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**Fujichrome Green:
The Photographic Fetishization of Biodiversity by
Environmentalists**

Simon Foale

Visiting Fellow, RMAP Program
simonjf@bigpond.com

Martha Macintyre

Centre for the Study of Health and Society
University of Melbourne
marthamac@bigpond.com

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Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Tel: +61 2 6125 9978
Fax: +61 2 6125 4896
Email: rmap@coombs.anu.edu.au

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Abstract

Colour photography is perhaps the most important fund-raising tool for the biggest international environmental NGOs. From the breath-takingly beautiful portraits of colourful or endangered fauna, to quaint thatch-roof villages and ceremonially painted natives, to confronting scenes of logging, or polluted seascapes, these dense and evocative images, with all their implicit assumptions, are skilfully deployed to manipulate donors and subscribers into handing over cash for the good cause. But the images frequently hide less glamorous realities and play upon racist and profoundly unscientific ideas about people and ecosystems. They also form part of an anti-development agenda that opposes and actively subverts the aspirations of the owners of the ecosystems being represented. In many ways the images are no less disingenuous than a Coke advertisement. In this paper we explore ways in which photography is used to mask reality in biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and the relationship between the two, by drawing on examples from our experiences working for and with international environmental organisations working in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. The fact that tourism is still believed by international environmentalists to be *the* answer to the development problems of impoverished rural people living in exotic and photogenic landscapes and seascapes is an issue we discuss in detail, with examples from Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. In these places tourism not only fails to deliver the level of development people aspire to, but in most cases it involves significant negative social impacts. But the images presented of these places perpetuate outdated and chauvinistic stereotypes of Pacific Islanders as happy simple people, at one with nature and unengaged with the global economy, while at the same time fetishizing charismatic fauna, and “pristine wildernesses” of rainforest and reef. Here we use the common theme of photography to argue that international biodiversity conservation programs and ecotourism are both (related) forms of western hegemony, and that together they fail spectacularly to deal with global inequality.

Introduction

In his groundbreaking book *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1959), Bernard Smith proposed that “...in the century preceding the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) the Pacific provided a challenging new experience for Europeans, one which placed unprecedented pressure upon biblical creation theory and provided a wealth of new evidence out of which was fashioned eventually the first scientifically credible theory of evolution” (p.viii). The scientific observations, and especially the drawings and paintings undertaken by botanists, natural historians and artists who went on exploratory expeditions, generated debate, speculation and scientific theories that are now the basis for contemporary interest in the South Pacific environment – notably the observation, classification and conservation of its biodiversity.

Smith argued that the artists who attempted to capture the strange exotic beauty of Pacific landscapes, flora, fauna and natural phenomena were consistently inspired, but also constrained by their peculiarly European vision. He demonstrated the ways that artistic genres and cultural values imbued the paintings, drawings and sketches that Europeans brought back from their voyages while simultaneously shaping and distorting the world that they encountered. Crucial to this was what Kuklick has characterised as a ‘...conventional European view’ of the subjects of anthropological study as ... ‘technologically unsophisticated, preliterate peoples [who] were living in humankind’s primeval condition’ (1991, 1). This perception has persisted and developed permutations that render tribal people, especially those in the Pacific, as both incapable of protecting their natural environment (and therefore in need of assistance from Western environmentalists with a more scientific view) and as ‘natural’ stewards of its resources (WWF 2003). The images used to construct the primeval world that is in need of conservation are more often those of the documentary film or the colour photograph. Nature Photography, particularly as it used in the service of environmentalist campaigns and publicity for eco-tourism, has produced a partial and romantically-

inflected vision of the Pacific that owes more to its cultural origins in the industrial nations of Western Europe and North America (the North or the West) than it does to the experience or cultures of the people of the Pacific.

The Scientific and Cultural Importance of Pacific Biodiversity

The international environmental organisations currently working in the South Pacific and Papua New Guinea without exception focus on policies for the conservation of *biodiversity* (AKA Wilson 1992, Myers *et al.* 2000). Why is biodiversity important and what is threatening it in these countries? The biodiverse ecosystems of concern in the South Pacific are wet tropical rainforests, and coral reefs. Both of these systems are extremely species-rich, indeed most biologists refer to them as megadiverse (Veech 2003). This megadiversity is under threat from logging, coastal development, shifting cultivation, overfishing (particularly destructive fishing such as dynamite fishing), mining, and last but not least, global warming (Goodland *et al.* 1990, Roberts 1993, 1995, Hoegh-Guldberg 1999). The work of conservationists is thus to mitigate these threats somehow, but the necessary emphasis on local sustainability means that they must do so without compromising the economic returns that they generate for the local people.

The concern about biodiversity is ostensibly informed by biological and ecological science (Wilson 1992, Orians *et al.* 1996, Loreau *et al.* 2001), but as Ghilarov (1996) convincingly argues, since its invention in the late 1980s, the term biodiversity has taken on a life of its own, and has in fact become politicised and sequestered by a profoundly unscientific narrative, which has been well described in the writings of James Fairhead and Melissa Leach (1994, 1996, 2000), among others. This of course is the familiar Western, dualist image of nature as untouched, pristine and separate from (destructive) culture, and in need of protection from it. This philosophical position is invariably revealed in the choice of photographs used in the publicity material by these organisations. Before discussing the images however, we look first at the two core scientific ideas underpinning the ideology of biodiversity conservation, and how these are perceived by the (indigenous) custodians of that biodiversity in Melanesia and the Pacific:

1. The first tenet of the biodiversity conservation ideology concerns the interconnectedness of species, and the importance of these interconnections to ecosystem productivity. If too many species are removed from the “system”, it becomes less productive, which negatively affects the well being of people who use the “ecosystem services” of that system. Thus, the destruction of many species of corals by global warming (which causes coral bleaching) or blast fishing removes both primary production (Wild *et al.* 2004) and shelter (Roberts 1996, Kawasaki *et al.* 2003), and the system is no longer able to support a fish community and therefore a fishery. Complex or highly speciose systems tend to be more resilient to the removal of small numbers of species because of ecological redundancy, i.e. there can be a large degree of ecological overlap among a “guild” of species. On the other hand simpler or relatively species poor (usually temperate) systems tend to be much less resilient to major disturbances, and can collapse or transform to another state quite quickly if even one species is removed. Such species are usually referred to as keystone species.
2. A second, and importantly different, idea informing the environmentalist-scientific concern for biodiversity is that of the “inherent value of species”, which could also be referred to as the “problematization of extinction” (Foale 2001). This idea is underpinned by the concept of geological time and Darwin’s theory of evolution. It attributes a value to scientific knowledge about the historical processes that were involved in evolution and attaches a moral obligation – those who comprehend the extraordinary evolutionary trajectory of species should ensure that it is not foreshortened. Thus people should be concerned about extinction because we know that all of the species on earth today are the product of an immensely long evolutionary process, taking millions of years. This makes the rate of species extinctions within the last century look increasingly alarming, especially as humans have been the main agents of destruction. Notwithstanding the existence of totemic and culturally significant species in many indigenous societies, the inherent value of species is an idea that is generally not embraced by the vast majority of Pacific Islanders, who are the

custodians of the highly speciose rainforests and coral reefs that are the focus of environmental concern in PNG and the Pacific. Most of these people are Christians (Ernst 1994), and have no time for Darwin's (or his successors') ideas, if they are aware of them at all. As such they tend to be, on the whole, unconcerned about extinction, if it does not immediately threaten food security (Bulmer 1982, Clarke 1993, van Helden 1998, 2001, Foale 2001).

The importance of the difference between these two assumptions about biodiversity, the ecological linkages on the one hand, and the inherent value of species on the other, is nowhere better illustrated than in the case of turtles. Turtles have existed since the Jurassic period, and have changed little since then, but populations of most species are currently in decline. Some, such as the Leatherback and the Hawksbill, are listed as critically endangered. Leatherback populations are now so small that extinction is imminent. Not surprisingly, photographs of turtles, especially Leatherbacks, abound on the brochures, websites and annual reports of all of the major international environmental Non Government Organisations (NGOs) – The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International (CI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Turtles look 'prehistoric' and so proclaim their evolutionary status, inviting donors and subscribers to fulfil their moral obligation towards the preservation of these ancient species.

But the vast majority of Pacific Islanders do not care about the extinction of turtles, and continue to kill them and collect their eggs. Because turtles are relatively rare they are a bonus, and not a staple that must be husbanded. Their imminent extinction is not a threat to food security in small Pacific communities. There are still plenty of fish on the reefs and yams in the gardens. From the perspective of a Pacific fisherman who happens to catch a large turtle, the removal of a single turtle from the ocean provides an opportunity to feed a group of people and gain prestige by giving away valuable meat. Even when informed that the turtle population is in jeopardy, he is unlikely to be convinced as Pacific peoples generally develop ecological knowledge systems about plant and animal species that are visible, regularly encountered and have some obvious role in subsistence. For example, on Lihir in Papua New Guinea, people have highly elaborate taxonomies of yam species that they grow in their food gardens, yet they hardly have any terms for grasses and low-growing ground cover as these are not used. When a colleague recently asked a Solomon Islander what he would tell his grandchildren if he knew that he had killed the last Hawksbill turtle on earth, he unabashedly replied that he would tell them how good it tasted (Foale 2001).

Will the disappearance of turtles have ecological repercussions throughout Pacific food chains? Probably not. Jackson *et al.* (2001) have presented a plausible argument for the link between declines of green turtles in the Caribbean and the die-back of seagrass meadows off Florida, but such tight ecological linkages are unlikely to be demonstrated for Pacific Leatherbacks or Hawksbills. Turtle photos draw money for conservation of turtles in the Pacific, but the "problem", is externally imposed, just as it was in Kissidongou (Fairhead and Leach 1996). The result of this is that a mining company in PNG has to put fences around leatherback nests, and pay security guards to protect them from the locals, so that the company can maintain an environmentally friendly image (Macintyre and Foale 2004) and in the Solomons, at the time of writing, environmentalists are paying locals to allow turtle eggs that they would otherwise have harvested, to hatch on their beaches – a slight modification of the familiar debt-for-nature paradigm.

Picturing Pristineness

But there is more to the concern about turtles in our view than just their imminent extinction. Turtles, like pandas, tigers and snowy owls, because of their sheer rareness, are symbolic of pristine unviolated nature – they represent the whole unspoiled system in all its vulnerability. These 'charismatic megafauna' are the species that have retreated furthest from industrial man's presence, and as such, have become all the more precious in the minds of environmentalists. Whether or not they are keystone species, or perform a critical ecosystem service is irrelevant as they evoke a vision of an evolutionary past that is populated by strange amphibian reptiles. They embody our imaginary primeval as it has been made accessible by palaeontologists. As such, photographs (or nature

documentaries) of these creatures must convey pristineness and a world devoid of humans. As Derek Bousé observes:

When we film lions gorging on a bloody zebra in the Serengeti, or a cheetah flat out after a bounding gazelle, we rarely turn our cameras on the dozen or so Hiace vans and land-rovers, packed with tourists all sharing the wilderness experience. All over the world we frame our pictures as carefully as the directors of costume dramas, to exclude telegraph poles and electricity pylons, cars, roads, and people. No such vestige of reality may impinge on the period-piece fantasy of the natural world we wish to purvey. (Bousé 2000, 14, cited in Vivanco 2002).

The concern for species preservation is imaginatively entwined with the desire for the maintenance of an unspoiled paradise, somewhere that the Westerner can come to escape from industrial bleakness and drudgery. Therefore, the purported *ecological* importance of the illustrated subject (the turtle, the dugong, whatever) is used to occlude what is in reality the exploitation of the audience's desire to be tourists, to 'explore', 'discover' and penetrate unviolated nature, to play out the old imperialist fantasy. Kuklick demonstrated the way that nineteenth-century ethnological museums were similarly 'educative' and '...intended to provide experiences especially illuminating to the newly leisured and newly enfranchised artisan and lower middle classes.' (1991, 108). The political reading of a racial and social hierarchy that she discerns in the ways that museum displays were designed has its contemporary counterpart in the documentary nature film (Vivanco 2002), the large format books of photographs and the actual experience of travelling to tropical islands and witnessing the natural environment first hand. Eco-tourism is often viewed as a morally responsible form of recreational travel (because it does not entail the environmental and socio-economic impact that tourism to commercial resorts generates) and it is educational, raising awareness of the biodiversity and promoting environmentalism. This is why the idea of ecotourism is so emotionally compelling to environmentalists working in the Pacific - it affirms an antimonious view of the Man/Nature divide and provides a moral justification – the protection of an innocent, 'untouched' world.

Ecotourism and the European vision

Development in PNG and the Pacific to date has taken the form primarily of extractive primary industries – logging, mining and industrial fishing. Most of these operations are owned and controlled by foreigners, and a small fraction of the revenue from them flows to landowners and local governments in the form of rent, royalties and taxes. All of these industries are environmentally destructive in some way, and environmentalists concerned about mitigating their impacts were faced with the challenge in the 1990s of finding some alternative form of development that was environmentally benign but also generated significant levels of revenue, ideally commensurate with what people were receiving from the industrial developers. This approach took the form of the Integrated Conservation and Development Project, and the 1990s saw a proliferation of these all over the world, and there were many in PNG and the Pacific (van Helden 1998, 2001, Foale 2001).

These projects invariably tried ecotourism as one of the alternative development options. Ecotourism projects in the Pacific are designed for low-budget, low-impact travellers, usually backpackers. The guests sleep in traditional leaf houses, eat simple food prepared by local villagers, the toilets are not salubrious, and there is usually no air-conditioning or hot water. The lodges are usually owned and operated by families, or more rarely by communities. The number of guests and the financial turnover is typically very small (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000, 316-317).

By contrast, foreign-owned tourism businesses, such as the live-aboard dive boat operations, afford a much higher level of comfort, and have much higher overheads, and of course, charges. The scale of investment, and management demands, seem to keep these kinds of operations well out of reach of local entrepreneurs. A small fraction of the takings flows to locals through employment as skippers or deck-hands, rent to reef owners, and purchase of fresh fruit and vegetables.

While the live-aboard dive operations are still operating in PNG and Solomon Islands, all of the ICAD projects, and most of the associated eco-tourism businesses have failed, mainly because they simply could not generate profits that were remotely comparable to the cash payments that were given in the context of competing extractive industrial options. In 2000, the WWF-supported ecolodge in Western Solomon Islands, Vanua Rapita, yielded a grand total of US\$40 per person for the small community that owned and managed it. By contrast, standard compensation payment for destruction of a single tree in the context of a mining project in Papua New Guinea is in the vicinity of US\$30 (Schedule of Payments for Lihir 1994. Department of Minerals and Energy, PNG). For a community that leases land and loses all use of its forest resources over the designated area, the amounts of compensation can be hundreds of thousands of dollars. That same community might include people who gain employment from the enterprise and so earn wages that enable them to participate in the cash economy and abandon subsistence agriculture – to be active agents and beneficiaries of ‘development’.

Environmentalists have predictably underestimated the strength of local aspirations for development (c.f. Foale 2001, Hviding 2003, Macintyre and Foale 2004), driven primarily by the desire for the affluent lifestyle of the foreigners whom they encounter, whether in person or through various mass media, a desire that is fanned by every contact with rich, camera-toting tourists. This desire is articulated most commonly through requests (to development agencies or in negotiations with mining or logging companies) for permanent houses, water tanks, and money for school fees and medicines (Macintyre and Foale 2004; Hviding 2003). People are clearly not satisfied with living in the quaint sago leaf and bamboo houses that tourists find so charming.

Despite these failures, environmentalists still cling to eco-tourism as the solution to the problem of ‘development’ without environmental destruction, and it is increasingly clear that their motivation is deeply rooted in the ‘European vision’ of the Pacific. Eco-tourism is in many respects a way of maintaining a relationship with the South Pacific that constructs it entirely as a commodified cultural entity – a primordial “Nature” to be aesthetically consumed. The environment is valued as wilderness, epitomising a domain which the European can enter (with cameras), walk lightly through its rainforest, laze on its white sand beaches, dive on its coral reefs and leave with images of pristine beauty. This encounter with nature and its primeval beauty is a form of *recreation* – an escape from the industrialised world of the North and an engagement with a prelapsarian appreciation of the abundance of Nature. Perhaps this is another reason why the local human inhabitants are rarely portrayed toiling in gardens or cutting down rainforest trees for timber with which to build houses – the fantasy of superabundant food obtained with little effort and the illusion that the lives of people are ‘simple’ and ‘easy’ are sustained by removing them from the picture, or including them only when they enhance the image of decorative, natural simplicity. The environment of the Pacific is to be preserved, protected from exploitation and the ravages of industrialisation in order to sustain the ideal of a place where human interaction with Nature is mild, gentle and harmonious. It is essentially desired as a Westerner’s Nature playground and the harsh realities of life for many Pacific islanders - poverty, low life expectancy and endemic malaria - are ignored

Beautiful Photos, Prosaic Ecologies

The importance of the aesthetic beauty of these wildernesses is also seen in the photography used by environmentalists, and here the divergence from the ecological rationale again becomes clear. The animals and plants represented in environmentalist brochures and websites, as well as being rare or having some scientific/evolutionary curiosity value, are also usually strikingly coloured and/or anthropomorphically appealing in some way – toucans, anemone-fishes, red-eyed frogs, baby harp seals, all have been abundantly used to symbolise wilderness, regardless of their real ecological importance, or lack of it. WWF’s brochure on Forests of New Guinea, part of its “Ecoregions 200” series, leads with a quote from Wallace: “New Guinea contains more strange and new and beautiful objects than any other part of the globe” (WWF 2003). Ironically, Wallace himself expressed annoyance with the misrepresentation of the Amazon by the romantics of his time, as observed by Nancy Stepan: “The problem lay, he said, in ‘picture drawing travellers who,

by only describing the beautiful, the picturesque, and the magnificent, would lead a person to believe that nothing else existed under the tropical sun” (2001, 62).

The anthropomorphic dimension of the aesthetic appeal is crucial to the evocation of an emotional response that inspires commitment to a specific campaign or more general political activism. Animals that have large (soulful) eyes, sport brilliant colours or can be seen as comical or quaint are far more likely to summon forth the mixture of emotional and aesthetic appreciation that inspires financial generosity. As Kay Milton (2002) has so clearly demonstrated, environmentalist zeal originates in emotional identification, in ‘loving Nature’, rather than scientific understanding. Nature photography thus presents an essentially *unscientific* interpretation of ecology and biodiversity. We rarely see photographs of organisms of major ecological importance: the fungi in the soil (Lodge *et al.* 1996), the symbiotic unicellular algae living within the tissues of corals (Mueller-Parker and D’Elia 1997), the thousands of drab little insects that perform vital pollination functions (Williams *et al.* 2001). Nor do we see much on the websites and brochures about coral bleaching, which is killing corals all over the developing world, and is driven entirely by profligate fossil fuel consumption in rich countries (Hoegh-Guldberg 1999, Wilkinson 1999, Wilkinson *et al.* 1999, Hughes *et al.* 2003).

Paradoxically, the complex technologies that enable Westerners to visit the Pacific and take photographs are not acknowledged as alien. The whole process of obtaining the photograph – the international travel, the expensive equipment, the profoundly industrial, technologically sophisticated process of manufacturing and developing colour film, prints, or digital images – is all unconsciously excluded in the apprehension of the representation. It is suspended in the interest of indulging in the illusion of being a lone explorer, a single ‘eye’, while it also embodies the immense difference in wealth between industrial photographer and pre-industrial landscape (and its inhabitants). The fact that the social context of photography is one of recreation from an industrialized world assists in suspending the economic realities and the economic differences between the photographers and the objects of their gaze.

A good example of the importance of maintaining the fantasy of the non-present photographer in the photographic portrayal of pristine nature can be seen in the convention of minimising “backscatter” in underwater photographs. The presence of backscatter betrays the use of underwater lights, which reminds us of the presence of the technician behind the lens. Backscatter also spoils the expectation of the tropical sea as ‘pure’ and ‘clean’ in its clarity, which is indeed a reality for some locations, and on average tropical seas tend to be much clearer than temperate ones. However the attempt to deny the presence of particles in the water, even on reefs, many of which grow in naturally turbid, nutrient-rich waters (Hatcher 1997), utterly obscures the complexity and variety of coral reef ecosystems. Reef waters can in many places be a living soup, swarming with the microscopic larvae of a myriad species of reef fauna, immense numbers and diversity of tiny crustaceans and other types of plankton, as well as all sorts of abiotic particles, gobs of mucous produced by corals, and “marine snow” which is an agglomerate of sediment, microbes and mucous (Kiorboe 2003). Many of these aesthetically annoying specs are vitally important food sources for the pretty reef fish that are so often photographed, as well as many benthic organisms (Polunin 2002, Fabricius and Dommissie 2000).

The desired illusion at all times with underwater photography is that of the naturally lit subject, which of course becomes increasingly difficult below ten metres because of the rapid fall-off of light intensity, the increasing dominance of blue wavelengths, and the constraints of colour film speed and lens apertures.

There are also a host of other “rules” for what constitutes a good wildlife photo – eyes must be sharp, well composed; no clutter in the frame (especially not human clutter like fences or rubbish); the animal must be looking natural (not stressed or trying to escape) and lighting must look natural. While it is acceptable to ‘catch’ an image of an animal running or hiding, it will only be published if the head is visible. The fact that most animals are glimpsed fleetingly in dense green foliage or darting between coral and rocks underwater means that the studio and the tank are often used by

professional photographers. Indeed Stephen Dalton, a brilliant and multiple prize-winning photographer, specialises in high-tech, often studio-based photography that captures behaviours in animals that are essentially impossible to capture in the wild. He goes to great lengths however to convey the illusion of the animal being situated in its natural environment (Dalton *et al.* 1990, Harrison 1995, 52-56). Wildlife photography is recognised as both an aesthetic and a technical feat.

Indigenous People – Malthusian Menace or Ecological Nobility?

In areas of the world such as the Brazilian rainforests or the islands and reefs of Melanesia, humans are in many respects seen as vandals or potential destroyers of “globally important” biodiversity. In his critique of ‘fundamentalist ecology’, Jeffrey Schantz has pointed out that their essentialist discourses ‘have tended to construct ‘humanity’ as a bloc, undifferentiated by power, in which a universalistic human species itself is held responsible for biospheric destruction.’ (2003, 148). Such adherents often embrace the ideal of the ‘noble savage’ who is a ‘natural’ custodian of the environment (see below) or simply disregard the fact that local inhabitants might be very proprietorial about their land and sea resources and deeply resent the idea that foreigners have any right to unilaterally declare their land, fish, animals or plants in need of ‘conservation’ or to limit their economic activities. The desire to proclaim whole areas of rainforest as ‘national parks’ often ignores the populations for whom the forests provide their subsistence, their livelihood.

But contradictory stances are taken up in defence of Nature. The opposite construction can also hold. The local inhabitants of these places, when their existence is acknowledged, are viewed often as part of the landscape - embedded, or living in complementary harmony with ‘Nature’. This is the Baraka / Powaqatsi image, and while it has been most commonly used to portray indigenous people as heroic victims of predatory resource extraction corporations (Brosius 1999, Vivanco 2002) it also conveniently doubles as an advertisement for the tourism-as-answer agenda.

This imagined harmonious symbiosis ignores historical details such as the fact that often indigenous people have been forced out of the areas they once occupied – and currently live on the margins of land used for plantations, farming, logging and mining (Australian Aborigines being a prime case) and in most instances in Melanesia, the low population densities allowed types of land use that did not require attention to conservation principles (Bulmer 1982). Human depredations were simply not of a scale that jeopardised biodiversity, and in many cases have probably enhanced it (Brookfield and Padoch 1994, Clarke and Thaman 1997). However, in a fascinating recent study based in the Western Solomon Islands, a combination of floristic, oral history and archaeological analyses have been used to show that pre-colonial agroforestry systems have generated conspicuous large patches of low-diversity forest (Bayliss-Smith *et al.* 2003). How this sort of information will be apprehended by the international environmentalists working in Solomon Islands remains to be seen.

In the article “Endangered Forest, Endangered People” Peter Brosius examines the rhetoric of the (European) environmentalists and their representations of the local Penan people in their campaign against logging companies. He reveals the ways that environmentalists transform ethnographic descriptions into “... a form of ecological etherealism that is derived entirely from the Western romantic tradition...” (1997, 59) transforming the pragmatic management of subsistence plants employed by the Penan into “...a sacred obligation to bequeath to the following generations a healthy forest fully capable of providing life to its human inhabitants.” Similar assumptions inform the heady blend of Nature and ‘spiritual beliefs’ that permeates some of the more extreme environmentalist writings (Lovelock 1979, Besthorn and McMillen 2002, Haigh 2002).

Conclusion

The emphasis on global environmental responsibility in current Western discourses derives not only from scientific awareness of species loss, the effects of pollution and the role of humans in environmental transformation, but from the political dominance based on the industrial and technological advantages that the ‘West’ has gained. Bernard Smith’s recognition of the interweaving of aesthetics, European Romanticism, scientific curiosity and the development of

scientific theories of evolution in the representation of the Pacific has its contemporary counterpart. The construction of the region as an area of 'unspoiled' beauty has in many ways continued to shape the 'European Vision'. Now presented in film and photograph, the Pacific remains an imagined 'Paradise'. The exploitation of the natural resources of the Pacific region – its minerals, fisheries, timber, fertile soils and the labour of its people – that began two centuries ago (and inspired its 'exploration') has facilitated the maintenance of political and economic power. Part of that political dominance requires that the region be seen as a "natural" world, unaffected by the forces that have destroyed so much in industrialised countries. (Never mind the atomic testing on its atolls, the mining of guano that has left several islands wastelands, the pollution of rivers and reefs by mining operators, the land clearing for plantations and the destruction of forests). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the triumph of the capitalist endeavours that began the European transformation of the Pacific environment 200 years ago have generated leisure and the capacity for travel. The romanticism has transmuted and has new modes of visual representation that inspire new forms of consumption. The imbrication of scientific, aesthetic and commodifying representations is vividly represented in the photography and in the construction of Pacific islands as destinations for jaded Westerners who continue to consume its resources and to subjugate the interests, desires and in some cases even the existence of Pacific people.

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Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife; and pollution. It is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable. As indicated by the I=PAT equation, environmental impact (I) or degradation is caused by the combination of an already very large and increasing human population (P), continually