

Haidy Geismar, *Treasured Possessions: Indigenous Interventions into Cultural and Intellectual Property*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013, xvi, 297 pp.

doi:10.1017/S0010417514000528

Property and persons constitute one another insofar as things possessed have owners. Haidy Geismar investigates intensifying complications in both, as rights to certain sorts of things more and more define and assert indigeneity within and beyond the nation state. The states considered here are bicultural New Zealand (or is it Aotearoa?), where politicking floats on conciliations between descendants of indigenous Māori and settlers from abroad, and Vanuatu where people, although outwardly in charge of their own country, are finding it difficult to maintain and protect bits and pieces of their tradition (their *kastom*) that they find most valuable.

In both places, ownership is increasingly refracted by international codes and treaties governing, or at least attempting to govern, intellectual property, cultural property, intangible cultural heritage, and the like. Geismar astutely traces ways that agents (owners, activists, claimants) in New Zealand and Vanuatu localize (“provincialize” she calls this) mostly Western property regimes and understandings so that these better serve local goals, including the assertion of indigenous identity, rights to possess, and other forms of sovereignty. She follows “the imaginative ways in which Māori and ni-Vanuatu [people of Vanuatu] absorb intellectual and cultural property as legal categories into their own efforts to constitute indigenous identities and, by extension, sovereignties” (xi).

To explore how some Māori and ni-Vanuatu have indeed provincialized global property regimes, better to assert local sovereignty, Geismar offers three paired analyses: Vanuatu’s *kastom kopiraet* (copyright) system and New Zealand’s less successful attempts to “brand” Māori commercial product; Vanuatu’s Cultural Centre and New Zealand’s National Museum/Te Papa Tongarewa; and New Zealand artifact auctions with moves to promote a “*kastom* economy” in Vanuatu. The first of these comparisons reveals that model international intellectual copyright law fails to comprehend local systems in Vanuatu where ownership of valued carving and plaiting styles, song and dance choreography, pharmacology, genealogical knowledge, and the like are not wholly owned by individual creators or makers, although persons as locally conceived do have copyright to manage and market product and, also, to ensorce pesky copyright violators. Over in New Zealand, state sponsored schemes to brand and thereby manage the market in Māori art and artifact mostly failed insofar as Māori makers reject state interference and insofar as they, too, argue that rights were communal as much as individual.

Geismar’s second comparison of museum practice teases out local understandings of cultural property (which, as is made clear by the disconnects

between Pacific and Western understandings of intellectual property, is not distinct from the latter). *Te Māori*—an exhibition of *taonga* (treasured Māori possessions) that toured the world in the mid-1980s inspiring international acclaim—alongside bicultural politics in New Zealand encouraged museums in that country to nudge their self-justifications of custody and curation into something closer to “guardianship.” Cultural property, as displayed, became sacred (charged with ancestral Māori *vim*) but also nationalistic (symbolizing noble New Zealandism). Back in Vanuatu, the once dusty Cultural Centre transformed from a minor colonial gallery into a vibrant organization that has become a clearinghouse of cultural research and *kastom* validation.

Finally, Geismar investigates the impact of treasured possessions as proofs of indigeneity on auction houses and economic development efforts. In New Zealand, activists have unnerved the auction trade, sometimes showing up at sales to denounce both buyers and sellers. The transformation of onetime personal collections into treasured cultural property has certainly altered auction practice in many places beyond New Zealand. In Vanuatu, Cultural Centre activists proclaimed 2007 the year of Traditional Economy. They promoted several sorts of treasured objects (traditional money) including circle-tusk pigs, shell beads, and dyed mats as acceptable currency to pay school fees, library charges, and local court fines, and thus sneaked *kastom* objects into everyday economic practice and the development efforts sponsored by state and international agencies.

Geismar’s nuanced exploration of Pacific challenges to international property regimes reminds us that persons and possessions are not everywhere the same—and this is increasingly true where issues of indigenous identity and sovereignty are on the front burner. Questions of who owns what, or what owns whom, compel critical ethnographic interventions, like this.

———Lamont Lindstrom, University of Tulsa

Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

doi:10.1017/S001041751400053X

This book recasts our histories of the last two centuries. Instead of accepting standard national narratives punctuated by radical ruptures—regime changes, state formations, depressions, and especially World War I—Manjapra portrays the period 1815 to 1945 as a unified “age of entanglement,” fashioned by interconnections that traversed state boundaries and ignored political periodizations. For more than a century, he argues, Germans and Indians collaborated across a series of academic disciplines in an effort to “destroy the nineteenth-century world order organized by British power” (1). That power, based on a combination of English enlightenment and empire, gained its greatest prominence