI score in 2003 was Norway, with a score of 0.944, and the average for all high-income OECD countries stood at 0.929. The average for all developing countries was 0.655, but eight small island Third World states scored above 0.800, and another 10 above 0.700. (Seven South Pacific microstates are not included in the tables.) Indeed, of the 35 states classified as "low human development"—that is, countries with scores under 0.500—none were small island states (Clague et al., 2001, pp. 32–34; Commonwealth Advisory Group, 1997, pp. 128–130, 135; Domínguez, 1993, p. 16; Pinkney, 1994, pp. 55, 60; Sutton, 1987, p. 11; United Nations Development Programme, 2003, pp. 237–241).

4. NEGATIVE FEATURES OF SMALL ISLAND POLITICS

Other researchers have investigated the negative features of small states. Smallness, as Ott notes, creates contrasting effects. While it in most instances it encourages democratization, in others, the tight control exercised by elites may, conversely, result in heavy-handedness on the part of decision-makers (Ott, 2000, p. 99). Richards has remarked that in polities where elites tend to converge, decisions may have consequences that reverberate and have significant effects throughout the society. This is a "small personalised world which has a closer unity between state and society through the individual office-holders" and where "the dividing line between private and public concerns tends to become blurred" (Richards, 1990, pp. 42–45).

Baldacchino has criticized small state governments for their "aggrandized roles" in the economy and society: "The distinction between state and civil society becomes close to a theoretical quirk." Such state ubiquity on small islands can foster nepotism, cronyism, patronage and political clientism, even in the Commonwealth states (Baldacchino, 1997, pp. 69–70). Their small populations and conse-

quent lack of anonymity allow political leaders in these countries to accumulate "a great deal of personal information on voters" and citizens who do not support popular governments can be "easily identified" and victimized, with "the denial of jobs to those who had not supported the governing party" (Hope, 1986, p. 192; Peters, 1992, pp. 12, 100). Politicians such as Eric Gairy and Maurice Bishop in Grenada, James Mancham in the Seychelles, and Walter Lini in Vanuatu, were guilty of such political transgressions in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is also difficult to operate the specialized, impersonal, universalistic and politically neutral rational–legal bureaucracies that Max Weber considered the hallmark of a modern state. "In small states, public officials are *personally identified* with the consequences of their decisions," emphasizes Baker (1992, p. 18).

The relatively small population base, coupled with large-scale emigration (often of the most dynamic elements), has left many states with a paucity of seasoned public servants and skilled professionals and has forced them to depend on external intellectual resources, sometimes to their detriment. "Hypnotized by the imputed wisdom and inordinate powers which big-state visitors are seen to command," they may come to rely on outsider consultants who, despite a particular field of expertise or specific skills, are less informed about or concerned with those issues most significant to the local population and have no long-term commitments to the welfare of the citizens (Baldacchino, 1997, p. 56). Weak and naive governments also may allow themselves to be manipulated by charlatans and shady adventurers from abroad peddling get-rich-quick schemes, which often results in corruption, exploitation, and fraud. Money laundering and, even worse, arms dealing, drug trafficking, and resource piracy, have also led to consequences corrosive to the democratic process. On some islands, where powerful criminal organizations have become threats to government itself, there have been "mounting concerns about... non-conventional security dangers" (Bartmann, 2002, p. 367). Even the adversarial Westminster system of government itself has come in for criticism: Antiguan academic and diplomat Ronald Sanders, a onetime high commissioner to the United Kingdom, faulted it for creating "an unwholesome confrontational character" in small states; the intense political rivalry, he maintains, may cause opposition parties to oppose worthwhile government initiatives and

be reluctant to set aside political differences for the national good (Sanders, 1997, p. 370). These are, of course, problems that affect the entire category of small states, not just islands, but islands must address them as well.

Sutton has found the long-term survival of democracy in the South Pacific states altogether more problematic than in the West Indies: in this region, pre-democratic political cultures, including various forms of hereditary rule by tribal chieftains, had survived the rather short-lived period of often indirect colonial rule (Sutton, 1987, pp. 9–10). Payne, too, has maintained that "the South Pacific mix of traditionalist politics with democratic forms" has been less able to cope with social and economic change (Payne, 1995, p. 48). It has also hindered the political advancement of women; seven South Pacific states have no female representatives at all in their legislatures (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2003). In 1994, Peter Larmour famously quoted a Fijian newspaper that feared that democracy in the South Pacific was a "foreign flower" that would never take root (1994, p. 45).

Off the west coast of Africa, the Lusophone island states of Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe have suffered prolonged periods of one party non-democratic misrule, while in Equatorial Guinea, which includes the island of Bioko (Fernando Po), opposition political activity is systematically repressed, and torture and human rights violations are common. In the Indian Ocean, the Comoros, Maldives and Seychelles have all suffered from failed mercenary-led coups, while considerable violence accompanied the parliamentary elections in semi-autonomous Zanzibar in 2000. This has led to calls in some quarters for dismantling the 1964 union with the mainland. Zanzibar and its neighboring islands have their own government structures and a degree of autonomy within Tanzania—but now there is pressure within the opposition for greater internal freedom or outright independence.

Nevertheless, there is reason for optimism. The South Pacific does remain, as Reilly (2000) indicates, an "oasis of democracy" (p. 261). Other than Fiji and the Solomon Islands, no other state in Oceania has the sort of bipolar ethnic structure that gives rise to ethnonationalist crises and "them and us" politics, as Greg Fry terms it. This has made possible, he maintains, "a remarkable tenacity in keeping to democratic change of government" (Fry, 2000, pp. 301–303). It is important to remember that

politics in most South Pacific states is "guided by a consensual mood" which allows for power sharing and the expression of minority interests (Anckar, 2000, pp. 60, 64, 69). They are, in the main, functioning democracies: they have held numerous free elections and seen many peaceful changes of government since independence; opposition parties are represented in assemblies; voter participation rates are quite high; civil and political liberties have been upheld; and a free press and labor unions are a feature almost everywhere. Many traditional leaders whose powers derive from clan, tribe or kinship networks have also been elected to modern democratic offices and so combine influence with constitutional authority, which has had a stabilizing effect in some states. Like the Caribbean, these societies are mainly Christian—though in Fiji, where a Methodist-based ethnic Fijian nationalism is fuelled by an anti-Indian animus, this has proved an impediment, rather than an aid, to democratic discourse.

The few non-liberal democratic laggards are moving toward permitting greater popular control over political institutions. Samoa, for example, until 1991 excluded 80% of its population from the franchise; titled family heads (*matai*) elected almost all of the members of parliament. Samoa now has universal suffrage, though even now only traditional heads of families can sit in the legislature. Tonga, which never came under formal colonial rule and remains a traditional monarchy, may also be advancing toward a full-fledged system of democratic government. The strong criticism of the Tongan nobility recently mounted by ordinary Tongans has already shown results; in elections held in March 2002 to the 30-person Tongan Legislative Assembly, seven of the nine seats elected by popular vote were captured by the Human Rights and Democracy Movement.

As for Africa, McElroy and Morris remind us that African islands "enjoy relatively better socio-economic conditions" than their mainland counterparts: their average per capita income is over three times greater than on the continent, recent GDP growth has been 50% faster, unemployment rates are considerably lower, and their literacy and life expectancy rates are significantly higher (McElroy & Morris, 2002, pp. 41–44, 51).

Van de Walle lists four African states that have democratized in the 1990s: of these, two are the island states of Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe (the others are Benin and Mali). "These countries exhibit reasonably

effective instruments of horizontal accountability, usually in the form of a court system or a national legislature that has shown itself willing formally or informally to challenge a constitutionally dominant executive," he has asserted (Van de Walle, 2002, p. 68). Cape Verde moved to multiparty democracy in the 1980s following a period of one-party rule under the leftist African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). In 2001, there were hotly-contested presidential and legislative elections. The country now "stands out as a successful case of political reform" and "is well on its way to becoming a functioning African democracy" (Meyns, 2002, pp. 153, 164).

At independence in 1975, the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé e Príncipe (MLSTP) took power in São Tomé and instituted a quasi-Marxist regime. In the mid-1980s, though, the political climate began to shift and São Tomé has held three competitive presidential elections since 1991. In addition, an effective opposition has emerged in the country's parliament. A bloodless army coup in 2003 was squelched and civilian rule quickly restored in this two-island state, whose economic fortunes look bright with the recent discovery of potentially rich offshore oilfields.

The Seychelles, victim of a coup in 1977 which installed France Albert René as ruler, chafed under his one-party Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) regime after 1979, but in 1991 René and the SPPF consented to liberalize the political system, inviting opposition leaders to return to Seychelles and help rewrite the constitution to permit multiparty politics.

5. ETHNIC CONFLICT AND SEPARATIST SENTIMENTS

"Islandness" has also proved little protection against severe ethno-cultural cleavages, as has been made very clear in bifurcated countries with plural social systems. Indeed, given their small size and the proximity within which communities are forced to co-exist, such tensions may be aggravated, because, as Austin has noted, island populations tend to think that islands "should be complete in themselves" as homogeneous entities. "Little wonder, therefore, that when island communities are mixed...resentment is both mutual and strong" (Austin, 2000, pp. 59, 61). Thurston Clarke has

remarked that "Islands divided by religion, race, or nationality have been spectacular disasters" (Clarke, 2001, p. 255). Indeed, as Premdas has pointed out, their small population size and land area, coupled with a predominantly ethnic bipolarity in their demography, "establishes a particularly virulent context of communal relations" (Premdas, 1999, p. 104).

This is evident in Cyprus, partitioned between its Greek and Turkish communities since 1974; Fiji, where two military coups in 1987, a new constitution promulgated in 1990, and a third coup in 2000, all attempted to preserve the political hegemony of the indigenous (*taukei*) Melanesian Fijians over the numerically almost-equal Indo-Fijian community, descendants of 19th century indentured laborers from India; Trinidad and Tobago, which has from time to time suffered from severe ethnically-based political conflict between its communities of African and South Asian ancestry; and even Mauritius, where the francophone Creole and other communities have become minorities in a population now predominantly of Indian origin. In New Caledonia, indigenous Melanesian Kanaks face opposition from French settlers in their struggle to attain independence from France. The Solomon Islands are also sites of ethnic conflict and the country's political institutions have suffered in consequence, with one government removed by a coup in June 2000; by 2003, the archipelago was in the throes of civil war and had sought help from Australia to restore order. Vanautu is another Melanesian state that is remarkably heterogeneous and has suffered negative consequences.

Yet even in such circumstances small island states have done remarkably well, as shown by Mauritius. It is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous states in the world. Indians form some 52% of the overall population; Creoles, of mixed African and European or Asian ancestry and for the most part Roman Catholics, comprise 27%; Muslims make up over 16% of the country; Chinese about 3%; and Europeans, mostly French Catholic, 2%. In all too many states, such a demographic profile would constitute a recipe for disaster. Yet despite the lack of a shared past, or a common culture, language, religion, or unifying set of ideals, there has been relative ethnic collaboration and stability. In 2000 Mauritius held its seventh free election since independence, resulting, with the victory of the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien

(MSM)/Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) coalition under the leadership of Aneerood Jugnauth, in the third democratic transfer of power in its history. Though there has been an increase in ethnic tension recently, the country has had only four prime ministers since independence, and its political culture remains robustly democratic. Mauritius has in place a working constitution and a competitive multiparty system; partisan politics are open and robust, civil liberties remain fairly secure, the rule of law prevails, and the judiciary is independent.

As for Trinidad and Tobago, while ethnic affiliation largely determines party preference, the country has remained firmly democratic, despite three abortive—and rather eccentric—attempts to overthrow elected governments, in 1970 and 1990. The People's National Movement (PNM), the largely Afro-Trinidadian or Creole-supported organization which had ruled the country, with one interruption, from independence in 1962 onward, was in 1995 defeated by the Indian-backed United National Congress (UNC) whose leader, Basdeo Panday, became prime minister. In 2002 the PNM beat the UNC and Patrick Manning look over. Trinidad's vibrant civil society encourages citizen participation in the political process and the development of strong political parties—another party, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) was also in power, during 1986–92. Compare this to Guyana, a mainland state with a similar ethnic divide, which exhibited a complete breakdown in democratic politics during the Forbes Burnham era during 1964–85. The commitment to democracy of the late autocrat's Afro-Guyanese backed People's National Congress (PNC) remains very problematic; in 1997 the party responded to electoral defeat by the predominantly Indian People's Progressive Party (PPP) with street violence, which failed to undo the results. The PPP was re-elected in 2001.

Pinkney refers to Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago (as well as Barbados), which have never experienced authoritarianism, as "continuous democracies," while Lijphart has identified Mauritius and Trinidad as two of only three Third World ethnically plural countries (along with India) with populations of more than a quarter million that are established democracies, defined as states that have been continuously democratic for at least 20 years (Lijphart, 1999, pp. 48–61; Pinkney, 1994, p. 83).

It is worth noting that even in the Cypriot and Fijian cases, democratic institutions have managed to a large extent to withstand extremely severe challenges. Both ethnically-based Cypriot states remain internal democracies. Their multiparty political systems provide for free and fair elections for both the legislative and executive branches of government; an independent judiciary safeguards civil rights and liberties. Indeed, few states can lay claim to such popular support and consent. Fiji continues to grapple with deep-seated ethnic divisions between its aboriginal and Indian-origin population, and the politicisation of its military does remain a major concern. Nonetheless, following a year of quasi-military rule, new elections were held in August 2001 under the 1997 constitution, which grants Indo-Fijians equal political rights, and the country has returned to civilian rule under Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase's new United Fiji Party or *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL). The Commonwealth, which had suspended Fiji from participation in its decision-making councils in 2000 under the provisions of the Harare Declaration, allowed it to resume full membership following the election.

Archipelagos, with their "especially complex relationships in terms of centre and periphery," and their "island-specific nationalisms," have also been prone to secessionist movements, often based on outlying islands that feel ignored and economically marginalized by the more populous core (Baldacchino, 2002, p. 353; Hache, 1998, p. 64). The island of Tokelau split away from Western Samoa in 1962 and Anguilla from St. Christopher and Nevis in 1967. The Ellice Islands (Tuvalu) split from the Gilberts, now Kiribati, in 1975, three years prior to independence. Nationalists on the island of Bougainville, part of Papua New Guinea, declared a "Republic of the North Solomons" in 1975 and sporadic fighting has continued ever since. The Comoros have been destabilized by secessions; the island of Mayotte never joined the federation, and in 1997 Anjouan and Moheni declared unilateral independence. Rotuma attempted to secede from Fiji in 1988. Nevis, which tried to separate from St. Christopher in a referendum in 1998, is the most recent example. Barbudans have sought at times to quit their partnership with Antigua, Tobagonians theirs with Trinidad, Rodriguans theirs with Mauritius, and the people of Cariacou theirs with Grenada. Secessionist threats have also been voiced on

the islands of Espiritu Santo and Tanna in Vanuatu, in the Marquesas Islands chain of French Polynesia, and on islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Solomons.

The feeling of distinctiveness which living on an island or archipelago inculcates typically facilitates the existence of an insular-based nationalism. Newitt has noted that "Individual island populations, however small, can easily evolve a strong sense of a separate identity" (1992, p. 11). The existence of so much separatist sentiment may reflect, suggests Dommen "the strong sense of locality the bounded island context breeds" (1980, p. 942).

6. CONCLUSION: A SEA OF DEMOCRACY

I began this article by observing that, historically, political philosophers considered small size beneficial to a polity. Only in recent times, with the formation of very large states that arrogated to themselves exclusive economic and political space, did smallness of scale in politics and economics come to be regarded as detrimental to the welfare of a people. Now that the 21st century has ushered in an age of multitiered governance and global economic integration, will we return to the pre-19th century image of the ideal polity as being one of more modest dimension? Such positions can no longer simply be dismissed out of hand as political heresy. They can only reinforce the cause of those who champion small island sovereign statehood.

On May 20, 2002, Timor Leste (East Timor), with its 750,000 inhabitants, became a sovereign state. After a quarter century of Indonesian occupation, which followed upon four and a half centuries of Portuguese colonialism, East Timor's infrastructure remains in tatters and it is one of the least developed countries in the world, with a life expectancy of 57 years and illiteracy at over 40%. Yet a constitution has been drawn up, and a president with limited powers, Xanana Gusmão, was democratically elected. In Dili, the capital, a government drawn from the assembly's majority party, Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for Independent East Timor), has been formed. Another small, democratic island nation has been born (Chesterman, 2002, pp. 60–73; East Timor, 2002, pp. 34–35; Freedom, 2002, pp. 40–41; Murphy, 2002, p. 7). Compare and contrast this with its giant archipelagic neighbor and former oppressor, Indonesia,

which remains a country plagued by military authoritarianism and political extremism.

What then, to conclude, is the balance sheet when we assess the relationship, if any, between democratic political systems and small islands? Not every island is a Malta or Mauritius, an economic and political success story. Many of the world's islands are poor. Using income, human resource weakness and economic vulnerability as criteria, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's *Least Developed Countries 2002 Report* listed 10 small island states among the world's 49 "least developed countries" (United Nations Conference on Trade & Development, 2002, Part 1, pp. 3–16, Part 2, pp. 244–275).

Yet, as Anckar and Ott have pointed out, poverty has had fewer negative consequences in small islands than might be expected; even poor islands fare better than others. Maybe we will never be able to isolate scientifically that elusive independent variable that seems to make islands more conducive to democracy, even if one exists. But more and more statistical and anecdotal evidence indicates that a significant feature about many small island jurisdictions has been their ability to maintain democratic political systems, something which still eludes many larger countries, particularly in the Third World, where most of these states are located.

Development theorists in the 1960s used to maintain that democracy "could only be established on a foundation of economic development" but today, Macdonald writes, that proposition has been reversed (1998, p. 24). As Huber points out, democracy in the long run "is more likely to facilitate peaceful transformation of structures of social and economic domination than authoritarianism" (1993, p. 75), with all of the attendant beneficial economic ramifications. So even for the poor, there is reason for measured optimism.

"The common forces associated with progressive modernization," asserts Russell King, have thus had a sharper impact in the small island setting—better education, a greater degree of urbanization, later marriage and smaller families, and so forth. Small islands, he declares, are indeed "demographically distinct" (King, 1999, p. 95). They have relatively higher levels of affluence and a more thorough metropolitan exposure. And they "contribute to the democratization of the globe" (Anckar, 2002, p. 388). All this makes the small island countries of the international community 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.

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