

Book and Media Reviews

that avoids getting too caught up in the byzantine mazes that local-level Melanesian politics are so famous for. It will well serve the high school or college classroom as well as any other context in which climate change and environmental issues are raised.

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Trading Nature: Tahitians, Europeans, and Ecological Exchange, by Jennifer Newell. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8248-3281-0; 312 pages, illustrations, appendixes, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$45.00.

Trading Nature examines the ways in which nature underlies, motivates, and shapes exchanges between cultural parties in Pacific encounters. Drawing on an impressive range of source materials, Jennifer Newell carefully examines the easily overlooked (in part because often underfoot) place of nature in exchanges between Tahitians and Europeans, from the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries into Tahiti's present. Throughout, she draws attention to the material significance of culturally distinct perceptions, conceptions, and engagements with nature and in so doing offers a much-needed perspective on the place of nature in Pacific histories.

As Newell clearly identifies in her introduction, Western observers have demonstrated a consistent tendency to erect impermeable boundaries of the mind between nature and culture, ignoring the many ways in which the two are woven together in everyday

human experience. *Trading Nature* seeks to illustrate and resolve the many inadequacies that this tendency has yielded in broadly circulating understandings of Tahitian historical encounters. Numerous facts about various sorts of exchange are used to showcase the ways in which nature and culture are historically intertwined, as well as the ways in which influences exerted on one another are catalyzed by the interactions of cultural groupings with divergent interests, resulting in consequential legacies into the present. As Newell both argues and reveals throughout the text, the culturally encoded "naturalness" of a place plays a direct role in how an environment is conceived, interpreted, and interacted with. *Trading Nature* also identifies the significance of fluidity—the ways in which the meanings ascribed to and the values associated with the components of a natural environment ceaselessly fluctuate over time. Indeed, in many places, Newell's text contributes to the broad conversation in Pacific history about the understated point of fluidity in meaning, and the ways in which notions of value pass through forms of exchange parallel to yet enmeshed within the more material circulations of goods, services, animals, and plants.

An intriguing duality present throughout the book requires readers to consider the conceptions, values, and motivations behind ecological exchanges on the part of both Tahitians and the European voyagers. Newell moves vividly and carefully through what she calls "landscapes of the mind" and is inclusive of a variety of cultural factors, taking into consideration concurrent European literary

and scientific movements, as well as Tahitian lineages, beliefs, and practices (60). She takes care to dedicate separate sections of the text to the movement of exchanges into and out of Tahiti, with each section providing fascinating, thoroughly engaging examples—from the introduction of cats consequently leading to the complete disappearance of ground-dwelling Tahitian birds to an emergent Tahitian preference for oranges with implications for indigenous plant species. In the section “Out of Tahiti,” Newell draws on the well-known Bligh voyages, as well as others, to highlight the transport of breadfruit and the ways in which this connected Tahiti to the Caribbean, yielding a global perspective on what might otherwise appear as highly localized. Examples cohesively work to illustrate Newell’s main point—that there is an answer to the “So what?” in regard to the impact of ecological exchange.

As the book title implies, Newell focuses the vast majority of her energies and examples on Tahiti, yet she also successfully draws on other Pacific sites as points of comparison and further explanation. Most notable of these is her comparison of the introduction and subsequent flourishing or collapse of cattle populations in Tahiti and Hawai‘i, which Newell attributes to differences in forms of chiefly power—an important example of the intermingling of cultural factors in the impact of ecological exchange. In the conclusion she points out that Europeans often blamed unsuccessful ecological imports on some fault of the Tahitians—for example, a failure to thoroughly look after an animal or garden—when in reality, the ecologi-

cal introduction relied quite heavily on its suitability (or, rather, its unsuitability) for the island and its terrain, among many other cultural factors. Consequences that are both concrete and fluid arise from even the smallest ecological exchanges, and these have the power to reverberate over many years; as seen with citrus trees, a single aggressive plant has the ability to utterly outcompete native plants, to dominate an ecological space, and to impinge on all the cultural domains that were previously attached to that ecology.

Newell subtly highlights avenues for further work. She indicates not only the need for similar studies for other Pacific sites but also how deeply ecological and cultural interactions are intertwined, everywhere. Pulsing beneath the text is a call for increased awareness of our own, everyday cultural interactions, the active role that our natural surroundings play in these interactions, and the resulting consequences—for better or worse—that are so rarely foreseen yet often come to fruition only to be misunderstood, ignored, or dismissed in synthetic accounts of important historical moments. Newell carefully details her sources for each ecological introduction, shedding additional light on the values placed on nature’s trade. At the close of her text, Newell offers two appendixes, referenced throughout the text, which provide an organizational framework that serves to both guide and inform the general reader, as well as to satiate the demanding tastes of academics keen to follow her into history’s verdure. Examining the appendixes with a keener eye yields another layer of insight into how some

of the more straightforward, historical details of Tahiti both reveal and substantiate Newell's claims.

Trading Nature is written in a manner accessible to both academic and general audiences. Newell should be lauded for bringing into conversation two important streams of contemporary Pacific scholarship—the renewed interest in cross-cultural encounters and exchange and the rapidly emerging literature on culture and nature in the Pacific. For scholars already embedded in Pacific studies, Newell draws on familiar arguments about and episodes in early and mid-nineteenth century encounters across the Tahitian beach. At the same time, she offers keen, fresh insights into how many previously well-discussed moments can be viewed through a less familiar, ecologically driven framework. For a general reader, she offers memorable insights into specific ways in which natural and cultural interactions do not stand alone or in contrast to one another but are, rather, co-constituting and ever-present—if overlooked—features of day-to-day encounters.

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Le paradis autour de Paul Gauguin, by Viviane Fayaud. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2011. ISBN 978-2-271-07093-7; 278 pages, illustrations, bibliography, index. Paper, €26.98.

New Cytheria. Point Venus. Swaying palms and languorous vahine on the luxuriant shores of an island paradise. For many, the Western myth

of Tahiti is almost inextricable from the life and work of Paul Gauguin. Yet, as art historian Viviane Fayaud argues in this volume, Gauguin did not single-handedly invent what she calls French Oceanic Orientalism. Rather, he inherited an iconographic tradition with fascinating roots and surprisingly overlooked antecedents. Throughout the nineteenth century, voyaging artists—for instance, officers on French naval and scientific expeditions—produced thousands of sketches and drawings of their travels in the Society and nearby islands. Fayaud analyzes this representational corpus and explores how it paved the way for Gauguin's own fin de siècle celebrity and the enduring tropes now synonymous with his oeuvre.

"In searching for Polynesia in this iconographic collection," Fayaud argues, "we find France first" and then "the world of the artists themselves" (212). The actual islands come into view only thereafter. She focuses her analysis on four artists in particular. The first two, Jules Louis Lejeune and Max Radiguet, Fayaud terms "expedition artists." Lejeune served as official artist aboard *La Coquille*, a ship that circumnavigated the globe between 1822 and 1825. His somewhat technically limited work consists mostly of detailed renderings of Tahitian material culture and picaresque portraits of Tahitian notables. Working twenty years later, from 1842 to 1844, Radiguet voyaged on the *Reine Blanche*, a ship engaged in gunboat diplomacy in Tahiti and the Marquesas. His drawings predictably reflect the political concerns of the expedition and depict interactions between French marines