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Book Review: Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood by Dean Itsuji Saranillio

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REVIEWS



***Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood.* Dean Itsuji Saranillio. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. ix + 282 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 paper. ISBN 9781478000839.**

In *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood*, Dean Itsuji Saranillio narrates a critical, counter-genealogy to the imperialist and settler colonial discourse that helped calcify Hawai'i's statehood. He accomplishes this by analyzing the complicated interplay between Kānaka 'Ōiwi, different Asian groups, and haole (white) settler elites within the context of different historical moments organized around U.S. militarism, economic crisis and white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, capitalist expansion. In the introductory chapter titled: "Colliding Futures of Hawai'i Statehood," Saranillio argues that "U.S. imperialist ventures in Hawai'i were not the result of a strong nation swallowing a weak and feeble island nation, but rather a result of a weakening U.S. nation whose mode of production—capitalism—was increasingly unsustainable without enacting a more aggressive policy of imperialism."¹ Moreover, three main logics organize *Unsustainable Empire*; first, the idea that settler colonialism fails forward into various settler futures of imperial formations, such as Hawai'iian statehood.² Second, occupation and settler colonialism are both relevant to understanding the uniqueness of Hawai'i's situation and the multiple tactics the United States has utilized to occupy Hawai'i.³ Finally, the four coordinates: white supremacy, liberal multiculturalism, settler colonialism, and imperialism, which overlap in the formation of Hawai'i's "illegitimate" statehood.⁴

In 1893, the Hawai'iian Kingdom and Queen Lili'uokalani were deliberately overthrown by haole settler elites. This demonstrates how patriarchy, heteronormativity, and sexism constitutes settler colonial and imperial operations. Throughout *Unsustainable Empire*, Saranillio weaves a racial-gendered analysis to put forth a critical re-organization

1. Saranillio, Dean Itsuji. 2018. *Unsustainable Empire: Alternative Histories of Hawai'i Statehood*. Duke University Press. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, 10.

3. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

4. *Ibid.*, 13.

of knowledge that centers on censored Kānaka ‘Ōiwi resistance to the settler statecraft of Hawai‘i. For example, in chapter three, titled: “‘Something Indefinable Would Be Lost:’ The Unruly Kamokila and Go for Broke,” Saranillio highlights Senator Alice Kamokilaikawai, a descendant from Laakapu, who was a direct descendant of the goddess “Hina and Ahumaikēalakea the First.”⁵ Connected to a powerful lineage of Indigenous monarchical governance, Kamokilaikawai mobilized her political office during the territorial period to advocate for the Kānaka ‘Ōiwi.⁶ Understanding Hawai‘i’s illegitimate occupation and statehood, thus, cannot be understood without the critiques of patriarchy that Saranillio sustains and unveils throughout the text, and through Kamokilaikawai, around the role that gender plays in social relationships and power dynamics. This racial-gendered analysis is extremely valuable as it is absolutely necessary.

Unsustainable Empire is a complex history grounded in, informed by, and in relation to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi cultural politics of resistance, refusals, and resurgence. Interrogating and tracing the affective and discursive work of settler statecraft, Saranillio destabilizes the theatrical agenda of state agencies, propaganda commissions, and opinion campaigns to ultimately challenge, defamiliarize, and dismantle the hegemonic settler narration of Hawai‘i statehood. He juxtaposes this with “divergent stories and unexpected individuals who were largely dismissed and deviant, such as historical revisionists, unruly women, subversives, communists, con men, gays, and criminals” to spotlight decolonial alternatives against the unsustainable occupation and settler colonization of Hawai‘i.⁷ For instance, in chapter four titled: “The Propaganda of Occupation: Statehood and the Cold War,” Saranillio spotlights Sammy Amalu, who, while living modestly on the outskirts of Waikīkī, performed a multimillion-dollar public prank on the tourism and real estate industries in 1962. Posing as an investor who put forward the biggest offer on several key hotels, Amalu was eventually found out to be a failed con man when he was not able to leverage his end of the deal.⁸ Saranillio shows how Amalu’s hoax articulates a queer, Indigenous resistance to U.S. settler colonial occupation.⁹

Of significance to the re-narrativizing of Hawaii as unceded, seized territory under occupation by the United States, is the comparative analysis of white and Asian settlement in relation to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi. Drawing upon Haunani-Kay Trask, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Candace Fujikane and Jodi Byrd, Saranillio explains how Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan, Filipino, and Korean immigrant communities in Hawai‘i were implicated in settler desires for statehood. This

5. Ibid, 100.

6. Ibid, 100.

7. Ibid, 8.

8. Ibid, 162-163.

9. Ibid, 163.

disrupts presumed alliances among historically oppressed groups and specifically calls into question desires for inclusion, assimilation pressures, and longings for citizenship with regards to immigration. Saranillio's deployment of a comparative race analysis, between and among multiple groups, supports theorizing outside of a limiting binary analysis of power, e.g. settler/native or immigrant/citizen. The author is able to simultaneously analyze the positionalities of Kānaka 'Ōiwi, different Asian groups, and haole (white) settler elites in relation to one another, creating a more thorough and complex understanding of the dynamics at play in Hawai'i's statehood. While this methodology has fortunately innovated the field of Critical Ethnic Studies and the discourse of Asian Settler Colonialism, a pitfall that Saranillio speaks to, with which I agree, is that the dialogue of "settlers of color" reaches a vexing stagnation for *those* settlers of color whose political work is invested in being in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for sovereignty, to which Saranillio suggests: "...interrogating one's relationship to a system of settler colonialism might have more efficiency by questioning what one is doing, rather than how one identifies." I am hopeful that the ongoing investments in the work of comparative critique will take up Saranillio's insight.

Finally, *Unsustainable Empire* highlights investments in Critical Ethnic Studies to center Indigenous knowledges and politics in relation to racial-capitalism, anti-black racism, and other minoritized, racially oppressed groups. In theorizing Asian settlement, the text contributes to the growing field of Asian Settler Colonialism, which, also speaks to the field of Filipinx American Studies. A similar dynamic is operating in relation to Filipinx American studies which focuses on settler/Native/Filipinx immigrant/Filipinx American dynamics imbricated within a complex history of Spanish and U.S. colonialism and imperialism of the Philippines.

In closing, *Unsustainable Empire* calls for serious engagement with Indigenous resistance and refusals to occupation, statehood, and federal recognition, writ large. It is a compelling summoning for non-Native peoples to be accountable and responsible to Indigenous land and presence.

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***The Labor of Care: Filipina Migrants and Transnational Families in the Digital Age*, by Valerie Francisco-Menchavez. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018 + 256 pp., \$83.17 (hardcover); \$28 (paper). ISBN 978-0252083341.**

In *The Labor of Care: Filipina Migrants and Transnational Families in the Digital Age*, sociologist Valerie Francisco-Menchavez presents a poignant