

## Book reviews

**Johannes Riquet (2020). *The aesthetics of island space: Perception, ideology, geopoetics*. Oxford University Press. 384pp, Paperback. ISBN 978-0-19-883241-6. £19.99.**

The Preface of Johannes Riquet's *The Aesthetics of Island Space* says the following:

“When I began this project, I was strongly influenced by a tradition of scholarship that viewed literary islands—specially literary islands from the English-speaking world—as supreme figures of bounded space and the fictions of modern individualism, nationalism, and colonialism that accompanied it. These valuable analyses alerted me to the ongoing importance of islands in the Western imagination, and to the ideological functions they served. But I have gradually come to understand that British and American island narratives challenge these ideologies as frequently as they consolidate them, and that they mobilize and destabilize space as much as they render it static and controllable. It is this neglected story of islands that I wish to tell in this book, which aims to reconsider the central role islands have played in rethinking space since the ‘insular moment’ [...] of early modernity” (pp. vii–viii).

Riquet speaks of a personal journey, but, of course, this is also part of a broader, collective journey which many other European and North America island scholars have been on over the past few decades as well—what I have elsewhere called ‘relational turn’ (Pugh, 2016), which focuses upon engaging and disrupting the modern imaginary of islands as “enclosed, autonomous, and static spaces” (p. viii). Throughout, Riquet generates the powerful sense that the coherence of modern frameworks of reasoning (spatial, psychological, phenomenological, and so forth) was never straightforward in practice; and that islands, ostensibly emblematic bounded spaces of coherence, have played a central role in this realization.

The specific focus and “premise” of Riquet’s book is:

that the modern voyages of discovery posed considerable cognitive and perceptual challenges to the experience of space, and that these challenges were negotiated in complex and contradictory ways via the poetic and aesthetic engagement with islands. While scholarship has frequently emphasized the literary construction of islands as geometrical abstractions and easily comprehended spaces, *The Aesthetics of Island Space* argues that the modern experience of islands as mobile and shifting territories implies a dispersal, fragmentation, and diversification of spatial experience. (p. 7)

Thus, Chapter 1 focuses upon the modern migrant condition, islands and after-affects in the New World; foregrounding tropes of arrival, departure and rupture, as well as open senses of space, emergence and possibility. The examples engaged are extremely appropriate, and really carefully chosen, including Angel Island and Ellis Island, but also *The Tempest* and Cecil B. DeMille’s 1919 film *Male and Female* “which was made just before the United States put a curb on immigration” (p. 26). The figure of the isolated island is profoundly questioned and overturned. Chapter 2 develops this theme and the disruption of modern frameworks of reasoning

by examining how the island resists the bounded image, focusing upon the figure of the island in early European exploration and in representations by Hollywood. This is a very good chapter and here the island is revealed to be simultaneously open and closed, so that “repeated viewing can go either way: as well as freezing an image, it can release it” (p. 26). Chapter 3 turns from islands as bounded images for aesthetic consumption, to more open and permeable conceptions of the island ‘self’. It examines memoirs and diaries, mostly from the Pacific Northwest, such as George Vancouver’s journal and the diary of George Gibbs—foregrounding islands as spaces of multiple interconnections and places where subjectivity is re-centered in expansive landscapes, but also islands as spaces which resist cartographic fixation. Again, modern reasoning is the focus, with the chapter explaining how these “texts negotiate an intensive engagement with space precisely through the *failure* to comprehend it” (p. 28, emphasis in original).

Chapter 4, the final chapter, argues that Darwin and Wallace were also pivotal figures who thought relationally with islands, and, via H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, knocking on the door of the Anthropocene, this is brought up to date with Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. I liked this chapter the best. For all the critique in island scholarship, I strongly agree with Riquet that Darwin played a key role in the development of relational thinking and for the disruption of modernity’s linear and hierarchical visions of progress. The whole point of the theory of evolution, developed from thinking with islands, was to foreground how speciation and differentiation was a product of the intensification of relation on islands. As Riquet (p. 246) says, Darwin brought about “a radical change of perspective [of life, exemplified by island life ...] a relational perspective.” “Islands allow Darwin to imagine [...] a decentred world in flux, a conglomerate of criss-crossing lines” (p. 260).

Bringing together such perspectives from science, literature and cinematic studies, *The Aesthetics of Island Space* is one of the most detailed and comprehensive examples of relational thinking with islands which I have read. It is impossible to do justice to the depth and breadth of the examples it contains. Riquet demonstrates how contemporary work with islands does much to disrupt modern frameworks of reasoning; reflecting well today’s commonplace notion that:

Islands are particularly potent landforms for a reimagination of the earth and our relation to it, which is partly due to the imaginative potential of their geo(morpho)logical instability (think, for instance, of volcanic islands). Indeed, if islands lend themselves to a discussion of productive processes, they can equally be mobilized to negotiate destruction and dissolution. (p. 4).

Good books help develop your thinking, often in ways that the author may not have intended, and, for me, *The Aesthetics of Island Space* did just this. Reading this book got me thinking that islands do seem to do a lot of ‘work’ in these kinds of contemporary debates which seek to disrupt modernity; the coherences of spatial fixations, the human/nature, mind/body divides, and so forth. Riquet’s particular tack at these debates focuses upon the generative tensions between the production of islands and phenomenal experience, “the interplay between *poiesis* and *aisthesis*” (p. 3, emphasis in original). As Riquet elaborates:

While we cannot escape textual mediation, different poetic constructions of islands will imply different spatial conceptions, and an attention to the materiality of islands

can have transformative effects: first, in the *resonance* between the materiality of islands and the materiality of their textual production, and second, in the *interference* of the former in the latter; in the resistance physical islands offer to their various figurations and ideological appropriations in fictional and non-fictional discourses. (p. 4, emphasis in original).

More generally speaking, today we see a whole suite of relational approaches—from object-oriented, to posthumanist and Black and Indigenous studies—being developed by explicitly drawing upon islands and island cultures; in the work of leading authors like Timothy Morton, Anna Tsing, Karen Barad, David Farrier, Tiffany Lesotho King, and Cary Wolfe; which complement or variously disrupt the longer-term relational approaches of island scholarship itself, from Brathwaite, to Glissant and Hau’ofa. But this also got me thinking that how humans think about islands is simultaneously *both a product of the world and its producer*. Thus, how islands are drawn upon and put to use in these developments, not only tells us about islands but also about *ourselves*, and our own shifting preoccupations. This provoked my further thinking. Why is it that Riquet’s journey, whilst no doubt personal, is also part of something like a broader collective journey of North American and European scholarship engaging islands over the past few decades? How and why do *these* approaches cohere around certain analytics, rather than others? What do they downplay, neglect, or seek to foreground? What are the various modes of affect, and what capacities for becoming affected are being engendered? How does drawing upon islands in the rich variety of relational approaches which today characterise debate show us the world, or enable us to enter the world? And, what does the interest in these by North Americans and European scholars in particular in recent years tell us about ourselves, how we seek to connect with island communities around the world, our own personal and collective shifting preoccupations as scholars interested in islands and the world?

As Isabelle Stengers would say, to underplay the importance of such critical questions would result in the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’, where we imagine that we are merely observers reflecting, meditating or speculating upon islands and the world, rather than their products and producers. It is perhaps because Riquet’s book is such a good example of relational thinking with islands that it has led me to more firmly believe something which I hitherto only speculated might be important: we now need a new agenda for island studies. How can we develop an agenda which not only interrogates how modern reasoning has grasped islands, as Riquet and so many others now do, but which also examines this recent proliferation of relational approaches which explicitly work with islands as well – how can we take *these* as a more explicit analytical focus? For sure, this already goes on quite naturally; not least because it is necessary for the development of relational approaches themselves. But that is not what I am getting at. What I am saying is that we need a bit more critical distance; to stand back and analyse the development of a significant body of thought which is now in the world and which today explicitly draws upon islands in order to develop relational thinking. In short, how are islands and island cultures being put to use and work in the relational turn? My concern does not have normative undertones, but is rather focused upon how we could do the important work of drawing out the genealogies, heuristics, and map the analytics of this turn? I am not aware of this being done to date, so please contact me if you know of anything. Riquet’s book is an exemplary case of relational thinking in island scholarship, and I recommend it without reservation. But it is precisely because it can be seen

as something of a pinnacle of what is now a broader body of thought in the world, that it makes me believe that we now need to carve out some new stakes, this new agenda, for island scholarship going forward.

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**Kirstie Petrou (2020). *If everyone returned, the island would sink: Urbanisation and migration in Vanuatu*. Berghan. 214pp, Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-78920-621-0. US\$120.**

Two of the defining processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries have been urbanisation and migration. Intrinsicly intertwined, both rural and urban spaces have been transformed across the Global South. These processes are heterogeneous in nature and have created, reinforced and challenged economic, social and spatial inequalities. Whilst international migration has garnered much interest, both within and beyond academia, internal migration remains the dominant and key phenomenon shaping everyday mobilities. Across the Pacific Islands, increasing urbanisation and migration is changing contemporary island life. Indeed, internal migration is dominating the flows of people in the Melanesian states of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Drawing upon the everyday experiences of islanders from the small island of Paama in Vanuatu and the capital Port Vila, this book unpacks the ongoing, complex connectiveness between the rural and urban lives of the Paamese. Situated in Malampa Province, Paama island is home to approximately 20 villages and 1,544 Paamese (2009, Census). However, this only represents a small percentage of the 6,521 people who identify as Paamese across Vanuatu. Consequently, this community offers an ideal case study to consider translocalism and mobility. The book focuses on the experiences of ni-Vanuatu from the four villages of Liro, Liro Nesa, Asuas and Voravor that make up the greater Liro Area on Paama.

Kirstie Petrou, a human geographer, utilises longitudinal research to consider the lived experiences of mobility, rurality and urbanism in Vanuatu. She builds upon Gerald Haberkorn's fieldwork on rural-urban mobility and urbanisation conducted in the 1980s. She advocates that longitudinal research allows perceptive insights into change and continuity of migration and urbanisation over time, providing opportunities for new understandings and reflections. Indeed, the book highlights the perseverance of a culture of mobility amidst several gradual and incremental changes. Although circular migration remains a key component of Paamese life, motivations and experiences of mobility have changed. Petrou challenges narratives of rural decline highlighting how translocal kin networks can be used to sustain the island from beyond its shores. Thereby, shedding light on how island communities may prove sustainable and adaptable in the long term and the continued importance of the rural in providing perceived security for urban migrants.

Thematically structured, each chapter offers an insight into different components of the everyday lives of Paamese migrants. In the introduction, Petrou introduces the key themes of the book of urbanisation, migration and translocalism as well as setting out the rationale for utilising a longitudinal approach. Chapter One offers an overview of urbanisation and migration in Vanuatu whilst Chapter Two outlines everyday life on Paama, contextualising

the case study and highlighting elements of continuity and change. Next, Chapter Three focuses on the rural social environment and economic opportunities on the island of Paama. Chapters Four and Five consider mobility from both an island and urban perspective exploring the culture of migration and poverty of opportunities on the island and how urban migrants hopes of returning home often do not materialise. Chapter Six explores the social lives and new social relationships of migrants in Port Vila whereas Chapter Seven highlights the economic hardships. Finally, the conclusion in Chapter Eight considers the continuity of broader processes of social and economic change and how hybrid social organisations blend traditional and modern ways of living, whilst stressing the significance of kin relationships.

This book's strength rests in the rich contributions from Petrou's rich ethnographic research with extracts from interviews interwoven with her field diary notes as well as quantitative analysis. As such, it offers valuable insights into the everyday lives of the ni-Vanuatu and their perceptions of migration and urbanisation. Consequently, the arguments are grounded in nature with the longitudinal research methodology allowing Petrou to situate them temporally as well as spatially. Moreover, the focus on gender indicates the gradual shift in understandings of mobility and gender relations thus offering a valuable contribution to considerations of gender and mobility across the Pacific. Kinship also is a key theme, with this book highlighting the ongoing importance of considering kin in unpacking contemporary remittance patterns and ongoing social relations.

Given the richness of the empirical material, this book has the potential to make a much greater theoretical contribution to contemporary debates in urban and rural mobility. In its focus on internal migration, it could have gone much further in contributing to scholarship through unpacking ideas of circular migration and perceptions of mobility, continuity and change and thus contributing more substantively to scholarship. Within the longitudinal approach, there seems a great scope for engaging with the geographies of memory, but this is largely untouched in the analysis. Additionally, given Vanuatu's vulnerability to climate change and environmental hazards more broadly, questions surrounding the environment remain largely unanswered—with climate change notably absent from the discussion. If environmental factors remain absent in ni-Vanuatu perceptions of migration, it would be interesting to unpack why. Given that the fieldwork was conducted in 2011, there are some nods towards the impact of technological changes and development such as the increased access to mobile phones. Given the tantalising hints towards the growing role of technology, there, perhaps, should have been more space given in the conclusion to reflect on changes over the past decade.

Overall, this book should be of note not only for those interested in Melanesia and the Pacific but recommended for scholars concerned with urbanisation and migration in small islands and the Global South more broadly. It illustrates the strength of utilising a longitudinal approach to provide rich ethnographic data to shed light on intergenerational changes on urbanisation and migration in Vanuatu. Challenging notions of the transformative impacts of migration, the book offers a more nuanced take with consideration of the precarity and hardship of urban life and the ambivalence towards migration outcomes with a focus on continuity.

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**Joy Davis (2019). *Complicated simplicity: Island life in the Pacific Northwest*. Heritage House. 229pp., Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-77203-270-3. CA\$22.95.**

*Complicated Simplicity* brings to the fore the paradox of island living in the Pacific Northwest archipelagos through the eyes of real people and their lived experiences, including those of her parents during her own childhood on Bath Island. Before immersing the reader into the diverse trials, tribulations and delights of living on a small island, Davis takes them on a fascinating journey of what islands are all about, surveying the idea of island as we would a skipping rock to assess its qualities ahead of tossing it into the sea to joyfully skim and skip across the incoming tide. From the perspectives of poets, writers, sociologists, scientists and more, Davis paints a dynamic landscape and constructs an island lexicon that breathes life into the notion of islandness for the most inexperienced of us. She offers a peek into the academic world of nissology while echoing themes of isolation and survival that islands in literature have often evoked. She initiates the novice scholar with terms such as enisling, islanded, and islomane, the latter who is said to have “a rare affliction of spirit” (Lawrence Durrell). It is this affliction that has captured Davis’ imagination and which she seeks to expose, both in form of personal memoir and phenomenological study, in the course of the book.

Joy Davis writes from first-hand experience and, in part, presents *Complicated Simplicity* as an ode to her sailing-loving parents who in 1962 when she was 10 made the decision to buy Bath Island, near Gabriola. The interviews conducted with island settlers over two summers as research for the book appeared to have enriched Davis’ appreciation for the bravery, ingenuity and skill of her parents’ occupation with putting down island roots while maintaining a healthy family life. In the seven chapters that follow, Davis’ personal reflections are interspersed together with those of her interviewees as bioluminescence in night waters, throwing a bright light on the accounts of mounting challenges and the seemingly overwhelming circumstances of island living. From choosing the right island and building site to managing the need for food, water, fuel; from navigating the dangers of sea logs and quick turns of weather to developing self-sufficiency, Davis touches on a myriad of considerations that are essential to finding the right individual balance for succeeding at small island life in the Pacific Northwest.

In addition to capturing the experiences of individuals from the San Juan Islands, Gulf Islands, Discovery Islands, Broughton Archipelago as well as some locations on the west side of Vancouver island, Davis amplifies her own findings with the experiences recorded in the writings and memoirs of other island dwellers like Celia Thaxter (Maine); John Fowles (Isles of Scilly); David Conover (Wallace Island) and Joy Orth (Stikine River Estuary) among others. The inclusion of these stories in many cases link the Pacific Northwest islands to other cold water islands across the globe as unique natural environments that need to be properly stewarded. As a budding scholar interested in the year-round sustainability of cold-water island states, I made many connections to Maritime island living, where need for resilience, sense of isolation, strong weather patterns and land-water biodiversity are distinguishing characteristics.

Small islands in the Pacific Northwest are undeniably defined by their sea surroundings and Davis appropriately addresses this feature throughout the book. She aptly expounds the role of the weather and sea in these cold-water islands, no doubt a sensitivity developed from many years of operating *Molly*, a clinker-built vessel, to and from Silva Bay with her sister as part of the daily trek to school. With no cell phone to check in, Davis’ mom had to wait until

early evening to know her daughters were safe. Learning to read the weather and its shifts and its subsequent impact on the sea was essential to overall satisfaction of island living for the interviewees. Many stories were shared of inexperience, wharfs turning upside down or disappearing, logs appearing suddenly in the boat's path, seafoam covering dwellings, supplies being loaded and unloaded, and passages being planned and commonly delayed. Weather and sea determined positioning of homes, moorings and other structures; sourcing of food; and wayfinding. And these experiences were intensified for those islanders who chose islands not serviced by ferries. Davis takes time to explore the additional demands on time, resources and well-being which results from further remote island living. Through her stories, Davis dispels myths about island time, leisure, and recreation and at the same time promulgates a deep love for the natural world, healing solitude and independence. For Davis, her parents and her interviewees, true enjoyment in island living came in learning to live in peace with nature, growing more self-sufficient and developing resilience in the face of the unexpected.

In addition to contributing to the literature on what it means to be an islander, Davis has captured a time in history where a mostly homogenous population of people were disenchanted with city life and the way of civilization and, consequently, attracted to the promised difference of island living. As a result, there is little attention to gender differences (the creation of the Lady's Skiff Club is an exception) and diversity. There is an intentional inclusion of First Nations which could perhaps be a more significant theme in future should Davis pursue a study of Haida Gwaii, as indicated in a recent interview. With today's technologies and new products, life as described by Davis may now be easier, making this book all the more pertinent to capturing this way of life. Davis writes well about a topic that is very personal to her and about which she is very knowledgeable. This book will be a particular reading pleasure for those who are connected to the area or who love islands.

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**Nicholas Laughlin & Nailah Folami Imoja (Eds.) (2017). *So many islands: Stories from the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Indian and Pacific Oceans*. Little Island Press. 214pp., Paperback. ISBN: 9781877484421. US\$16.**

*So Many Islands: Stories from the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Indian and Pacific Oceans* is an anthology of poems and short stories by islanders from each of these respective oceans. The editors selected their authors with diversity in mind—each writer brings with them a new island, along with a unique vernacular, identity and tradition to write from. The array of voices makes each piece refreshing, while the length and number of the texts maintains cohesion across the various perspectives and ideas.

These distinctive stories do share a few features that we might call 'islandness', some of which Marlon James outlines in his introduction to the text. The common experience represented best in this collection is what James refers to as "folk wisdom clashing with facts and knowledge to create a new folk wisdom" (p. 15). This conflict plays a minor role in many of the stories: a woman is chastised for teaching her granddaughter about animals and plants

found in the bush in ‘Granny Dead’—‘Unaccounted For’ argues the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago—and in ‘Perilous Journey’ the young teach the old about the dangers of pesticides. My favourite moment in the anthology comes from ‘A Child of Four Women’, in which Marita Davies, the author, arrives on the island her grandmother was born on for the first time and must complete a pilgrimage with her long lost cousin. Marita leaves tobacco on a statue as an offering to *Nei Reei*, one of the island’s spiritual ancestors, but as she drives away children scurry over to take the tobacco back to their elders.

“Hey! They took my tobacco!”

“What did you expect *nei* Marita? Of course someone will take it.”

“But it’s for the statue!”

Kairo cackled with laughter and teased, “The statue can’t smoke your tobacco, *nei* Marita!” (p. 78)

She feels somewhat betrayed that her island experience is interrupted by children she initially sees as greedy, and this moment draws out more complexity in the conflict between folk wisdom and modern knowledge. Here, Marita’s experience of folk wisdom and island traditions do not align with her expectations, but while these islanders uphold tradition, they also have common sense. A bag of tobacco cannot just sit on a plinth or it will be wasted. Not every one of these stories is trying to break expectations of islandness or resist the colonial lens, but each of the seventeen texts tries to tease nuances out of these expectations and slowly construct an image of the island identity.

While many of these stories do build upon one another and develop ideas across the collection, several cover similar topics without as much distinction and often one piece is less impactful than another. Those narratives have their differences, but when the crux of multiple stories is, for example, colonial violence, the anthology invites comparison, which is not preferable structurally for a collection of short stories and poems. The aim of an anthology such as this is that each piece contributes to a greater whole. These stories certainly do not clash with one another, and islanders have many shared experiences across their distinct islands, so the repetition of a few topics is inevitable. Some of these echoes are well-balanced: ‘A Child of Four Women’ and ‘Beached’ deal with the issue of repatriation from different perspectives that contrast and compliment each other. However, I genuinely enjoyed some of the stories less than others because they covered similar territory with less creativity. The form of this collection specifically feels as if several pieces are in competition with one another, rather than in conversation.

Several texts overlapped, but others did not convey much of anything. One of the exciting elements of a short story or poem is that they can break the rules, say what they want to say how they want to say it. But that means that some texts feel as if they do not have as much of a purpose, that the reader is being shown something without an apparent meaning. I found myself enraptured by Tammi Browne-Bannister’s prose in ‘Perilous Journey’—she writes powerfully about the African diaspora, sustainable gardening practices and centipedes—but a sudden turn in the penultimate paragraph left me reeling and unsure what I was supposed to take from the overall piece. This problem did not arise frequently, but some texts stayed with me a lot longer than others due to the message they impart.

What I loved most about the collection is that the island itself is rarely the focus of each text. Instead, the island is the context—the authors write from the islands rather than just about them, which makes space for many different narratives. ‘Coming Off the Long Run’ is an enthralling story about a cricket team working toward their league title, ‘Plaine-Verte’ explores religious prejudice and orthodoxy through a bildungsroman, ‘1980s Pacific Testing’ discusses nuclear experimentation and the mistreatment of islanders in Oceania, and each writer is informed by their island without being constrained to their island. Even when a text is literally about the island, the author does more than simply depict the land. Such is the case in the as final poem, ‘Avocado’, in which the Caribbean has gone metaphorically missing and the speaker must find it. Here, the Caribbean is discovered inside a gift from a stranger, the eponymous avocado, as well as in descendants of freemen, roadside flowers, ‘the midday light’, and elsewhere. Each text can only provide a snapshot of its island, but the islands we see are as diverse and vibrant as the islanders representing them.

Overall, *So Many Islands* is a wonderful selection of poems and stories that is surprising, engaging and enlightening. Each poem is stimulating, each story captivating, providing the collection with a great depth of perspectives, styles and techniques. At times, these perspectives overlap a little too much, to the detriment of one piece or another, but at their best these texts weave together to construct something close to the identity of the islander diaspora. The collection will introduce you to a number of accomplished and talented writers you might not have been lucky enough to discover otherwise, and is well worth the read.

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**Marian Bruce (2019). *Listening for the dead bells: Highland magic in Prince Edward Island*. Island Studies Press at UPEI. 139pp. ISBN: 978-1-988692-29-6. CAD\$18.95**

Marian Bruce’s *Listening for the Dead Bells: Highland Magic in Prince Edward Island* is a collection of supernatural-themed stories sourced from written records and oral histories. These stories are supplied by former residents of Scotland and their descendants who settled in PEI. The accounts that Bruce records feature ghosts, fairies, healing springs, charms, curses, witches, changelings, and, most of all, premonitions. Different kinds of premonitions, such as forerunners, dreams, visions, divination, and visits from the dead, each get their own sections of the book. This book is both educational and entertaining; written for the enjoyment of anyone who loves a spooky tale or has a passion for the art of oral history and island culture. It also provides further interest for readers from PEI who enjoy searching through the stories for the names of familiar communities or families—something that Islanders, in particular, love to do. Bruce highlights the transference of cultural phenomena through immigration and the extraordinary way such cultural knowledge is preserved on islands.

Bruce interlaces stories from PEI with stories from Scotland, frequently crisscrossing back and forth between the Highlands and Island communities to draw comparisons and conclusions. Bruce expertly weaves together a multitude of separate stories, organizing them by theme and tone. Bruce could be accused of being repetitive as she sometimes repeats

information from previous chapters when relevant to a new chapter. However, this means that a reader could conceivably pick up the book and choose to read any chapter they wished and still have enough background explanations to follow along.

Bruce never makes value judgements of the stories she shares but will include comments from the storytellers or witnesses contesting the legitimacy of specific events. Bruce is not out to explain away all of the mystery and magic of these stories, yet she still refrains from glossing over contradictions merely for the sake of telling a good story. Her role is that of a records keeper and cultural analyst, recording all the relevant information and addressing how the data was affected by the culture and communities into which it was transplanted. Bruce is mindful of confirming from where and who a story originated, even while discussing multiple stories concurrently. In this way, she properly conveys her sources and relevant information about the storytellers without straying too far into academia. This is in order to accurately convey the transferral of key concepts through time and space from one island to another. For the most part, Bruce manages to do this without overcomplicating the text or creating too much disorder. However, it can be jarring and confusing at times when a short three-line story about a family, meant simply to introduce a topic, leads immediately into a fuller story about an entirely different family altogether.

Bruce dedicates a lot of time to the examination of the intersection between traditional Celtic beliefs and rigid Christian doctrine. She depicts many historical figures who felt that there was no room for pagan superstitions within their theology and their unsuccessful attempts to stamp out such beliefs. However, she points out that many more people of every level of the laity and the cloth saw the two worlds as one and the same. The descriptions that the storytellers give often invoke “the sacred unknown” to defend their beliefs through Christian faith explanations. They explain premonitions as warnings from God to prepare them emotionally for hardships, or to remind them of His grace. Bruce includes these explanations to show how ancestral beliefs were continued on even through the adoption of new religions.

While many Gaelic terms or phrases such as *Bòcan*, *Sluagh*, and *Dreag* appear throughout the book, maintaining the accuracy of the orally transmitted tales, Bruce acknowledges the tragic irony of the fact that all of these stories are recorded in English despite having their roots in traditional Scottish folklore and belief. The final chapter is dedicated to lamenting the death of the Gaelic language in PEI. This is an important element to consider in Bruce’s study. Although much of the cultural phenomena of Scottish folklore and superstition carried over to PEI, the language they were transmitted through died out before the stories themselves did. Bruce argues that both the Gaelic language and the storytelling culture it cultivated have diminished in PEI in recent generations. However, the belief, or the *desire* for belief, in the supernatural is still present. Younger generations feel disconnected from their ancestors’ stories and views of the world, yet still seek out the unexplained and mysterious. Bruce gives evidence of this through the interest of youth in ghost story events contrasted with the lack of intimate involvement with the subjects of the stories.

Bruce fulfils this desire for the unknown with a treasure trove of interesting and hair-raising stories. She contributes a wealth of information that has not previously been compiled in the same collection until now. Through these stories, Bruce examines the cultural preservation effect that often occurs on islands. When immigrants from the Isle of Skye moved to PEI, they transplanted entire communities and their stories and beliefs came with them.

The connections she has drawn between the folklore and supernatural beliefs of Scotland to those of PEI have significant value to the realm of Island Studies.

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**Alastair Bonnet (2020). *The age of the island: In search of new and disappearing islands*. Atlantic Books. 249pp., Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-78649-812-0. £14.99.**

*The Age of the Island* is an essential guide to islands in a state of flux, be they emerging or disappearing.

This highly accessible volume allows the reader to accompany Alastair Bonnett on his seemingly inexhaustible global journey to set foot on new and disappearing islands on (almost) every continent. I lost count of how many islands were attained by this most contemporary of explorers as he describes their unique characteristics with almost effortless grace. Many of these treasured islands are accompanied with a little sketch map by the author on which one could sense he had almost willed a large 'X' to mark some hidden chest. While gold, on each occasion, was conversations with locals, many as seemingly eccentric as the islands themselves, I sensed that it was drawing the actual maps that were the trophies that Bonnett himself so eagerly sought.

For clearly, Alastair Bonnett loves maps, or more precisely, the “forgotten and overlooked” places he finds on them. He has written extensively on them: *Beyond the Map* (2017); *New Views: The World Mapped Like Never Before* (2017); and *Off the Map* (2014) though confusingly marketed in North America as *Unruly Places*. The subtitles of these books tell more about Bonnett’s devotion to the obscure: unruly enclaves, feral places, lost places, ghostly places, emerging lands, invisible cities, secret cities, inscrutable geographies, gap spaces, and so on. In each of these titles there is at least one chapter devoted to islands (again, Floating Islands, Unruly Islands, and so on) and in this, his latest book, islands get the full stage. While there is some overlap of material from previous books, *The Age of the Island* does fill an important niche in our fast-changing, and somewhat unravelling world.

Much of the book is concerned with new islands: “most artificial islands cater for short-term and short-sighted human ambitions” (p. 212). These, mostly, are newly built as bold infrastructure projects to ‘reclaim’ land from the sea starting, unsurprisingly, in the Netherlands but moving swiftly to the fast growth economies of the Gulf States and China where “island-building has started to become a default option for growing coastal cities looking for more land” (p. 226). China is building islands as part of territorial claims in the South China Sea and, as such, islands are part of a highly complex geopolitical debate which like other global issues can only be briefly introduced. In turn, these are balanced with other, quirkier, islands which Bonnet describes as natural, overlooked and accidental and it is perhaps on these that he is most comfortable. The much shorter section on disappearing islands again exposes the geopolitical though through the lens of the climate crisis about which there is some exposure of the main elements relating to the lack of political will to address global environmental change issues. The book ends, almost too quickly, on future islands and the

future of islands and what they represent at a time when the world appears to be “unspinning” (p. 193). I would have liked to have heard much more about Bonnett’s ideas on this and hopefully this is something that will appear in the academic literature. Given the book’s main title, I was, by the end, seeking more rationale in support of why this moment is the Age of Islands and what might support this claim. But then it’s an introductory guide, and *Island Studies Journal*, its papers and the many books it reviews provide that deeper perspective.

At times the book almost reads like an ornithological field guide though to new islands rather than exotic birds. Each with its unique identifiable characteristics carefully described and catalogued with taxonomic precision attending to distinctive aspects and behaviour patterns. In *The Age of Islands*, Bonnett deals with well over 100 island groups according to the index. (In *Off the Map* there were 47 places and in *Beyond the Map* a further 39 places). Each place is recorded with a perceptive attention to their uniqueness and importance in a world that is indeed “getting stranger” and where the “world’s unruly zones are multiplying and changing fast.”

In addition to the author’s photographs and delightful hand-drawn maps (reminiscent of those by Alfred Wainright of the Lakeland Fells in England), more general maps could have supported the text, with perhaps a World Map showing all the island groups. Better, even, to have had them listed or, ideally, illustrated with graphics showing information about the Age of Islands sculpted in the hands of a capable data visualisation expert as Bonnett does to some extent in his earlier book of maps (*New Views*, 2017) though this has since been surpassed in terms of quality, engagement and impact in Chris McDowall and Tim Denne’s astonishing *We Are Here: An Atlas of Aotearoa* (2020) which elevates, in those authors’ words, data plumbing to data poetry.

Nonetheless this modest but carefully constructed book is engagingly written—“islands freckle their coasts” (p.22)—with some perceptive writing on the meaning of place in contemporary society. As such it is indispensable for an early career Islands Studies scholar and the book, is every bit as welcome for grounded travellers seeking diversion from the current pandemic.

And what for the future? In a world of increasing crises, constrained resources and wicked problems, it is not quite clear where this increasing number of islands is headed. Though, as Bonnett so elegantly puts it, “The heart of any island is the water crossed” (p. 231).

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**John Gibney (2019). *A short history of Ireland, 1500–2000*. Yale University Press. 281pp., Ebook. ISBN: 9780300208511. £5.55.**

We can define ‘island’ simply as a landmass that is smaller than a continent, surrounded by water. Ireland is such an island, and the history of Ireland as Gibney states has been crucially shaped by geography. Ever since the world’s focus shifted from landmasses to oceans since the late-14<sup>th</sup> Century, Ireland has constantly changed and influenced the world. John Gibney’s new book is a primer on modern Irish history from 1500 CE to 2000 CE, providing an

excellent “big and brief picture” view, which shows key historical events that changed Ireland from a traditional civilization to a modern culture.

The book consists of five parts, accounting for a century each. At the beginning, Gibney introduces the land and the people—geographical and ecological diversity, natives and newcomers, which shows physical and cultural changes and continuity. In Gibney’s eyes, the history of modern Ireland begins in the sixteenth century with the Norman invasion and the creation of the colony, distinguishing the island from the medieval world.

Part one includes three chapters, with particular attention to two major changes in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: the introduction of the Protestant Reformation and the extension of English power over the island. The issues of politics and religion were always intertwined. An English political extension was in association with a religious one, which further led to destroying the lordship of Ireland. Regardless of whether the presence of English power in Ireland was considered a Tudor conquest, the ideological impulse rather than cultural assimilation between them, as Gibney points out, becoming “an incremental clash of cultures lay at the heart of the conflicts of the sixteenth century” (p. 46).

In the second part, the economy and politics are the main subjects for early modern Ireland. The Irish economy boomed during the seventeenth century, although livestock still remained a crucial product. However, the period of the 1640s saw turbulence in Irish society, such as the Cromwellian Conquest and the Restoration. Actually, it was not only Ireland that was going through a period of instability; most parts of the world in the seventeenth century were also experiencing turbulent times. Historians named this “the general crisis of the seventeenth century.” More importantly, the above-mentioned question on the English conquest of Ireland still remains. Gibney further calls upon us to ask whether early modern Ireland was a kingdom or a colony. This is a departure from the norm, for historians to rethink the interactions of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales from a new angle of “new British history”. This is of fundamental importance.

The book’s third part is centered on the formation of identity heavily based on ideology. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Protestants owned this land and exercised governance over the land. This issue is a mixture of religion, politics, and wealth, indicating the emergence of a new ruling class, the “Protestant ascendancy,” in Ireland’s Parliament House. Gibney further describes people with various identities as Catholics, Jacobites, or Protestant patriots, to examine the formation of the Irish identity that was distinct from that of the British. Protestant political identity in Ireland was a long drawn out process, and Gibney clearly states that this was not automatically created but strived for, indicating that Ireland was a kingdom rather than a colony.

In 1800, a union was established integrating the two parliaments of Ireland and Britain. The fourth part shows that the two parliaments were to be governed in different ways after 1800, given the different vision of Irish nationalists. An economic dimension is a vital aspect that influenced Irish history; the famine (“the great hunger”) resulted in great loss of the Irish population, as did disease. The post-famine era did bring us to the most significant series of changes to Irish society, including a new Catholic middle class that promoted the development of cultural transition, such as language and literacy, sporting activities, and food. All of these reflected the structure of rural society.

The last part of the volume focuses on the struggle for Irish independence in the twentieth century, which was full of contest and rivalry. Wars, uprisings, and violence marked

this period. However, after winning independence, the Republic of Ireland in the 1980s was in a state of economic recession, resulting in emigration on a huge scale. Fortunately, the 1990s saw economic growth and the country received immigrants, which was the result of the process of “social partnership”. This supported to some extent the growth of the economy, with the stress being on cooperation among business, unions, and the agricultural sector to produce a blueprint for the economy. With the economic boom ending in 2008, the Irish political system may seem to be fragmented again.

‘Change’ is the key term that guides us in tracing the history of modern Ireland, from the aspects of politics, economy, religion, culture, population, language, and others, which indicates that Ireland has undergone a series of profound social transformations over the past five centuries. Gibney insists on asking the question as to what kind of entity Ireland was: a kingdom, a colony, or a typical ancient régime society? He clearly points out that “the questions of identity muddy the waters around this issue” (p. 124). His book allows us to see how the Irish people struggled for political independence and their Catholic connections with Catholic Europe without Britain, which helps understand contemporary issues, such as the border issue of Northern Ireland.

Gibney adds a special section following each part, to communicate with his readers—Where Historians Disagree. This is a fantastic writing style to express opinions of a historian. In some cases, it is not easy to distinguish historical narratives and academic historical research for general readers and fans of history. Gibney uses a simple and concise way to show that “the writing of history changes as much as history itself” (p. 243).

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**Toyin Falola, R. Joseph Parrott, & Danielle Porter Sanchez (Eds.) (2019). *African islands: Leading edges of empire and globalization*. University of Rochester Press. 432pp, Hardcover. ISBN: 13:978-1-58046-954-8. £110.**

African islands that surround Africa from the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean form a rich yet intricate loop of historical, socio-cultural, political, economic, linguistic and interracial dynamics that still exercise an influence on the islands’ regional and global spheres. Due to their strategic positions, the African islands connected the world from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas into an intricate web of networks. These islands, despite their elemental importance, received minimal focus. The authors of the current volume brilliantly highlight that, despite these islands’ meagre sizes and the various socio-economic and ecological constraints, they are not mere remote and geographically small or inconsequential entities. African islands hold a significant historical and geopolitical importance; “interoceanic crossroads” where worlds meet and overlap. This book shows that African islands acted as liminal spaces between independence and bondage, ecological constraints and openness, economic success and failure, political, socio-cultural interrelations, hybridity and conflicts. Thus, the book pushes away from narrowly defined nationalist histories and encourages larger

conversations relevant to these as unique spaces of analysis for understanding the history and cultures of the African islands and the African continent.

The book, in a well-crafted and detailed discussion, features the historical and geographic particularities of the African islands and their contribution to the historical, economic, socio-cultural and political texture of Africa and the world. The Atlantic Ocean islands; the Canaries, Sao Tome and Principe, the Bijagos, Bioko, West African islands, and Cabo Verde show examples of self-identification struggles, economic success and failure, historic self-sufficiency and local autonomy, indigenous marginalization due to globalization and disempowerment, strategic importance in wartime, and postcolonial language struggles. Indian Ocean islands, on the other side of the continent; Mascarenes Islands (Mauritius and Réunion), Zanzibar, Madagascar, the Comoros and Seychelles, reflect an intricate history of labour migration, economic, religious shifting and socio-cultural dynamics. Slavery and post-slavery struggles, rise and fall of external influences, mobility, manipulation of colonial effects, maintenance of the sense of community and autonomy.

Despite these geographic and historic differences, African islands are brought together in this volume in an interactive dialogue that shows, thanks to these islands' networks and exchange, novel ideas, imperial governance, economic organisation, and cultures moved from one region to another which helped structure the African islands and the African history in the process. Nevertheless, drawing on their economic importance, natural resources, strategic locations, linguistic and cultural particularities, these islands grappled with major challenges such as slave trade, the influence of the former imperial powers, major ethnic, cultural, political and identity clashes. These challenges and particularities contributed to shaping the unique and complex islands' identities, nationalism, regional and global relations.

The above description of the volume's contents is necessary to show the various dimensions that formed the history and the present day of the African islands. These dimensions bind the historical, colonial, postcolonial, cosmopolitan dynamics of the islands in a web of hybridity and interrelations. The authors of this volume thoroughly highlight these dimensions throughout the histories of these islands, portraying the major characteristics, historical events and external factors that shaped the African islands. The authors, additionally, state that despite the African islands' differences, they share geographical and historical commonalities especially as former colonies of the former imperial powers.

As a remark, I believe that further and in-depth focus on the islands' interactions and histories with inland African states as shown with the coastal states would have been instructive to have a closer look on the African island states and inland states' historical dynamics and their regional and continental networks. In sum, this volume is indispensable to the study of African islands to shift from the lens of insularity, remoteness and marginalization to the study and understanding of African Islands to a lens of relational and connective histories of the African island identities, cultural, geopolitical, global and regional dynamics.

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