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Williard, Ashley M. *Engendering Islands: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Violence in the Early French Caribbean*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2021.

Many of the sources for Ashley M. Williard's literary analysis in *Engendering Islands* exist in fragments. Williard's examination of the sparse and partial traveler's journals, religious documents, and letters that remain from the beginning of French colonial encounters is an intellectual intervention on its own to the history of bodily difference as a basis for racism, occupation, and enslavement (1). The source pool also serves as a useful motif for thinking about how racism was constructed piece by piece in the French colonies and European metropole (17).

*Engendering Islands* takes up the earliest period of slavery in the French colonies in order to denature the racism and sexism that came to be applied to enslaved people's bodies. Williard tracks the influxness of definitions of bodily alterity, which reminds the reader that they were contested, in conversation, and not inevitable. She tracks this process through observing marriage, reproduction, and masculinity during the under-examined period of 1635-1715.

While bodily difference would become one of the main ethical foundations of enslavement, Williard demonstrates how, during this early period of colonial encounter, focus on bodily difference was in "nascent emphasis" (26). The first attempts at resolving cultural differences involved conversion. Williard analyzes writings to the metropole by religious men located in the colonies, observing their growing interest in converting the Kalinago people they encountered; the "cultural lack" evidenced by how the Kalinago practiced marriage, kinship, and organized labor could only be rectified through conversion (27). Besides illuminating their methodologies for

resolving these issues, the letters emphasize what these religious men saw as problems: the supposed “‘excessive’ sexuality” of Kalinago people and the perceived difference in their reproductive behavior.

The moral, religious, and gender ideals that colonizers attached to bodily difference were sometimes employed in two directions. Colonizers held up examples of people they had converted as exemplifying metropolitan ideals regarding gender and sexuality to chastise French women for behavior deemed inappropriate. “And yet,” as Williard writes, “these exceptions served to prove the rule by reinforcing European generalizations of immoral Kalinago customs and natural African lechery” (60). For example, missionaries asserted that Kalinago women’s bodies were inherently proficient for the physical and reproductive work of enslavement through the Christian principle of self-sacrifice. As time went on, the social issues missionaries encountered in the French Caribbean could only be reckoned with through the prism of enslavement: “On both sides of the Atlantic, these gendered representations worked both to chastise Kalinagos, Africans, women, and sinful European men, and to affirm the patriarchal values of the Church, the monarchy, colonialism, and Atlantic slavery” (61).

These standards of appropriate gender roles were also unevenly applied: Kalinago people represented both the “bad savage” that threatened the colonial project and an outdated ideal of masculinity that could inspire wayward colonizer men, while the violence of colonizers was portrayed as “valorous” (98, 101). The power of defining which was which lay with the colonial writer and often came down to the selective use of verb tense: missionaries praised Kalinago marriage rituals that inspired courageous masculinity and linked them to the Bible using the past tense; they used the present tense to describe where shifting Kalinago masculinity reflected European masculine ideals and where it did not (101-102).

While the use of these stereotypes was fluid, by the end of the seventeenth century, they had consolidated enough that whiteness was different (63). By this time, the metropole had created a moral and religious obligation to enslave and occupy.

As Williard writes in the introduction, “Instability defines racial discourses” (9). Archival and state memory of French colonization has glossed over this early period of enslavement and naturalized what was actually a highly contested process of enslavement. This monograph is a reminder to investigate the under investigated, the taken-for-granted. It will be useful to all scholars of colonization, enslavement, gender, the history of medicine, sexuality, and all students of historical methods.