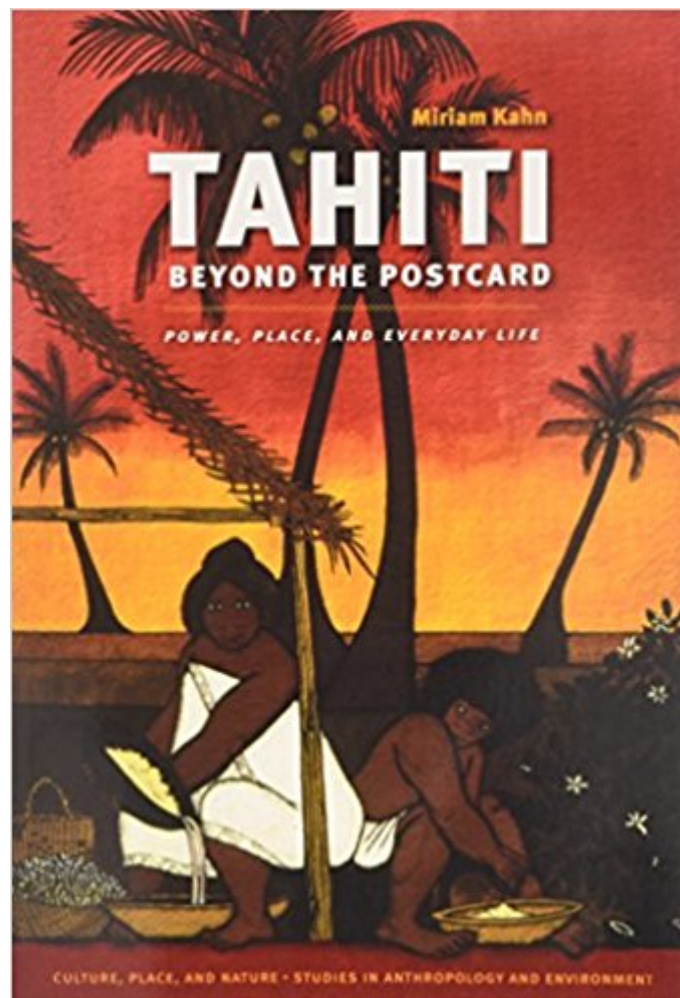


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# Tahiti Beyond The Postcard: Power, Place, And Everyday Life (Culture, Place, And Nature)



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2013 ICAS Book Prize (Social Sciences) The "Tahiti" that most people imagine - white-sand beaches, turquoise lagoons, and beautiful women - is a product of 18th century European romanticism and persists today as the bedrock of Tahiti's tourism industry. This postcard image, however, masks a different reality. The dreams and desires that the tourism industry promotes distract from the medical nightmares and environmental destruction caused by France's 30-year nuclear testing program in French Polynesia. Tahitians see the burying of a bomb in their land as deeply offensive. For Tahitians, the land abounds with ancestral fertility, and genealogical identity, and is a source of physical and spiritual nourishment. These imagined and lived perspectives seem incompatible, yet are intricately intertwined in the political economy. *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard* engages with questions about the subtle but ubiquitous ways in which power entangles itself in place-related ways. Miriam Kahn uses interpretive frameworks of both Tahitian and European scholars, drawing upon ethnographic details that include ancient chants, picture postcards, antinuclear protests, popular song lyrics, and the legacy of Paul Gauguin's art, to provide fresh perspectives on colonialism, tourism, imagery, and the anthropology of place.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Tahitian salvation from the pretty picture could get ugly . . . but at least Kahn's book already alerts the international media to scrutinize Tahiti and French Polynesia under critical commentary, and not just the travel pages." — Frances Mae Carolina Ramos, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 43:2

welcome addition to any ethnography course focusing on the Pacific, as well as courses or scholarship concerning tourism, the philosophy of space and place, the military in the Pacific, and the effects of colonialism. . . . any museum studies or museum anthropology course delving into the politics of display."â •Jennifer Wagelie, Pacific Affairs, December 2012"This is a work for scholars seeking a dual view of both Polynesian and European perspectives and practices from one of the most mythical places in the world."â •Matt Matsuda, Pacific Historical Review, February 2012"Kahn foregrounds the intertwined European and indigenous histories and experiences that constitute Tahiti and provides us with Tahitians' perspectives on life in a place that figures so centrally in historical and contemporary imaginings of tropical paradise. . . . methodologically and ethnographically rich."â •Colleen Ballerino Cohen, American Anthropologist, September 2012"Kahn's book is an enjoyable ethnographic exploration of power, imagination, and the social production of space in its past and present."â •Susanna Trnka, Journal of Anthropological Research, Volume 67 2011"Kahn writes beautifully about a beautiful place, which makes her book highly readable and inviting. With this accessibility, the theoretical dimension comes alive, and Kahn's work is, most importantly, the exposition of a sophisticated and powerfully explanatory political philosophy of space. Summing up: Highly recommended."â •Choice, November 2011

"Tahiti Beyond the Postcard is provocative and original, and makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the contradictions associated with tourism and the politics of space in Tahiti."â •Stuart Kirsch, University of Michigan

I was required to buy this for a class by the professor who wrote the book. It actually turned out to be a pretty good book as far as readability, but also it is a really good ethnography. I'm an anthropologist and I feel myself pretty immune to stuff like being sold by the advertising of "exotic" places. I had to admit that the advertising for Tahiti, even though intellectually I KNEW BETTER, sucked me in. This is a really good account of the real lives of Tahitians who still live under colonialism, trying to find a place in their own society that has been commodified for sale as an exotic "other."

Author lived there and gave a side to Tahiti that you would not find in the usual travel books. I picked the book because we are traveling to French Polynesia. I have a better understanding of the country now.

Elegantly and accessibly written, this book offers an exemplary and deeply respectful coupling of scholarship from the 'global core' and the 'global periphery'. And, to be sure, Miriam Kahn's is not a sentimental, condescending use of non-Western ways of knowing. She presents an array of contemporary and historical, academic and vernacular texts, all grounded in several decades of ethnographic engagement in/with Tahiti. Confidently, but not bullishly, Kahn remains rooted in her disciplinarity as an anthropologist while writing a properly transdisciplinary book - one that speaks across, and insightfully connects, geography, history, literature and art, as well as cultural, postcolonial and tourism studies. In her effort to stay true to the distinctive cultural politics of French Polynesia, however, Kahn avoids forcing her site into her literature. Academic voices are there to illuminate not determine the complex meanings and uncomfortable histories of Tahiti. It's why, for example, the book is primarily about the production and mythologization of place and not simply about tourism. What Kahn fully understands - what drives her never-shrill critique - is that tourism is just one formation in a long-standing, power-laden struggle over space. Nor is Tahiti tritely accounted for here by a narrative of omnipotent visitors-cum-colonizers and passive, victimized locals. In this regard, I recommend the penultimate chapter of the book titled 'Everyday Spaces of Resistance' in which Kahn presents a beautifully articulated account of Tahitians' efforts to control the discourse by (re)asserting their own 'lived experiences' of the place they call home. Once you've finished with this concluding chapter, you'll not be able to resist turning to the first word of Introduction and pursuing the book in its entirety. [REVIEWER: Crispin Thurlow, author of 'Tourism Discourse: Language and Global Mobility']

This is a terrific book: the content is wonderful, the images great, and the voice of the author immediately engaging. The historical and ethnographic content ranges from early fantasies through colonialism and cold war nuclear testing, then back to today's tourism. The book operates successfully on several levels at once: it allows easy access to the way most of us ordinarily imagine exotic locations and possibilities of a freer way of life; it provides carefully researched and well-theorized scholarship on the complex story of the dynamic between the ways of life and special character of the place; it gives us many photographs, postcards, and maps that alone make the book worth having. Not the least, the author's voice comes through in a compelling manner, alternatively very personal when explaining her interest in this distinctive place and opening us to serious ethical and political reflection of what has been done to the island and its people--and to our shared responsibility for what might come next.

Miriam Kahn takes nothing for granted in this brilliant ethnographic account. She draws stunning parallels that connect present life in Tahiti with its long and complicated history of colonialism, nuclear testing, and the tourism industry. How does the representation of Tahiti as an "authentic paradise" with hyper-sexualized women, white sandy beaches, and hotel demonstrations of "Tahitian culture" contrast with the way Tahitians themselves negotiate and communicate identities in this 21st century colony? While providing detailed descriptions of her fieldwork as well as engaging a substantial and carefully crafted bibliography, this book provides a crucial narrative to this largely misunderstood place. *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard* stretches your thinking while sustaining an easy to engage writing style. This is somewhat of a rarity among academic text of this nature. From my perspective this book is certainly a must read for anyone with an interest in social theory, anthropology, indigenous studies, tourism, colonialism, and globalization. Moreover, I find it imperative that anyone planning to visit French Polynesia informs himself or herself with this ethnography before doing so.

*Tahiti Beyond the Postcard* is an interesting and informative look beyond the common held ideas of Tahiti. The book is very interesting to read and the complex ideas are broken down to become easily understandable. Miriam Kahn expertly shows the correlation between nuclear testing in French Polynesia and the rising tourism in the region. While most people who think of Tahiti imagine grass skirts and white beaches, this book shows this misconception and explores how the French government has purposefully propelled these images to distract from the testing. The most interesting idea I took away from the book was the idea of "the cocoon" and how tourists often go on vacation but spend their time trying to make it feel as close to home as possible without seeking to really go beyond the borders of their comfort levels. I definitely recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in the Pacific or who has thought about being a tourist and looking beyond the postcard.

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