

Theodoros Rakopoulos (2023). *Passport island: The market for EU citizenship in Cyprus*. Manchester University Press. 248pp, hbk/ e-book. ISBN: 978-1-5261-6736-1/ 978-1-5261-6735-4. £85.00.

Granting ‘Golden passports’ through Citizenship by Investment Programmes (CIPs, or CBIs) has been a global phenomenon for many years, fuelling new discourses on the meanings and value of citizenship. Moreover, the phenomenon emphasises the hyper-mobility of global elites and the renegotiated realities at the nexus of political economy, territoriality, nation statehood, and belonging(ness) in a globalised world. *Passport island: The market for EU citizenship in Cyprus* by Theodoros Rakopoulos represents a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and is, to date, the only work that offers an in-depth ethnographic examination of the subject.

The author explores the topic by drawing on the example of the Republic of Cyprus, where CIPs existed until 2020, enabling thousands of individuals to obtain European Union (EU) citizenship. In a socio-anthropological manner, the book not only dissects the political and economic framework for CIPs/CBIs, but also delves deep into the world of those who develop, distribute, and utilise such “passports-as-commodities” (p. 223). The book blends sound academic scholarship with the style of a captivating and engaging investigative documentary, providing fascinating insights into the complex interrelationships that underlie these developments. Rakopoulos succeeds in revealing how ‘Golden Passports’ became the principal export commodity of Cyprus, radically changing the social, cultural, and material landscape of the island state. This was particularly apparent in the city of Limassol due to the notable presence of the elite beneficiaries, and the construction of high-rise buildings (‘passport towers’) on the city’s waterfront.

The book further tackles related questions of increasing global social inequalities: a crucial dimension that merits deeper analysis in the context of the academic debate on the global commodification of citizenship. A key argument of the book unfolds along the observation that commodification of citizenship or “golden passports are the continuation of offshoring by other means” (p. 79). In this context, the author regards ‘Golden Passports’ as a powerful symbol and product of political landscapes in which nation states and borders are being renegotiated but continue to have considerable significance.

Divided into five chapters, the book is framed by an introduction and a conclusion. With the former, the author provides a topical introduction, as well as familiarises the reader with a complex theoretical framework. At the centre of this, for instance, is the term ‘*jus pecuniae*’ (the right of money), through which the shifts in citizenship triggered by ‘Golden Passports’ can be understood as a commodity beyond ancestry and territory. Furthermore, the chapter addresses various perspectives relevant to understanding the topic: from the nexus between global inequality and elite mobility, to an examination of the symbolic and political meanings of passports, and broader concerns around the politics and commodification of citizenship (with a regional focus on the EU and Cyprus). Albeit lengthy, the chapter comes to a precisely formulated assessment that lays a foundation for the following chapters: ‘Golden Passports’ are a double expression of global inequalities. In a global system of inequality in which national passports are ranked with unequal political value, elite minorities can escape political restrictions by exploiting loopholes in national political economies opened by CIP schemes.

Chapter 1 (*Location*) offers a well-founded discussion of the spatial context of the study. The author provides transparent, valuable insights into the positionality of the research and methods. It becomes apparent from this point that this ethnography is not limited to Cyprus, but that the case study forms part of a global network: a thread that can be followed throughout the entire work. Chapter 2 (*CIPizenship*) offers a historically informed overview of the political framework conditions and development of CIPs, contextualising these in ethical and moral discourses and aligning them with debates on a globalised industry of selling citizenship.

In the following two chapters, 3 and 4 – *Makers and Takers* – the book unfolds its full potential, anchored in ethnographic research. The author engages intensively and in a multi-layered fashion with actors performing the Golden Passport Industry in Cyprus. Taking into account both the side of the makers or ‘providers’ (including political decision-makers, economic brokers, and real estate investors) and the side of the takers, who are aptly described here as “offshore citizens” (an analytical category the author introduces in chapter four, the book provides a multifaceted mosaic of the social backgrounds and effects of ‘Golden Passports’; in particular, the influential significance of ‘wealthy Russians’, who choose Cyprus as an elitist safe haven, becomes evident.

Chapter 5 (*Markets*) finally broadens the spatial focus and illustrates how CIPs constitute a powerful global industry in which the interrelation between property and citizenship is pervasive. Although only cursory, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific region are thematised. The author shows that the insights offered are not limited to the specific case study of Cyprus but can be considered on a global level, in many spatial contexts. Indeed, there is much to suggest that small states, particularly islands, constitute hubs of (hyper)mobility for international economic elites today and in the future, offering citizenship/residence by investment programmes of various kinds, which should be further researched in this context. In sum, *Passport island* is an engaging and important work for audiences interested in exploring both new forms and politics of citizenship (making), as well as the entitlement to and value of citizenship in a globalised world, shaped by underlying structural inequalities. Rakopoulos’ book is a distinctive contribution towards gaining a deeper insight into how elite groups use passports as commodities to create hybrid spaces beyond national borders to advance their agendas, whereas the accumulation and protection of wealth seems a priority. The work provides insights into how they are shaping politics, and reinforcing social inequalities.

Admittedly, the author does not explicitly engage with the complex concept of ‘smallness’ in this book. However, smallness is dealt with implicitly and the book reveals, in a fascinating way, the extent to which small states are embedded in international relations. It highlights how their ‘smallness’ may constitute a strategic asset: for example, via existing networks and complex political power structures, which play a very special role in relation to the new global ‘offshore’ practices described. To a certain extent, and the example of Cyprus shows this quite clearly, small states may be jeopardising their fragile sovereignty, with a desire for economic profit leading to new dependencies. Small (island) states (especially in post-colonial contexts), which are utilising ‘passports as commodities’ in various ways in the hope of economic benefits might be subjugating themselves to the volatile ways of global elites in the long-term. Further research into the tensions and conflicts resulting from this would be particularly intriguing.

Above all, the book further demonstrates that deep scholarly engagement with and research on small states will allow us to better comprehend global complexities, reinforcing the importance of small states in global politics. It offers valuable food for thought: especially regarding how connections, dependencies, and trajectories between individual case studies may exist, allowing global dimensions of the phenomenon to be explored in greater depth. Moreover, *Passport island* is an inspiring invitation to all researchers beyond disciplinary boundaries to scrutinise the influence of global elites on socio-spatial transformations of spaces and places, and to better understand these through intensive, qualitative, and critical research.

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