

~~change impacts (and who would be expected to pay). All those questions are answered, sometimes in many different ways.~~

~~This book provides a solid basis to interact with other disciplines, including island studies, from a law perspective in order to seek actions on, and hopefully long-term solutions for, low-lying island communities dealing with climate change. Such actions are geared towards what some islanders are requesting, aiming to decide and implement for themselves, albeit with external support in many cases. Climate change is indeed a major threat to many islands and islanders, both the physical manifestation and the social and political construction of the topic. This book represents an important contribution, demonstrating how an island government can work with external experts on an equal footing, to tackle these major threats.~~

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**John Connell (2013) *Islands at risk? Environments, economies and contemporary change*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. hbk. ISBN: 978-1-78100-350-3. x+337pp (of which 74pp are references) + index. Can\$149.**

As I was getting to the final chapters of this book, I was getting quite overwhelmed by the continuous assault of negative language on my senses, whether in the form of dramatic action nouns (collapses, catastrophes, departures, disappearances, eruptions, extinctions, extirpations, hazards, insecurities, threats, uncertainties) – or in the form of evocative adjectives (absent, corrupt, lacking, powerless, unsustainable, vulnerable, weak). But then, all these words are lifted from the titles of the books, reports and articles listed in the reference section. Hence, with Connell crafting this book to review the literature, one should not be astonished.

It is an understatement to claim that Connell advises islanders to “be wary” (p. 228). But I was pleasantly surprised – and my state of depression lifted – by a quite carefully written and more optimistic conclusion, where islanders are acknowledged for also being proactive and opportunistic citizens, and not just wretched victims of forces beyond their control. This scoreboard, at the end of the day, perhaps explains why there is a haunting question mark in the book’s title: islands are at risk, and very much so; the range of what appear to be insurmountable challenges is simply bewildering. And yet, even in such ‘perfect storm’ conditions, as long as there is life, there is hope: we should not hold our breath until the last islander switches off the proverbial lights.

This was not an easy book to write. But Connell – the most prolific small island studies scholar I know – has finally come up with a comprehensive guide to contemporary small island livelihoods, cataloguing the various ills – all, he says, traceable to globalization (p. 245) – as well as the social capital and local wisdom that could still afford, in a flourish of cultural hybridity, some viable management of modernity and its discontents. This book is a tour de force, a vastly expanded version of his 1988 monograph *Sovereignty and Survival* which introduced me to his work.

One perennial difficulty in writing about islands is: which islands to write about – and therefore, also which islands not to write about. In this case, and guided by exemplars with which he could claim some familiarity, Connell limits his scope to the three regions with the world’s largest concentration of sovereign island states: the Caribbean Sea (but including all

the United Kingdom Overseas Territories in the North, South and mid-Atlantic), the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. He also organizes his material into two categories, one being a sub-set of the other: a set of 59 SISIs (or small islands and small island states) with resident populations of one million or less, of which 24 are SIS (small island states). Like every classification, this has weaknesses: it is a convenience sample, an admittedly arbitrary collection that eliminates many of the world's subnational island jurisdictions (of which there are over 110, including Greenland, the world's largest non-continental island), as well as some small island states which are relatively rich and/or lie in non-tropical zones (Bahrain, Cyprus, Iceland, Malta). And perhaps part of the doom and gloom scenario of the first seven chapters (out of a total of eight) lies precisely with this unwillingness to connect with the 'developed' (for want of a better term) island states and territories – which perhaps provide some important lessons as to how some islands could graduate to a status that is at less risk? (I will not drop the interrogative mark). In any case, no selected grouping of islands will entirely satisfy.

After the obligatory definition-setting introduction (Chapter 1), and to chart the limits and problems of the possible (p. 43), Connell delves into a political economy overview, affirming the inextricable relationship between power and wealth in island contexts that have been constructed, to a fault, as colonial platforms, geo-engineered to feed, revictual, defend or otherwise service empires. This chapter (Chapter 2) already identifies one of the foundational dilemmas of critiquing small island jurisdictions – many are inherently unsustainable, depending for their livelihoods on largesse – material, financial, human, touristic – forthcoming from other locations beyond the horizon: “one way or another, the fate and future of SISI are at least partly in the hands of others” (p. 20). Next (Chapters 3-4) is a journey through the three broad sectors of economic activity – the primary (agriculture, forestry, fishery and, increasingly of late, aquaculture), now very much in decline with the almost complete removal of preferential tariffs under the neo-liberal WTO regime; the secondary (manufacturing), also in decline after some optimism in the 1980s; and the default option of the tertiary sector, dominated by tourism (and allied industries, including construction, craft and catering), but including various other intangibles, such as financial services, electronic gam(bl)ing, bunkering, and military infrastructure. (Strangely enough, mining, which is an extractive industry, is placed alongside manufacturing in this discussion; whereas I see it fit more closely to agriculture). The following three chapters (Chapters 5-7) review what are perhaps the three most significant challenges to small island living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: urbanization; international migration (out, in, and circular) and climate change (particularly sea level rise). Indeed, and in spite of many unknowns, a ‘triple whammy’ outcome of these demographic and environmental trends can lead to rural and out-island depopulation, creeping urban sprawl with its high (especially youth) unemployment and pernicious poverty rates, especially for those who have lost touch with traditional forms of social support, solidarity and self-reliance. And, for good measure, the environmental woes are added in, creating a toxic cocktail of dismal existence: “... gloom hangs over degraded ecosystems and fractured cultures, unemployment, drugs, corruption, crime and uneven terms of trade” (p. 245).

Is one to be excused wondering who would want to live in such dire straits? This is where Connell perhaps goes overboard with his morality, eschewing an island way of life that was purportedly better when less impacted by modernity. Even McDonald's, he tells us, “that paragon of globalization”, has only set up shop in three of his 24 SISs (p. 245).

Now, I am no fan of fast food chains; but it does sound a tad paternalistic and disingenuous to adopt such a tone. If he is arguing for “culturally sensitive forms of

accommodation” (p. 248) to the challenges and opportunities presented by change, who then gets to decide on the balance between local and foreign, past and present? Surely, it should be the locals, for better or for worse? And it would be just as naïve to ascribe all woes to exogenous variables (all fitting neatly under the rubric of globalization).

“Small islands were never paradise” (p.230); and they seem to be increasingly less so for their residents, even if touted as much to potential and visiting tourists. Nicely signposted and authoritatively written, *Islands at risk?* will get you thinking hard and gingerly about the promises and pitfalls of island development. You will also not be lost for a reference: Connell does not disappoint with a reference list of almost 1,000 entries, stretching over 74 pages.

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~~Richard D. Fulton and Peter H. Hoffenberg (eds.) (2013). *Oceania and the Victorian imagination: Where all things are possible*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 209pp. ISBN: 978-1-4094-5711-4 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-4094-5712-1 (ebook pdf); ISBN: 978-1-4724-0470-1 (e-pub). £55.~~

~~This book had its origins in the 15<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Victorian Interdisciplinary Studies Association of the Western United States (VISAWUS) held on the island of Hawai'i in October 2010. Strangely though (except for a single footnote), the fact that all twelve essays had their genesis in papers delivered at the conference is not signalled anywhere between the book's covers. On the one hand this doesn't matter; but on the other it is worth mentioning, I think, because the structure and content of the book are evidently determined by the VISAWUS programme.~~

~~The broader topic of the conference, 'Oceania and the East in the Victorian Imagination,' is prudently contained here to focus only on the Victorian engagement with Oceania, and the way that the Victorians' interactions with Oceania impacted on their literature, and on their culture generally. The central argument of the book as a whole is that, while studies of Oceania have thus far been peripheral to Victorian Studies (taking a back seat behind studies of the influence of India or Africa on the Victorian imagination), Oceania was anything but peripheral in the formation of Victorian culture. Given its prominence in the book's title, the choice of the inclusive term Oceania might usefully have been explained; instead it is employed interchangeably with the geographically defined term South Pacific. Yet while the geographical span of the South Pacific is, as Rod Edmond explains in his 1997 book *Representing the South Pacific*, often anachronistically defined as the Polynesian triangle – a vast area stretching from Hawaii in the north, to New Zealand in the south-west, and Easter Island in the east – here, Australasia is included in its generous embrace.~~

~~The focus of the book, however, is clear, and consistently considered across the range of essays: the way contact with Oceania/the Pacific was significant in the Victorian imagination and across a range of cultural forms. The book is divided into three (four-essay) parts, each of which holds interest for island studies scholars, particularly those based in literary or cultural studies. The first section explores the way the Victorians represented the Pacific and themselves in the Pacific through photography, travel writing, and exhibitions; the second looks at the way the Pacific and Pacific Islanders were represented in Victorian fiction;~~

