



HAL
open science

Global Environmental Governance and Small States: Architectures and Agency in the Caribbean, by Michelle Scobie

Malcom Ferdinand

► **To cite this version:**

Malcom Ferdinand. Global Environmental Governance and Small States: Architectures and Agency in the Caribbean, by Michelle Scobie. *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 2020, 94 (1-2), pp.173-174. 10.1163/22134360-09401009 . hal-03099689

HAL Id: hal-03099689

<https://hal.science/hal-03099689>

Submitted on 6 Jan 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Michelle Scobie, *Global Environmental Governance and Small States: Architectures and Agency in the Caribbean*. Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishers, 2019. x + 212 pp. (Cloth US\$120.00)

How do small island developing states (SIDS) engage with global environmental issues given their modest size and subaltern position on the international scene? How do they navigate their way through the Anthropocene, the current geological era in which humans are severely altering the planet's ecosystems? These are the overarching questions Michelle Scobie, a lawyer and international relations scholar, addresses in her new book, *Global Environmental Governance and Small States*. The book focuses on the 15 SIDS of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), including Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados. Despite contributing very little to global phenomena such as global warming, this region is the unjust recipient of acute environmental damages, as evidenced by the devastating 2017 hurricanes. In a well-researched and thoroughly documented text, Scobie describes how these islands confront these challenges.

The book's first two (of nine) chapters provide the theoretical framework of environmental governance and the Anthropocene and an overview of the complexity at play. Chapters 3 to 8 address the issues of sustainable tourism, climate change, marine and ocean governance, renewable energy, cultural heritage, and global trade, providing numerous examples from the Caribbean. For each environmental subject, Scobie meticulously lists and describes the role of the relevant international treaties and conventions, such as the Nagoya Protocol and the climate change conferences (COP), the international institutions such as the United Nation Environmental Program (UNEP), the important nonstate actors, the major NGOs and the private companies involved. She also provides various conceptual diagrams that illustrate the complexity of environmental governance as well as data on energy use and exports. Such mapping will be useful for both students and policy makers in the Caribbean. Chapter 9 offers a summary of the main findings.

Three results stand out. First, most islands are energy importers despite having major potential for renewable energy. Second, the balance for sustainable tourism is hard to find. A main source of national income, the tourism industry also leads to pollution, poor land management and overuse of resources such as water. Yet, there remains a lack of legislation, resources or political will to effectively curtail these environmental damages. Third, climate change diplomacy remains a major challenge since the funding mechanism between developed and developing states is not clearly defined. If developed states

agree with the idea of burden sharing duties, they reject the notion of corrective justice that would compensate SIDS for damages caused by climate change.

Although repetitive at times, the book's scholarly style allows readers to access each chapter independently. Nonetheless, one can regret the absence of nonindependent Caribbean islands such as Martinique, Puerto Rico, Montserrat, and Curaçao. Although not part of the SIDS, they are equally important actors of Caribbean environmental governance. Another absentee is the important issue of land pollution from agriculture. My main criticism however is not directed at the book *per se*, but at its theoretical framework, which revolves around the concepts of "environmental governance" and "Anthropocene." First, the administrative task of governing the environment does not necessarily lead to an ecologically sound society. In positing Caribbean ecology as an issue of management of resources and limitation of pollution, such an approach overlooks the criticism that a capitalistic global economy and neoliberal policies lie at the root of the ecological crisis. Second, the Anthropocene is a Eurocentric concept that negates the history of colonization and slavery, so poignant in the Caribbean. In that light, the history, legacy, and ongoing demands for reparations for slavery are simply categorized as "cultural heritage management." Yet no mention is made of the most ecologically destructive events of this region: the enormous amount of deforestation made by the plantation systems. It then seems to appear self-evident that one needs to put aside the existing sociological, historical, anthropological, and philosophical research on these postcolonial and post-slavery societies to conceptualize ecological issues. From the perspective of the Anthropocene, the Caribbean is still a sunny virgin beach devoid of people and history. Apart from managing the environment, can the Caribbean people speak in the Anthropocene?

Aside from the criticism of the environmentalist approach of the Anthropocene, Scobie's book is a welcome addition to the field of global environmental governance. It renews attention to the Caribbean among SIDS scholars and provides much-needed information for local Caribbean governments that are facing global environmental issues within the international web of policies and legal frameworks, conventions, and institutions. Such information will surely help Caribbean people assert their voice.

Malcom Ferdinand

CNRS IRISSO/Université Paris Dauphine

malcomsun@gmail.com