



Aerial view of Copenhagen, metropolitan centre of the kingdom of Denmark that includes the territories of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands

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## “This is who we are”:

Non-self-governing islands  
crafting a new sovereignty through  
five mechanisms and four drivers

### ABSTRACT

*The continued relevance of the classic concept of state sovereignty has been questioned from diverse academic corners, particularly since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. When it comes to real-life alternatives, one prominent alternative political praxis of sovereignty that emerged since then seems to be Indigenous sovereignty. This chapter argues that another alternative political praxis also emerged since the 1990s, one that largely escaped the limelight: the sovereignty of non-self-governing islands, an Islandian sovereignty. Depending on what is defined as a “non-self-governing island” or a “subnational island jurisdiction” (Baldacchino, Bartmann), there are between*

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*40 and 100 or more of these islands. One particular subset comprises 40-odd islands that are remnants of Europe's colonial (settler) histories. Remarkably, the peoples of these islands refuse classic state sovereignty when voting in independence referendums. Instead, they seem to forge new forms of engagement, new relationships, with their metropolises.*

*This chapter presents five common mechanisms that seem to shape the relationships between former colonial metropolises and their non-self-governing islands and it illustrates these mechanisms of Islandian sovereignty with examples from islands' political praxis. As an additional step, the chapter explores the question of what are the drivers behind these successful mechanisms. It identifies four specific facets of islanders' identity that may explain to some extent the success that islanders have in applying the five mechanisms.*

## INTRODUCTION

The decolonization process of the overseas territories of the colonial powers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to a halt in the mid-1980s. Virtually all of these 40-odd overseas territories are islands thousands of miles from Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK, or the US, and the peoples of these islands refuse sovereignty when voting in independence referendums. These islands therefore remain "non-self-governing islands." Nonetheless, the islanders are not upholding the status quo. Rather, they seem to forge new forms of engagement, new constitutional relationships, with their metropolises. This chapter presents an overview of five common mechanisms that islanders use to shape these new relationships; it argues that islanders—instead of the metropolitan authorities — are the leading agents when it comes to developing and using these mechanisms.

Elsewhere, I have argued with various co-authors that these five mechanisms and this new relationship between non-self-governing islands constitute the contours of a new form of sovereignty: an "Islandian" sovereignty, juxtaposed to the classic, continental, Westphalian sovereignty (Prinsen & Blaise, 2017; Prinsen et al., 2017). What remains to be investigated is what drives these mechanisms; why are they created and how is it that they seem so effective in "moving the goal posts of the status quo"? In a recent case study of negotiations between metropolitan France and its overseas territory Wallis & Futuna, I interviewed islanders negotiating with metropolitan France and through the generous conversations a number of drivers could be identified. Four of these are associated with the islanders' concept of identity (Prinsen et al., forthcoming, 2018).

In this chapter — first presented at the 1st International Conference on Island Economies in November 2017 on Hainan Island, PR China — I summarize and then

connect the five mechanisms with the four drivers and do so by moving beyond single case studies, presenting a range of examples from across the globe to illustrate the mechanisms and how four facets of islanders' identity drives them. In addition, I endeavour to expand what is, in my eyes, a rather Anglophone pond of examples by focusing wherever I can on islanders' experiences with sovereignty on Danish, French, and Dutch non-self-governing islands.

## FIVE MECHANISMS CREATING A NEW SOVEREIGNTY FOR NON-SELF-GOVERNING ISLANDS

### **FIRST MECHANISM:**

#### ***non-self-governing islands vote “no” in independence referendums***

The populations of contemporary non-self-governing islands started the creation of their own unique form of sovereignty — self-determination — in the 1980s. Nearly half the non-self-governing islands associated with the six (former) colonial powers identified in the introduction have organized at one point in time a referendum on independence; the vast majority of them — 17 of the 21 — after the early 1980s when the world's decolonization wave was effectively coming to an end. In 19 of the 21 referendums, majorities voted against independence from the colonial metropole; these majorities often exceeded 90% of the electorate (Table 6.1, following page)<sup>1</sup>.

### **SECOND MECHANISM:**

#### ***non-self-governing islands continuously negotiate constitutional frameworks***

After saying “no” to full sovereignty, the second mechanism that is actually shaping this new form of sovereignty for non-self-governing islands is a process in which islanders negotiate and renegotiate continuously with their respective metropolises to adapt and adjust the constitutional framework that keeps them bonded. For example, the UK has 14 UK Overseas Territories and for the six territories in the Caribbean alone there are three different Acts outlining the constitutional relationship between these islands and London. Four of them (i.e., the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and the Turks & Caicos Islands) have their relationships with London detailed in the 1962 West Indies Act. Bermuda has a separate constitutional arrangement under the 1967 Bermuda Act, and Anguila and

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	<b>Non-self-governing islands</b>	<b>Metropole</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Most recent referendum on independence (year; percentage against)<sup>2</sup></b>
1.	Saint Pierre and Miquelon	F	6,000	1958; 98%
2.	Wallis & Futuna	F	12,000	1959; 94%
3.	Northern Mariana Islands	US	53,000	1975; 79%
4.	Aruba	NL	103,000	1977; 6% <sup>3</sup>
5.	Guam	US	160,000	1982; 96%
6.	Republic of Marshall Islands	US	53,000	1983; 96% <sup>4</sup>
7.	Federated States Micronesia	US	106,000	1983; 42% <sup>5</sup>
8.	Cocos (Keeling) Islands	AUS	1,000	1984; 96%
9.	Palau	US	21,000	1984; 69% <sup>6</sup>
10.	New Caledonia	F	269,000	1987; 98%
11.	United States Virgin Islands	US	106,000	1993; 95% <sup>7</sup>
12.	Bermuda	UK	62,000	1995; 74%
13.	Sint Maarten	NL	34,000	2000; 86%
14.	Bonaire	NL	20,000	2004; 99%
15.	Saba	NL	2,000	2004; 99%
16.	Sint Eustatius	NL	3,000	2005; 99%
17.	Curaçao	NL	153,000	2005; 95%
18.	Tokelau	NZ	1,000	2007; 65%
19.	Mayotte	F	213,000	2009; 95%
20.	Puerto Rico	US	3,474,000	2012; 94%
21.	Falkland Islands	UK	3,000	2013; 100%

TABLE 6.1: **Results of referendums on independence on non-self-governing islands**<sup>8</sup>

London arranged their relationships in a unique Anguila Act of 1980 (Thomas & Clegg, 2016, p. 243). A similar diversity and complexity is visible in the institutional arrangements for the other eight UK Overseas Territories. Moreover, while the Acts may often be decades old, there are continuous changes or expansions to these Acts; 12 of the 14 UK Overseas Territories have seen constitutional changes since 2001 (Hendry, 2012). A review of these changes leads Hintjens and Hodge to talk of “complex, often obscure administrative and governance arrangements ... a set of fragmented, and remarkably personalized, ad hoc governance arrangements” (Hintjens & Hodge, 2012, p.190).

In a remarkably comparable analysis of the constitutional arrangements in

France between Paris and its eleven Overseas Departments, Regions, and Collectivities (DROM-COM),<sup>9</sup> Mrgudovic (2012) also notes that the relationships between the metropolitan centre and these non-self-governing islands “have evolved progressively at different speeds and degrees” (p. 85) and “today there are as many statuses as there are overseas territories” (p. 95). To cite an example, the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia has had 10 different constitutional statuses since 1946, leading one analyst to describe the process of continuous negotiations between Paris and New Caledonia as a “waltz of statuses” (Leblic, 1993, p. 53) and another compares the process to “an institutional yo-yo” (Agniel, 2009, p. 6).

The Netherlands has six overseas territories as remnants of its colonial history. The colonial constitutional arrangement was overhauled in 1954 as part of an early decolonization process and these Caribbean territories federated into the Dutch Antilles. However, by the mid-1970s, this arrangement broke apart and a new constitutional arrangement was negotiated, leaving one island on a path towards independence and the others in a restructured relationship with The Hague. By the 1990s, parties deemed this arrangement no longer desirable. In a decade-long process that included a series of referendums in which independence was overwhelmingly rejected, the Dutch Antilles were “disestablished” (Nap, 2011, p. 49) and a process of “dismantling ... and renewal” was initiated (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 8). In 2010, the Dutch Constitution was overhauled to award each of the three larger islands its own *sui generis* status, and integrate the remaining three with a fourth status as “special municipalities” with a range of unique rights (Kochenov, 2012, p. 150). As an illustration of the increasingly diverse arrangements, two of the three larger islands now share their own currency (Netherlands Antillean guilder), the third larger island has its own currency (Aruban florin), and the three special municipalities decided to use the US dollar; none use the metropolitan Euro. However, in line with a now familiar pattern, yet another round of negotiations may be in the air, as a broad survey among islanders in 2015 found growing and “widespread feelings of resentment about the nature and impact of the increasingly strong Dutch presence” (Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2017, p. 17).

The US has different constitutional arrangements with eight groups of islands. Three Pacific groups are members of the UN, but each has a so-called Compact of Free Association with the US; two are quite similar, but the third compact with Palau is quite different in content, duration, and financial implications. Two of these compacts have been fully “amended” and renewed twice since their inceptions between 1983 and 1994 (Underwood, 2003) and a detailed proposal for an earlier than planned “augmented compact 2016-2024” for Palau is still before the US Congress (US Government Accountability Office, 2016). The other five groups of islands are more closely associated with the USA as either “Unincorporated Organized Territories” or as “Unincorporated Unorganized Territory,” yet each with their own unique constitu-

tional arrangements. For example, within the former category, Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands have different arrangements, yet both are officially described as “a Commonwealth.” However, as if to show the similarity with other metropolitan practices of “obscure” and “fragmented” arrangements, the US State Department acknowledges that “the term ‘Commonwealth’ does not describe or provide for any specific political status or relationship” (US Department of State, 2013).

New Zealand and Denmark show similar patterns with regard to their overseas territories. New Zealand has found itself renegotiating repeatedly its constitutional relationship with the three territories in its former colonial Pacific reach, still referred to in official government publications as “Realm entities ... territories with which New Zealand has special constitutional relationships ...” (Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee, 2010, p. 7). Again, Niue, the Cook Islands, and Tokelau each have a unique arrangement that evolved over time. Equally, the constitutional relationship between metropolitan Denmark and on the territories of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands also varied and has been renegotiated repeatedly (Jensen, 2003). On balance, and recognizing that the metropolitan authorities can also initiate renegotiations on the relationship with their overseas territories, the agency of the islanders is probably best reflected in the exasperation of a former British Foreign Secretary: “I didn’t realise that I would have to spend so much time on the bloody Turks and Caicos Islands!” (Ledgister, 2014, p. 167).

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### **THIRD MECHANISM:**

#### ***non-self-governing islands get away with bending their metropolises’ rules***

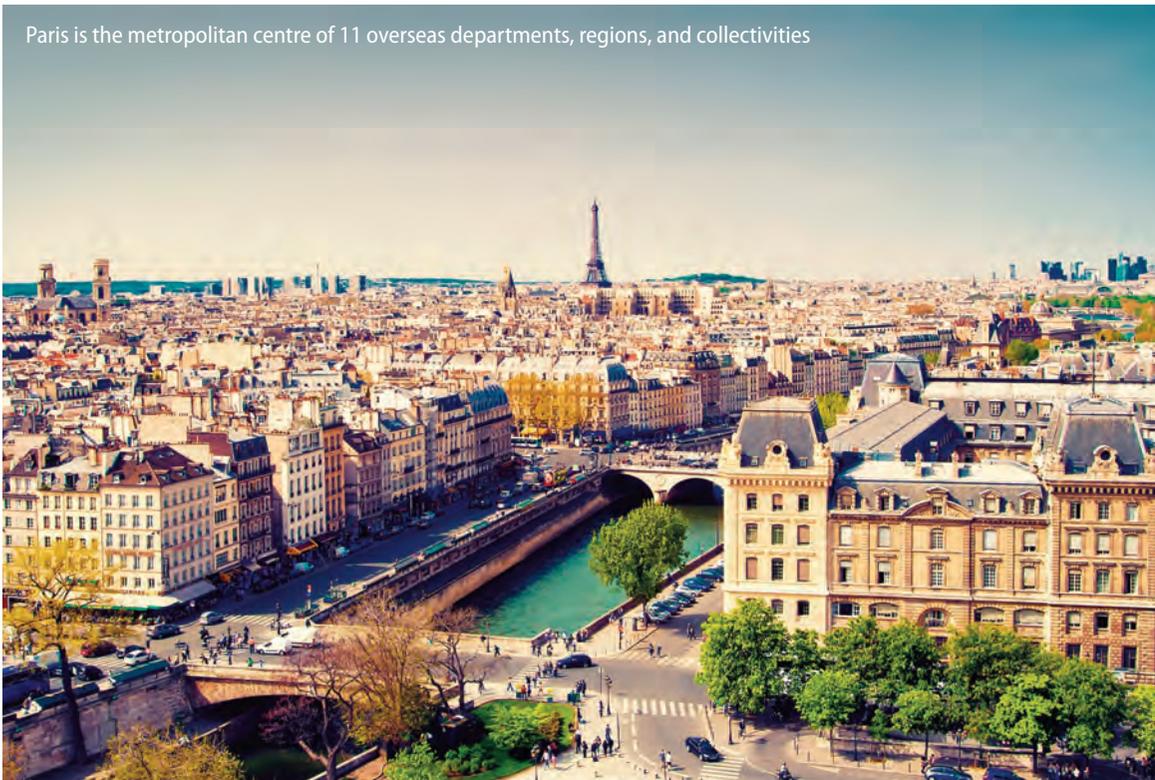
As subnational jurisdictions of their metropolises, non-self-governing islands often have a significant degree of autonomy. However, aside from the constitutionally agreed space for local legislation and enforcement, the islands are expected to abide by metropolitan rules and regulations. And yet, in several instances the non-self-governing islands seem to “get away” with ignoring or bending the enforcement of metropolitan rules if they so wish in opposition to metropolitan authorities. Arguably, this is an expression of sovereign governance that is unattainable for other subnational jurisdictions. This applies, in particular, in areas of

sexual and religious mores where cultural values of islanders and metropolitans often diverge: abortion, prostitution, same-sex marriages (Veenendaal, 2016b, p. 159). A few examples can illustrate this.

One example is the debate on homosexuality and same-sex marriages. Metropolitan Netherlands legalized same-sex marriages in 2001. Ever since, the local authorities on Aruba have dragged their feet in opposition, using all practical and legal means at their disposal. After 15 years of resistance, the Dutch Supreme Court forced Aruba's government to comply. In 2016, Aruba's government acknowledged that it will "recognize" same-sex marriages by allowing same-sex couples to register their partnership. However, they still could not marry on the island and a legal amendment recognizing these "registered partnerships" as equal to "civil marriage" was withdrawn hours before a vote (van Dijke, 2016). The Dutch government remains committed to full application of same-sex marriages in the overseas territories of the Kingdom. A similar dynamic unfolded on the British Cayman Islands, where islanders for more than 30 years resisted in many and diverse ways the decriminalization of homosexual acts. In 2000, London also chose the "nuclear option" and imposed its legislation on the Caymans' Legislative Assembly. In response, and anticipating the tug-of-war over same-sex marriages, the Cayman Islands government enacted a Bill of Rights which enshrined islanders' "right to marry a person of the opposite sex" (Vlcek, 2013, p. 357).

Another example of non-self-governing islands creatively bending metropolitan rule unfolds in Wallis & Futuna, a French Pacific territory. France's constitution

Paris is the metropolitan centre of 11 overseas departments, regions, and collectivities



underscores the secular character of the state and public services, and a series of laws enforces this principle. A 2004 law, for example, reiterates that it is prohibited to wear or display religious symbols in public schools and stipulates explicitly it is also applicable on Wallis & Futuna (Legifrance, 2004, Art. 2.1.1). However, all primary schools on the islands are managed by the Catholic mission, which has received a subsidy for all operational expenses by the French state since 1969. Unsurprisingly, the primary schools on the islands display all manner of Catholic symbols — prominently. However, “bending metropolitan rules” need not always be about sexual mores. The Bermuda Parliament enacted a local law in 1997 to prohibit the operation of global fast-food chains on the island. Commercial parties challenged the Bermuda government through all courts and the matter ultimately ended before the Privy Council in London. It ruled in 2014 that Bermuda’s “Prohibited Restaurants Act” was allowable (Bermuda 4u, 2014).

#### **FOURTH MECHANISM:**

##### ***shortfalls on non-self-governing islands’ public budgets are compensated by financial transfers from the metropole***

In most cases, it proves to be rather difficult to determine the extent to which the local government structures on non-self-governing islands rely on domestic revenue for their budget and expenditure. As with any other subnational jurisdiction, non-self-governing islands will benefit from direct fiscal transfers from the metropole as well as from indirect fiscal transfers as the metropolises generally assume the expenses for national affairs such as defence or foreign affairs. Moreover, to varying degrees health and education expenses on the islands will be covered from central ministries’ budgets and some of these expenses may not be recorded as metropolitan transfers. In addition, non-self-governing islands may benefit from tax arrangements whose net financial benefits may not appear in the islands’ public accounts. Nonetheless, these metropolitan transfers are often substantial and critically important for the islands’ governments to carry out their own policies and give material shape to self-determination.

For example, research into New Caledonia’s public budget identified two channels for metropolitan transfers. One channel comprises financial transfers into New Caledonia’s government’s budget for mostly education and health services. While most of these transfers can usually be traced, they can appear in unexpected places in islands’ balance of payments. In New Caledonia’s case, the allowances of metropolitan personnel stationed on the islands are recorded as income for the local government. A second channel is more difficult to calculate or estimate; it comprises indirect or diffuse financial transfers in the form of tax exemptions and tax arrangements for metropolitan private investments, long-term public investments, private-

public-partnerships, and debt restructuring arrangements. These financial transfers are important resources for the governance of a non-self-governing territory, but can be difficult to calculate or estimate (Prinsen & Blaise, 2017). This phenomenon of “two-channel” metropolitan transfers — one that can be traced in the annual accounts and one that cannot — may also occur in other cases. For example, the metropolitan Dutch government paid off 2 billion USD of public debt of the governments on the islands of the Dutch Antilles in 2010 to start the new constitutional framework, “with a relatively clean slate” (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 252).

With the above caveats in mind, Table 6.2 provides an impression of the volume and diversity of metropolitan financial transfers into the public budgets of their non-self-governing islands. This global diversity is underscored if it is noted here that only three of the 14 UK Overseas Territories actually receive budget support from London (Montserrat, Pitcairn, and Saint Helena-Ascension-Tristan da Cunha) (Ledgister, 2014, p. 163); the other 11 non-self-governing islands appear to be able to raise sufficient revenue so as not to feel pressure to negotiate with London over budget support. Importantly, the figures show that for many non-self-governing islands these metropolitan transfers are of critical importance; the per capita calculations suggest it is unlikely that the islands’ local governments could raise this income for their current expenditure from domestic taxation.

	<b>Non-self-governing island</b>	<b>Metropole</b>	<b>Metropolitan budget support (USD)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Budget support per capita (USD/cap)</b>
1.	New Caledonia	F	1,500m <sup>10</sup>	2015	5,600
2.	Wallis & Futuna	F	123m <sup>11</sup>	2016	10,300
3.	Dutch Caribbean Municipalities	NL	294m <sup>12</sup>	2015	11,800
4.	Cook Islands	NZ	13.2m <sup>13</sup>	2016	800
5.	Saint Helena	UK	27.6m <sup>14</sup>	2015	6,100
6.	Montserrat	UK	27.6m <sup>15</sup>	2016	5,500
7.	Palau (CoFA)	USA	38.3m <sup>16</sup>	2009	1,800
8.	Northern Mariana Islands	USA	72.0m <sup>17</sup>	2015	1,400

TABLE 6.2: **Metropolitan budget support for non-self-governing islands or associated territories**

***FIFTH MECHANISM: non-self-governing islands have international representation that is beneficial to them, but uncomfortable for their metropole***

Subnational jurisdictions are generally not empowered or allowed by the national governments to have international representation by signing international agreements with other nation states or becoming members of multilateral regional or international bodies comprising sovereign states. In fact, the act of signing an international agreement is by some UN standards the hallmark of statehood. It is “evidence that the international community had accepted the [signing party] as a ‘State’ under international law” (UN, 1994, p. 10). And yet, many non-self-governing islands — subnational jurisdictions by most definitions — do have international representation and sign international agreements. Even more than that: there are examples of non-self-governing islands expressing their unique form of sovereignty by signing international agreements that are beneficial to them, but may be uncomfortable to their metropolises. In some economic modelling, this ability of non-self-governing islands to develop and manage overseas relationships beyond the metropole is an essential ingredient for the success of these islands (Oberst & McElroy, 2007).

The Faeroe Islands, part of the kingdom of Denmark, has nonetheless its own diplomatic representation at the EU in Brussels, and in the capitals of a number of other European nations, some of these nations reciprocated and opened diplomatic representatives on the Faeroe Islands (Karlsson, 2009). This is not necessarily uncomfortable for Denmark. However, what is more likely to make Denmark feel somewhat uncomfortable is that the Faeroe Islands have signed bilateral free-trade agreements with Norway, Switzerland, and Russia — in stark contrast to Denmark’s trade relationship. Greenland has taken its ability in the opposite direction; whereas Denmark is a member of the EU, Greenland decided in 1985 to “un-sign” its membership in the EU and withdrew from all EU treaties (Ackrén & Lindström, 2012, p. 503).

While this was a remarkable “first” in 1985, the French overseas territory of St. Barthélemy followed a comparable path in 2012, after a referendum which also led to a realignment of its constitutional relationship with metropolitan France. “St. Barthélemy is only the second Member State territory to have ever become separated from the EU after Greenland” (Athanasios & Shaelou, 2014, p. 37).<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in the French territorial sphere, the government of New Caledonia is not only signing international trade and diplomatic agreements with neighbouring countries — which is permitted in line with a 1998 agreement with Paris that allows New Caledonia “to enter into agreements with ... countries within its areas of responsibility” (Legifrance, 1998, Art. 3.2.1) — but its local island authorities have recently also entered the international arena. New Caledonia has three provincial governments, and the Provincial Government of the North Province entered into a multi-billion-dollar international joint venture in 2012 to operate nickel mines in the North

Province. On top of the fact that the island's local authorities are now engaging as the majority shareholder in large-scale, long-term, international business agreements, it also needs to be noted that some of the international partners are South Korean and Chinese companies. Their participation in nickel mining in the North Province breaks the hold that French and European mining companies hitherto had on nickel mining in New Caledonia — something that surely ruffles some feathers in Paris (Prinsen & Blaise, 2017, p. 74).

#### FOUR DRIVERS MOVING THE MECHANISMS FOR “ISLANDIAN” SOVEREIGNTY

The five mechanisms described above are the levers through which the people on non-self-governing islands are creating a unique form of sovereignty. This form of sovereignty is not a classic Westphalian sovereignty of the nation state, but it has all the hallmarks of self-determination, a people charting their own path. The next section endeavours to move beyond the description of mechanisms and explore the question of why people on non-self-governing islands use these mechanisms. Why do people say “no” to independence, yet act in the international arena as if they were? Why do they haggle continuously with their metropole, get away with bending metropolitan rules, and yet continue to succeed in attracting funding from the metropole? Quite possibly, some answers to these questions of “why?” can be found by exploring the identity of people living on non-self-governing islands. Arguably, there are several facets of the identity of people living on the far-flung remnants of former colonial empires that differentiate them from the other citizens of the nation state to which they are tied. The next paragraphs explore four facets — illustrated with examples — of the identity of islanders that may explain some of the energy that drives the mechanisms by which these islanders build their own forms of sovereignty.

**WHY DO PEOPLE say “no” to independence, yet act in the international arena as if they were? Why do they haggle continuously with their metropole, get away with bending metropolitan rules, and yet continue to succeed in attracting funding from the metropole?**

#### *Shared national identities*

First, islanders on non-self-governing islands and metropolitans are bound together through a shared nationality. In part, this shared nationality also means a shared national identity that bonds, but it is also likely to reduce drive to seek full and final separation. In his annual speech before Parliament, the Dutch King generally underscores the bonds across all parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 2015 he talked of the commemoration of 200 years of the restoration of the monarchy in



Amsterdam is also the metropole for six Caribbean territories

1815, whose economic strength rested to a large extent on a colonial empire that had slavery and indentured labour as a central pillar. He looked forward to “the shared celebration of two hundred years of the Kingdom. Together with the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, the Netherlands continues to work towards a good future” (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2015, p. 1).<sup>19</sup> Royal visits to the Caribbean Netherlands are frequent, and surveys find clear majorities on the islands holding positive or very positive opinions on the Dutch royal family; indeed, islanders consider this bond an integral part of their shared identity of being “Dutch” (Veenendaal, 2016a, p. 23). One random comment on Curaçao during a recent royal visit exemplifies this: “I am really proud to be Dutch. It is an honour to see [King] Willem-Alexander and [Queen] Maxima close up” (Osepa & Koek, 2015).<sup>20</sup>

In other metropolitan realms, a similar shared nationality is also found. When, in 2012, the French President Hollande received delegations of overseas territories, he welcomed them by exclaiming, “You are not guests of the republic. You are the French Republic!” (Hollande, 2012).<sup>21</sup> On the other side of the globe, a local education official on Wallis & Futuna expresses an equal sentiment when he stresses that “The population on our two islands is profoundly French and Francophone” (Prinsen et al. forthcoming, 2018). Royle’s study of Saint Helena notes that “St. Helena’s people are now fiercely loyal to the United Kingdom and its monarchy” (Royle, 2010, p. 206).

It should be noted, however, that such a shared national identity on non-self-governing islands can disappear in the course of time — even on seemingly comparable islands in similar frameworks. For example, Amoamo reports that until the late twentieth century, “almost every Pitcairn home had framed photographs or pictures of the Queen or the Royal Family”; but due to a series of conflicts with London and metropolitans, this sense of proud British identity has now disappeared (Amoamo, 2013, p. 248). In fact, conflicts or adversarial engagements are also a recurring and fundamental aspect of the relationship between islands and metropolises, as will be discussed shortly.

### ***Complementary locational identities***

Next to a shared national identity, islanders and metropolitans also each have their distinct locational identities as islanders and metropolitans and — importantly — these two identities are connected as binaries. The concept of binary identities is not new; it is one of the foundations under postcolonial theory that emerged in the 1970s. Leading scholar Edward Said argued that in an oppressive colonial framework, the images of identity of the colonial rulers and the identity of the people they rule are symmetrical to each other but in an hierarchical relation of inferior and superior (Said, 1978). Similarly, Biko, as a leader of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa’s apartheid era, argued that apartheid taught black South Africans that their marginalization was explained by the fact they were black and inferior to white South Africans. If black people grew into accepting this imposed identity, acceptance of the seemingly inevitable status quo would follow. “His heart yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame himself for not having been ‘educated’ enough to warrant such a luxury... an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity” (Biko, 1978, p. 43). However, the islanders’ agency driving the five mechanisms described earlier does not suggest islanders on these remnants of colonial empires and metropolitans are locked into this set of hierarchical binary identities. On the contrary.

Since the early 2010s, several scholars in the field of Island Studies are presenting evidence that these islanders and metropolitans are not (or no longer?) connected through hierarchical binary identities, but rather engage in a process whereby parties develop complementary binary identities. Grydehøj’s study of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland speaks of a “collaborative construction of [each other’s] identities” in which “Greenlanders are a people of nature” and Danes

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are portrayed as urban dwellers (Grydehøj, 2016, p. 106). There is complementarity, not hierarchy. A similar dynamic can be seen around the Dutch Caribbean islands. A man from Curaçao residing in metropolitan Netherlands was recently interviewed in a national newspaper. "They are particularly cantankerous in winter, whereas we will always smile, no matter how cold it gets," he said, to which his wife quickly added: "But we are all Dutch with the same passport" (Marijnissen, 2017).<sup>22</sup> This idea of sharing a nationality and yet have complementary identities within the national borders was aptly captured by Dutch Caribbean literary star Van Leeuwen: "If the Netherlands says it is five to twelve, it is only five to six over here" (Cornelisse, 2004).<sup>23</sup>

### ***Complementary identities are created in an adversarial process***

Van Leeuwen's allusion to negotiations leads to the third facet of identity around non-self-governing islands: the complementary identities may be mutually created, but this generally happens in a rather adversarial process between the non-self-governing islands and their metropolises. In most cases, islanders and metropolitans seem to be at loggerheads. For example, a comparative analysis between British and Dutch education policies in overseas territories finds one common feature: "serious disagreements" between London and the islands and a "series of disputes" between The Hague and the islands (Thomas & Clegg, 2016, pp. 244, 248). Research into French education policies in Wallis & Futuna captured the anger when education officials on the islands talked of their engagement with Paris: "I think they are deaf!" and "They take us for idiots" (Prinsen et al., forthcoming, 2018). A Greenland minister blasts Copenhagen: "The arrogance is devastating for our relations" (Christian, 2016). Perhaps not unexpectedly, feelings of animosity also surface in representatives of the metropolitan side, although they tend to be voiced in terms that can readily be perceived as paternalistic, such as "deep concerns" or "serious doubts" about the islanders' capacities or situation. A comment in the Dutch Parliament by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations on governance issues on Sint Maarten is fairly typical: "There is a generally shared feeling among citizens, businesses and foreign governments that in a broad sense the reliability and proper operation of the administration on Sint Maarten represents a problem that is larger and deeper than it appears" (Plasterk, 2013, p. 2).<sup>24</sup>

In a global context, islanders and metropolitans each seem to have a distinct set of issues that drive the adversarial character of their relationship. For people on the non-self-governing islands, issues of morality are a principal source of conflict with their metropolises. They feel their sexual or religious mores are pushed aside by metropolitan authorities and their regulations. This causes fierce animosity and creative responses in "bending metropolitan rules" as a means to maintain control on morality on their islands. For example, in many of the 40-odd non-self-governing islands at the centre of this chapter, there have been protests and resistance in one way or

another to metropolitan attempts to open up islands for increased equality for members of the LGBT+ communities, particularly for same-sex marriages. The previously detailed conflicts over same-sex marriages on Aruba and the Cayman Islands suffice as illustration.

For metropolitans, the issue of allegations around poor governance and corruption on the islands seem to be the principal driver of conflicts with the islands. As one example, in the Netherlands, the earlier comments of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations not only apply to Sint Maarten, but extend to all Dutch Caribbean territories. On Aruba, the metropolitan government basically froze



The 22 overseas territories associated with the European Union have organized in the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (OCTA)

Aruba's 2014 budget because "the public debt of Aruba has doubled over the last five years ... Aruba is at risk of going into a financial danger zone."<sup>25</sup> In response, the Aruban Prime Minister stated, "Aruba is being taken hostage, raped and humiliated by the Netherlands" and went on hunger strike (Volkskrant, 2014).<sup>26</sup> On Curaçao, the metropolitan government established a commission in 2011 to investigate concerns about corruption. The commission's report concluded that there were "doubts about the integrity of [Curaçao] Ministers" (Rosenmöller, Maas & Hillebrink, 2011, p. 21) and set in motion a chain of events that led to the prosecution and conviction of corruption of Curaçao's Prime Minister from 2010 to 2012, who protested his innocence and claimed he was being framed by the Netherlands (Broere, 2017). In another context, events do not appear to be entirely dissimilar. In French Polynesia, a repeatedly re-elected President was convicted on corruption charges by the Court of Cassation in Paris in 2014. However, he continues to exert significant political influence and is instrumental in the territory's oppositional action to metropolitan influence — to the dismay of metropolitan officials who see these actions as "unfriendly gestures towards the French state" (Gonschor, 2016, p. 214).

### *Historical knowledge of the relationship is a driver for islanders*

The fourth facet of identity that seems to drive the relationship between people on non-self-governing islands and their metropolises is islanders' deep historical knowledge of that relationship. It seems people use that knowledge actively to contextualize their current strategy. For example, when Dutch Caribbean writers and politicians discuss their relationship with the Netherlands, they start with the "The Peace treaty of Munster in 1648" (van der To et al., 1998). In the same vein, representatives of the people of Saint Helena frame their contemporary relationship and disagreements with London in the context of a decree of 1673 (Royle, 2010, p. 206) — probably much to the bewilderment of their metropolitan counterparts. Local education officials on Wallis & Futuna were also acutely aware of the historical context of their current negotiations with Paris. The director of the Catholic education department sees the current contracts with the Ministry of National Education as a continuation of nineteenth-century agreements. "My ancestors discovered that with these people, they can live better than they did before"; and he persists in the negotiations in spite of the difficulties because "otherwise I would make my ancestors look stupid" (Prinsen et al., forthcoming, 2018). On the other side, there is little to suggest metropolitan representatives have any comparable depth of historical knowledge. The earlier comments on the "bloody Turks and Caicos Islands" already suggested that much.

## CONCLUSIONS

People living on the 40-odd non-self-governing islands that are remnants of the colonial empires of Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK, and the US are shaping a new form of sovereignty that they believe best suits the historical roots and future interests of their islands. This new form of sovereignty is predicated not simply on a continuing relationship with their respective metropolises, but on a relationship that is redefined on — mostly — islanders' terms. The mechanisms underpinning this new sovereignty start by islanders saying "no" to independence as a severance or perhaps ignoring of past ties. Next, islanders actively and continuously renegotiate the terms of the relationship; gradually they may get improved terms and, perhaps most importantly, because of their continuous character that is also unique to every island, these negotiations become the central element of the relationship. Where islanders fail to improve the terms of the relationship, they can often get away with "bending" the rules to suit their interests or values. And next to that — irrespective of the negotiations and conflicts about "bending the rules" — the islands' governments not only secure significant budget and one-off financial support from their metropolises in addition to their domestic revenues, but they also manage to create space to engage in international agreements and relationships beyond their metropolises, even if these do not quite align with metropolitan interests.

There will be an array of reasons why people on non-self-governing islands develop these mechanisms — and why they are rather effective. One set of reasons revolves on four facets of these islanders’ unique identity. First, they share a national identity with metropolitans. At the same time, however, contemporary islanders are also developing binary and complementary locational identities in interaction with metropolitans. The complementarity of the identities arguably is what binds the two parties together as much as the shared nationality. Next, it needs to be noted these complementary identities are developed in an adversarial process. The mechanisms of saying “no,” everlasting negotiations, and bending the rules underpin this adversarial dynamic and the disagreements over financial transfers and accounting, and the development of relationships with third parties only inflames matters. And yet, the often disagreeable character of relationship does not detract from the continuation of the engagement — perhaps to the contrary. A detailed awareness among virtually all islanders about the centuries that the relationship has already endured may mean it is difficult to imagine an identity outside the relationship: “This is who we are.”

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Due to peculiar local circumstances, even the two exceptions (Aruba and the Federated States of Micronesia) ended up retaining a constitutional bond with their former colonial metropolises.
- 2 The voting processes for these referendums have, of course, differed on the various islands. Often, people have had multiple options. In this column I count the votes against independence. For example, in the 1984 referendum on the Cocos Islands, the electorate voted on three options: integration with Australia, free association with Australia, or independence. In this column I added up the results of votes in favour of the first two options to the total of 96%.
- 3 About 94% voted for independence in 1977. However, the vote for independence was probably more a vote to secede from the other Dutch Antilles than from metropolitan Netherlands (Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2017, p. 9). The independence process was abandoned in 1994.
- 4 A majority (58%) voted for a Compact of Free Association (CoFA). However, if that had failed to get a majority, then 96% voted against independence.
- 5 A majority (77%) voted for a CoFA. However, if that had failed to get a majority, then 42% voted against independence.
- 6 A majority (67%) voted for a CoFA. However, if that had failed to get a majority, then 69% voted against independence.
- 7 The referendum was invalidated due to insufficient voter turnout (<50%).
- 8 As it is a subject of debate what qualifies as a “non-self-governing island,” this list comprises islands listed on the UN list of “Non-self-governing territories” (UN, 2014) and islands listed in the CIA Factbook as “nonindependent territories” (CIA, 2016). Added are a few islands that are not on these lists and yet have organized referendums on independence: Bonaire, Mayotte, Saba, and St. Eustatius.

- 9 "Départements et Régions et Collectivités D'Outre-Mer (DROM-COM)" – ten of these eleven are islands.
- 10 Expenses of the French state in New Caledonia in 2015 were XPF 153.1 billion (IEOM, 2016, p. 56).
- 11 Expenses of the French state in Wallis & Futuna in 2016 were XPF 12.6 billion (IEOM, 2017, p. 50).
- 12 These figures refer to three of the six Caribbean territories: the three "special municipalities" of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba. The source notes that about 80% of public expenditure on the three islands is covered by metropolitan transfers; i.e., EUR 250 million in 2015 (Spies et al., 2015, p. 48).
- 13 For the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 New Zealand provided NZD 19.3 million in budget support to the Cook Islands' government, largely for education and health services (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016).
- 14 UK Government budget support grant to Saint Helena Government (SHG) for the Financial Year 2015/16 was GBP 20.63 million (Department for International Development (DFID), 2015, p. 1).
- 15 UK Government budget support grant to the Montserrat government for 2016/2017 Fiscal Year is GBP 20.6 million (Department for International Development [DFID], 2016).
- 16 The US government provided USD 574 million in compact support to Palau for 1995-2009, averaging USD 38.3 million per year. Proposed financial support for the 2011-2024 period is still subject to debate (US Government Accountability Office, 2016, p. 3)
- 17 The US Office of Insular Affairs reports USD 72.0 million in federal grants to the Northern Mariana Islands in Fiscal Year 2015, which is about 24% of public expenditure on the islands (US Department of the Interior, 2016).
- 18 At the time of writing it seems that the UK is having difficulties following the same path.
- 19 "...de gezamenlijke viering van 200 jaar Koninkrijk. Samen met de Caribische delen van het Koninkrijk blijft Nederland werken aan een goede toekomst."
- 20 "Ik ben bijzonder trots dat ik Nederlander ben. Het is voor mij een eer om Willem-Alexander en Máxima van dichtbij te zien."
- 21 "Vous n'êtes donc pas les invités de la République! Vous êtes la République française!"
- 22 "Die zijn vooral zo chagrijnig in de winter, terwijl wij áltijd blijven lachen – wat er ook gebeurt en hoe koud het ok is." and "We zijn allemaal Nederlanders met hetzelfde paspoort."
- 23 "Als Nederland zegt dat het daar vijf voor twaalf is, is het bij ons pas vijf voor zes."
- 24 "Er is een algemeen gedeeld gevoel bij burgers, bedrijven en buitenlandse overheden dat de deugdelijkheid en het behoorlijk functioneren van het bestuur in ruime zin op Sint Maarten een probleem vormt dat groter en dieper is dan zich laat aanzien."
- 25 "De staatsschuld van Aruba de afgelopen vijf jaar verdubbeld ... Daarmee dreigt Aruba in de financiële gevarenszone te komen."
- 26 "Aruba wordt gegijzeld, verkracht en vernederd door Nederland."

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