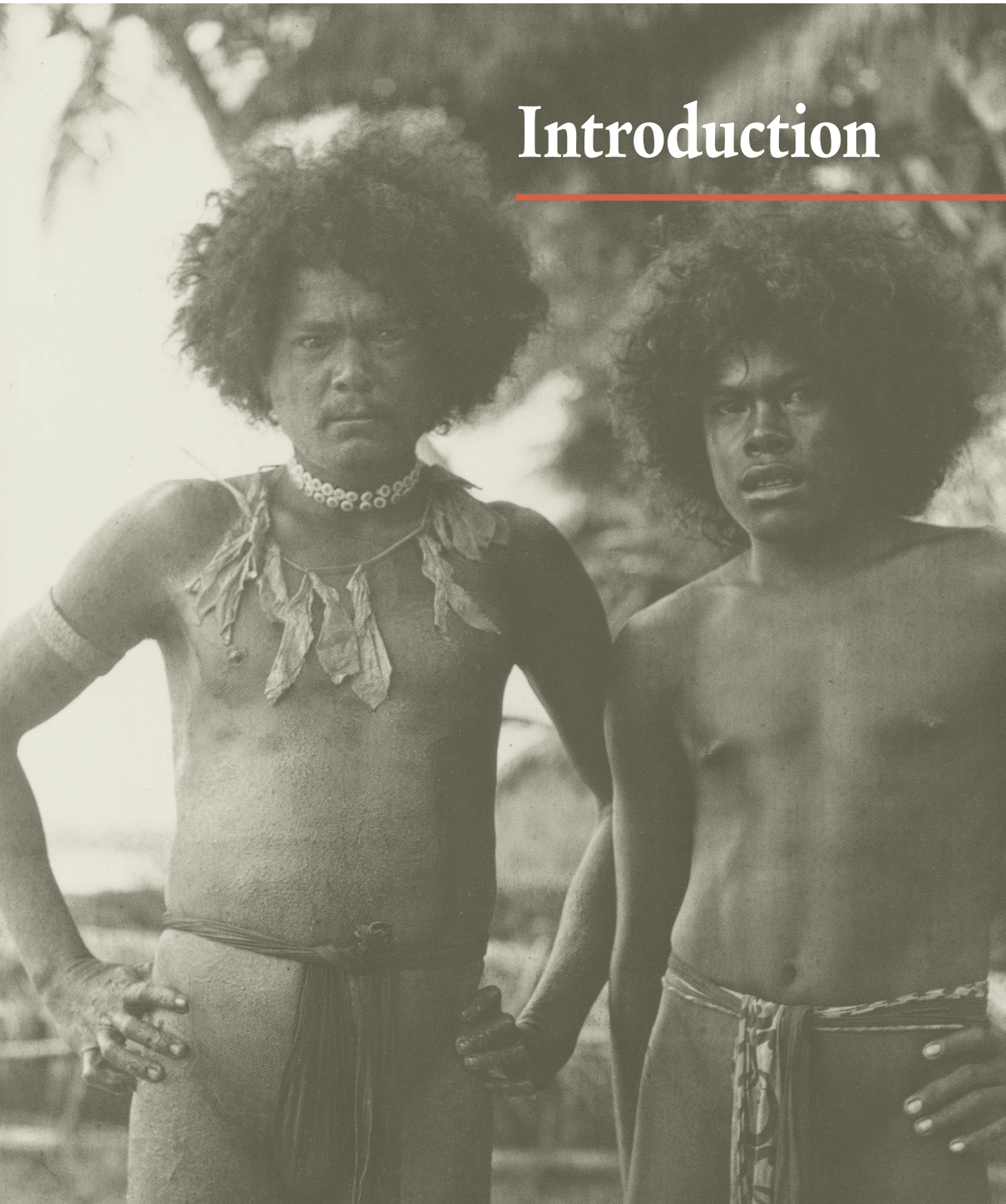


# Introduction

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# Island Narratives

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On the island of Tetiaroa, a completely renovated ecohotel, *The Brando*, opened in 2014. Here, visitors can experience ultimate luxury, enjoyment and relaxation while actively taking part in the island's exploration of ways to save the planet from collapsing. *The Brando*, named after the actor, is not only a luxury hotel but also an example and ideal of hyper-technological solutions for energy supply, with bio fuel from coconut oil, a solar-driven desalination plant producing drinking water and air conditioning using cold water from the deep waters around the atoll. Thus, the hotel's guests contribute not only to saving Tetiaroa but to saving the world; they are not mere tourists but pioneers and scientists in a living laboratory or a kind of Noah's ark – seeking a new ecological world order where technological progress and sustainability are not opposites, and where society and nature have been reconciled and become allies.

In one of the six film adaptations of *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), Marlon Brando plays Fletcher Christian, who in 1789 mutinies with the rest of the crew against the headstrong Captain William Bligh and subsequently seeks refuge on the island of Pitcairn. Here, the crew kill Tahitian men in a disagreement over Tahitian women whom the British have kidnapped. The mission for the *HMS Bounty* was of an ecological nature, collecting seedlings from the breadfruit tree, which was widespread in Tahiti and the fruit of which was planned to feed slaves when replanted in cotton plantations in other parts of the British Empire. The film adaptation of *Mutiny on the Bounty* resulted in mass tourism and gave rise to a financial and cultural tsunami in Tahiti. In 1962, tons of imported white sand was spread on Matavai Beach because black sand would not satisfy the millions of visitors expecting to find a snow-white Bounty beach. Through Brando's involve-



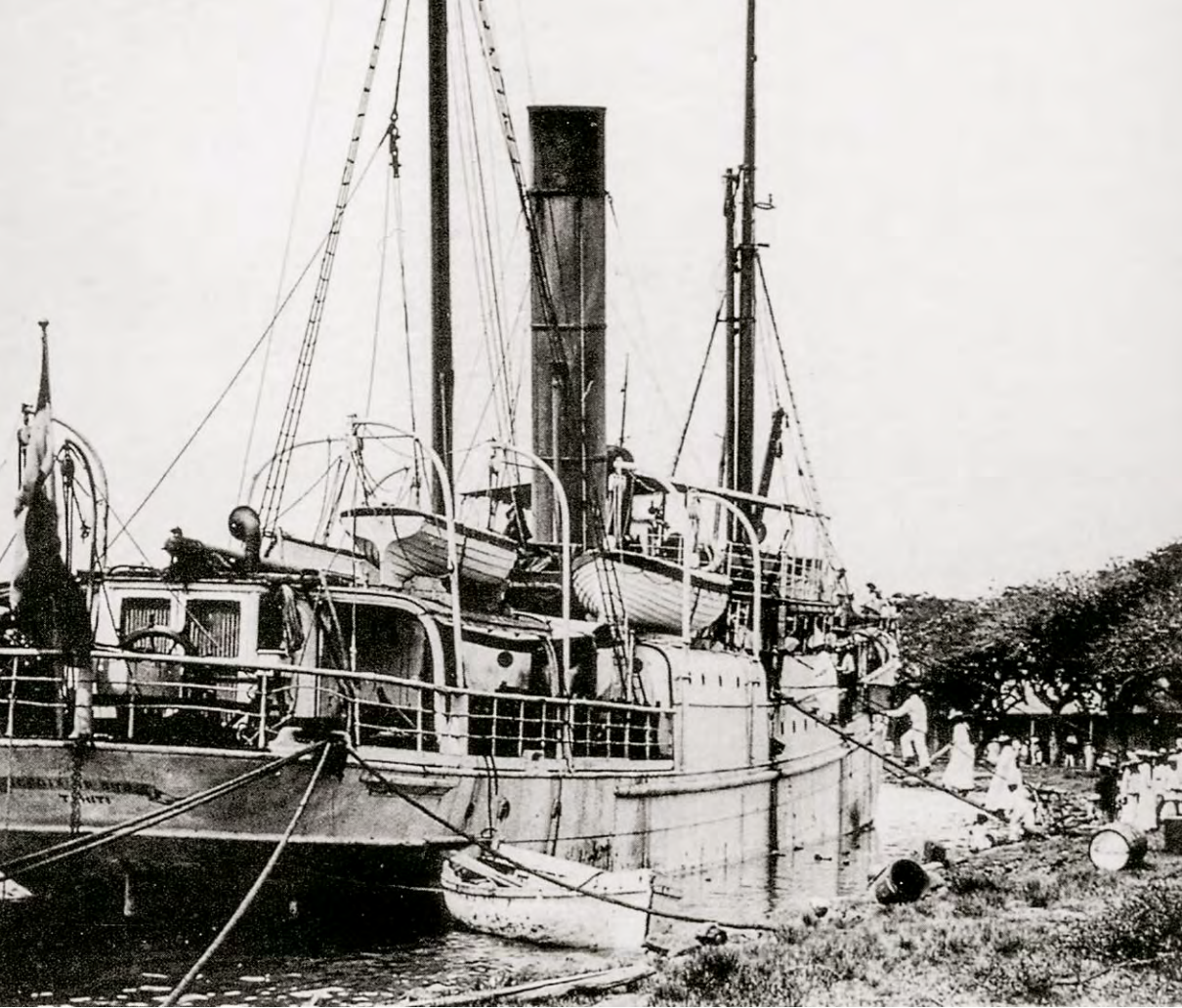
“Was this the beginning or the beginning of the end?” From Bernard Judge, *Waltzing with Brando* (2014). Somerset Maugham noted the unique “silvery whiteness” of the beaches when he visited the atoll of Tetiaroa in 1916. With his earnings from the film *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Marlon Brando bought the island in 1966, loosely planning to build a refuge for himself and a band of hippies, political activists and wealthy tourists. The tracks in the sand are from a tractor that Brando’s architect, Bernard Judge, arduously managed to transport across the protective atoll reefs to construct a landing strip. The hyper-luxury ecological hotel *The Brando* opened in 2014.

ment, Tahiti was branded as a paradise that travelers could do more than dream about: they could travel to the new international airport that the French had just built in preparation for nuclear tests in the Moruroa Atoll. Furthermore, thousands of extras were involved in the filming, which took forever because of Brando’s caprices and constant changes to the screenplay, bringing the film company MGM to the brink of bankruptcy. Brando married the Tahitian beauty Tarita Teriipaia, who also played his love interest in the film. He purchased part of the Tetiaroa Atoll for 200,000 US dollars in 1966, and the following year he paid 70,000 US dollars for the rest of the atoll, which comprises 13 islands and is situated 50 km off Tahiti. Somerset Maugham wrote in 1916 that the beaches here have the “silvery whiteness” usually described in accounts of the Pacific islands. Tetiaroa was supposed to be a refuge from the fame that Brando hated, and later a breeding ground for the eco-fantasy that materialized in 2014 – despite the global financial crisis that threatened to put an end to the project.<sup>1</sup>



On October 6, 1982, the Danish newspaper *Information* featured an article by Bengt Danielsson on Paul Gauguin in French Polynesia, with the headline “Gauguin’s Tahiti – and the real Tahiti”. It was written in connection with a Gauguin exhibition at the Danish art museum Louisiana, and attempted to clear up two common misunderstandings regarding Gauguin in the French colony. One camp of art historians completely disregarded the impact of the artist’s environment, or saw it as a purely artistic motif – an exotic and primitivistic stylistic element with no political dimensions. Another camp depicted Gauguin as a daring critic of the colonial oppression of the indigenous Polynesians. According to Danielsson, the truth is





*Croix du Sud* in the main town of Tahiti, Pape'ete Pape'ete, 1897. The ship brought the painter Paul Gauguin to the Marquesas Islands in 1901, where he hoped to finally find the savagery that he had sought in vain in Tahiti. The Marquesas paintings were “new and horrific”, while his audience suddenly found the Tahiti paintings to be “relatable and charming”. Before his departure, Gauguin wrote to his friend Monfreid: “My Bretagne paintings have become pure rosewater because of Tahiti, and Tahiti will in time become pure eau-de-cologne because of the Marquesas Islands.”

much more complex and much more obscure. From the outset, Gauguin envisioned the naïve and primitive, idyllic paradise that he had read about and seen glimpses of in the Polynesian pavilions at the Exposition Universelle of Paris in 1889. He was disappointed when he arrived in Pape'ete, an ugly barracks town with women in floor-length European dresses, but he

found the motifs he had been looking for when he moved away from the town to the village of Mataiea, which better lived up to his vision. However, he had no understanding of, or interest in, Polynesian culture. Later on, he became the editor and main writer of the satirical magazine *Les Guêpes*, which was a dubious organ for the section of French colonists that wanted to adopt a stricter course against the natives, and therefore attacked the colonial administration for being too soft and the missionaries for being too lenient.

In 1901, Gauguin put an end to his career as a satirical writer and traveled to Hiva Oa, an island in the Marquesas Archipelago that is even more remotely situated in the Pacific Ocean. Again, he was hoping to find a genuine primitive paradise, but instead met with an even more impoverished culture – a despondent society whose wildness was rootless and destructive, enduring colonial oppression that was far more brutal and destructive than in Tahiti. Here, Gauguin finally sided with the natives against the gendarmes and Catholic church, engaging in a sort of artistic guerrilla warfare against the French authorities on the island. When he died in 1903 of drink and sheer misery, he was up to his neck in lawsuits and convictions initiated by the colonial administration to silence him.

Danielsson's *Information* article is a conscientious, precise and rather sober account of Gauguin's activities in Polynesia. However, it ends in a tirade against the colonial rule of 1982, which, according to Danielsson, had not changed significantly since Gauguin. The Polynesians were still desperate, their desperation having become loud and clear in their powerless struggle against the nuclear test bombings which France – having lost their colony in Africa in 1963 – moved from the Algerian desert to the atoll of Moruroa. "I am convinced that if Gauguin lived today, he would lead the Polynesians' battle against the last and worst form of colonial injustice", Danielsson concludes. Thus, he uses Gauguin to speak his own cause, and we end doubting whether the article addresses Gauguin's or Danielsson's own Tahiti and reality.

Bengt Danielsson was a member of Thor Heyerdahl's famous Kon-Tiki expedition, which in 1947 journeyed 7,000 km on a balsa wood raft from Peru to the atoll of Raroia in the Tuamotu Archipelago, a part of French Polynesia. As a zoologist and early environmental advocate, Heyerdahl wanted to investigate how animals and plants had spread to the remote and isolated Pacific islands. Heyerdahl had sought refuge, together with his wife Liv, on Fatu Hiva in an attempt to live in a prelapsarian paradise. Here, in 1937, he found some rock carvings that resembled pre-European



From Bengt Danielsson's *Forgotten Islands of the South Seas: Travel Account from the Marquesas Islands 1953*. The controversy concerning Thor Heyerdahl's theories was partly due to the fact that his critics found it hard to separate his different roles as scientist and media-savvy adventurer. Bengt Danielsson wrote a doctoral thesis in anthropology based on his field study on the atoll of Raroia, where he was stranded together with Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki. *Forgotten Islands* (1953) can be read as a scientific correction of the tale of "Paradise Lost" that Heyerdahl created about the island of Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas. However, it can also be read as a well-planned venture in a literary world market for escapist and nostalgic travel accounts of remote, forgotten or threatened cultures. In the shadow of the destructions of World War II, this market was growing rapidly, with Thor Heyerdahl's earliest expeditions and books paving the way – also for Danielsson.

sun symbols from South America, and proposed the controversial and subsequently falsified theory that Polynesia had originally been colonized by South American Stone-Age people. Heyerdahl tried to prove the theory with his journey, which prepared the ground for experimental maritime archaeology in the Pacific as well as inspiring the cultural festivals that take place every year in Polynesia, celebrating Polynesian navigation and canoe building. On a similarly dubious basis, Heyerdahl then went on expeditions in other parts of the world, while Bengt Danielsson stayed on the atoll of Raroia, where he lived from 1949 to 1952 with his French wife, Marie-Thérèse. Here, he did the foundational fieldwork for his doctoral thesis *Work and Life on Raroia* (1955) and a number of travel accounts that present the image of the atoll as "a happy island". Danielsson became the Swedish consul of Tahiti in 1961, but in 1978 he was stripped of the title due to his involvement in the worldwide protests against the French nuclear tests. After his daughter's death from cancer in 1972, he and his wife became key figures in the protests, and he wrote the book *Förgiftat paradiset* (Poisoned Paradise, 1986), for which he was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 1991.

The title of Bengt Danielsson's article "Apocalypse Now in Moruroa", published in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* on February 17, 1982, refers to Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and the book that inspired it, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), thus drawing on a tradition of imperial-critical horror fiction. The article in *Information* a few months earlier, in connection with the Gauguin exhibition at Louisiana, questioned Gauguin and the art critics' perception of the relationship between dream and reality, but it was also an autobiographical projection onto Gauguin's story. In the last lines of the article, Gauguin is presented