

Book and Media Reviews

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 33, Number 1, 267–294
© 2021 by University of Hawai'i Press

little recognition outside of immediate foreign policy circles. While Gonschor addresses these issues, he does so relatively quickly. The text also could have benefitted from a more thorough examination of the degree to which St Julian's actions reflected the interests of the kingdom itself versus his own reimagining of the kingdom, unconnected to the actual needs and circumstances of both the government and the people.

Gonschor's faith in the potential of the kingdom drives a significant amount of the work, which serves as a corrective to colonial dismissals of the Hawaiian kingdom and Indigenous political ability in general. At times, however, this faith can be myopic. He argues, for instance, that Hawaiian annexation of Tabiteuea "most likely" would have prevented the massacre there in 1880, without explaining the reasoning behind such a claim (139). With regard to the Oceanic present and future, he argues that Hawaiian independence would once again allow Hawai'i to lead Oceania, even arguing that, "though parts of Oceania's body have been reassembled, its head is still missing, politically speaking" (165). Such an assumption of inherent Hawaiian leadership is problematic at best, and contemplation of the current and future role of Hawai'i in Oceania requires a considerably more critical lens.

While some of the author's assumptions could be better unpacked or clarified, this only detracts slightly from the otherwise clear argumentation and evidence that Gonschor has put together. This is a significant contribution not just to the study of

Hawaiian history and political science but also to the broad array of fields within the whole of Oceania.

KEALANI COOK
*University of Hawai'i-
 West O'ahu*

* * *

Possessing Polynesia: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania, by Maile Arvin. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. ISBN paper: 9781478006336, ix + 328 pages, photos, maps, figure, notes, index. Paper, US\$27.95

Maile Arvin's *Possessing Polynesia: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania* is a refreshing approach to settler colonial, Pacific Islands, and gender studies. Arvin is willing to broach the subject of anti-Blackness within Oceania among Pacific Islanders and challenge Polynesian exceptionalism, topics that few Pacific Island scholars are willing to address. In this way, her work comes into conversation with scholars such as Teresia Teaiwa, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Tracey Banivanua-Mar, and Aileen Moreton Robinson. Arvin also discusses heteropatriarchy as a central component of settler colonialism and applies an Indigenous feminist framework to her analysis, setting her work apart from previous settler colonial texts. Although *Possessing Polynesia* primarily centers on Hawai'i and is not universally applicable throughout Oceania, it opens a dialogue within Oceania scholarship that has been long overdue. The book is divided into two parts: "The Polyne-

sian Problem: Scientific Production of the ‘Almost White’ Polynesian Race” (35–124) and “Regenerative Refusals: Confronting Contemporary Legacies in Hawai‘i and Oceania” (125–239).

Throughout the work, Arvin attempts to disentangle the very insidious and racist logics of the social sciences, such as eugenics, anthropometry, and social Darwinism, as they have been applied not just to Polynesia but throughout Oceania. Arvin also interrogates white explorers’ creation of Polynesia and of the Polynesian and their need to place Polynesians in proximity to whiteness—to make them a distant Aryan ancestor to justify white settlers’ “natural” possession of Polynesian lands. She introduces the ways in which Polynesians themselves have internalized these discourses in order to create racial hierarchies throughout Oceania. Arvin’s central theme throughout each chapter is the “logic of possession *through* whiteness.” She states, this “logic is possession *through* (not *by* whiteness) because whiteness is not an agent in and of itself” (65).

Arvin opens the book with the question “What is a Polynesian?” (1). Establishing from the outset that Polynesia is “a settler, scientific project” and not a place (5). The first section focuses on the anthropological “Polynesian Problem” (35) and European explorers’ and white social scientists’ need to racially map Oceania, marking so-called Polynesians as almost white and closer to civilized while simultaneously marking so-called Melane-sians as distinctly Black and savage. Throughout this first section, Arvin engages with the nineteenth-century racial theories of the Aryan Polynesian

(50) and the belief that Polynesians descended from Aryans or the ancient Greeks or Romans, as promoted by Abraham Fornander (54) and Edward Treager (56). Arvin also discusses how King David Kalākaua utilized these racial theories and conducted his own studies as a tool to promote and maintain Hawaiian nationalism and sovereignty, rather than ascribing to anti-Blackness. However, Arvin also goes on to point out that “undoubtedly Kalākaua and other Native Hawaiians did internalize many ideas about their own racial superiority” (63). This was evident in Kalākaua’s attempt to use Hawai‘i as a model for a Samoan confederacy, as Hawaiian delegates to Sāmoa clearly viewed “themselves as superior to Sāmoans because they believed ‘that Hawai‘i had the greatest na‘auao of Polynesian peoples,’ meaning that they had achieved the most progress in mastering Euro/American political structures” (63). However, without a deeper understanding of the political relationship between Hawaiians and Samoans prior to Western contact, it is hard to know to what extent European racial theories influenced Hawaiian ideas of superiority over Samoans or served to enhance an already embedded sense of superiority through genealogy held by Hawaiians. In either case, Arvin’s willingness to name examples of Polynesian exceptionalism is vital to understanding relationships among the peoples of Oceania today and how those relationships were formed.

Arvin concludes the first section by explaining to the reader the ways in which Hawaiians are often framed as conditionally white and how anthropological theories on the “hybrid

Hawaiian” and race mixing in Hawai‘i informed American myths of democracy and the immigrant melting pot (96). In chapter 3, “Hating Hawaiians, Celebrating Hybrid Hawaiian Girls: Sociology and the Fictions of Racial Mixture,” Arvin calls out the ways in which an obsession with Hawaiian origins and racial mixtures has served to erase discussions of American colonial violence in Hawai‘i. She highlights how, in the mid-twentieth century, social scientists like Romanzo Adams worked to promote the myth of racial harmony within Hawai‘i in order to convince “the white American public to view statehood as a natural progression of Hawai‘i’s exceptional racial harmony” (97). Again, we hear the language of the “exceptional.” However, a deeper interrogation of the Adams archives actually reveals the racism and anti-Blackness that existed within Hawaiian communities. Arvin’s example of the Lam/Lorden interviews from the Adams archives (106), conducted by graduate student Margaret Lam, demonstrates attitudes toward Native Hawaiians, even among Native Hawaiians, that portrayed them as being anywhere from almost white to the “blacker Mongoloid, more akin to the Melanesian” (107), drawing on the racialized literature of Louis Sullivan. These interviews expose the infiltration of racist stereotypes of the Jim Crow South, which had been imposed on African Americans and then applied to dark-skinned Hawaiians, and also reveal a kind of self-hatred among Hawaiians who, if mixed and lighter-skinned, preferred to stress their proximity to whiteness and insist on their distance from the “lazy” and “repulsive” ways of

dark-skinned Hawaiians. These moves toward whiteness were brought out in pop culture, which featured “hybrid Hawaiian girls” (114) to entice white male tourists and white soldiers to come to the islands and intermarry and to promote the idea that their “children will be ‘bigger, stronger and more fertile’” than the Hawaiians of the past who “had no immunity to European diseases” (117). Arvin paints a very real picture of American, military, and tourist desires to breed and control a near-white population through its fair, mixed-race women, while vilifying the Hawaiian male and darker Hawaiians and their proximity to Blackness.

In the second half of the book, Arvin enters into discourses on genomic science, law, and contemporary art through a concept she calls “regenerative refusals,” which “are actions that seek to restore balance and life to Indigenous communities that continue to live with structures of settler colonialism” (130). She conveys this concept most effectively in the last two chapters and turns the reader’s attention to contemporary artists of Oceania and the ways in which they intersect their art and contemporary social movements. Notably, Arvin looks at the work of artists Keahi Pao and Shigeyuki Kihara, who are unapologetically returning the gaze onto the colonizer and challenging settler logics of gender and hybridity. She ends by focusing on a range of artist-scholar-activists in Oceania who are involved in the Mauna Kea and Free West Papua movements and on the ways those movements intersect with the Black Lives Matter movement and movements for climate justice. In

all of these, artist-scholar-activists are seeking to build solidarity, restore generational connections across time and space, and undo the harm that these racist social sciences have created.

Overall, Arvin dives deep into several centuries of the production of the project known as Polynesia and opens a necessary dialogue on anti-Blackness within and among the peoples of Oceania that should become required reading for scholars in settler colonial studies and Pacific Islands studies, as well as those in Indigenous studies, African American studies, and academia more broadly. *Possessing Polynesians* speaks to multiple disciplines and should be seen as a welcome addition for both scholars and grassroots organizers who are seriously invested in the process of decolonization.

JOY LEHUANANI ENOMOTO
University of Hawai'i

* * *

Working with the Ancestors: Mana and Place in the Marquesas Islands, by Emily C Donaldson. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. ISBN hardback: 9780295745824; ISBN paper: 9780295745831, 280 pages. Hardback, US\$95.00; paper, US\$30.00

In *Working with the Ancestors*, Emily Donaldson provides welcome documentation of the enduring importance—yet ambiguous significance—of ancestral landscapes in Oceania. While focused on the Marquesas, Donaldson's primary thesis will resonate with scholars across the region who are grappling with the idea of

ancestral landscapes as spaces actively negotiated by multiple stakeholders. However, the analysis of how these landscape negotiations intersect with contemporary issues of historic preservation and conservation within the context of global heritage development is perhaps the work's most important contribution. Donaldson's sensitive attention to the complexity of these issues has resulted in a multifaceted work well suited for a broad audience. While the disparate narrative may at times raise questions about Donaldson's primary purpose, the text as a whole hangs together sufficiently to raise the question of whether this complexity is, after all, the point, as stakeholders of different backgrounds bring into view distinct engagements with place and the past.

This ethnography brings contested meanings and events to life through an effective melding of voices, substantive global comparisons, and theoretical contextualization. The first chapters provide a background that helps the reader to understand the complexity of land rights in the Marquesas. While readers familiar with Oceania will recognize many elements of this form of land tenure, it is nevertheless enlightening to read about this manifestation within the context of mission activity and French territorial governance. Importantly, these chapters highlight the changing meanings of ancestral landscapes and the contexts that give rise to those meanings. This sets the stage for the latter three chapters, which operationalize this background to contextualize the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage movement within the Marquesas.