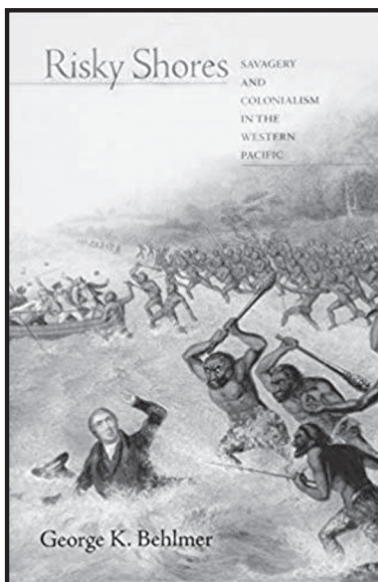


reef biologists demonstrate. She has done this in a volume that is readable both to the non-scientist and to professional biologists interested in the question of the future of coral reefs and corals. Although the *Chasing Corals* video came out as Braverman was finishing her book, this book represents a more in-depth treatment of the situation and the notes in the sources chapter allow individuals to follow up on different aspects of the problem. The title provides some intrigue, but I thought that animal whisperers were able to get the animals they whispered to, to do things that another person might not be able to get the animal to do. I don't think any amount of whispering to a coral will get it to behave better in its environment. Even with that thought, I highly recommend this book to all readers.

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George K. Behlmer, *Risky Shores: Savagery and Colonialism in the Western Pacific*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, Maps. Illustrations. xiv + 338. Notes. Index. B & W Photographs. Paper and eBook Formats. ISBN 978-1-5036-0594-7 and 9781503605947.

George Behlmer's expansive *Risky Shores: Savagery and Colonialism in the Western Pacific* addresses fascinating issues and raises many important questions, both directly and indirectly. The depth of his research means that the book will serve as a point of reference for scholars of the Pacific for years to come. The sources he reveals

and the questions he raises also open up multiple avenues for future work, and scholars may also wish to build on his research by considering the issues that he only raises obliquely. *Risky Shores* made me think more deeply about what constitutes "murder" and justifiable violence; the problems of archives, knowledge, and bias; how difficult it is for today's scholars to avoid the perspective and language of colonizers; the issue of when and for whom "history" happens; and the interconnectedness of local colonial encounters, economics, the environment, and European geopolitical concerns. The work will be useful for college and university

instructors at all levels as well as for researchers in history and anthropology.

One of the most profound questions that the book raises is what constitutes “savagery” – that is, unacceptable violence or brutality – among both people the British understood as “primitive” and by British colonists and colonial officials. Indeed, it is a key argument of the book that the British were often as concerned about the depredations of their own emigrants as about the actions of indigenous peoples. Behlmer begins his history of colonial encounters in the Western Pacific with a discussion of the historiography and debates over the nature and even existence of cannibalism (Chapter 1), which was often seen as the most “savage” of “savage” customs. He delicately balances this debate by acknowledging that the practice could both be real and be something that different people used rhetorically. This is a key point throughout the book: the variety of competing practices, interests, and historical agents involved when we discuss “colonialism” and/or “imperialism,” and how this affects both the historical record and our critical approach to it.

For instance, the relatively few colonial officials representing the interests of the British or Australian governments over vast swaths of territory were often at odds with the desires of settlers, planters, and missionaries, who in turn often disagreed with each other. Moreover, it was often in the interest of explorers and missionaries to rhetorically heighten the savagery of the peoples they encountered or hoped to convert, by publicizing practices like cannibalism (e.g., 44, 50). At the same time, people like the Fijians used cannibalism as an anti-colonial strategy: as he writes, “once these folk realized the white man’s dread of cannibalism, they began exaggerating their own fondness for *bakola* [bodies]” (56). Meanwhile, opponents of expanding indentured labor recruitment for the new plantations of coconut, sugar cane, and cotton wielded the language of savagery and invited comparisons to the abolished Atlantic slave trade (Chapter 2).

A closely related recurring question revolves around criminal “murder,” traditional forms of cannibalism and headhunting warfare, the labor trade, and, as Behlmer summarizes one set of colonial documents, “state-sponsored violence” that was “regrettable but necessary” (227). What kinds of European violence or incursions provoked Islander “outrages” at the “interface of ship and shore” (134) and how and when did the Royal Navy use collective violence to punish these (e.g., 137)? Would juries of their peers hold recruiters accountable for violence against indentured or even kidnapped Islanders (e.g., 141)? Would courts accept Islander testimony in such cases (e.g., 142-3)? Behlmer investigates these questions and the complexities of the inter- and intra-colonial politics and personalities in revealing depth and detail, and his narrative helps explain how and when events reached Britain that then prompted legislation or changing colonial policies (146). These

examples provide a thought-provoking examination of the reach and rule of law in colonial contexts. For many colonial officials, the expansion of the rule of law was the essence of British governance, but competing interests made this difficult in terms of legislation, authority, and enforcement; neither the labor recruiters nor the headhunters necessarily accepted such legal regimes.

The debate about murder and the rule of law gets to the heart of the colonial enterprise and the expansion of European settlement and trade, and the requisite violence that accompanied these. By what right or interest were the British and other Europeans in this part of the world at all? It is here that Behlmer quietly weaves in a much larger geopolitical struggle happening in the background, and which for understandable reasons is not central to the book: the threat of German expansion into the South Seas that provoked British territorial claims, what Behlmer calls “preemptive colonization” (180); German Papua New Guinea and later Australian interests would drive a desire to settle that territory (222), and the economic and military threat of Japan would further drive British efforts there (242, 250). Late nineteenth-century British colonization of the Solomon Islands officially took place to regulate the labor trade and control the savagery of both the labor recruiters and the headhunters.

However, the presence of numerous competing European economic interests could also serve to dampen the effectiveness of such regulation; for instance, British attempts to curtail the outrages of the labor trade through the 1872 Kidnapping Act “made it a felony for British subjects to decoy, carry away, confine, or detain without his or her consent, any native of an uncolonized Pacific Island” (146), but this inspired many ships to simply switch to registering as French. Here is the pattern of so much capitalist, imperialist expansion: the colonial government bowed to pressure from advocacy groups and the need to rein in violence provoked by settler and trader abuses, but at the same time wished to both expand its territorial footprint and its balance of trade. Meanwhile, as Chapter 3 makes clear, the labor trade itself, by supplying guns to indigenous recruiters, had created new levels of violence in traditional practices like headhunting. (Later, after Australian independence in 1901, racial fears would change the question of regulation and labor recruitment again, with whites-only immigration policies [152].)

While Behlmer frequently alludes to both the quality and nature of the historical record, and actively engages with a wide range of scholarship, I found myself wanting to know more about how he understood and delimited his archival base. While sources obviously appear in the endnotes, and his analysis makes the relative biases of these clear, the scope of this work is so broad, and its problems and questions so big, that more foregrounding of his system and methodology would have been helpful. In a similar vein, Behlmer is quite clear that he is trying

to find a balance between traditional, revisionist, and post-colonial accounts in terms of interpreting European motivations and Islander agency from what are almost exclusively European sources. Yet I found that one of the implicit questions he raises is that of his own analytical perspective and choice of language relative to those sources. It can be very difficult for historians not to take on their subjects' rhetoric, and on occasion I found it hard to parse whether his use of words like "taming" (e.g., 196), "pacifying" (e.g., 20), or "primitive" (e.g., 211), without scare quotes, was unconscious or deliberate.

Beyond his language, the story that Behlmer tells, for this reader at least, raised the problem of colonialism itself: by what right were the British establishing their laws in places across the world, putting people to death for murder, or making areas safe for settlers (e.g., 196)? Were the Kukukuku people not justified in defending their land from encroachment of miners and others (223)? In the end, the answer that he provides seems to be that the British were there for strategic reasons, aware that if they did not take it, another European power would. In that sense, this book gives us a sense of the "Scramble for the South Pacific," a topic that clearly deserves greater recognition in survey courses.

For its extraordinary wealth of research, for the deftly chosen examples and the effective interpretation of these within a larger historical framework, this is essential reading for those interested in this part of the world or in the power structures and mechanisms of imperialism.

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## SUBSCRIPTION and STAFF INFORMATION

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