Friendly Fire: Forced Friendship and Violent Embraces in British-Tahitian First Contact.

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It was June 1789 and bounty mutineer Fletcher Christian was perambulating around the tropics with his comrades. This 'amiable and gallant'[1] hero, or in contrary opinions 'monster of depravity'[2] was treated 'worse than a Turk' by Captain Bligh, he claimed. Having successfully orchestrated a mutiny deposing the offending Captain, Christian was now sailing in search of his South Seas idyll. Fearing imminent capture if they returned to Tahiti, the mutineers had decided on Tubuai, a neighbouring island first navigated by Cook boasting plentiful 'breadfruit, cocoanuts and plantains.' All Christian desired, according to the narrative of fellow mutineer James Morrison, was to be 'permitted to live here in peace.' To this end, Christian began courting and gifting his way to residency: 'The Weomen were treated with civility and presents were made to each.' However, Christian's amorous efforts were thwarted when 'the men who followed them began to steal everything' in consequence of which 'a Scuffle ensued.' What began with Christian giving one man 'three sharp stripes with a rope' progressed into warfare and ended with the naming of the harbour 'Bloody Bay'. While the Tubuains brandished their weapons with 'many threatening Gestures' and pelted stones at the mutineers' boats, Christian marshaled together his artillery and ordered the firing of muskets and canons. The Tubuains 'took to the woods' while the mutineers undertook a 'diligent' but unsuccessful search to find them, leaving "presents of hatchets and c in their Houses'. In spite of these rather inauspicious beginnings, Christian remained optimistic. He had 'formd a resolution of settling on this island' which he believed he could manage through 'bringing [the inhabitants] into friendship either by persuasion or force.' Ultimately, their respite at Tubuai was brief and volatile ending much as it began: with native resistance, a violent battle and the mutineers' bewailing their inability to woo the women.[3]

As Greg Dening has noted 'Being the first European strangers to land at Tubuai, [the mutineers] began a re-play of first contacts throughout the Pacific - of misread signs, of mythical presumptions and of killings.'[4] One of these mythical presumptions was that Europeans possessed a universal right to hospitality and friendship; that they could bring people 'into friendship

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[1] Mary Russell Mitford, *Christina, The Maid of the South Seas: a poem*, London, Printed by A.J. Valpy for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1811, p.1.

[2] George Gordon Byron, *The island, or, Christian and his comrades*, Philadelphia : H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1823, stanza 4.

[3] James Morrison, *The Journal of James Morrison, Boatswain's Mate of the Bounty, describing the Mutiny and subsequent Misfortunes of the Mutineers together with an account of the Island of Tahiti* (United Kingdom: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1935), p.132.

[4] Greg Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language· passion, power and theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.90.

through either persuasion or force.' By persuasion the British meant 'trifling gifts,' and pantomimes of future trade, civility and harmony. By force they simply meant killing. This presumption explains why James Morrison would see no contradiction in describing Fletcher's earnest desire for peace whilst narrating a story of violent incursion.

This paper will explore the casual entwining of friendship and violence in Tahitian first contact narratives. I argue that friendship provided a frame for British fantasies of cosmopolitan pluralism effected through free trade and enacted in moments of cross-cultural contact. In narratives of British-Tahitian first contact, friendship provided the moral justification for violence and allowed for its subsequent erasure. Its presumption of a degree of similitude permitted the imposition of British commercial and cultural norms at the same time as its requirement of openness and difference led to an unsettling of British cultural practices and subjectivities. I argue that friendship presented a model of political relationship that resolved tensions between imperium and dominion and effaced the problems of consent which troubled British imperial endeavours. I explore how natural law concepts of a right to friendship played out in the context of Tahiti, justifying violence and grounding a new commercial fraternity in its wake. Yet those who came to Tahiti proclaiming friendship did not see themselves as violent imperialists, and their desire for friendship allowed for genuine moments of cross-cultural exchange and curiosity. Friendship provided an affective framework within which Britons and their laws not only became intimate with the Other but momentarily incorporated Tahitian law and custom in to British law and custom. My argument, however is that these gestures of peace and amity took place within an architecture of violence; they were performed against a backdrop of coercion and its denial.

Instructions to navigators and rules for sailors provide a lens into how the British imagined their future relations with indigenous peoples as well as how they imagined their own identity as imperialists. In these visions commerce, cross-cultural contact and the spectre of violence were governed within the overarching moral framework of friendship. Cook, before setting out on the Endeavour, received Secret Instructions advising him 'by all proper means to cultivate a Friendship and Alliance [with the natives], making them presents of such Trifles as they may Value, inviting them to Traffick and Shewing them every kind of Civility and Regard; taking care however not to suffer yourself to be surprised by them, but to always be on your guard against any Accidents.'[5] He replicated these instructions in his own rules which he read to the sailors

[5] James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p.75.

upon their arrival in Tahiti hoping that 'some order should be observed in Trafficking with the Natives.' His first rule was 'to endeavour by every fair means to cultivate a friendship with the Natives and to treat them with all imaginable humanity.'[6] Bligh, in his breadfruit expedition of 1793 copied Cook's rules attaching specific orders 'for better establishing a trade for Provisions and good intercourse with the Natives'. He instructed 'every person to study to gain the good will and esteem of the Natives - to treat them with all kindness and not to recover by violent means any thing that may have been stolen from them.'[7]

In these accounts friendship functions as both a metaphor for trading relations and as a necessary precondition for trade. They outline an imagined sequence of events where friendship expressed through presents compensates for British intrusion and stabilises power relations between native and stranger through a gifting pantomime of benevolence and goodwill. Once stabilised, friendship is used to establish order in trafficking with the indigenous peoples. A reciprocal exchange of goods based on needs and desires rather than displays of rank and benevolence is expressed as a relationship of friendship or an 'invitation' to friendship. Further, to establish order in the market, as Cook explained, friendly behaviour based around ideas of 'civility and regard' ensured that trade would not descend into personal avarice where value would be set 'at each one's own fancy' leading to 'confusion and quarrels between us and the Natives.'[8] Rather, friendship was to civilize and refine British subjects according to an ordered ideal of gentlemanly sociability as much as it was to civilize indigenous peoples through the imposition of British cultural norms. Finally, in Cook's instructions, friendship is the expression of cosmopolitan harmony. Treating the native with 'kindness' 'civility' and 'all imaginable humanity' would gain their esteem, secure order and establish 'good intercourse' across cultural lines.

The cosmopolitan fantasy of global commerce as a means of creating global sociability can be traced to the doctrine of universal economy, espoused originally by Libaneus in the fourth Century. According to the doctrine, as political theorist Cavallar explains, 'God had made sure that commodities were dispersed among various countries and different regions, thus offering an incentive to trade.'[9] This would result in a global fraternity where 'increased interaction would

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[6] James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery* (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p.75.
[7] William Bligh, *Orders for the Conduct of Affairs on HMS Providence,* 19 June 1793, ML Safe 1/22b.
[8] James Cook, *Journals*, p.72.
[9] Georg Cavallar, *The Rights of Strangers: Theories of International Hospitality, The Global Community and Political Justice since Vitoria* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2002), p.265.

teach them to love each other as children of God.'[10] The doctrine persisted through to the 18th Century with Hume arguing against protectionism on the grounds that it deprived 'neighbouring nations of that free communication and exchange which the author of the world has intended by giving them soils, climates and geniuses so different from each other.'[11]

The ideal of universal economy was narrowed in the context of voyages to the South Seas as commerce was construed as a peculiarly British honour and commerce itself as a peculiarly British gift. 'Making discoveries of countries hitherto unknown...and in climates adopted to the produce of commodities useful in commerce' would, as King George advised in his preamble to Commodore Byron's Instructions, 'redound to the honour of this nation, as a maritime power (and) to the dignity of the Crown of Great Britain.'[12] Trading these commodities would 'supply the wants of nature without rapine or violence' and would 'produce a common interest'[13], as John Hawkesworth author of the 1773 account of the British voyages to the South Seas argued. Yet for Hawkesworth this 'common interest' arose not from the goods being exchanged or from the practice of trading itself but from a shared appreciation of British 'commerce and arts.' Deploying a common orientalist trope, Hawkesworth depicted the British and their commercial relations as capable of unifying and subduing the innate bellicosity of the native. British commerce, he wrote, 'preserve[d] life' through 'prevent[ing] the inhabitants of the same country from being divided into different clans, which among savages are almost perpetually committing hostilities against each other.'[14]

Trade as an expression of peace and global friendship was used to define British imperialism against other imperialisms both past and present. Like Jorgenson, Hawkesworth ground the exceptionalism of British imperialism in the privileging of commerce over conquest and the giving of knowledge over the taking of land. In the 'General Introduction' to his *Voyages* Hawkesworth congratulated King George III on what late 18th Century poet James Thomson had described as Britain's 'well-earned empire of the deep.'[15] He lamented that much of the globe still

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[10] Georg Cavallar, *The Rights of Strangers*.
[11] David Hume, 'On the balance of trade' in *Political Discourses* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, 1752), p.148.
[12] Commodore Byron, in John Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty, for making discoveries in the southern hemisphere, and successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and hte Endeavour: drawn up from the journals which were kept by the several commanders and from the papers of Joseph Banks, Esq.* (London: W.Strahan and T. Cadell, 1773), p.7.
[13] John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p. xxiv.
[14] John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p. xxiv.
[15] James Thomson, as cited in P.J.Marshall, 'Introduction' in *Oxford History of the British Empire*

remains unknown because 'sovereign princes seldom have any other motive for attempting the discovery of new countries than to conquer them' which means that 'ambition has always found objects nearer to home.' Yet it was the 'distinguishing characteristic of King George to:

> *act from more liberal motives, and having the best fleet, and the bravest as well as the most able navigators in Europe, your Majesty has, not with a view to the acquisition of treasure, or the extent of dominion, but the improvement of commerce and the increase and diffusion of knowledge, undertaken what has so long been neglected.'*[16]

Unlike the Spaniard's bloody conquest of the Americas, and unlike past European empires' efforts to exert a single hegemonic hold over subject territories and people, the British acted from 'liberal motives.' As Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1772 concerning a proposed British voyage to New Zealand, they went 'merely to do them good.' The purpose, Franklin elaborated, was 'not to cheat them, not to rob them, not to seize their lands or enslave their persons.' Rather it was to 'enable them... to live as comfortably as ourselves.'[17]

For commerce and gifting to spin the globe into a web of fraternal networks it was imperative for the British to believe that indigenous peoples wanted to 'live as comfortably as ourselves' or that they valued their 'presents of such Trifles.' Trading and gifting were predicated upon myths of reciprocity, peace and equal exchange which could only be supported if British goods had universal value. To this extent, in their encounters with the South Seas the British commodity was elevated to the status of a universal good and an appreciation of British commodities symbolic of a shared humanity. The manifest love of trinkets, beads and British technologies on the part of the indigenous peoples signified a sentimental aptitude for incorporation into the bonds of European civilization, whereas an indifference to British goods marked ones' expulsion.

Commodore Byron mused that 'the love of ornament seems to be a universal principle in human nature, and the splendid transparency of glass, and the regular figure of a bead, are among the qualities that by the constitution of our nature excite pleasing ideas.'[18] If the 'constitution of our nature' was to be determined by an appreciation of British goods, then those who lacked this

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.4-5.

[16] John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.vii.

[17] Benjamin Franklin, as cited in Dierdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.13.

[18] Commodore Byron in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.36.

appreciation could be relegated to the position of the inhuman. Placing a love of British goods and technologies within the frame of a human/animal distinction, Captain Wallis, commenting on the New Holland natives observed that 'their perfect indifference to every thing they saw, which marked the disparity between our state and their own, though it may preserve them from the regret and anguish of unsatisfied desires, seems, notwithstanding, to imply a defect in their nature; for those who are satisfied with the gratifications of a brute, can have little pretension to the prerogatives of men.'[19]

In competing discourses, the spurning of British goods, or an inability to appreciate their value within a European frame, placed indigenous peoples in the category of 'noble savages' existing as a critique of European materialism. Literary theorist Dierdre Coleman notes that Benjamin Franklin following his meeting with Joseph Banks and Dr Solander, wrote of the New Holland natives as a 'Nation of Philosophers'. Banks and Solander, having recently returned from the first Cook voyage, regaled Franklin with stories of the 'happiness of the New Holland natives who spurned all European trinkets, clothes and other inducements to European friendship.'[20] Byron similarly located the South Sea Islanders in a utopian state of nature and suggested that their inability to distinguish between different qualities of European goods was more rational than the arbitrariness of British distinctions. '..[B]efore we despise their fondness for glass, beads, ribands and other things, which among us are held in no estimation, we should consider that, in themselves, the ornaments of savage and civil life are equal, and that those who live in a state of nature, having nothing that resembles glass, so much as glass resembles a diamond; the value of which we set upon a diamond, therefore, is more capricious than the value which they set upon glass.'[21]

To admit that the British were trading in goods which were 'held in no estimation' among Europeans was to admit to the inequality of exchange and the fraudulence of friendship. Byron attempted to efface this through critiquing the arbitrariness of European distinctions and also through exoticising the value placed upon the commodity; in a 'state of nature' different standards of value applied which could equalise the exchange. 'It must be remembered', he wrote 'that an Indian is more distinguished by a glass button or a bead, than any individual among us by a

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[19] Captain Samuel Wallis in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p 206

[20] Dierdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.13.

[21] Commodore Byron in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.36

diamond.'[22]

Where Byron conceded the lack of value in British goods other writers construed British trinkets as symbols of the marvels of an advanced civilization whose cultural and pedagogical value balanced or outweighed the goods offered by the natives. In these narratives, indigenous peoples would receive European goods in a state of awe and reverence, barely able to conceal their insatiable desires for more. In a poem which Wallis was given celebrating his voyage around the world, the anonymous poet imagined his first meeting in Tahiti:

The Swarthy Indians round us flock
With each a pittance from their Stock
Which they for various trifles truck
Content with what we spare.
Oft on our Ship they fix their Eyes
As oft on us with Deep Surprize
And deem our Floating world a prize...'[23]

The poet had no doubt read George Robertson's popular account of the voyage, which was the first of the British voyages to appear in print in Britain. Robertson described Tahitians sitting on a hill watching their first bloody skirmish 'in great hopes of sharing all our nails and Toys, besides the pleasure of calling our great Canoe their own...'[24] Similarly, the *General Evening Post* in 1771 wrote of two Tahitian natives who had come with Cook to Batavia, subsequently dying due to sickness. The tragedy of their deaths, however, were somewhat compensated for by the wonders of civilization they were able to behold prior to death. '...the two strangers were amazingly struck with the sight of coaches and horses....They were extremely surprised also at the sight of themselves in a looking glass' the paper reported.[25] Wallis also described Purea, the assumed Queen of Tahiti's 'astonishment' as she looked through his telescope: 'her countenance and gestures expressed a mixture of wonder and delight which no language can describe', he wrote. [26] If the natives failed to show surprise or awe then it was seen as evidence of their childish or inhuman natures. As Wallis wrote on the New Holland natives as they disembarked from

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[22] Commodore Byron in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.36.
[23] *A Poetical Essay on the Dolphin Sailing Round the Globe in the Years 1766-1768*, as cited in Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas, *Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology 1680-1900*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 200, p.27.
[24] George Robertson, *An Account of the Discovery of Tahiti* (London: Butler and Tanner, 1955), p.43.
[25] *General Evening Post*, July 20 1771, p.3.
[26] Captain Samuel Wallis, in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.297.

Australia 'we remarked that not one of them looked behind, either at us or at the ship, so little impression had the wonders they had seen made upon their minds, and so much did they appear to be absorbed in the present, without any habitual exercise of the power to reflect upon the past.'[27]

Failing to appreciate the wonders of British goods and refusing their offers of friendship could have devastating consequences for indigenous peoples. Cook's instructions to 'take care not to suffer yourself to be surprized by them' was an allusion to the threat of force to which the British would have recourse if met with native resistance. This was particularly the case if the ship was in distress or its crew in need of provisions. As Byron wrote, reflecting upon his unsuccessful attempt to anchor in Tahiti: 'I should indeed have thought myself at liberty to have obtained by force the refreshments, for want of which our people were dying...supposing we could not have made these poor natives our friend.'[28] Where Byron drew a distinction between friendship and violence Bounty mutineer James Morrison, as we have seen in his description of Fletcher Christian forcing his way into friendship in Tubuai, saw them as compatible.

In shipboard narratives as well as in legal and governmental discourses, violence and friendship had a close yet ambiguous relationship. In international law the argument propounded by natural law theorists Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century and Francisco de Vitoria in the sixteenth century that Europeans had a right to friendship and hospitality enforceable through war were challenged by Emmerich de Vattell's influential 1758 treatise *Law of Nations*. De Vitoria and Grotius had originally justified Spanish and Dutch imperialism (respectively) through the doctrine of universal economy - a fabulous tale of love and lack where trade was designed to encourage travel and foster friendship across geographical divides. Thus, according to Hugo Grotius, 'anyone who abolishes this system of exchange, abolishes also the highly prized fellowship in which humanity is united.'[29] They act, according to de Vitoria against divine law, human law and the law of nature; the last of which decreed, among other precepts, that 'the Sovereign of the Indians is bound by the law of nature to love the Spaniards'[30], or whomsoever seeks to sojourn in their country. Inherent to the right to friendship was the right to trade. As Grotius argued "it is permissible for the Dutch to carry on trade with any nation whatsoever...For

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[27] Captain Samuel Wallis, in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.206.
[28] Commodore Byron in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, pp.114-115.
[29] Hugo Grotius, 'De Jure Praedae' in *Freedom of the seas, or The right which belongs to the Dutch to take part in the East Indian trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1916), p 218.
[30] Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De ivre belli relectiones* (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), p.152.

God has not willed that nature shall supply every region with all the necessities of life; and furthermore, He has granted pre-eminence in different arts to different nations. Why are these things so, if not because it was His Will that human friendships should be fostered by mutual needs and resources, lest individuals, in deeming themselves self-sufficient, might thereby be rendered unsociable....'[31] For Vitoria and Grotius, those denied hospitality and friendship could enforce them through a 'just war.'[32]

The eighteenth century saw a gradual shift away from natural law towards positive law and with this came a greater emphasis on state sovereignty, and the regulation of international trade and diplomacy through treaties and contracts. Vattell's 1758 treatise *Rights of Nations* captures this shift through his critique of the right to trade, which he attacks by asserting state sovereignty and expressing a civic humanist suspicion of commerce. As he wrote, 'the freedom of commerce is a natural right of all nations'. 'Each nation is perfectly free to buy or not to buy a thing which is for sale.' 'When the Spaniards attacked the American tribes on the pretext that the latter refused to trade with them, they were but attempting to conceal their insatiable avarice.'[33] For Vattell, state sovereignty also meant that visitation rights became subject to the consent of the country, although refusal had to be justified by 'real and substantial reasons.' Fusing natural law with positive law, Vattell argued that the sovereign:

> *ought not even to stop at trifles, — a slight loss, or any little inconvenience: humanity forbids this, and the mutual love which men owe to each other, requires greater sacrifices. It would certainly be too great a deviation from that universal benevolence which ought to unite the human race, to refuse a considerable advantage to an individual, or to a whole nation, whenever the grant of it might happen to be productive of the most trifling loss or the slightest inconvenience to ourselves.*'[34]

Similarly, the German jurist Moser, a contemporary of Vattell's argued that state limits on the freedom of commerce had to be respected, with the excpetion of cases of necessity. 'Ships which are in dire straits ought to be helped and this obligation is based on the rights of humanity.'[35]

The focus in these discourses on sovereign consent and divine law evinced in ideas of 'mutual

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[31] Hugo Grotius, 'De Jure Praedae', p 218.
[32] Hugo Grotius, 'De Jure Praedae', p.219 and Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis,* pp.154-155.
[33] Emmerich de Vattel, *The Rights of Nations* (Philadelphia: T. and J.W. Johnson, 1849), : 2:2:23.
[34] De Vattel, *The Rights of Nations*, 1:2, 24.
[35] Justus Moser, *Versuch des Volkerrechts*, vol.7, pp.675-702. As cited in *The Rights of Strangers*, p.319.

love' and 'universal benevolence' coexisted with the threat of force which could be resorted to in cases of necessity. Violence and conquest were antithetical to how the British liked to conceive of their empire based upon free (rather than coerced) trade. However, through conceiving of intrusion as an act of friendship based on consent and inspired by need, violence could be resorted to as a final measure given that the original intention was axiomatically and self-evidently benign. Native resistance in the face of British beneficence, superiority and, in the case of ship's distress, vulnerability could be repelled as an act of self-defence. Hence, in the case of Byron, the fact that his crew were dying would have rendered him 'at liberty to have obtained by force the refreshments.' Similarly, as Lord Moreton advised Cook before setting out on the first Endeavour voyage:

> *Have it still in view that shedding the blood of those people is a crime of the highest nature:- they are human creatures, the work of the same omnipotent Author, equally under his care with the most polished European...No European Nation has a right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent...Therefore should they in a hostile manner oppose a landing, and kill some men in the attempt, even this would hardly justify firing among them, till every other gentle method had been tried. There are many ways to convince them of the Superiority of Europeans.*[36]

The sacral underpinnings of global friendship evinced in the natural law theorists persists in Moreton's 'Hints' however more as a prohibition against, rather than an incitement to violence. His focus on consent reflects an emphasis upon state sovereignty and indeed he refers to indigenous peoples as the 'legal possessors' of the land. Yet Moreton's overarching Christian humanist frame still acknowledges the necessity of violence in instances where all 'gentle means' have been exhausted, meaning, perhaps where goods and technologies have failed to inspire awe. This right, although severely curtailed, appears to be both predicated upon, and an expression of a belief in European superiority. As a final and undesirable measure, violence for Moreton, will convince the native of European superiority. It is British superiority and the benefits of commerce which Hawkesworth appeals to in his justifications for imperial violence. Although rejecting the idea of providence later in his *Voyages*, Hawkesworth invokes a quasi-divine notion of all affairs culminating in the ultimate good to justify bloodshed. As he writes, 'Upon the whole, therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the increase of knowledge and commerce are ultimately common benefits; and that the loss of life which happens in the event, is among the partial evils

[36] Lord Moreton's 'Hints', as cited in James Cook, *Journals*, p. 514.

which terminate in the general good.'[37] Sailor George Robertson also justified his killing of two men during the first days of battle in Tahiti with 'the old proverb...that evil designs is sometimes productive of good.'[38] Like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' commerce and knowledge even out the negative aspects of imperialism in a divine teleology of the 'general good.'

First Contact

The imagined sequence of events in Cook's Secret Instructions were played out in Wallis' first landing. It involved pantomimes of friendship through gifting and trade, followed by the British suffering 'surprize' by native resistance, and culminated in bloodshed, warfare and an imagined pedagogy of violence where natives became, in Moreton's words 'convinced of European superiority', at least on a military level. Yet it was a sequence of events whose meanings were muddled and thrown into confusion by Tahitian cultural practices. Displays of friendship operating as invitations to trade or 'treaties of peace' as Cook was to later describe them, were epistemically disrupted by competing Tahitian attitudes to private property, sexuality and according to Dening's ethnographic reading, religion. Friendship, in this first encounter involved an exchange of misread signs and projected meanings on either side.

The very first moments of contact, as described by Wallis and Robertson, were structured by friendship and measured by violence. On June 19th 1767 the sickly and starving crew of *The Dolphin* drifted into Matavai Bay to be greeted by 'upward of a hundred canoes' advancing through an early dawn fog. According to Robertson,

> *When they came within pistol shot they lay by for some time - and looked at our ship with great astonishment, holding a sort of Counsel of war amongst them: meantime we made all the friendly signs that we could think of, and showed them several trinkets in order to get some of them on board.*[39]

The space between cultures is measured by a pistol shot, a discussion configured as a Counsel of war. It is against this backdrop that 'friendly signs' are made, gifts are displayed and spatial borders opened through 'try[ing] to get some on board.' Invitations rested upon possibilities of repulsion.

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[37] John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p. xxiv.
[38] George Robertson, *An Account of the Discovery of Tahiti* (London: Butler and Tanner, 1955), :35.
[39] George Robertson, *Account*, p.20.

Friendship held a close relationship to fear, appearing in the literature as both an expression of fear and as a means of mediating the potential violence on either side. The space between the British and the Tahitians, otherwise extended and hardened through fear, was contracted through displays of friendship. Later that first morning, Wallis described how greater numbers of Tahitians continued to row out to them. 'I suppose they thought themselves safe', he explained, 'having so many of them about us, and we still making friendly signs and showing them trinkets.'[40] After a devastating battle involving massive losses of Tahitian lives, friendship on the part of Tahitians is configured as an expression of terror and submission. When one of the Dolphin's boats approached a small number of beached canoes, 'they seemed greatly afraid, and made all the signs of friendship that they could think of.'[41] In a later trading incident Robertson studying their bodies and gestures for signs of defeat notes that as they 'paddled nearer the ship' they 'forced a sort of smile, then laid down the plantain tree top and showed us what they had got to sell.'[42] Cook also describes the Tahitians in his first landing as greeting him 'with all the signs of friendship and submission.'[43]

Much Pacific historiography draws a distinction between the violence of first encounter and the genuine moments of cross-cultural exchange which followed[44]. Yet the British themselves acknowledged the persistent interlacing of violence in friendship. Wallis described an incident where the Tahitians witnessed Banks shooting a duck from the sky giving them 'such a dread of the gun that if a musquet was pointed at a thousand of them, they would all run away like a flock of sheep.' Their 'orderly behaviour in trade' he wrote 'was in a great measure owing to their having upon this occasion seen the instrument of which before they had only felt the effects.'[45] The anonymous author of a compendium about the Bounty mutiny also concluded in their appendix that 'The general disposition of this people seems to be gentle and friendly. They seem inclined to peace, and almost always give a kind reception to strangers. This latter circumstance, however, may in some cases arise from fear.'[46]

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[40] George Robertson, *Account*, p.21.
[41] George Robertson, *Account*, p.55.
[42] George Robertson, *Account*, p.47.
[43] James Cook, *Journals*, p. 77.
[44] See Lamb, Edward and Thomas who divide their South Seas Anthology into a tripartite structure beginning with Violent Possessions, followed by Exchange and ending with Missionaries. Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith, and Nicholas Thomas (eds), *Exploration and exchange: a South Seas anthology, 1680-1900*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000.
[45] Wallis in Hawkesworth, Voyages, p.281.
[46] Anonymous, *Dangerous Voyage*, p.165.

Yet within this frame of fear and violence, displays of friendship were used by the British to attempt a 'peaceful' possession of the island, to establish 'orderly behaviour' in trade and to sustain a mythical ideal of commercial cosmopolitanism. They fervently read signs of friendship into a bewildering array of Tahitian gestures, cultural practices and referred to violence as a last resort. As Byron boasted when reflecting upon Tahiti, 'I had given strict orders to the officers never to molest the natives, except it should be necessary in cases of self-defence, but to try by all possible means to obtain their confidence and good-will.'[47] Similarly, Robertson wrote that Wallis had 'given strict orders, that no man should hurt or molest them, until we tried their tempers...'[48]

'Trying their tempers' or 'trying to obtain their confidence' meant reading Tahitian bodies and gestures for meaning and, for the British, attempting to project their own needs and desires through corporeal symbols. The language of friendship in Wallis' landing was, by necessity a sensory language- a physical theatre where gestures, sounds and objects competed for meaning in a space without words. As Robertson described: 'The method we took to make them Understand what we wanted was this: some of the men Grunted and Cried like a Hog, then pointed to the shore – others crowed Like cocks, to make them understand we wanted fowls. This the natives of the country understood and Grunted and Crowed the same as our people, and pointed to the shore and made signs that they would bring us off some.' [49]In those first few days of contact, establishing peaceful relations so that provisions could be sought and trade established was of utmost importance and it was the body and physical objects which moved to centre stage as the medium of friendship's expression.

The British first sought peace through 'making them friendly signs', 'showing them trinkets' and inviting them on to the ship'[50] They also read Tahitian gestures through their own frame of friendship. Both Wallis and Robertson are vague on what 'friendly signs' actually comprised, but Robertson seems to suggest that they involved both mimicries of Tahitian gestures and performances of English ceremonies of civility. 'All of them appeared cheerful and talked a great deal' writes Robertson of the Tahitians when they first came near the ship. 'to please them we all seemed merry and said something to them.'[51] As an informal mode of regulating diplomatic

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[47] Commodore Byron in John Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.114.
[48] George Robertson, *Account*, p. 29.
[49] *Ibid.* p.21
[50] George Robertson, *Account*, p.21.
[51] George Robertson, *Account*, p.21.

relations and diverting war, friendship developed and utilised hybrid cultural symbols incorporating and blending British and Tahitian norms. Plantain branches became invested with significance symbolising what the British hoped to be 'Emblems of Peace and friendship'.[52]When a single canoe visited the British the day after they had arrived 'one of the men made a short talk, and threw on board a Branch of the plantain Tree.' The British 'therefore made a short talk, and threw him in another which we got before, and the Captain Gave him some toys.'[53] Similarly, on the day of their arrival the British managed to convince a 'fine brisk young man' to come on board and similar ceremonies were performed: 'After throwing in the Plantain Trees...he accepted of a few trinkets and shook hands with us.'[54]Although in international law and British policy, as evinced in Morton's 'Hints,' Tahitians could be considered to be legal possessors of the land, they lacked the trappings of European parliamentary or monarchical sovereignty. Thus custom and affect stepped in, for the British, to regulate inter-cultural relations.[55] Peace, for the British, could be effected through displays of merriment, hand-shakes, speeches and plantain branches.

Yet while the symbols were hybridised, the meanings applied to these symbols were derived from a European epistemic frame. It would be difficult to surmise what Tahitians actually meant when they offered plantain branches. Their meaning appears ambiguous, in spite of how resolutely the British clung to the idea that they symbolised friendship. Dening has suggested that plantain branches were a 'sign of peace, of deference and of sacrifice'[56] and that in the context of first encounter they were token offerings of human sacrifice to the British, whom they believed to be Gods[57]. Somewhat confusingly for the British, they also appeared prior to attack, as Wallis narrates referring to the day of battle: 'After some time, a man who sat upon a canopy that was fixed on one of the large double canoes, made signs that he wished to come up the ship's side; I immediately intimated my consent, and when he came alongside, he gave one of the men a bunch

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[52] George Robertson, *Account,* p.46.
[53] George Robertson, *Account,* p.24.
[54] George Robertson, *Account,* p.21.
[55] Custom was also established as the appropriate basis upon which a foreign consul should act when meeting with a ruler in default of treaties in international law. As Emmerich de Vattel wrote 'In default of treaties, custom is to be the rule....for a prince, who receives a consul without express conditions, is supposed to receive him on the footing established by custom'. Emmerich de Vattel, *Law of Nations*, Book 1 Chapter 19, *Op.Cit.*
[56] Greg Dening, *Performances*, p.144
[57] Dening argues that Tahitian behaviour during first contact makes sense not as resistance to British incursion but rather as ceremony and ritual marking the arrival of Gods. As he writes 'Tahitian expectancy would be that [*The Dolphin*] would make a landing, be the centre of sacrifice, be the occasion for re-instatement and investiture of the *ari-i rahi*, be the circumstance for alliance and treaty, and the establishment in them of some sort of hegemony.' Greg Dening, *Performances*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p.141.

of red and yellow feathers...I received it with expressions of amity, and immediately got some trinkets to present him in return, but to my great surprise...upon his throwing the branch of a cocoanut tree, there was an universal shout from all the canoes....and a shower of stones was poured into her on every side.'[58] Robertson, who was particularly keen to read plantain branches as a symbol of 'peace and friendship' omits the appearance of a plantain branch in this context and has them only appear again as symbols of friendship or surrender. What he had decided to be a symbol of peace appearing just before an assault jarred with his narrative of conquest and surrender. Similarly, Banks refers to the plantain as a 'token of peace'[59] to which Hawkesworth in his narrative flourished with a classical allusion: 'the same symbol of peace that is known to have been in use among the ancient and mighty nations of the northern hemisphere'.[60] Dening's analysis that they were a token replacement for human sacrifice is plausible within the context of first contact. Their appearance in the literature of the later voyages, however, is confined to 'tayo' or friendship rituals as a symbol of peace and reciprocal dependence.

Friendship was not a democratic or egalitarian process but rather signified status and marked rank, particularly in the delicate diplomatic work of first contact. To this extent presents, rather than commodities, were the objects of diplomatic exchange. Presents bearing the symbolic imprint of political personhood demanding reciprocation were distinguished from the more democratic medium of commodity exchange which, once effected, left no social or political debt.[61] Presents were seen, or hoped by the British, to ratify treaties of friendship and peace, as the stabilising of power effected through exchange could be symbolically transferred to all subjects represented through the power of the giver. As British presents, consisting of trinkets, hatchets, beads and cloth, were often the same as their trading commodities the conditions of giving assumed vital importance. Similarly, discerning the correct person to receive the gift was crucial for the presents to maintain their symbolic power.

Lacking any shared language, it was difficult for the British to ascertain who should appropriately

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[58] Wallis in Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.268.

[59] Joseph Banks, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768-1771*, Vol.1, J.G. Beaglehole (ed), Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1962, p.252.

[60] Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.79

[61] This argument is inspired by Nicholas Thomas and Marcell Maus' majesterial work on the gift. Thomas in particular, distinguishes the gift from the commodity as follows: '...in the former [the gift], the processes of consumption and personification, or the self-replacement of people predominates; in the latter, production and objectification (the making of commodites) are the dominant processes. The exchange relationship of the commodity is one of equivalence. Once it has been effected there is no excess which must in some sense be accounted for socially.' Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994, p.14.

receive their gifts. Dress, gesture, objects and ornaments were read for marks of distinction and gifts were distributed carefully according to an economy of scarcity. Robertson projected on to the Tahitians the political weight which the British attached to the reception of a gift as a symbol of peace. The first man to receive a gift was the 'fine brisk young man' who jumped upon the awning. 'We handed up some trinkets to him, but he Laughed and stared at us and did not receive anything from us, until several of the Indians along-side made Long talks and threw in several Branches of plantain Trees. After throwing in the Plantain Trees, which is an Emblem of Peace, he accepted a few trinkets and shook hands with us: soon after several of them came on board but we gave nothing to any but he that came first.'[62] In Robertson's narrative, the gift could not be received until the Tahitians had conferenced and decided upon peace. Once it had been received 'they all seemed very peaceable' he wrote. For the gift to maintain its diplomatic significance and value it was also crucial that not all should receive it. The man's initiative, in British eyes, conferred status.

Yet it was the man's reliance on the opinion of his peers that left the British convinced that the 'chief' who could properly ratify a treaty, was yet to arrive. They spent much of their first day anticipating a visit and were excited when they observed a canoe larger than the others. As Robertson writes 'We supposed this to be some chief's, or a message from some Head Man, as we saw none of the rest with sails...(we) soon got along-side, but we saw no person of Distinction in her.' While the ornamental exceptionalism of the boat conferred status, the *habitus* of its inhabitants did not match with hierarchical British notions of authority. Wallis wrote that he watched for someone 'who seemed to have authority over the rest.'[63]

The British studied the movements, dress and behaviour of Tahitians in their quest for a chief and it was not until Wallis was to meet Purea, a high ranking Tahitian woman, that he found someone whose comportment was compatible with his preconceptions of royalty. Wallis was impressed by the 'great respect' which she commanded of others, although ultimately it was her bodily movements which convinced him, although incorrectly, or her royal status. She had 'a pleasing countenance and majestic deportment', he wrote. 'She seemed to be under no restraint, either from diffidence or fear, when she first came into the ship; and she behaved all the while she was on board, with an easy freedom, that always distinguishes conscious superiority over habitual

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[62] George Robertson, *Account*, p.21.
[63] Samuel Wallis in Hawkesworth, *Voyages*, p.259.

command.'[64]Wallis, as the captain of the ship, was discriminating as to who should receive his friendship. During his first day on shore he met with some 'friendly Indians' who 'both by their dress and behaviour [appear] to be of a superior rank.' To these people I paid particular attention'[65] he wrote. This is not to suggest that friendship was confined to those with status, but rather that it had to correspond with rank. As George Tobin, a lieutenant who sailed with Bligh remarked: 'Most of the seamen had now established their Tayos, and the cook this day underwent the same ceremony that his Captain had done before, but with a native in a more subordinate situation.'[66]

Gifting as an expression of peace and diplomatic friendship had to precede trade. The British performed friendship rituals to maintain the fiction of 'free' trade based upon mutual need and reciprocal dependence, and to orchestrate trading relations ideally administered through centralised or hierarchical political power. To this extent, friendship settled over the carnage of war and miraculously erased its memory. Just hours after the final battle between the British and Tahitians, during which Tahitians lost hundreds of lives, had their boats destroyed and their provisions looted, Wallis' officers enacted a gift exchange and proclaimed friendly relations. For gifts to be gifts, and not commodities, the setting needed to be appropriate and bloodshed was a common backdrop for performances of friendship. In the aftermath of battle the Tahitians came down on to the beach with 'several hogs, dogs and cloth' which Wallis reciprocated with 'some hatchets, nails and other things'. Wallis referred to the Tahitian produce as a 'peace offering' which was ratified by the British through their removal of each item, including the cloth which they at first left upon the shore. According to Wallis 'the moment the boat had taken the cloth on board, the Indians came down, and with every possible demonstration of joy, carried away all I had sent them into the wood.' The exchange of gifts was followed by an exchange of gestures, passions and misunderstood words. Wallis writes that an old man came down on to the shore and 'made a speech to the people, pointing to the stones,slings and bags with great emotion, and sometimes his looks, gesutres and voice were so furious as to be frightful.' After his 'passions subsided' the British officer 'endeavoured to convince him, by all the signs that he could devise, that we wished to live in friendship with them, and were disposed to show them every mark of kindness in our power.' He 'shook hands with him and embraced him, giving him at the same

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[64] Samuel Wallis in Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages*, pp.288-89.
[65] Samuel Wallis in Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages*, pp.287-288.
[66] George Tobin, *George Tobin journal and sketches on HMS Providence, 1791-1793, with an additional material to 1831*, 11th April 1792, Microfilm, CY 1421, frames 1-169. Mitchell Library, Sydney.

time several such trinkets'.[67] Wallis concludes his journal entry and Hawkesworth concludes his chapter on first contact with the successful establishment of trade. The 'old man went away with great appearance of satisfaction' and 'all the ships company...had as much [produce] as they could use.'[68] While the Tahitians were no doubt relieved that the battle had ended, to suggest that they were joyful, satisfied and convinced that the British wanted to show them 'every mark of kindness' beggars belief. Rather, these were the emotive responses necessary for the British to maintain the fiction of empire as voluntary, peaceful and mutually beneficial.

During the Wallis and Cook voyages friendship continued to atone for the sins of the past and ensure its forgetting. Amnesty and amnesia were more than etymological bedfellows. Peace required forgetting. Yet such forgetfulness was also read as symptomatic of Tahitian infantility and civilizational regress. Tahitians were caught in a double bind. If they were to act upon British violence they would meet with war. If they were to feign indifference or offer friendship, they were considered children. Cook, Banks and Forster all narrate an incident involving the death of a Tahitian man and the wounding of many others when a Tahitian man attempted to steal a musket from one of the sailors. According to Parkinson, Banks was 'highly displeased' with the wanton violence and attempted to 'accomodate the difference, going across the river, and, through the mediation of an old man, prevailed on many of the natives to come over to us, bearing plantain-trees, which is a signal of peace amongst them; and, clapping their hands to their breasts, cried 'Tyau', which signifies friendship. They sat down by us; sent for coco nuts, and we drank the milk with them. They laughed heartily, and were very social, more so than could have been expected, considering what they had suffered in the late skirmish.'[69] Reflecting upon this instance Parkinson rhetorically asked 'Have we not reason to conclude, that their dispositions are very flexible; and that resentment, with them, is a short-lived passion?'[70] Cook, when later commenting upon Tahitian manners agreed. 'They tears' he wrote, 'like those of children, were always ready to express any passion that was strongly excited, and like those of children they also appeared to be forgotten as soon as shed.'[71] Coherent with eighteenth century discourses of sensibility and emotion, Tahitian gestures, tears and affective expressions were read as revealing the truth of their inner selves, which the British hastily concluded were childish and irrational. As George Tobin wrote in 1792 'so little does serious reflection intrude on their thoughtless

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[67] Samuel Wallis in Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages*, pp.278-279
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, In his Majesty's Ship The Endeavour*, Caliban Books, London, 1984, p.15.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] James Cook, *Journals*, p.79

dispositions. An O'tayhetian man may be tenderly affected for a short period, but it would appear that no circumstance whatever is capable of fixing a lasting impression on his mind.'[72] For representatives of an empire attempting to reconcile myths of peaceful cosmopolitan mingling with the realities of violence and native resistance, Tahitian forgetfulness and friendliness were common and convenient tropes. Performances of friendship and gift exchange enacted a kind of delphic creation, erasing the horrors of the past and setting the clock of the country at zero.

Friendship, as a term used to justify and mediate violent territorial incursion, altered in meaning and scope during the time the British spent on Tahiti. It continued to provide a space for the regulation of cross-cultural intimacy and exchange yet it was a space that was persistently bordered by violence - politically and physically. In moments of first contact, friendship was an expression of British imperialist fantasies of cosmopolitan pluralism that did not so much conflict with the realities of imperial violence, but rather justified and accommodated its occurrence. In international law, official correspondence and on the beaches of Pacific Islands violence and trade flourished under the 'beneficent' auspices of friendship. Friendship justified commercial acquisitiveness and maintained the myth of an empire based on free, rather than coerced, trade. While friendship provided space for cross-cultural curiosity, it exacted native goodwill at gunpoint. As a story of imagined benevolent intentions and the violence performed under its rubric, Tahitian-British first contact is not peculiar to its time and place. Rather, it is a story that reverberates throughout histories of imperialism and whose echoes can be heard today.

[72] George Tobin, *George Tobin journal and sketches on HMS Providence, 1791-1793, with an additional material to 1831*, 11th April 1792, Microfilm, CY 1421, frames 1-169. Mitchell Library, Sydney.