Book and Media Reviews
chapters enormously useful in learning about Indigenous peoples. For those in Pacific studies who are particularly interested in global indigeneity, this book will also serve as an effective tool to stimulate a comparative discussion of the struggles and successes of the Aborigines, the Māori, and Kānaka Maoli with Indigenous groups and Fourth World peoples outside the region.

The focus of this book is twofold: “to compare and contrast the success of seven Fourth World peoples” and to raise awareness of “the possibility of affecting government policies aimed at assisting in the survival of Indigenous peoples” (iv). The book serves the first purpose well, though the amount of information can be overwhelming and readers can get lost in the sea of laws and policies discussed. What the book is missing is an energized discussion of how policy makers and organizations working toward Indigenous rights can use this information to positively change the experiences of Fourth World peoples across the world. The book’s contributors envision people taking the restorative histories presented in Native Nations and using the information in their respective circles of influence. Perhaps that leaves too much to hope and chance. There is much work to be done regarding Indigenous peoples, but the hopeful note in this collaborative project toward providing new histories, promoting clear-eyed scholarly engagements, and re-voicing silences in Fourth World peoples’ pasts and presents is well worth heeding.

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Language Contact in the Early Colonial Pacific examines the historical evidence for Maritime Polynesian Pidgin (MPP). It makes the case for a Polynesian-based pidgin that formed during European encounters with the region as early as the 1760s and endured for over a century before any European language-based pidgins and creoles would emerge. As the most recent volume in Cambridge University Press’s interdisciplinary series Approaches to Language Contact, Drechsel’s volume presents the reader with a theoretically and methodologically innovative study. Painstakingly amassing and interpreting the evidence for a Polynesian-based pidgin that functioned as an important early colonial intercultural medium of maritime communication in the Pacific, Drechsel offers a significant contribution to Pacific history and regional linguistics.

An image by the Armenian-American painter Arman Manookian (1904–1931) adorns the cover of the book and depicts a scene with Hawaiians in the foreground on land, gazing seaward toward an offshore ship, sails unfurled. The author notes the rarity of this perspective in period paintings, which often represent contact between Polynesians and Europeans from the European viewpoint, that is, from a ship’s deck toward a Pacific island. Extending this artistic analogy to lin-
guistic research on pidgins in the early colonial Pacific, the author notes that “art emulates political and linguistic realities” (7) and emphasizes how few studies have yet seriously considered the sociohistorical importance of Polynesians as speaking persons and of Polynesian languages as primary agentive influences in the emergence of a maritime pidgin in the Pacific.

With this intriguing opening, the author introduces the puzzle presented by MPP: What evidence has been missed, overlooked, or misinterpreted that might shed light on a renewed and reconsidered linguistic and political understanding of the early colonial Pacific? In pursuing these questions, the reader is thrust into Drechsel’s critical commentary on the Eurocentric cultural blinders that he suggests are influencing current theories on the emergence and functional roles of jargons and pidgins in this regional context. His introduction argues that the majority of scholarly discussions on this issue tend to be both contradictory in their claims and biased in favor of the view that early colonial jargons and pidgins must have been based on European languages, privileging the linguistic role of European and American sailors as the main contributors to a new maritime contact variety, which would quickly have been adopted throughout the Pacific. Drechsel proposes a new model of language contact, one that was initiated by Tahitians using a reduced variety of Tahitian in acts of linguistic accommodation in encounters with European voyagers and later stabilized as MPP. During the period of stabilization, both colonial sailors and Polynesians took up other varieties of reduced Polynesian languages—in particular reduced Hawaiian and Māori—in their intercultural encounters across the Pacific, yielding a surprisingly capacious, effective, and trans-Oceanic communicative matrix.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part provides a challenging examination of the questions, theories, and methods of historical sociolinguistics, plunging the reader into the relevant context of Drechsel’s nuanced proposal for the existence and role of MPP in the early colonial Pacific. In this part, the author also provides a fuller explanation for why the existence of MPP has been difficult to identify due to perspectives that have assumed the greater influence of European languages as forming the basis of contact mediums in the early colonial Pacific. The previous lack of a rigorous methodological approach, sensitive to the concomitant sociolinguistic, political, and ethnohistorical contexts of the time, has served to reinforce standard perspectives. With an innovative methodology that primarily employs ethnohistory and philology, and further drawing on sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, Drechsel complicates and subverts the Eurocentric model of early language contacts and encounters. This methodological hybridity, he argues, is better equipped to engage in the project of amassing, interpreting, and reconstructing a system of communication from fragments of ethnolinguistic evidence scattered across a diverse range of historical documents cutting across different genres and times.

In part 2, a close examination of a wide variety of this archival material is presented, including diaries,
journal entries, correspondence, and administrative reports by European and American colonial voyagers, merchants, settlers, and so-called “beachcombers.” Drechsel’s analysis of these documents from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century establishes the evidence for his arguments on the significant role of MPP. Accounts in this second part are further divided into three subsections documenting MPP’s initial emergence and stabilization, its resilience over time as an important and enduring means of communication, and finally its survival in particular niches late into the nineteenth century, particularly aboard ships with multilingual crews engaged in commercial expeditions. Herman Melville’s semi-fictional writings of voyages in the eastern Pacific receive a relatively longer treatment. This is partly due to Melville’s inclusion of several conversations and other linguistic observations in his writings, which provide Drechsel “highly regular linguistic data” for deducing the grammatical paradigms of MPP. Notably, throughout his analysis, Drechsel acknowledges the variable quality of these historical documents in terms of their richness of linguistic data and depth of sociolinguistic context.

In part 3, the author offers a summation of MPP’s historical trajectory, an overview of its life span, including a more in-depth linguistic description and a clarification of its historical sociolinguistic function. Readers with an interest in Native American pidgins and jargons will find the parallels the author draws between Chinook Jargon and MPP worth considering—research on Chinook Jargon in the Pacific Northwest provides useful theoretical and methodological insights on Polynesian-based pidgin formation in the early colonial Pacific. The author’s analytic conclusions on the explicit linguistic evidence available and the sociocultural contexts in which communicative exchanges occurred serve to provide a rich descriptive overview of the sociolinguistic dimensions and functions of MPP.

Drawing on a diverse range of historical sources, Language Contact in the Early Colonial Pacific offers a compelling critique of the implicit Eurocentric perspective that has dominated theories on early colonial Pacific jargons, pidgins, and creoles. This new model of regional language contact raises provocative questions concerning not only the linguistic properties and functions of jargons, pidgins, and creoles but also the distribution of power in social interactions and more macro-level political engagements between Polynesians and European and American voyagers over the course of increasing colonial expansion and influence across the Pacific. Privileging analytic sensitivity to the sociocultural contexts in which communicative exchanges involving MPP occurred, Drechsel’s original methodological approach is a significant contribution. While methodological bricolage may raise issues for scholars used to adhering to more strictly defined disciplinary boundaries, the ambitious project of uncovering evidence for the use and function of MPP clearly demands a deep appreciation of extralinguistic factors and thus a methodology suited to this task. This volume may raise more questions than it answers, taking the reader through an immense historical puzzle to which
the author has devoted many years. While not a definitive description of
MPP, it serves as a preliminary foray into a profoundly different, potentially
revelatory, and more robust sociolinguistic history of the early colonial
Pacific.

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Plastic Paradise: The Great Pacific
Garbage Patch. Documentary, 57 min-
utes, DVD, color, 2013. Written and
directed by Angela Sun; distributed by
Bullfrog Films. Available through Bull-
frog Films at http://bullfrogfilms.com/
catalog/plpaso.html. US$333.00.

Plastic Paradise: The Great Pacific
Garbage Patch has garnered numerous
awards and attention from around the
globe. With a message that stirs people
to want to reverse course, Angela
Sun’s documentary is an exposé that
left this viewer deeply moved by the
enormity of the environmental catas-
trophe in progress as well as by the
proximity of the problem to easily
overlooked dimensions of our daily
lives. The film was particularly mean-
ingful for me after having witnessed
firsthand the challenges of trash dis-
posal and environmental degradation
on Atafu Atoll in Tokelau, and it will
resonate with numerous discussions of
contemporary issues in the Pacific.

Sun describes the Great Pacific
Garbage Patch (GPGP) in the North
Pacific as an immense floating mass of
toxic debris about the size of Texas. In
the film, she makes her way to remote
Midway Atoll, just south of the North
Pacific gyre where the GPGP is located,
to see firsthand what she consid-
ers “ground zero,” an island with
minimal human development and an
enormous albatross breeding ground
awash in plastic debris.

According to the filmmaker, plastic
debris collects in this fashion because
a combination of gyres (large systems
of rotating ocean currents) serve as
catchment basins, and debris that
would otherwise circulate randomly
concentrates within certain zones. At
the same time, low-lying islets and
high islands alike act as “combs” and
catch the plastic waste as it swirls
by, concentrating the pollutants
and toxins with potentially horrific
short- and long-term consequences
for nonhuman (and possibly human)
ecologies. The gyres that participate in
the ocean’s plastic sickness can be seen
as a metaphor for Sun’s documentary
storytelling. She too has several topical
gyres of information that swirl about
throughout the film and ultimately
coalesce into a compelling picture of
environmental dysfunction.

Gyre 1: plastic debris. Sun cites
statistics for plastic production, which
began in the early twentieth century
but ramped up during World War
II and has seen steady growth since.
There is ample footage of debris on
Midway (five tons of washed-up
plastic is inadvertently fed to nesting
albatross by their parents every year);
abandoned nylon nets tumbling along
the shallow coral-sea floor, destroying
the delicate ecosystem (there are an
estimated 640,000 tons of discarded
plastic fishnets in the ocean); and
marine life entangled in all manner of
plastic trash. A US Fish and Wildlife
ranger cuts open a newly deceased
albatross to display a bellyful of