Uncharted Seas: European-Polynesian Encounters in the Age of Discoveries

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By the mid 18th century, Europeans had explored many of the world's oceans. Only the vast expanse of the Pacific, covering a third of the globe, remained largely uncharted. With the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, England and France once again devoted their efforts to territorial expansion and exploration. Government funded expeditions set off for the South Pacific, in misguided belief that the continents of the northern hemisphere were balanced by a large land mass in the southern hemisphere. Instead of finding the sought after southern continent, however, these expeditions came into contact with what 20th-century ethnologist Douglas Oliver has identified as a society "of surprising richness, complexity, vitality, and sophistication."[1] These encounters would lead Europeans and Polynesians to develop new interpretations of the "Other," and change their understandings of themselves.

Too often in the post-colonial world, historical accounts of first contacts have glossed them as simple matters of domination and subjugation of native peoples carried out in the course of European expansion. Yet, as the historian Charles H. Long writes in his critical overview of the commonly-used term *transculturation*:

> It is clear that since the fifteenth century, the entire globe has become the site of hundreds of contact zones. These zones were the loci of new forms of language and knowledge, new understandings of the nature of human relations, and the creation and production of new forms of human community. These meanings have for the most part been ignored due to the manner in which the West, in an uncritical manner, absolutized its meaning of itself as the norm for all humankind.[2]

1 Douglas Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society* (Honolulu, 1974), 1.
2 Charles H. Long, "Transculturation and Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* 2nd ed. (Detroit, 2005), 9295.

Historical studies of South Pacific encounters, in particular, have been plagued by two trends. Most accounts have been "histories from above," or "Great Man histories," focusing on captains and celebrity scientists, a minority of all crews. And historical analyses have rested too heavily on a Eurocentric assumption that Enlightenment philosophy pre-determined the tone and outcome of early exchanges between Europeans and Polynesians. Only recently has the task of reevaluating first contacts as complex multi-layered relations been taken up. One useful indication for how to proceed might be drawn from Karen Ordahl Kupperman's study of first contacts in North America. She urges us "as far as possible, to sweep away our knowledge of the eventual outcome of the train of events set in motion during [the contact period]."[3] We might ask why it might be useful to approach a history without consideration of eventual outcomes. In response, it can be noted that first contact events have occurred in multiple environments over the course of several centuries. Various factors have shaped their different outcomes; however, it may still be possible to identify repetitive common patterns of interaction during first contact events. These patterns may become even more apparent in a case study of multiple contact events in a specific locale.

The study of first contact events in the South Pacific and the New World has recently taken a new direction, thanks to a better understanding of the native side of these encounters gained through archaeology and ethnographic field work. Historians working in micro-history such as Robert Darnton, Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, and Anne Salmond have shown how a limited number of participants in any historical series of events can be studied and used to interpret trends within a larger social context. While study of the voyages of exploration was long dominated by scholarly interest in how European encounters with Polynesians were shaped by Enlightenment philosophical debates and in turn shaped later Romanticism,[4] more recent scholars have begun to focus on the dynamics of the encounters themselves—brief events lasting only a few weeks, or even days.

In her brilliant work, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*,[5] Anne Salmond applied Robert Darnton's cultural history methodology,[6] to depict Captain Cook and his crew as a ship-bound microcosm of 18th-century male European society, adapting to and absorbing Polynesian cultural traits through contact. However, even Salmond's account, though immensely insightful into Polynesian cultural impacts upon the European voyagers, becomes exclusively absorbed in telling the stories of Captain Cook and botanist Joseph Banks. While Salmond does identify social divisions aboard Cook's ship the *Endeavour*, she does not concentrate her focus on the ways in which these divisions shaped transculturation experiences. Anne Salmond's perspective in this book may have resulted from her decision to limit her focus to accounts of the Cook voyages, in this

3 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, 2000), x.
4 Bernard William Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (Oxford, 1960).
5 Anne Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook's Encounters in the South Seas* (New Haven, 2003).
6 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York, 1985).

echoing traditional historiography of the voyages of discovery in the English-speaking world. In recent, though as yet unpublished work, Salmond has extended her scope to other voyages, making new comparisons possible.[7]

The Burden of the Enlightened

If one looks at multiple voyages to the same location, such as Cook's, Bougainville's, and Bligh's voyages to Tahiti, the repetition of patterns of sub-cultural differences in shaping European-Polynesian contact becomes more apparent. It must be kept in mind when taking voyages as a unit of analysis that some crew members served on multiple ships under different captains. Bligh, to give only one example, served as a sailing master under Captain Cook before gaining his own command.[8] Thus the logs of different ships cannot be assumed to correspond to non-overlapping crews. Yet, unlike regions studied by historians of first contact in the Americas, the Polynesian islands, with their relatively small populations and clearly delimited geographical boundaries, offer investigators ideal case studies of first contacts and the patterns of sub-cultural variation they reveal upon close inspection.

A large social divide separated the crews of the 18th-century voyages. The captains, officers, and scientists belonged to an educated and wealthy elite, while the sailors and marines were drawn, sometimes even impressed, from the most impoverished of the lower classes. This division was strictly upheld by naval law. While members of the elite could hope for promotion and advancement, almost never did the status of a common seaman allow movement across the fundamental divide. In order to understand the different contact experiences of those on each side of this division it is important to take into account variations in their cultural backgrounds.

In 1754, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote his widely read "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," and its concept of "the noble savage" came to pervade European popular and philosophical thought. Scholars have long agreed that this Enlightenment concept of the "Other" played a role in European perceptions of first encounters with Polynesians.[9] Yet, this now commonly accepted assumption has led to the relative neglect of some important dynamics of cross-cultural contact. The mode, tone and outcome of contact events are not determined simply by one group's interaction with another on the basis of its own preconceived ideas, but result from a complex interaction between socially heterogeneous parties, each of which brings its own social divisions and plurality of cultural experience to the encounters.

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7 I am thankful to Dame Salmond for sharing with me her lecture notes for "Voyaging Worlds: Early Encounters between European and Polynesian Sailors," a talk delivered at the annual general meeting of the Hakluyt Society, London, June 27, 2007. Dame Salmond has informed me that her forthcoming book, *Aphrodite's Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti*, will deal with successive voyages to Tahiti, from Wallis to the evacuation of the Bounty mutineers.

8 Caroline Alexander, *The Bounty: The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty* (New York, 2003), 44.

9 Ian Cameron, *Lost Paradise: the Exploration of the Pacific* (Topsfield, 1987), 146. But, for a challenge to this idea, see Ter Ellington, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley, 2001).

An attentive reading of first contacts between Europeans and Polynesians in the 18th century reveals them to have been more dynamic, interactive, and mutually affecting than simplified accounts stressing European domination and European cultural preconceptions might lead us to presuppose. In the Pacific, far from the might of European population size and military power, single exploratory vessels of fewer than a hundred men sailed at the fringes of their known world. In this hazardous isolation European crews were often dependant on native populations, not only for the success of the ship's mission, but for their very survival. And divisions within each party to the contact corresponded to differences in perceptions of the opportunities it afforded and in motivations for, and modes of, mutual cultural adaptation.

Though enduring preconceptions of the "noble savage" would leave lasting effects on European written narratives of first contacts, on the beaches of the Pacific a more complex reality was unfolding. It is high time that we look past the Eurocentric romanticism of the published narratives of voyages of discovery, written by and for educated elites, and try to imagine that more complex reality. This will give a voice to those European explorers whose names have been forgotten: the illiterate common seamen, on whose lives, limbs, and labors the voyages in the Pacific were powered. An approach taking into account social divisions within the European contact population, as well as the agency of the native population, should shed further light on the nature of first contacts between peoples everywhere.

The crew of an 18th-century naval ship was in essence a miniature social hierarchy of contemporary European male society. The place of officers was reserved for members of high status families. Unlike the deckhands, marines, and able-bodied seamen, officers associated with social elites in their home countries, were highly literate, trained in science and mathematics, and studied classical literature—a study that in Bougainville's case appears to have been a passion. At the same time, however, officers were often the younger sons of aristocratic families who, unlike firstborn heirs, were dependent upon their profession as a source of income and social advancement.

The sailors and marines who worked under these officers came from the bottom of the social strata. Often sent to sea as young boys, or even involuntarily impressed, 18th-century sailors grew up on the ocean. Without fixed homes or lands, they frequented bars and brothels, threatened to desert in every port, and were subject to lashing for any insubordination.[10]

On the voyages of exploration a third group joined the crew: scientists, their assistants, and rich adventurers, such as the Prince of Nassau, who accompanied Bougainville. Men such as Joseph Banks and Philibert de Commerson drew income from landed estates, frequented opera houses and *salons*, and corresponded with members of European learned

10 Even Captain Cook, remembered for his popularity among the men he commanded, was quick to deal out the penalty of lashing. As Anne Salmond writes: "During this stay in Rio...four more [sailors] were punished, each with twelve lashes—one for refusing to work, the second for swearing at the officer of the watch, the third for attempting to desert, and the fourth for not doing his duty in laying on the lashes." Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 59.

societies. Adventure seekers with funding to use as they pleased, these members of the ship were essentially paying passengers.[11] They did not participate in the work of running the ship, but only disembarked to explore new lands and collect curiosities, no doubt to the envy of the marines and seamen, whose comings, goings, and trade with native populations were strictly controlled by the officers. Though bound together in the confined wooden world of the sailing vessel, a diversity of social groups brought to Polynesian encounters their own distinctive interests, resources, constraints, and sub-cultures.

When the first voyages of exploration set sail for the South Pacific, the philosophical debates of Europe depicted the "uncivilized" men who inhabited distant shores in romantic terms, elevating the "savage" to a position of noble character. As the known world of the Europeans expanded, the imagined "savage" no longer referred only to the enslaved peoples of Africa, the long-term trading partners of Asia, or even the natives of the Americas, but also, for the first time, to remote peoples of the South Pacific.

To philosophers in Europe as well as European mariners, the South Pacific represented the very fringes of the known world, or more precisely, the farthest possible distance from home. Johannes Fabian, a Dutch anthropologist, argues that from its earliest beginnings ethnographic writing has equated geographical distance with temporal distance.[12] Fabian's observation suggests the manner in which the geographical distance of Polynesia influenced European philosophical debates concerning its inhabitants. A native on the distant shores of a previously unknown land, conceived as more primitive than a European, could by that very token be understood to be related to the European as the past is to the present. Philosophers, as well as those members of ships' crews familiar with "noble savage" debates, could perceive Pacific voyages as travels through time as well as space, and the Polynesians they encountered as living equivalents of ancient Europeans. This conception of the noble savage would be a heavy burden for the scientists and educated elite of the voyages of discovery. Ironically, the group of men instructed to make the most detailed observations of the new peoples encountered was the very group most prone to over-influence by preconceived ideas already circulating in book form. In other words, because of their status, culture, and social connections to the European audience for whom they were writing, elite members of the voyages of exploration had a perception of the "Other" that was already anchored in spatial and temporal perspectives of European literature.

To understand these perspectives it is helpful to examine the work of Jean-

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11 Joseph Banks, as described by Michael Alexander, is a good example. "A recently elected member of the Royal Society, Joseph Banks, a rich young dilettante with a particular bent for botany, used influence and an investment said to total £10,000 to secure a place in the expedition." Michael Alexander, *Omai 'Noble Savage'* (London, 1977), 39.

12 "...'primitive' is a category of thought and a figure of speech and writing. Generally speaking, anthropology appears to have been a field of knowledge whose discourse requires that its object—other societies, some of them belonging to the past, but most of them existing contemporaneously in the present—be removed from its subject not only in space but in time....Everything we ever had to say on the topic, from primitive mentality to mythical consciousness, to pre-rational, preliterate thought, feeds on temporal distancing." Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971-1991* (Philadelphia, 1991), 198.

Jacques Rousseau. This *philosophe* used a concept of the "noble savage" to explore the nature of civilization. Later popular conceptions of the "noble savage" fed upon literal interpretations of his writings and were further stimulated by published accounts of the voyages into the Pacific. But Rousseau used the notion of the "noble savage" as a scientist might use a control element in an experimental procedure. Trying to explain the origin of human inequality, he depicted, as point of comparison and departure, a "blank slate" of man in a natural state. It was this hypothetical "blank slate" that Rousseau personified with the term "noble savage." In his own words:

> [I]t is no light undertaking to separate what is original from what is artificial in the present nature of man, and to know correctly a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have precise notions in order to judge our present state correctly.[13]

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of the "noble savage" preceded Rousseau's writings. As O. H. K. Spate sarcastically remarks in *Paradise Lost and Found*: "The Noble Savage was not the brain-child of Jean Jacques Rousseau; he had enough as it were legitimate bastards without having this fictitious one fathered on him."[14] However, Rousseau's writings brought new popularity to the concept at the very time of contact between English and French crews and Polynesians. As John Dunmore writes in his introduction to the journal of Lapérouse: "Rousseau expressed the concept [of the "noble savage"] in a form that caught the imagination of the French just when philosophers and the general public were becoming preoccupied with the place of man in society and the validity and the structure of existing political systems."[15] For a European reading public, Rousseau's philosophical fiction of an original natural man would be combined with popular conceptions of the "noble savage," long ingrained religious beliefs in a lost earthly paradise, and classical allusions to a Greek island of Cythera, place of Venus' birth. Together with these traditions, Rousseau's writings worked to affirm an association of nature and primitive man with innocence, and of civilization with decadence, suggesting that with the development of civilization man lost his natural virtue. But even this idea of the decay of morals with the progress of time, and the association of rediscovered classical virtues with new worlds opened by navigation, was not a new development in philosophical thought. As pointed out by the French historian François Hartog, a 16th-century work by Machiavelli already employed metaphors of New World navigation for historical discovery, identifying the "new" with the "ancient."

> Après 1513, Nicolas Machiavel, désormais tenu a l'écart de la politique active, s'engage dans un voyage de redécouverte de la république romaine. Critiquant l'éducation donnée par l'église, les *Discours sur la premiere decade*

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13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses,* ed. Roger D. Masters (New York, 1964), 93.
14 O. H. K. Spate, *Paradise Found and Lost* (Minneapolis, 1988), 245.
15 Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse, *The Journal of Jean-Francois de Galaup de La Pérouse 1785-1788*, ed. John Dunmore (London, 1994), 200.

> *de Tite-Live*, incontestablement, "repolitisent" les anciens et invitent à les imiter....Le livre s'ouvre sur un étonnement. Les Anciens sont plus admirés qu'imités. Certes quand il s'agit de droit ou de medicine, on fait directement appel à eux, mais quand on s'interroge sur la maniere de fonder, ou mieux, de maintenir un Etat, le plus souvent, on les ignore....Machiavel invite-t-il à découvrir une "route nouvelle," à l'instar de ce que les navigateurs vers le Nouveau Monde ont eu l'audace d'oser. Car, dans ce qui est en train de devenir l'Ancien Monde, le monde des Anciens peut, à sa façon, être tenu aussi pour un "Nouveau" monde.[16]

Well before Rousseau then, not only was looking to the past well established as a means of improving the present, but the new routes to new worlds opened by navigators were already metaphorically cast as new routes to understanding an ancient European past. For philosophically-minded elites, the matter at stake in the 18th-century exploration of distant Polynesia was nothing less important than the investigation of history itself. They were ready to interpret voyages of exploration as voyages of European self-discovery—alternatives to other forms of historical excavation. John Douglas, canon at Windsor and editor of Captain Cook's journals, wrote in his introduction:

> The expense of his [Cook's] three voyages did not perhaps, far exceed that digging out the buried contents of Herculaneum. And, we may add, that the novelties of the Society or Sandwich islands, seem better calculated to engage the attention of the studious in our times, than the antiquities, which exhibit proofs of Roman Magnificence.[17]

Elite crew members who recorded observations of native populations brought their own preconceptions of their relation to these peoples to the encounter and wrote for readers who already held firmly-rooted expectations of what the "Other," described in their observations, was *supposed* to be like. The historians Marshall and Williams write: "For no other region do we have such detailed and thoughtful accounts of the indig-

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16 Francois Hartog, *Ancien, Modernes, Sauvages* (Paris, 2005), 171. My translation:
> After 1513, Nicolas Machiavelli, though removed from active politics, embarked on a voyage of re-discovery of the Roman republic. Criticizing the education given by the church, the *Discours sur la premiere decade de Tite-Live* incontestably "re-politicizes" the ancients and invites their imitation....The book opens with a profession of astonishment. The ancients are more admired than imitated. Of course, when considering law or medicine one makes direct appeal to them, but when one questions the manner of founding or, better yet, of maintaining a state, most often one ignores them....Machiavelli issues an invitation to the discovery of a "new route," in imitation of the daring navigators towards the New World. For, in what is on its way to becoming the Old World, the world of the ancients can, in its own fashion, also be taken for a "New" world.

17 Alan Moorhead, *The Fatal Impact* (New York, 1966), 75; John Dunsmore, "Introduction," 76, in James Cook, *A voyage to The Pacific Ocean. Undertaken, by the command of His Majesty, for making discoveries in the northern hemisphere....Performed under the direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore....Vol. I. and II. written by Captain James Cook, F.R.S. Vol. III. by Captain James King....* 3 vols. (London, 1784), Vol. I. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. http://galenet.galegroup.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/servlet/ECCO.

enous inhabitants over a short period of time." But, they claim "there is a clear two-way link between the conclusions of the scholars at home on primitive peoples in general and the explorers' assessments of the specific peoples they encountered."[18]

Not all encounters between Europeans and native populations left presumptions formed in Europe intact; in fact, these preconceptions were immediately challenged by some of the observations recorded by South Sea explorers. After observing natives in Patagonia, Bougainville would remark in his journal entry: "They piss in a crouched position, would this be the most natural way of passing water? If so, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who is a very poor pisser in our own style, should have adopted that way. He is so prompt to refer us back to Savage Man."[19] And the French Captain Jean-François de Lapérouse, writing in his journal the day after one of his officers was killed by some Samoans, expressed exasperation with idealizations popularized by the *philosophes* that were inadequate as a guide to survival among the 'savages':

> I am a thousand times more angry with the philosophers who so exalt the savages than with the savages themselves. This unfortunate Lamanon, whom they massacred, said to me on the eve of his death, that these men were more worthy than ourselves. A rigid observer of the orders given in my instructions, I have always treated them with the greatest consideration, but I assure you that if I were to make a new voyage of this kind, I would demand different orders. A navigator, on leaving Europe, ought to consider the savages as enemies....[20]

That a ship's log would record an officer as having held those who were soon to kill him in such high esteem suggests how deeply committed some elite voyagers were to the preconception of the "noble savage"—or at least how much they felt pressure to publicly affirm it. So intent were some of them upon doing so that they were unable to accurately interpret the reality of their interactions with indigenous populations—at least in the accounts they published in Europe. The original, unpublished journals of the early French explorers (Bougainville, Lapérouse, Entrecasteaux) reveal that many of their encounters with Polynesians left far from "noble" impressions. It is thus particularly interesting to note that the edited and published accounts of these journals omitted their critical remarks. Despite the explorers' disillusioning experiences, and their willingness to challenge preconceived ideas on the basis of these experiences, the perception of European moral inferiority in the face of "natural" savage virtue would often be reaffirmed in the later published report.[21] Shortly after Bougainville made his

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18 P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 259.

19 Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville 1767-1768*, ed. John Dunmore (London, 2002), 12.

20 Spate, *Paradise Found and Lost*, 263.

21 On the disparities between the logs of 18th-century Pacific explorers and later published accounts of their voyages that continued to affirm European preconceptions, see: Jane Elliott, "The Choosers or the Dispossessed? Aspects of the work of some French eighteenth-century Pacific explorers," in *The French and the Pacific World, 17th-19th Centuries: Exploration, Migrations, and*

angry remarks about the unrealistic images of savages popularized by philosophers, he recounted an incident that took place among the Patagonians in a manner that suggests he was still ready to employ "noble savage" imagery. While his crew was trading trinkets with some natives, one of the native children swallowed glass given to him by the Europeans, mistakenly believing it to be food. The French tried to save the child but the boy died and the natives quickly departed from the ship. In his journal entry for that day, Bougainville wrote:

> They flee from a place death has soiled, they flee from nefarious strangers whom they believe to have come only to destroy them...how they hurried to get away from us! They abandoned one of their canoes that needed repairing. *Satis est gentem effugisse nefandam* (Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, 653. "It is enough to have escaped from a race of evil men"). And yet God is my witness to our humane intentions towards these individuals who are part of our species. But I forgive their feelings in these circumstances. What a loss in such a small society is an adolescent who had survived all the hazards of childhood![22]

Not only does Bougainville acknowledge his crew's fault in this drama, and try to interpret the events from the native perspective, but he frames the whole episode as comparable to one in the *Aeneid*, with the Europeans—not the natives—cast as a "race of evil men." These events may have continued to weigh on his mind, for the following day he wrote in his journal:

> Frightful night, deplorable day, rain, squalls, violent WNW wind. What a sequence of bad weather. Oh ye banks of the Seine, glow of a fine dawn, gentle scent of flowers, charm of greenery, enamel of our grasslands, sparkling network of life-giving dew, bird songs, oh spectacle of smiling nature, when will you come to refresh our senses saddened by the awful aspect of this land against which its maker seems to be angry. One cannot live in this horrible climate which is equally shunned by quadrupeds, birds and fish and where only a handful of savages live, whose wretchedness has been increased by their dealings with us.[23]

Leaving the shores of Patagonia and at last setting out into the expanse of the Pacific, Bougainville's perception of the "noble savage" had already been both altered and re-affirmed through experience. The noble savage ideal of Rousseau was incompatible with the observed misery of the native inhabitants, but at the same time the responsibility of the Europeans for worsening their misery was glaringly apparent. By acknowledging that his crew was responsible for increasing the wretchedness of a small and fragile group of people, Bougainville reaffirmed the association of civilization with moral culpabil-

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Cultural Exchange, ed. Annick Foucrier (Burlington, 2005), 279-301.

22 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal*, 29.

23 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal*, 30.

ity. However, the full development of a specifically located "noble savage" of the South Pacific, a being melded of preconceived ideas and fresh experience, was yet to come with Bougainville's far-reaching description of the Polynesians of the island of Tahiti.

A New Cythera

In *Lost Paradise* Ian Cameron observes, "Bougainville spent only ten days in Tahiti. He didn't therefore have time to get to know the island or the islanders all that well. Nor did he write a great deal about them—no more than four-dozen pages in his diary. However, what he *did* write has been quoted, misquoted, paraphrased, summarized, interpreted and analyzed again and again."[24] Why would Bougainville, after having criticized Rousseau's romantic idealizations, go on to portray Tahiti as an earthly paradise? Why would someone so critical of Rousseau in Patagonia sound so Rousseauian in Tahiti? Tahiti was to be depicted as Paradise Found, not only by Bougainville and his officers, but also by Cook and later explorers. The Europeans who first described the natural environment and people of the island combined biblical notions of a lost paradise with Rousseauist discourse. It was this combination of ideas that would be transmitted back to Europe, creating popular visions of the South Pacific that prevailed for the duration of the 18th century. The "noble savages" that the European explorers had been expected to find were, indeed, to be found, they declared to their patrons and public, on the islands of the South Pacific.

In *Nature, Culture and History: The "Knowing" of Oceania,*[25] K. R. Howe reaffirms the assertion of Simon Schama, that "landscapes are culture before they are nature."[26] Unlike the desolate and windswept Tierra del Fuego, the island of Tahiti was lush and tropical. Europeans who happened to arrive during a season of plenty imagined it as a place whose inhabitants had merely to pluck their food from the trees. It is apparent from reading Bougainville's journal that the physical landscape of Tahiti played a large role in shaping his overall impression; but it is also clear that he was eager to interpret that landscape in terms predetermined by his own culture. Recording his first day on the island, Bougainville would write:

> These people breathe only rest and sensual pleasure. Venus is the Goddess they worship. The mildness of the climate, the beauty of the scenery, the fertility of the soil everywhere watered by rivers and cascades, the pure air unspoiled by even those legions of insects that are the curse of hot countries, everything inspires sensual pleasure.[27]

The English scientist Joseph Banks, who accompanied Cook to Tahiti, would later

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24 Cameron, *Lost Paradise*, 149.

25 K. R. Howe, *Nature, Culture and History: The "Knowing" of Oceania* (Honolulu, 2000), 7.

26 "Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination....[O]nce a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery." Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, 1996), 61.

27 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal*, 63.

make a similar observation: "We walked four or five miles under groves of Cocoa nut and bread fruit Trees loaded with a profusion of fruit and giving the most grateful shade I have ever experienced...."[28] The landscape of Tahiti fit well with pre-conceived European notions of Paradise.[29]

Like the mythical island of Cythera, with which it was often compared, Tahiti lent itself to representation as a clearly-bounded sacred space, separated from the rest of the world. Even from a secular viewpoint, K. R. Howe argues:

> Settings for political utopias were often islands—probably because they were small and offered the ready possibility of visibility and control, as opposed to the difficulties of containment and protection in the continental locations. Islands are surrounded by sea, which could have physical and moral cleansing and redemptive characteristics, and of course a journey was always required to get to an island thus connoting the elements of pilgrimage and adventure.[30]

We can assume that Bougainville's and later European explorers' positive evaluations of the physical landscape of Tahiti were encouraged by European cultural constructs of what Paradise *ought* to look like. Furthermore, unlike the naked or fur-clothed Patagonians, the Tahitians were clothed in toga-like bark cloth, wore headdresses reminiscent of Hellenistic helmets, and had a rigidly defined social structure. All these factors would have triggered strong associations with classical antiquity among the Europeans. While Tahiti's natural landscape could be interpreted with reference to the Eden of European religious tradition, the islanders themselves could be interpreted with reference to classical history. The unknown was thus brought into relationship with the two major traditions of European literary culture: biblical and classical. It remains to be determined, however, in what ways ensuing interactions between the islanders and the European visitors would confirm or alter these first perceptions.

Some Tahitian social customs fit European conceptions of "noble savagery" in ways that those of other societies encountered in the Pacific did not. One of the most enduring legacies of the Tahitian encounter was the European amazement at Tahitian sexual customs. All the literate members of Bougainville's crew wrote with enthusiasm about Tahitian women's sexual offers. One of Bougainville's officers, Fesche, wrote in his journal: "The corruption of our morals has made us discover evil in an act where these people rightly find nothing but good."[31] Similarly, the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, a passenger on Bougainville's ship, described one of his experiences: "The Indians surrounded me and each one was eager to share with his eyes in the pleasure I was about to enjoy. The young girl was very pretty but European preconceptions require more mystery." The Prince went on to lament: "Happy nation that does not yet know the odious

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28 Howe, *Nature, Culture and History,* 7.

29 "The land, in short, was like Paradise before the Fall of Man." Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (Oxford, 1960), 25.

30 Howe, *Nature, Culture and History,* 10.

31 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal,* 257.

names of shame and scandal. If wise people carry out these ceremonies in association with the planting of seeds, why should the reproduction of the finest species of things ever created not also be a public festival?"[32] What these two accounts have in common is a critical stance, not towards native custom, as might have been expected, but towards European restraints in contrast to what were presented as Tahitian liberties.

The belief that uninhibited gratification of sexual desire is beneficial is very Rousseauian. In his discourses, Rousseau writes on the subject of love: "Now it is easy to see that the moral element of love is an artificial sentiment born of the usage of society....Limited solely to that which is physical in love, and fortunate enough to be ignorant of those preferences that irritate its sentiment and augment its difficulties, men must feel the ardors of their temperament less frequently and less vividly, and consequently have fewer and less cruel disputes among themselves."[33] Uninhibited sexuality was seen, from Rousseau's standpoint, not as licentious but as natural and thus superior to sexuality restrained by moral prohibitions.

Upon Bougainville's return to France, the accounts of several members of his crew were published in embellished form. Tahiti was recast as a new Cythera and its people portrayed as beautiful savages who, metaphorically, worshiped Venus. Large sections of Bougainville's own account were rewritten to appeal to a popular audience, to suit the sensibilities of the time and also, no doubt, to avoid scandal. References to sexual relations between high status members of the crew and Tahitian women were removed. As Ian Cameron describes Bougainville's published account: "the book was an instant best-seller, ...but it was a popular rather than scientific work."[34] Cameron goes on to state: "Many ordinary people who had shown little interest in Rousseau's *Discourses* showed very considerable interest in the activities of Bougainville's seamen....[I]t was as though legend had become suddenly transmogrified to reality."[35] Popular interest in Tahiti and its people was further increased by the arrival in Paris of a Tahitian, Ahu-Toru, who returned with Bougainville, starting a fashion of tattoos among the elite. This popular interest gave rise to new markets for such commodities as dioramic South Pacific wallpaper,[36] romantic poetry extolling Tahiti and, of course, Tahitian-themed pornography.[37]

But had anything new begun to emerge from European encounters with the "Other" in the South Pacific? Even as scientific gentlemen and educated officers were to find new opportunities for fame and profit in writing that took the expectations and tastes of a literate European reading public into account, the lower social body of sailors and marines was to discover opportunities of a very different nature in their encounters with Polynesians.

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32 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal*, 283.
33 Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 135.
34 Cameron, *Lost Paradise*, 155.
35 Cameron, *Lost Paradise*, 156.
36 "Les Peuples de L'Océan Pacifique" 1805 (wallpaper), reproduced in Alexander Laing, *Seafaring America* (New York, 1974), 84-85.
37 "Amusemens des Otahitiens et des Anglais," engraving, reproduced in Bernard Smith, *European Vision*, 30.

"Free Men have their Buttocks Painted": Emergence of the South Sea Sailor

The sailors and marines whose labors produced the voyages of discovery have long been ignored by historians; the journals of the officers, scientists, and gentlemen have dominated the study of the contact period. Within the framing purpose of reconstructing the sailors' cross-cultural exchanges, however, it is possible to discern aspects of their encounters with natives, even within the writings of the elite. One of the most telling indicators of exchange and acculturation with which we can begin this enquiry is the often-referenced adoption of tattooing.

Concerning the practice of Polynesian tattooing among European sailors, historian Douglas Oliver remarks: "usually the perforations healed in a month or so, but the infection sometimes developed, culminating occasionally in death."[38] Why did seamen on both Bougainville's and Cook's ships, in Tahiti for but a few days, submit to such a painful and risky procedure? Can this be simply explained as the bravado of young sailors demonstrating their courage and collecting an enduring souvenir of their adventures in the process? As Nicholas Thomas writes in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art, and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*: "While, from the late eighteenth century onwards, references to tattooing...are increasingly common, their near absence before 1769 is striking."[39] Caroline Alexander's description of the soon-to-be mutineer crew of the Bounty offers a hint of one possible motive for tattooing. In her account of the Bounty mutiny, she notes, "the Bounty's tastes [in tattoos] were varied, some sticking conservatively to English iconography.... But several of the men had undergone traditional Tahitian tattooing over large parts of their body, particularly on their buttocks. In Tahitian tradition, a man was not eligible to marry unless he had undergone the lengthy and painful operation of having his entire backside blacked over."

Interestingly enough, Bligh's description of the Bounty mutineers makes it clear that all but one was heavily tattooed.[40] Tattooing may be one indicator of aspirations for integration into island society, at least to the extent of establishing eligibility for partnerships with women, yielding access not only to sex and food,[41] but also to a wider web of relationships with their male kin. Bougainville's observations concerning the Tahitian tattooing ritual are also suggestive. Bougainville writes, "as for indications of social differences, I believe (and this is not a joke) that the first one, the one that distinguishes free men from slaves, is that the free men have their buttocks painted."[42] Tattooing may thus have conveyed a multiplicity of status claims, signaling—to a Polynesian audience—eligibility for social inclusion.

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38 Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, 160.

39 Nicholas Thomas, "Introduction," in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art, and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, ed. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas (Durham, 2005), 13.

40 Alexander, *The Bounty*, 117.

41 The common seaman's interest in food upon making landfall after months of sea rations is not to be underestimated. "There's a pattern to the indiscipline on voyages of Pacific exploration...most often, the 'murmuring' or 'mutinous' behavior centered on food." Alan Frost, "I'll Make You Eat Grass Like Cows: Food and the *Bounty* Mutiny," in *Pacific Journeys: Essays in Honour of John Dunmore*, ed. Glynnis M. Cropp, et al. (Wellington, 2005), 37.

42 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal*, 64.

No doubt some tattooed sailors were simply purchasing a permanent souvenir, such as the *Bounty* sailor, Thomas Ellison, who had the date of his arrival in Tahiti tattooed on his arm. However, ethnographic evidence tells us that tattooing within Tahitian ritual had more than a simple decorative function. This fact may have eluded "scientific gentlemen" on European voyages of exploration, such as Joseph Banks. After a lengthy description of Tahitian tattooing practices, Banks comments:

> It is done between the ages of 14 and 18 and so essential is it that I have never seen one single person of years of maturity without it. What can be sufficient inducement to suffer so much pain is difficult to say; not one Indian (tho I have asked hundreds) would ever give me the least reason for it; possibly superstition may have something to do with it, nothing else in my opinion could be sufficient cause for so apparently absurd a custom.[43]

It may be, however, that where Banks perceived only "absurd custom," sailors who underwent tattooing had been quick to recognize and take advantage of a rare ritual opportunity for cultural absorption and social advancement.

Tattooing in Tahiti, as in many other regions of Polynesia, was both a sign of status and a rite a passage. Members of the high status sect of the Tahitian Arioi, for instance, were distinguished by the blackening of one leg. The process of tattooing itself was a ritual act, performed at shrine sites where the divine powers of the deities were called upon.[44] Tahitian *willingness* to ritually tattoo European sailors suggests minimally a certain desire for, or at least acceptance of, their ritual social integration. And the sailors' eagerness to be tattooed can be read as a sign of a corresponding willingness to be integrated.

Molyneux, the *Endeavor's* master, and former master's mate on the *Dolphin,* remarked of one of two deserters, "he has no other reason than the pleasure of living in a fine country without controul they both had large Promises from some Principal men & was to have Lands & servants assighn'd them [*sic*]."[45] This brief remark, as well as Cook's and Bligh's tactics for pressuring Tahitian chiefs to return runaway sailors, suggests that Tahitians did on occasion encourage the desertion of European sailors. Indeed, the desire to incorporate them could be so strong that some Polynesians seem to have resorted to kidnapping. On his first voyage to Tahiti, Cook recorded one such attempted kidnapping:

> Friday 23rd. This Morning Manuel Ferrara Seaman a Portuguese was missing and I had some reason to think he was gone with an intent to stay here. It was not long before I was informed that he was at Apparra with Tootaha, the man who gave us this information was one of Tootahas Servants, he was offered a hatchet if he would go to Apparra and bring him to us. This was no doubt the very thing he came for, for he immediately set out and returned

43 Joseph Banks, *The Endeavor Journal of Joseph Banks,* ed. J. C. Beaglehole (Sydney, 1962), 336.
44 Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society,* 433.
45 Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog,* 94.

> with the man in the evening; the man in his own defense said, that as he was going to the boat in order to go onboard last night, he was taken away by force by 3 men, put in a canoe and carried to Apparra, upon enquiry I found it to be so and that Tootaha would have kept him had he not been persuaded to the contrary or perhaps he thought the axe of more value than the man.[46]

In many contacts between Tahitians and Europeans, friendship alliances were made official by declaring the relationship under the Tahitian title of *taio*, which solidified friendship in a ritual context. This formalized friendship of name exchange solidified the bonds of a military and economic as well as sexual partnership (as it normally gave men access to each others' wives). Many Tahitian women declared *taio* with European sailors as a way of formalizing trade relationships for European goods.[47] Douglas Oliver cautions, however, that "in attempting to reconstruct the *taio* institution, we face the problem of deciding what aspects of it were pre-European."[48] Exactly what the pre-contact meaning of *taio* was remains unknown as all descriptions of *taio* were recorded by European sources.

In order to understand the relationships forming between the Polynesians and the sailors, one must consider them as unprecedented and developing forms of social relationship; in other words, as actions undertaken by both sides in the hope of gain, though without the certainty of benefit assured through experience. Polynesians had much to gain from the absorption of Europeans into their tribal units. Not only did European sailors have valuable knowledge about European technology, including guns, they also could act as intermediaries in future European-Polynesian exchanges, bring prestige to their hosts, and may have been thought to contribute valued spiritual power or *mana* to the tribal collective.[49] Indeed, though the term beachcomber gained currency in the Pacific only in the 19th century, the phenomenon of the transculturated sailor who attached himself to native society, at least for a time, is as old as the first European voyages.[50] The lower class sailors and marines on European voyages had many attributes which could endow them with high social value and status in Polynesian society. Aspirations to realize this status would have motivated sailors to seek fuller cultural integration.

Cultural adoption, however, was a difficult goal to achieve; attempts often resulted in marginal men who were fully incorporated into neither culture. In *Indians and English: Facing off in the New World*, Karen Ordahl Kupperman describes individuals who crossed the social and cultural boundaries between English colonists and Native American tribes. Kupperman's examples range from accidental incorporations to official

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46 James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole (Cambridge, 1968), 104.

47 Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 66.

48 Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, 188.

49 Joanna White describes, for instance, the narrative of the 19th-century European resident of Fiji, who by his own account was employed by the local chief in the repair of muskets. Joanna White, "Marks of Transgression: The Tattooing of Europeans in the Pacific Islands," in *Tattoo*, ed. Nicholas Thomas, et al, 79.

50 H. E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History*, (Melbourne, 1968), 136.

handovers of English youths to be raised by Native Americans. She notes, however, that "Those boys who grew up in both cultures were viewed with the same kind of mistrust and scorn, ...they had steadfast loyalty to neither side and yet were absolutely essential."[51] A similar view was held concerning the European sailors absorbed into Polynesian society. The evidence does not suggest that Europeans could ever enter completely into Polynesian cultural worlds, their status as outsiders never being fully removed. A sailor with distinctive tattoos from more than one Polynesian island would have had no single island identity, but through the permanent markings on his body he was marked as a member of a wider Polynesian world.[52] Tattooed seamen were distinguishing themselves to the islanders and other seamen as a distinct group, establishing their identity as belonging to the Polynesian world as well as to that of the European ship.[53]

It is important to remember that although there were many voyages of exploration into the Pacific, ships were often crewed by seamen with previous experience in the region. For instance, two seamen who sailed with Cook to Tahiti had already traveled there on the voyage of the *Dolphin* with Captain Samuel Wallis. The repeated assignment of the same men on different voyages to the South Pacific testifies not only to their usefulness as culture brokers, but also to their willingness to participate in repeated high risk voyages to the region. As Thomas points out, precisely because of the presence of sailors who had formerly traveled to Tahiti, Cook's "visit was distinguished by a linguistic basis for cross-cultural observation and exchange that had never previously existed in Pacific-European interaction."[54] Sailors returned to a setting that was already familiar, where they had acquired lovers and may have had children. As Anne Salmond writes: the seamen "had come under Polynesian influence—not surprisingly, since some of them had spent more time in the Pacific than anywhere else in recent years, forming close relationships with Polynesian friends and lovers on shore as well as shipmates at sea."[55] When one considers the high mortality of sailors in the 17th and 18th centuries,[56] a ten-year period of sailing in the South Pacific represents a lengthy period of acculturation in a seaman's life.[57] Even in the European world to which some eventually returned,

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51 Kupperman, *Indians and English*, 209.

52 As historian Nicholas Thomas points out: "their subjective investments were ultimately not motivated by the expression of some novel form of cross-cultural subjectivity—that is, they were not 'going native'—but rather by an enhancement of self and biography that took the form of the bodily inscription of a proof of their travels and voyages, it is no surprise that their interest in Pacific motifs was correspondingly erratic." Thomas, "Introduction," 21.

53 A comparison might be drawn here with the marking of other boundary crossers. Kupperman has noted that the American Indians Squanto and Hobbomock adopted the names of these gods upon taking up association with the English. The names indicated "that they were entering a liminal state with all the power and danger that entailed." Kupperman, *Indians and English*, 185.

54 Thomas, "Introduction," 18.

55 Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 8.

56 Peter Earle reports: "[O]ne can summarize very roughly by saying that, out of every thousand English sailors who went to sea, about five would die in an accident each year, another ten would die in shipwrecks and some forty-five would die of disease." Furthermore, the danger of a voyage increased greatly depending on its length. For instance, "one in ten of those who sailed on East Indiamen died or were killed or drowned." Peter Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seaman, 1650-1775* (London, 1998), 130.

57 J. C. Beaglehole writes in his introduction to the *Endeavour* journal of James Cook: "They were a

years-long voyages to the South Pacific established seamen's social identities, not only as experienced sailors who had participated in a well-publicized venture, but specifically as *seamen of the South Pacific.*

The creation of this new social body can be interpreted as a direct result of transculturation's role in creating new forms of human community. In her article on Polynesian tattooing of Europeans, Joanna White observes that many sailors became tattooed because of social pressures that came to be felt within the Polynesian context. She writes that "beachcombers referred to the 'disgrace' and shame' associated with not being tattooed." White concludes: "the significance of the practice among indigenous peoples had been transmitted, at least in part, to the resident visitors. The transformation of beachcombers' bodies was therefore a product not only of their new social relationships, but [also of] their sense of themselves within a new cultural setting."[58]

There must certainly have been a number of "beachcombers" who never did return to Europe and whose stories have been lost. A few did return, however, to gratify a European appetite for tales of adventures in acculturation. The story of Joseph Kabris (1779-1822) offers a case in point. In 1795, after the whaling ship on which he was traveling was shipwrecked, Kabris and an English sailor swam ashore in the Marquesas. After parting ways with his English companion, Kabris was sentenced to death by the local chief, only to be saved from execution by the chief's daughter, in an episode reminiscent of the Jamestown colonist John Smith.[59] Kabris married and had children with this woman, becoming the chief's son-in-law.

Like sailors who were tattooed in Tahiti, Kabris was tattooed in the course of his ritual incorporation into the Marquesan tribe. "As son-in-law he received his first tattoo, a blackening of the skin around his left eye, a design called *mata epo* or 'shitty eye'....The next markings he received were suns on the upper and lower eyelids of the right eye, 'that the people call *mehama* and give me the title of judge'."[60] According to Kabris' narrative he was only permitted to marry once his tattoos were completed.

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young crew, generally speaking; few of them had passed their thirtieth year." Cook, *The Journal of the Endeavour,* cxxviii.

58 White, *Marks of Transgression*, 84. Pressure to adopt this Polynesian cultural norm could be felt not only by sailors, but also by other Europeans who spent prolonged periods of time living among the islanders. White describes the missionary George Vason, who came to Tongatapu in 1797, but only became tattooed after having lived on the island for a period of time. Vason explained his tattooing "as submission to sustained pressure from the young men with whom he associated, who mocked him for lacking the body markings that all Tongan men were not only expected to bear to demonstrate their manhood but took great pride in displaying" (84).

59 Kupperman has suggested that the death sentence of John Smith, and his supposed pardon by Pocahontas, was a ritual purification Smith had to undergo to be accepted as an ally of the tribe, and that it opened trade relations between the Native Americans and the Jamestown colonists. Kupperman, *Indians and English,* 174. Kabris' tale is also similar to that of John Rutherford, who jumped ship to marry a chief's daughter and live among the Maori of New Zealand. "[H]is face was tattooed in Maori 'moko' fashion, but the rest of his body was decorated in the Tahitian style, while the designs on his chest had probably been applied on Rotuma (in the fiji islands)." Stephane Oettermann, "On Display: Tattoed Entertainers in America and Germany," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History,* ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton, 2000), 199.

60 Yves Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," in *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism in the Pacific*, ed. Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn (New York, 2002), 39.

Later, after having wounded an enemy chief in battle, Kabris was once again tattooed, this time on his chest which, according to his narrative, made him "chief of the guard and viceroy of the tribe." It is significant that in his story Joseph Kabris was integrated into the Marquesan tribe through marriage and that the high status of son-in-law was confirmed by his tattooing.

Having been adopted into the Marquesan tribe, however, Kabris had crossed a divide that would separate him from Europeans. When a Russian ship arrived in the Marquesas in 1804, "a member of the crew remarked that the Frenchman had a better knowledge of the island than his English cohabitant. The evening before the ship's departure, Kabris was invited on board for dinner alone. Drunk on the liquor served to him by the captain, he fell asleep, and later awoke to find that the ship had set sail, and was now in the middle of the ocean."[61] Kabris, through his accidental transformation, had become an exploitable culture broker. However, as a boundary crosser, he was carefully controlled, and his kidnapping was considered acceptable by the Russian captain, who noted in his log that Kabris had "both morally and physically transformed into a savage."[62]

As Yves Le Fur notes, "the life of Kabris was not unique. One can find a number of examples of Europeans who lived—willingly or unwillingly—among different Oceanic peoples during the early contact period."[63] Another Englishman, who exhibited his tattoos in Europe in the 1830s, had tattoos in Maori and Tahitian, as well as Fijian styles.[64] As a social group, European sailors traveled much more widely in Oceania than their Polynesian contacts, as testified by their combining tattoos from different locations. This eclecticism should not be interpreted as counter evidence to the argument that tattooing among European sailors is to be read as evidence of enculturation. In fact, the Polynesians themselves may have adapted their practices to the new relations of exchange. Nicholas Thomas notes, for instance, that Tahitians may have been more willing than other islanders, such as Samoans, to allow strangers to be tattooed. But once the precedent of tattooing Europeans had been established in Tahiti, Samoans began tattooing European sailors as well.[65]

Cultural integration by way of tattooing was not restricted to sailors, as demonstrated by the case of Barnet Burns, a flax trader who came to New Zealand in 1830, lived under the protection of a Maori chief, and married his daughter. Le Fur writes that Burns was "captured by a rival group who killed members of his wife's tribe. [Burns] saved his own life by agreeing to fight for his captors, and be tattooed. He then escaped before the tattoos were finished and found his way back to his family....His tattoos were finished, giving him mana, and he became according to his narrative, the chief of a tribe of 600 people."[66]

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61 Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," 39.
62 White, *Marks of Transgression,* 85.
63 Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," 42.
64 Oettermann, "On Display," 199.
65 "Although Samoan *tufuga ta tatau* certainly tattooed Europeans during the 19th century, once a demand for tattoos on the part of visiting mariners was established, it is not at all evident that seamen arriving in Samoa would have encountered tattoo as something accessible to them." Thomas, "Introduction," 21.
66 Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," 43.

Both Burns and Kabris ended their days exhibiting their tattooed bodies as curiosities in Europe; neither resumed their former European lives, and both died in futile attempts to regain their homes in Polynesia.[67] Kabris even received money from Louis XVIII to aid in his return to the Marquesas.[68] While Yves Le Fur dismisses these men as "merely strange refractions in the mirror of the colonial gaze,"[69] it is more helpful to look for similarities between men like Joseph Kabris, Burnet Burns, and the mutineers from the *Bounty*. These individuals crossed cultural boundaries because it was in the interests of *both sides* of the encounter. The European sailors who crossed and re-crossed the social and cultural boundaries between the European and Polynesian worlds were acting on their own assessment of opportunities, constraints, and social pressures.

Power and Labor: Punishment, Discipline, and Trade

Sailors in the 18th and 19th centuries usually went to sea at a very young age. Without homes or families, they spent more time at sea than on land. Any shore leave provided a chance for desertion, a tempting contrast to the harsh rigors and discipline of shipboard life. Maritime historian Peter Earle writes: "an aggrieved or unhappy sailor might go to court, but he was far more likely to desert his ship, and after sampling the joys of the shore, try his luck in another one."[70] Tahiti, with its idyllic landscape and friendly people, was an attractive haven, as the fateful mutiny on the *Bounty* would attest. Bougainville spent only ten days on Tahiti, so it was unlikely that his crew had time to form alliances with Polynesians who could hide them if they tried to desert. The longer sojourns of Captain Cook, as well as the later voyage of Captain Bligh, however, had incidents of desertion. It is interesting to note the actions taken by the captains in command during these events. Both captains threatened the Tahitian chief in order to secure the return of their men, a tactic which proved successful.[71]

A lost seaman meant a shortage of labor for the return voyage, a loss that could not be replaced easily in remote regions of the Pacific. Even in Europe there was competition for the labor of seamen. As naval historian N. A. M. Rodger writes: "this shortage of men was a great encouragement to the crimps, as dealers in a scarce and valuable commodity. They [crimps] made it their business to entice seamen from their ships and

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67 Le Fur writes: "when Kabris died an amateur collector of curiosities attempted to obtain his skin in order to stuff and mount it for display. His corpse was buried between two old men to protect it from such attention." Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," 40. In tattooing himself, Kabris had become a curiosity; no longer a European worthy of Christian burial, because no longer a civilized Christian, he could be treated as a primitive man.

68 Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France, 40.

69 Le Fur, "The Display of Polynesian "Cannibals" in France," 44.

70 Earle, *Sailors*, 167.

71 Alexander, *The Bounty,* 115. "Bligh responded to the news with an icy resolve that he had hitherto not displayed. To his Tahitian friends, he stated in very clear, straightforward and polite language that he expected the men returned. Laughing nervously, they asked Bligh if he would hold them hostage on board his ship, as Cook had done. This was an unexpected and revealing question. In 1769, during his first visit to Tahiti, Cook had lost two marines to desertion and had retaliated by holding the chiefs hostage, his rationale being that his men could not survive on the island without the complicity of the islanders."

sell them to the highest bidder."[72] From this perspective, the Polynesian demand for European sailors can be considered to be a demand for physically fit and skilled laborers. It is tempting to consider shore leave and trade regulations, as well as the pressure applied to Polynesian chiefs for the return of sailors, as evidence of a competition over manpower between authorities on both sides.

In recording an incident of insubordination early in his voyage, Captain Bligh lamented in his journal that instead of confining the culprit until returning to Europe for a court-martial, he "could not bear the loss of an able working and healthy man."[73] Seamen in remote regions of the South Pacific were indispensable and irreplaceable on board ship, even as they became desirable to the Polynesians as cultural advisers and workers. Ship journals describe many instances in which captains and officers attempted to control the degree and type of social interaction between Polynesians and sailors, even though in their competition with the Polynesian elite they did not always achieve their goal.

The most obvious method for controlling interaction between sailors and Polynesians was control of trade. The voyages of exploration presented the opportunity for trade in "curiosities" in the form of cultural artifacts. Like the famous shrunken head trade of the Polynesian character Queequeg in Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*, many sailors in the South Pacific added to their salary through the sale of exotic artifacts gathered in the South Seas. For early explorers in the South Pacific islands, however, these private dealings meant an uncontrolled exchange market. Nicholas Thomas theorizes that sailors "sought to attach an aspect of scientific travel to themselves, to dignify their biographies, and certainly also to enrich themselves through the sale of South Seas curiosities, for which there was a ready market back in London."[74] Captains preferred to control terms of exchange for the sole benefit of the expedition, a difficult task when the frenzied sale of exotic artifacts to the sailors often resulted in a rapid inflation of the terms of trade. Partly in response to this problem, captains sought to establish strict controls on trade. As Caroline Alexander writes concerning the *Bounty*'s stay in Tahiti, "The establishment of a fixed market as opposed to a free-for-all run by the sailors' whim was of immediate advantage to [Bligh's] own ship as well as to future British vessels. As Cook had done—and based closely on Cook's own rules—Bligh drafted a set of injunctions intended to govern his men's conduct among the Tahitians."[75] The sixth injunction, the only one to which complaints by the crew were logged, was directly related to the matter of free trade with the native population:

> A proper person or persons will be appointed to regulate trade, and barter with the natives; and no officer or seaman, or other person belonging to the ship, is to trade for any kind of provisions or curiosities; but if such officer or seaman wishes to purchase any particular thing, he is to apply to the provider

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72 N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), 183.
73 Alexander, *The Bounty*, 97.
74 Thomas, "Introduction," 19.
75 Alexander, *The Bounty*, 108.

> to do it for him. By this means a regular market will be carried on, and all disputes which otherwise may happen with the natives will be avoided. All boats are to have every thing handed out to them at sun-set.[76]

Control over sailors was exercised through physical punishment and, unlike the spectacles of punishment carried out at sea before an audience of fellow seamen, the punishment of seamen in Tahiti took a noteworthy turn. The intended audience became the Polynesians themselves, and the ritual was reciprocated by the Tahitian chiefs. Bougainville offers one of the most striking examples of this reciprocal performance in his journal: "The occasion was useful. I saw two Frenchmen chasing Indians, with a stick in their hand. I tore the stick away from them and gave them a few blows: great acclamation on the part of the people whose chiefs ran up to save them from the effects of my resentment. They also drove away with blows of their sticks the crowd that was hindering us and was robbing us although we were sick of it."[77] The Tahitian chiefs' emulation of Bougainville's method of discipline can be read as a signal to the Europeans of their own authority and a sign that further interaction, and consequently all benefits of trade and military alliance, should be addressed solely to them.

In this ritual dialogue, Bougainville was, perhaps, less determined to right a wrong committed against the native population than to demonstrate to the Tahitians his right to control his men's interactions with the natives. In another incident, Bougainville's men were accused of bayoneting some natives. The ship surgeon aboard the *Etoile*, Francois Vivez, writes in his journal: "Mr. de Bougainville had wanted to draw lots among the criminals to have one shot but as the sun had set and the preliminaries would have taken too much time, they were sent on board."[78] Perhaps a better explanation for Bougainville's lack of disciplinary action would be that in his present circumstances he was unwilling to execute one of his crew, their labor being irreplaceable, and the danger of creating unrest among the rest of the crew being too great. The following morning, before the punishments were carried out, the Tahitians appealed to the French to stop the punishment, upon which Bougainville agreed to pardon the seamen. Vivez notes dryly, however, that "if I may be allowed to express an opinion [Bougainville] should not have done."[79] Who is the audience in this event? Both sides are, in fact, participating in what can be read as a ritualized affirmation of the rules of exchange and relative status of the multiple social bodies participating in the encounter. At the request of the Tahitians, the French seamen go unpunished; the Tahitians thus demonstrate their hospitality, kindness, and willingness to ally with the Europeans, while Bougainville demonstrates his power over his men. Bougainville shows that he is no less humane to his crew than the Polynesians are, while at the same time giving attention to the demands of the islanders. Bougainville must have been aware of the dangers involved were he to give proof to his own crew that the killers

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76 Alexander, *The Bounty,* 109.
77 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal,* 69.
78 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal,* 235.
79 Bougainville, *The Pacific Journal,* 235.

might have better chances of survival among the Polynesians. It is important to note that while in Tahiti these sailors were threatened with punishment by death, after departure punishment for their crimes is no longer mentioned.

Many historians have had difficulty reconciling Captain Cook's violent punishment of Polynesians and of his own men during the course of his third voyage to the South Pacific with his milder (by comparative standards) punishment of natives and sailors on his first voyage. On his third voyage, after the escape of a Tahitian prisoner, "Cook had his own men turned before the mast and disrated, and the errant sentinel flogged over three successive days."[80] Anne Salmond has suggested that Cook may have taken on Polynesian values of power and honor. In her preface to *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, Salmond writes: "it would be easy but wrong to describe Cook's behavior during the last voyage as imperialist brutality, however. The impact of Polynesia had played its part in his transformation."[81] One might also offer the suggestion that Cook's increased violence toward his own men may have been the result of a transformation not only of himself, but also of his men. Perhaps, just as the Polynesians became bolder in their thefts and less awed by European weaponry, Cook's own crew, with growing experience in Polynesia, may have become more recalcitrant in relation to their European superiors. If a sentry was punished for allowing a Tahitian prisoner to escape, the commander may have suspected that the sentry's loyalties were divided and that the negligence was intentional.

Conclusion

When considering the early contact period between Europeans and Polynesians, it is important to formulate an analytic approach that takes into account the non-homogeneous character of both sides of the encounter. Though the elite members of European crews often misinterpreted much of what they perceived during their encounters with Polynesians, an investigation of their actions and of their narratives of these encounters, as recorded in the ship journals, can nevertheless help us to reconstruct the complex dynamics of a multi-party exchange. Beyond the hackneyed narrative of South Pacific exploration as a tale of "Great Men" determining the outcome of cross-cultural encounters and imposing romanticized Enlightenment preconceptions on Polynesians, the history of the voyages of exploration can also be read as an intricate, multi-layered "history from below." First contacts in the South Pacific between Europeans and Polynesians were shaped by multiple social groups on each side of the encounter, governed in their perceptions and actions by their own distinctive sub-cultures and interests. By refining our understanding of these multi-partied encounters between European ships' crews and indigenous populations in the South Pacific, we may gain insights that can be applied to the study of first contacts elsewhere.

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80 Alexander, *The Bounty*, 128.
81 Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, xxi.