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in a room, in a house, on an island, in an ocean



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SCHULZ, Joy: *When Women Ruled the Pacific: Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Tahiti and Hawai'i*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023. Series: Studies in Pacific Worlds. 166 pp., appendices, illus., index, maps, photos. US\$50 (hardcover/e-book PDF/e-book EPUB).

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Joy Schulz's *When Women Ruled the Pacific: Power and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Tahiti and Hawai'i* is a small, handsome book with an introduction, chapters dedicated to each of four chiefly women—Purea and 'Aimata of Tahiti and Ka'ahumanu and Lili'uokalani of Hawai'i—and a conclusion. Following these are two appendices, notes, a bibliography and an index. This book represents the first extended study of these women together in one volume.

The introduction opens with the arresting description of Purea meeting Captain Samuel Wallis of the HMS *Dolphin* in 1767 at Matavai Bay, Tahiti. Schulz also introduces Ka'ahumanu of Hawai'i and highlights how both women held enough mana (divine power or political authority) to negotiate and develop relations with the British and American visitors to their shores. Foreigners misunderstood who these women were: the British assumed Purea was a queen in the English sense; in fact she was one (albeit very ambitious) of a group of ari'i (high chiefs); and Ka'ahumanu was kuhina nui (regent) during the time of Kamehameha II.

The author states that “no previous studies have shown the dominance of Polynesian women in wielding political power during these encounters and despite the unique threat foreigners posed to their rule and their people's independence” (p. 3). Schulz's objective becomes clear at the very start, which is to “correct the narrative by highlighting a historically unparalleled transcolonial queenship” (p. 3). Furthermore, by “rewriting traditional histories of contact from women's perspectives” she hopes to show that in pre-contact times, patriarchal power was not the norm on those islands. The themes examine how transnational contact altered political and gender models in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Tahiti and Hawai'i and how the adoption of Christianity affected power struggles between British, French and American imperialists.

A brief description of the peopling of the Pacific is summed up by Cook's often quoted question: “How can we account for this Nation spreading itself so far over this vast ocean?” (p. 5). Schulz discusses the similarities between Tahitian and Hawaiian social and political structures, and the importance of genealogy in chiefly lineages which highlight links to the gods which in turn

ensured spiritual mana; and how matriarchal power and a mother's lineage was at least equal to a father's genealogy with regards to chiefly status.

English and American efforts to spread Christianity throughout the Pacific were outwardly selfless affairs where Christians "pledged their lives to foreign lands and peoples" (p. 6). The London Missionary Society's first target was Tahiti, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions worked in the Hawaiian Islands after an initial contact with Indigenous nations in the American West. These missionary efforts affected the political and cultural landscape of both places. During and following these missionary endeavours came international trade, which led to a range of new problems and complexities as colonists and others arrived.

The complexities around gender structures of pre-contact Tahiti and Hawai'i is a focus of this work; and while differences in race, nationalist anxieties and religious narratives were all significant in unravelling the islands' power dynamics, Schulz argues that foreign patriarchal ideals were perhaps the most oppressive influence affecting how these female political rulers functioned.

Following the introduction, four chapters discuss the extraordinary lives of two Tahitian *ari'i*: Pūrea, whose title name was Tevahine-*'ai-roro-atua-i-Ahurai* (ca.1720–ca.1775), and Pōmare IV, or Vahine-o-Punuatera'*itua 'Aimata* (1813–1877); and two Hawaiian *ali'i* (high chiefs): Ka'ahumanu (1768–1832) and Lili'uokalani, or Lili'u Loloku Wālania Kamaka'eha (1838–1917). These chapters are explored through the lens of gender and power dynamics and the impact of missionary and colonial oppression.

I found the chapter on 'Aimata compelling, partially because in 1831 she generously took in my Tahitian foremothers and their children during a brief return to Tahiti after 41 years on Pitcairn Island, despite Tahiti being on the brink of civil war. Throughout her long reign, 'Aimata was often left vulnerable, her appeals to the British Queen Victoria to come to her aid were left unanswered, and the betrayal by one of her chief advisors, the missionary George Pritchard, is beautifully, heartbreakingly told. Such detailed inclusions of characters like Pritchard in 'Aimata's chapter are insightful and valuable. Therefore, the preceding chapter's exclusion of the high priest Tupāia—Pūrea's close advisor—who was highly influential in negotiations with Wallis is most puzzling.

Language is a powerful portal to a people's culture and worldview, and a reason to consult the community one is writing about. Using the word queen rather than the appropriate Indigenous terms was evidently a conscious choice made by the author, but it intensifies the Western representation of these women. There are some spelling mistakes—e.g., "Rai'atea" (pp. 16, 23), "Ra'iatia" (pp. 4, 5)—and misuses of the glottal stop mark or 'eta (Tahitian) and 'okina (Hawaiian).

As this book is suited to an academic audience, such details are critical. Overall, however, this book is a valuable revision of the lives of these extraordinary women, and I would hope that in the future Indigenous scholars will take up a challenge to write about these women from within their own cultures.

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