nomic security and a higher profile for economic issues.

Finally, most of the contributors emphasize the emergence in the 1970s and 1980s of a more self-confident, independent-minded, and assertive Australia. That development, coupled with changes taking place in the island states, the collapse of the United States–New Zealand leg of the alliance, and global change, requires higher levels of American sensitivity toward and attention to the region. Although one may not agree with all of the proposed policy changes in Ravenhill’s concluding chapter, few would quarrel with his underlying premise.

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John Connell’s monograph is primarily a teaching and bibliographic resource. It consists of a comprehensive bibliography on the economic development of small island states attached to a series of chapters covering a checklist of topics: self-reliance, demographic issues, employment, migration and remittances, rural development, fisheries, industrial development, services (finance and tourism), regional cooperation, and trade and aid.

The bibliography is the outstanding part of the monograph. It occupies 27 pages and contains 461 references (24 of them to Connell’s own previous work). For researchers newly embarking on the study of small-island economies, this bibliography will be a natural starting point. Even for old hands it is an excellent checklist, likely to yield some novelties. There can be few scholars more widely read in the small-islands literature than Connell, and his knowledge of the Caribbean and Indian oceans as well as the South Pacific gives the bibliography and accompanying text a genuinely global sweep.

His list of island microstates includes twenty countries with less than a million inhabitants and low per capita incomes. Fiji thus rubs shoulders with the Seychelles, Barbados with Tuvalu. Surely the first task must be to classify this group into subspecies? But no, Connell plunges directly into the attempt to deal with them all at once.

Partly as a result of this, the text makes heavy weather of a detailed and often confusing story. Connell is a meticulous collector, assembling fragments from all over the world in a set of predetermined topic-by-topic display cases. One’s admiration is aroused by the sheer effort required to gather so much material. But no great unifying themes or compelling line of argument emerge. The separate chapters tend to stand as entities, each fulfilling the need to say something about population, or trade, or agriculture, or tourism. They do not cross-fertilize, nor fit into any unfolding theoretical conception of the small-island economy as an ideal type—or alternatively, into a
fruitful classification of types of small islands.

To be sure, it is asking a lot to look for such a conception. The essence of the small-island condition is its contradictions. Here are political units below the usual threshold of political viability, yet grimly reproducing the institutions and practices of large sovereign nations. Here are economies doomed to operate in symbiosis with larger neighbors or patrons (a status often mislabeled “dependence”) whose governments, planners, and aid-donors quest endlessly after the holy grail of (equally mislabeled) “self-reliance.” Here are communities of families as cosmopolitan in their outlook and migration behavior as the Scottish crofters or Irish rural tenants of the nineteenth century, but tied into the straitjacket of postcolonial nationalities in a twentieth-century world of bureaucracy and computerized police files. Here are indigenous cultures whose forms are frozen in the lenses of tourist cameras, even as their content is increasingly contested.

Connell’s discussion is rife with such contradictions but never really brings them into focus. Island peoples, of necessity, learn to play several roles at once, because they have to get on with their lives. Decision makers in the world’s aid and development bureaucracies, in contrast, impose order on the confusion in their own minds by asserting fake imperatives: small-island political institutions “must” attain sovereign status, island economies “must” attain self-reliance, aid money “must” be spent on development projects rather than consumption.

Time after time Connell slips into repeating such nostrums, then recoils in recognition of the realities of the small-island situation, then retreats to the comfort of a sort of confessional question-begging. A typical passage reads: “although self-reliance is an important goal, especially in some sectors, and should remain a target, the prospects for an overall increase in self-reliance are very small indeed. More often self-reliance remains a nominal political objective, the key to the formulation of development plans, but not a genuine economic objective. . . . This kind of structure ensures that there is a major distinction between policy (which is rational and enshrines various technical objectives, which may include greater self-reliance) and politics, which remains the art of the possible” (80–81).

This idea that it is somehow “rational” to pursue objectives that have “very small prospects indeed” gives unwarranted legitimacy to the empty slogans of aid agencies and their consultants. Connell really does know better. His monograph contains a rich vein of source material, together with the fragments of an alternative way of seeing and interpreting the island world. It remains, however, the raw material—not a final product.

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