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**Published on** H-Environment (September, 2023)

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Andrea Noelani Brower’s *Seeds of Occupation, Seeds of Possibility* examines the development of the agrochemical industry’s power in Hawai‘i, and activists’ response, since the late twentieth century. Brower’s title signals her argument: corporate behemoths—think Monsanto (now Bayer), Dow and DuPont (now Corteva), Syngenta (now ChemChina), and so on—maintain an occupying presence in Hawai‘i. These companies transformed the islands into “an epicenter” of their operations, a veritable laboratory for pesticides and genetically modified organisms (GMO) designed for pesticide resistance (p. 2). The resulting oligopolistic power perpetuates long-standing patterns in which systems of imperialism, capitalism, and dubious (if not outright corrupt) political-economic relationships work against native Hawai‘ians’ rights and the islands’ ecological integrity. Yet the rise of resistance movements in the past fifteen years or so illustrates that none of these realities were (or are) inevitable. Radical change, Brower maintains, is possible.

Indeed, this book (part of the Radical Natures series at West Virginia University Press) is written from an unabashedly activist perspective. A sociologist, Brower identifies her central methodology as “activist ethnography”: an “immersion in social struggle as a participant, researcher, and theorist…. Rather than merely to describe, the aim [of such methods] is to effect” (p. 6). Having taken part in the movement in 2013, a pivotal year of activism, the author both gained access to fellow participants and became familiar with industry’s efforts at greenwashing and obfuscation. These two groups’ private communications and public writings comprise an important set of primary evidence in—and a key strength of—this volume. These sources shine most clearly in the final three chapters, while secondary sources and published watchdog and journalistic pieces form the core of the first six chapters.

Over these nine chapters, *Seeds of Occupation, Seeds of Possibility* carefully makes the case that present-day activists must—and, to some extent, do—challenge broad, deep-rooted systems of
power in their efforts to create a more just, equitable, sustainable world. The first three chapters trace the late twentieth-century rise of the “agrochemical-seed-biotech oligopoly,” state regimes of research and technology that are subservient to capitalist development (and these firms, specifically), and the industry’s arrival and early environmental impacts in Hawai‘i. Somewhat confusingly, the next three chapters go backward in time. They situate present-day issues in contexts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialism, the rise and fall of plantation capitalism, and the complicity of local, state, and federal governments in welcoming agrochemical firms to Hawai‘i. The final third of the book, which traces the rise and evolution of resistance and counter-resistance movements, is the strongest, for that is where Brower’s research and methods feel most at home.

Although Brower’s argument compels her to establish the continuity of large systems of power over nearly two hundred years of history, and to do so in fewer than 170 pages, the book is sometimes uneven in its execution. Broad, impersonal forces often seem to possess greater agency than the human beings at their helms. There are exceptions, to be sure—for instance, when relying most heavily on her ethnographic research (e.g., chapters 7-9) or on historians’ work (e.g., chapter 4). Elsewhere, however, individual actors appear but are often subsumed within the institutions and -isms that hold sway. In one representative passage, we read that an instance of successful activism was “in part absorbed by a neoliberal global capitalism that accommodates multicultur‐al liberalism while leaving structures of racial capitalism and extreme inequality deeply entrenched” (p. 87). Make no mistake, structures matter. And Brower astutely notes the neoliberal strategy of emphasizing individual choices over collective action works to dismiss activism and distract from structural forces (e.g., p. 147). Yet, as a stylistic choice, too heavy a focus on structures often dilutes the flow and liveliness of the prose. Conversely, and to her credit, Brower regularly gives voice to the people who, in both the distant and recent past, have pointed to alternative choices. Such an approach marks one of the book’s major victories: the consistent reminder that narratives of inevitability serve distinct political-economic purposes, often to the detriment of the greater good.

Historians may also find unevenness in Seeds of Occupation, Seeds of Possibility. A different organizational structure for the first six chapters might have more clearly set the stage for the recent activism that forms the book’s intellectual and moral heart. Moreover, Brower seems torn between acknowledging the importance of historical context and contingency while still suggesting, implicitly and explicitly, that “history repeats” itself, even if in “slightly repackaged” forms (pp. 140, 142). Historians should thus approach this book knowing that they are not its primary audience.

Rather, Brower seems to write for two main groups: like-minded activist-scholars (which may still include historians), and the activist community in Hawai‘i. While much of the book establishes the agrochemical-GMO industry as deserving of their resistance, the final chapter also offers more introspection and acknowledgment of the movement’s “less-than-liberatory elements” (p. 163). In this regard, it is unclear how radical the movement is. In one respect, the book is premised on the argument that present-day activism is a response to deep systems of power and injustice. In fact, Brower frames it as “a broad decolonization movement”—certainly a radical project (pp. 160-161). Yet she also declares a few pages earlier that “the movement is not generally a radical political struggle” and is more concerned with reforming capitalism rather than overhauling it (pp. 156-157). Reconciling this tension would probably entail a clearer distinction between Brower’s overlapping activist-ethnographic roles of “participant” on the one hand and “researcher and theorist” on the other. It also might have lent the
book a stronger conclusion about the legacy the movement continues to build.

These inconsistencies aside, *Seeds of Occupation, Seeds of Possibility* provides important insights into the historical roots of not only the present-day food system, but also political-economic power and local resistance to it. In charting how these systems of power became so entrenched—on the land, in halls of power, and in people's imaginations—Brower succeeds in illuminating “critical terrain[s] of struggle for dreamers of a better world” (p. 132).

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