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Jardins, cyclones et catastrophes

Ethnographier le désastre au Vanuatu

Maëlle Calandra

THE BOOK

This book focuses on the subsistence gardens of Tongoa, an island located in the central Vanuatu archipelago (South Pacific), and explores everyday life in an environment shaped by recurrent catastrophe. Drawing on an ethnographic approach at the intersection of the anthropology of nature and the anthropology of disasters, it seeks to highlight the relationships the relationships that inhabitants have with each other, with their gardens, and with the collectives of non-humans that inhabit their territories. Tongoa's environment is marked by disaster, which constitutes an inescapable condition of existence. Cultivated gardens are regularly disrupted, and at times temporarily destroyed, by large-scale seismic or climatic events —such as Cyclone Pam in March 2015. Examining the various phenomena encompassed by the local category of disasta reveals how catastrophe is conceptualized and why it enables the continual reinvention of the social.

THE AUTHOR

Maëlle Calandra is an anthropologist, she holds a PhD from EHESS, is a research fellow at IRD, and a member of the Migrations and Societies Research Unit (URMIS) in Paris. Her scholarship engages with current debates in the anthropology of disasters, the anthropology of human-environment relations, and migration studies. She works primarily on the island societies of the South Pacific, with a particular focus on rural Vanuatu. Her current research investigates the forced displacement of the inhabitants of Ambae island following the 2018 volcanic eruption, within the framework of the ANR-funded project "Environmental Migrations and Volcanic Disasters in Vanuatu: A Multiple Perspective (EMVOLDiVA)". Since 2023, she co-leads the course "Anthropology of Disasters" at Sciences Po Paris. In November 2025, her work was recognized with the Research Prize of the French Red Cross Foundation.

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