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Maile Arvin. *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. Illustrations. 311 pp. $27.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4780-0633-6.

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Hawaiian historiography is enjoying an exciting period of growth. Excellent recent works by Native Hawaiian scholars, notably David A. Chang's *The World and All the Things upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (2016), Kealani Cook's *Return to Kahiki: Native Hawaiians in Oceania* (2018), and Noelani Arista's *The Kingdom and the Republic: Sovereign Hawai'i and the Early United States* (2018), have emphasized the dynamism and viability of the Native Hawaiian worldview in the face of colonial efforts to reshape Hawai'i and its Pacific world. Some non-Native historians, too, have contributed to a richer scholarly understanding of Hawai'i, whether by analyzing disease as a colonial disruption (Seth Archer's *Sharks upon the Land: Colonialism, Indigenous Health, and Culture in Hawai'i, 1778-1855* [2018]), considering the mobility of nineteenth-century Native Hawaiian laborers across an expansive Pacific world (Gregory Rosenthal's *Beyond Hawai'i: Native Labor in the Pacific World* [2018]), or exploring the construction of imperialist discourses about Hawai'i as a multiracial paradise suitable for American statehood (Sarah Miller-Davenport's *Gateway State: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire* [2019]). These works all, in one way or another, challenge certain American orthodoxies: that the Hawaiian Islands constitute a harmonious tropical idyll; that the archipelago became a US territory in 1898 and a state in 1959 without violence or resistance; and that Native Hawaiians have always welcomed, or indeed invited, American commerce, militarism, and tourism.

In this ambitious and compelling book, Maile Arvin historicizes these myths, asking "how Polynesians are made invisible as a people, despite their literal and imagined presence in many of the centers of American culture" (p. 2). She then explores how Indigenous peoples continue to resist such myths. Arvin principally focuses on Hawai'i, not least, she argues, because Native Hawaiians are seen by Americans to stand for all Polynesians. Nonetheless, she demonstrates the applicability of her analysis to other Polynesian peoples

and suggests its resonance across the Pacific and in other settler colonial contexts.

Arvin's main argument is that European and American social scientists developed pernicious ideas about people of Polynesian descent as a result of the former's obsession with the latter's racial origins. Specifically, social scientists have repeatedly upheld the hypothesis that Polynesians are almost white, in turn buttressing settler colonialism: styling Polynesians "as more 'natural,' 'classical,' or otherwise primitive versions of white civilizations ... allows white settlers to claim indigeneity in Polynesia, since, according to this logic, whiteness itself is indigenous." This logic of "possession through whiteness," in which Polynesians are placed close to whiteness without ever being granted access to its benefits, suppresses an Indigenous cosmology emphasizing "relationships and responsibilities to land as ancestor" (p. 3).

The book is clearly and helpfully divided into two halves of three chapters each. Arvin employs cultural theory to great effect throughout the book, but each half also has its own distinctive approach. Part 1 is historical, principally analyzing the publications of European and American social scientists between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Here, Arvin provides an excellent example of how scholars can usefully engage with sources produced by white settlers, viewing them anew through Indigenous studies' critical lens. Much of the recent boom in Hawaiian historiography has been driven by a crucial emphasis on Hawaiian-language sources, sparked in particular by Noenoe K. Silva's pathbreaking ***Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*** (2004), but Arvin demonstrates the value of reexamining and critiquing outsiders' writings and methodologies "for the benefit of contemporary Indigenous peoples" (p. 34).

Arvin begins by charting the development across the nineteenth century of a scientific theory—Aryanism—which connected Europeans and Polynesians alike to a historical master civilization in South Asia. Aryanism allowed white settlers to think of Polynesians as almost-white "brothers" who had migrated off the civilizational map and thereby had become degraded. This theory naturalized white claims to Polynesian "heritage" and thus to Polynesian people, culture, and lands. Early twentieth-century physical anthropology further reinforced ideas about Polynesians as "conditionally Caucasian" (p. 67). The competing arguments to which it gave rise, for the preservation of the racial "purity" of Native Hawaiians on the one hand and for racial admixture as a route to "hybrid vigor" on the other, were both rooted in eugenics: more careful and controlled reproduction would allow Hawaiians to move back toward "the true Polynesian type"—closer to whiteness (p. 85). The idea of hybrid vigor became further encoded in sociological studies of the 1920s and 1930s, which styled Hawai'i as an exemplar of racial harmony, papering over ongoing racial tensions.

We begin to understand the devastation that physical anthropologists and sociologists wrought if we consider the 1921 Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, which established that a "native Hawaiian," entitled to a homestead under the terms of the act, had to be "at least one-half part" Native Hawaiian blood (p. 126). The separation of "pure" Hawaiians from "part" Hawaiians by social scientists underpinned the logic that made "blood quantum" the standard measure of who was Native Hawaiian, and a sufficient basis for determining access to land (p. 135). Particularly when combined with social scientists' advocacy of racial admixture, this definition made the ultimate disappearance of Native Hawaiians seem inevitable —"pure Hawaiians" would die out and "part Hawaiians" would become white Americans. As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui has shown in ***Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*** (2012), these understandings of who is Native Hawaiian are at odds with Native Hawaiians' self-definition, which is based not on blood quantum but on indigeneity, and on kinship forged

through reciprocal relationships with one another and with the land.

Across part 1, Arvin also brings in Polynesians who coopted social science, showing that the logic of "possession through whiteness" has never gone unchallenged (p. 226). Part 2 furthers this discussion of how Polynesians have responded to their ongoing "haunting" by social science (p. 24). Arvin deftly switches from history to an interdisciplinary approach—three well-defined chapters focus respectively on questions of legal recognition for Native Hawaiians (using fascinating court records and testimonies from public hearings), genetic and genomic science, and art. Arvin shows that while some Polynesians have sought to make social scientific technologies and racial classifications work better for them, operating within the colonial system, others have chosen "regenerative refusal," altogether rejecting the assumptions supporting white settler hegemony to imagine a radically different future (p. 23).

One "regenerative refusal"—the work of Sāmoan artist Yuki Kihara—furnishes *Possessing Polynesians*' striking and provocative cover image. A male model portraying the Polynesian demigod Maui stands subjected to anthropometric measurement by a white hand. He stares defiantly at the viewer, staging "a regenerative, alternative history in which Polynesian ancestors get to refuse and frustrate anthropometrists" (p. 204). It is rare to see a cover image capture the spirit of a book so well—Kihara's photography and Arvin's writing both evoke how social science's colonial past "haunts" the present and equip Polynesians to defy outsiders' classifications and imagine alternative possibilities.

There are a few questions raised by Arvin's central concept of "whiteness." After all, as she writes, Polynesians do not "pass" as white, so there is a discrepancy between the discourse she analyzes and the lived experience of Polynesian people (p. 14). Arvin also acknowledges the counterintuitive nature of the claim that racial mixing of Native Hawaiians with Asian immigrants was deemed, in the mid-twentieth century, to be moving the Hawaiian race closer to "whiteness." Furthermore, Polynesians at various times have been represented as racially "other," and this alterity provided arguments both for dispossession and, in Hawai'i's case, against admission into the American union. Various white settlers have also largely rejected the idea of shared heritage or the possibility of racial intermarriage—white American missionaries in nineteenth-century Hawai'i, for example.

To deal with these complexities, Arvin firstly follows Denise Ferreira da Silva in arguing that "raciality" involves the "production of minds" and not just physical characteristics (p. 25). Secondly, and more significantly, she argues that regardless of its historical instability, whiteness is always defined against blackness: Europeans seeking to classify Pacific peoples have focused on the distinction between "white" Polynesians and "black" Melanesians. However, "Western fears about Polynesian blackness, through ancestral or more recent relationship with Melanesians and African Americans, haunts [sic] the logic of possession through whiteness in deep and complex ways" (p. 4). In particular, settlers often responded to Polynesian claims to indigeneity, which upset the logic of possession, with the idea that Polynesians had fallen so far from their "true" Polynesian nature that they had become black. In the twentieth century, meanwhile, because Asians were neither black nor Indigenous, their intermarriage with Native Hawaiians was viewed as a "whitening" force. In convincing readers of this nuance, Arvin makes important points about the connection between antiblackness and anti-indigeneity, and about the retention of power by white settlers to racially define others in fluid and self-serving ways. She also shows how some Polynesians have imbibed antiblack discourses to strengthen claims to self-determination; thus, "whiteness was a fiction that did not require actual European people to uphold" (p. 65). Arvin calls on contemporary Polynesians

to overcome the Western "project," that asserts a Polynesia/Melanesia binary, and instead to recognize meaningful connections, shared histories, and common struggles across the Pacific (p. 7).

Arvin foregrounds not only race but also gender and sexuality. She offers an "Indigenous feminist analytic," examining how discourse affects actual bodies (p. 20). Images of Polynesian women and ideas about their sexuality have historically rendered Polynesians as "feminized possessions of whiteness" (p. 3). Nineteenth-century settlers responded both to travelers' assertions of Polynesian women's sexual availability and to a discourse of Aryanism which suggested that they were suitable partners. By the mid-twentieth century, the mixed-race Hawaiian girl became emblematic of Hawai'i as a "model melting pot" (p. 123). Their idealized almost-whiteness became an object of desire for white settler men, who could further dilute any sense of racial "threat" through intermarriage. Meanwhile, Native Hawaiian men of high blood quantum pressured Native Hawaiian women to have children with them, in order to "save the race" (p. 147). Rather than admonishing those men, Arvin employs a feminist lens to critique the heteropatriarchal structures that eclipsed Indigenous epistemologies.

Throughout the book, Arvin shows how the "good intentions" of outsiders "contribute to [a] settler colonial understanding of Polynesians as white possessions" (p. 54). We see little of the white Americans who were directly involved in the transfer of Hawaiian sovereignty to the United States; instead, Arvin presents a broader and more subtle story about a succession of scientific voices, from across Europe and America, who have purported to have the best interests of Polynesian peoples at heart (one of them, the Swedish judge and ethnologist Abraham Fornander, even supported the Hawaiian monarchy against American colonial incursion). Other voices include UNESCO in its championing of a multiracial Hawai'i in the mid-twentieth century, Thor Heyerdahl and his vaunted 1947 Kon-Tiki expedition that "proved" Polynesians' South American origins, and the contemporary American popular science writer Steve Olson. All have claimed to be moving beyond racial prejudice toward a "postracial" society but in so doing, argues Arvin, emphasized a shared universal narrative of migration and intermixing, overlooking structural inequality, indigeneity, and local epistemologies. Polynesians are then made to seem unreasonable, ignorant, or racist in their "regenerative refusals." Arvin stresses that Polynesians are not anti-science, nor exclusionary or backward-looking in their vision of future society. Rather, they recognize the colonial damage that arguments about the scientific "common good" have done to Polynesians and adopt "different definitions of the human" respectful of "Indigenous forms of kinship and belonging" (p. 129).

Arvin ends on a note of cautious optimism, observing that an understanding of the logic of "possession through whiteness" enables its contestation. While other theorists of settler colonialism have emphasized Indigenous elimination, Arvin's central notion of "possession" instead highlights the constant deferral of that elimination and the perpetuation of "deep, intergenerational memories and ... Indigenous identities" (p. 231).

In response to Arvin's work, scholars of imperial history and diplomatic history might more critically examine conventional wisdom about the "natural" Americanness of Hawai'i and the Pacific and seek evidence of colonialism in seemingly benign places. They might also better appreciate that colonialism is still a live issue in the Pacific and that Indigenous peoples are striving to set out alternative pathways. Arvin's interweaving of past, present, and future, of different disciplinary approaches, and of race and gender as categories of analysis is innovative, complex, and intricate. ***Possessing Polynesians*** is therefore an important book for historians interested in colonialism, science, or Indigenous engagements with European and American empires.

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