Contact in Context

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CONTACTS AND CONTEXTS

SANDHYA PATEL

Contact between peoples has been conceptualised in various sometimes conflicting ways. Aimé Césaire for example in the 1950s questioned the very notion of contact between peoples though he accepted and even lauded the theoretical possibility of encounter. Césaire then implicitly applies a subtle distinction between contact and encounter, terms which are often used synonymously. For the impassioned Césaire, contact (with colonisation in view) was the juxtaposition at a given moment of two worlds which did not involve any potentially fruitful "touching, close union, junction of one body to another."[1] On the contrary, it was a fundamentally destructive seizure of places and people.[2] Edward Said, building on Césaire's and later Frantz Fanon's groundwork, considers that from the eighteenth century onwards, "a very roughly defined starting point,"[3] a set of institutional practices he refers to as Orientalism came into being in order to "deal" with the Orient. Western visitor contact with the Orient generated representations which, within a wide-ranging series of texts, including travel literature, were in turn used to teach, settle and rule those Other places and peoples. Mary Louise Pratt[4] in general accordance with this assertion (though she does not refer to Said

[1] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language in Which Words are Deduced from their Originals* (1755). Short title.
[2] See Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1950).
[3] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin 1995), 4. First published in 1978.
[4] Mary Louise Pratt, ed., *Imperial Eyes; Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge 1992).

in her introduction), gives conceptual body to most of Said's basic tenets[5] specifically in the realm of travel literature. Pratt develops the concept of the contact zone defined as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination."[6] This zone is in effect a colonial frontier in Pratt's terms within which the "co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures" leads to interaction and improvisation.[7] The outcomes of these types of relations though may not always be as fixedly uniform as Césaire seems to have thought and Pratt points out that the diverse nature of colonial contact is often disregarded and "diffusionist" accounts of conquest and control seem to predominate. Similarly, David Carey[8] in 2009 in his book *Postcolonial Enlightenment* argues that postcolonial critique can refine an understanding of instances of cultural contact and inform interpretation of diverse European discursive standpoints. He challenges what he calls notions of the Enlightenment which dichotomise cultural contact in terms of an encounter between us (Europeans) and them (non Europeans).[9] This positioning generates interpretations of accounts of encounter as a type of cultural contact which is coherent in form and content and elides the possibility of accounting for "inconsistency of positions" in Carey's terms.[10] Carey's work shows that the Enlightenment was far from rooted in a regular and regulated body of thought and in so doing he encourages analyses of positions on cultural/colonial encounter with reference to other**,** this time, European voices at home, within the generalised relations of domination which were established with non European peoples. His study shows that the enlightened discursive environment allowed for approaches to power relations imprinted with what he calls an "anti-imperial strain."[11] Carey thus works towards recalling European "subaltern" voices which have so far remained silent to the advantage of

[5] Pratt develops a concept which she calls "autoethnography" (which Said also comments on in *Orientalism*): "for formerly colonised peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure [of colonial discourse and domination] upon themselves," *Imperial Eyes*, 25. Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon even earlier in the 1950s and 60s also reflect upon the power of the teacher, a power which instils a sense of striving within the colonised subject who endeavours to become like the coloniser through, for example, the mastery of language.
[6] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 1.
[7] Ibid., 7.
[8] Daniel Carey, ed., *Postcolonial Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).
[9] Ibid., 9.
[10] Ibid., 10.
[11] Ibid., 18.

the dominant discourses, then and now. The contact zone is thus an uncertain space and this book will investigate encounter in the light of a range of possible contexts which render this multitudinous site inordinately complex. The volume as a whole attempts then to identify what events and circumstances may impinge upon, dominate and direct interpersonal interaction and negotiation.

The periods, and the mainly French and British contexts examined here, may be justified by the unprecedented rise of British and French expansive intentions in the eighteenth-century. Said[12] refers to British and French enterprise in this particular age as "a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself," colonial expansion with reference to the Orient was then at its height. Said, but also Pratt and Carey, all identify one of the key phases of this founding process of textualising contact as taking place in the long eighteenth century. Pratt puts forward further complementary reasons for her focus on this period. She argues that natural history became a structuring epistemological force from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and that territorial expansion gained "momentum towards the interior, as opposed to maritime exploration."[13]

In this volume, the specific focus on the expeditions to the Pacific examined in Chapters 1 and 2 corresponds precisely, in parallel with the drive into the "interiors," to accrued attention to maritime exploration of the South Seas or the Pacific Ocean. There was thus "momentum" inwards but also a thrust outwards in the mid-eighteenth century when British and some French interest in this part of the world took the form of numerous maritime expeditions which resulted between 1760 and 1790 in the discovery of present-day Polynesia, New Caledonia, the Australian continent, New Zealand and numerous other Pacific islands and archipelagos. The "navigational narrative"[14] is largely recognised as a rich

[12] Said, *Orientalism*, 4.

[13] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 9. However, as regards the first point, natural history as an organisational paradigm was prevalent as early as the seventeenth century and as David Carey (see David Carey, "Inquiries, "Heads and Directions : Orienting Early Modern Travel," in Judy. A Hayden, ed., *Travel Narratives, The New Science, and Literary Discourse, 1569-1750* (London: Ashgate, 2012), 25-51) has very recently argued, it was a primary concern for figures like Bacon who largely acknowledged "the potential of travel for revealing the contours of nature" (27). Carey shows that the mid-sixteenth century Spanish questionnaires and the directives published by the Royal Society from 1660 onwards, with their emphases on tables and systematic observation, instituted the "knowledge-building project" described by Pratt (*Imperial Eyes*, 24) as emerging in the mid-eighteenth century.

[14] Ibid., 24.

source of natural historical and what today would be called ethnographical detail. Neil Rennie[15] for example minutely examines the idea of the South Seas as it developed between the fourteenth and the twentieth centuries and pinpoints this wealth of information (erroneous though it may have been) contained in the seamen's texts. Furthermore, in the eighteenth-century, navigators were often accompanied by botanists and artists who produced detailed portrayals of the flora, the fauna and the newly discovered peoples who were also described, drawn, painted and engraved. Odile Gannier and Vanessa Smith both engage with the nature of cultural transactions within the contact zone in the Marquises and in Tahiti drawing on these available sea/see-texts. The book will equally address issues of contact and context as they emerged later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the mechanics of contact in the East and in the West, in India and in America, as men and women explored and advanced into the heart of sketchily-known territories and remitted their experiences with growing precision. Importantly, inversed sites of encounter also took shape, at home, within exhibitions and shows which foregrounded contact with the Other in this time domestic cultural, political and economic locations. This book will attempt to connect contact to a specific context which Michel de Certeau defines as "the conditions within which it [contact] arose."[16]

In Part 1 of this collection, the conventional stance is adopted where contact is understood as taking place elsewhere and not on European soil. The chapters thus address contact far afield and examine related issues such as the degree and influence of apperceptive contextual processes both public and private, on interpretations, representations and functions of the contact zone. In so doing, the papers recognise that "texts exist in contexts" parrying Said's objections that there is "a reluctance to allow that political, institutional and ideological constraints act […] on the individual author."[17]

Gannier in Chapter 1 suggests that the French political and philosophical climate of the time (1768-1791) formed a crucial context for contact, influencing self-made seafarers (Cook and Marchand for example) and aristocrats (Bougainville and La Pérouse) alike.[18] Her examination of how

[15] See Neil Rennie, *Far Fetched Facts. The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[16] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies. Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986), 68.
[17] Said, *Orientalism*, 13.
[18] Julia Schleck ("Forming Knowledge: Natural Philosophy and English Travel Writing" in Hayden, *Travel Narratives*, 57) very interestingly examines the

like sought like in Tahiti and the Marquises is one example of how apperception directs interaction and understanding and almost forecloses attempts at intellectual improvisation, thus artificially structuring encounter. The ensuing production of texts then also engages with the issue of their viability as representations of dialogical interactions which Bachnik (citing Tyler) [19] evokes: "'Dialogue rendered as text . . . is no longer dialogue, but a text masquerading as a dialogue, a mere monologue about a dialogue since the informant's appearances in the dialogue are at best mediated through the ethnographer's dominant authorial role' further adjudicated by long-reaching contextual influence.

Similarly, in Vanessa Smith's approach to the question of contact contexts in Chapter 2, apperception is shown to work in circuitous ways as representations and interpretations of one contact context ("the Point Venus scene") influences those of another, in a world apart, in the salons of Paris, as Ahutoru, a Tahitian traveller, performs in Bougainville's apartments. Vanessa Smith posits that French aristocratic practices formed an identifiable context for both contact afar (in Tahiti) and within, in Paris, eliding and confiscating Other cultural systems and undermining the geographical isolation potentially beneficial (?) to encounter.

Leaving the Pacific behind, Frédéric Regard in Chapter 3 also focuses on the dialectics between home and elsewhere where the contextual weight of imperial and social ideologies on representations of contact by a white woman in remote areas of India, work here towards fashioning Other but also, primarily, self. Representations of cultural contact have often been conceptualised within paradigms of Self and Other. For example, as concerns late eighteenth century contexts I myself have argued that the writing up of contact in that period operated within parameters of strategic location, in Edward Said's terms,[20] where the author's personal position is central to a global understanding of the authority of the text in question.[21]

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question of credibility of texts from this perspective arguing that social background and hierarchy though important did not necessarily automatically attribute authority to the author. Elevated social status (Bougainville for example in Gannier's study) could, in Schleck's terms, sometimes prove to be a liability for a traveller seeking credence.

[19] See Jane M. Bachnik, "Perspectives of Distance and Anthropological Perspectives of Culture,"*Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 59, no.2 (April 1986): 75-86.

[20] Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

[21]See Sandhya Patel, "Les suds de Samuel Wallis. 1766-68" in Nathalie Vanfasse, ed., *L'Appel du Sud : écritures et représentations de terres méridionales et australes* (Aix en Provence: Editions A3, 2009).

Further, in speaking of scholars (or the aspiring literati in Honoria's case) Said contends that it is impossible to operate a scission between one's work and one's "circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position […], the mere activity of being a member of society."[22] Consequently Pratt's "dynamics of self representation"[23] may be seen to influence and mould Honoria's relaying of intercultural contact within the various zones of interaction. Regard examines the text and identifies the devices at work from this perspective which once again challenge the efficacy of a contact zone that, theoretically, induces dialogical, intercultural negotiation but which in reality exercises rather more oblique pressure. Here the arbitration in the interests of establishing authority, is between Selves, not between Self and Other, and the textual representations of contact reflect this perhaps inevitable bias.

This part of the book ends with Marie Bolton's historiographical essay in Chapter 4 on precisely this focus on texts by historians. Bolton argues that analyses of texts on contact have shifted from an emphasis on an abstract, encompassing notion of frontier (or contact zone) to a wider view of encounter in an extended, multiple space where the fixed notions of them and us and nature and culture, are somewhat attenuated. Within "shatter zones" and a tenuous "middle ground," Bolton evokes a "swirl" of groups, interacting, dominating, subjugating in America but her approach, like Said's, could be extended to take in different geographical arenas of encounter where for example islanders were quintessential peoples "in between" vast tracts of ocean. Primordial trading networks and changing landscapes were then key elements in the multiple mechanics of avowedly multifaceted contact relationships and their representations. Thus once again, the contact zone may be a circumscribed social space where disparate cultures meet but it may also be understood, metaphorically speaking, as a series of Venn diagrams, sub sets of one another or disjoined from one another but all within the one universal set, the general argument being that social, political, economic, philosophical, ideological and even geographical and environmental contexts undoubtedly exercise equal if not more influence than interpersonal relations between peoples, on the process and representation of elusive contact.

Part 2 of this book entitled "Contact Within" examines inversed sites of contact and considers the arrival of these discovered and colonised peoples on European soil. Textual representation progressively gave rise to

[22] Said, *Orientalism*, 10-11.
[23] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 5.

a synchronous *mise en scène* of the Other as the eras of discovery ushered in periods of settlement and extended colonisation after conquest, cession or simply appropriation of territories. The paradigm of contact between Europeans and Others and Other spaces was displaced both figuratively and literally. These displays, as Bancel argues in Chapter 5, were a source of entertainment for the public all over Europe. In parallel, Jonathan Woodham[24] singles out the growing need for appropriate governance strategies which encouraged reliance on anthropological, ethnological narratives of indigenous identities. The "vehicles" for such readings were the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century European imperial and colonial exhibitions or fairs. Thus, contact between groups was contained, this time in keeping with the idea of a circumscribed space, within an increasingly scientific conceptual framework, erected not on islands and beaches, but in European towns and cities where human "zoos" were the mirror images of encounter afar and worked toward constructing the Other[25] in terms of systematics, which is the science of classification of living things. Pratt's benign naturalist who "seemingly installed no apparatus of domination,"[26] collecting and carrying home interesting samples, was replaced by a horde of private entrepreneurs, entertainers and scientists who contributed in various "brutal" [27] ways to the exhibition and physical appropriation of the Other, *chez* the coloniser. These fairs were then organised in Europe, in the white settler colonies themselves (Australia for example) but also in other colonised territories where the indigenous populations constituted the majority. Thus, Others encountered themselves and Others in *mise en abyme* spaces as Hodeir and Pierre[28] refer to such inter-colonial exhibitions as taking place in Mauritius, on Reunion Island, in India, in the Caribbean and in South Africa. The chapters in this half of the book analyse contact as it took place between Europeans and Others on home ground as it were where again context proves to be of great note when analysing the fostering of now atextual encounter in this new context.

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[24] Jonathan Woodham, "Images of Africa and Design at the British Empire Exhibitions between the Wars," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 2, no.1 (1989): 15.
[25] See Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boetsch, Eric Deroo, Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *Zoos Humains. Au temps des exhibitions humains* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2004).
[26] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 33.
[27] Bancel et al, *Zoos humains*.
[28] Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, *L'Exposition coloniale* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe: 1991), 15.

Nicolas Bancel thus elaborates on what this contact between the viewer and the viewee consisted in and against which backdrop it occurred. He identifies exhibitory modes rooted in what Pratt identifies as the natural historical or scientific drive which characterised the nineteenth century, taxonomy being the principal mode of figuring contact. He distinguishes between American and European methods in initiating and overseeing contact between peoples positing respectively entertainment and science as being the two, not necessarily opposed, driving forces.

Fanny Robles in Chapter 6 builds on Bancel's examination and suggests inter-European and inter-national differences in the staging of contact where, as the century progressed, "direct contact" progressively came to be considered as a privileged means of allying entertainment and education as the attitudes towards what constituted learning gradually altered. Questions of morality which haunted the period were key contextual factors affecting reception and the mode of exhibition. The nineteenth century "culture of spectatorship" played an equally noteworthy role in determining what shape the "contact zone" was to take.

Thus context is shown in these studies to be instrumental in unpacking the complexity of contact within, in spite of the diminished rhetoric of distance. Thus, though de Certeau posits that the production of othering discourse may be based on accrued notions of remote time and space, he himself begins his analysis of Montaigne's *Of Cannibals* with the following observation where place may be understood as designating geographical location as well as cultural and social role:

> "If we are to believe Montaigne, what is near masks a foreignness; therefore the "ordinary" includes "facts just as wonderful as those that we go collecting in remote countries and centuries" . . . . What Montaigne ponders in this essay is precisely the status of the strange; who is "barbarian"? What is a "savage"? In short what is the place of the other?"

It is precisely from this perspective that Laurence Gouriévidis in Chapter 7 interrogates the exhibition of "internal" Others with whom contact was to be made. Gouriévidis engages with this ambiguity and argues that these fabricated encounters were engineered in a context of national identity construction. The display of internal alterity was put to national use, as was the exhibition of external alterity. In Said's terms, thanks to this deployment of the Other, national culture "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against […] a sort of surrogate and even underground self."[29] Pratt similarly identifies the metropole's (a term which is open to

[29] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

various interpretations) "need to present and represent its peripheries [here the Highlands] and its others continually to itself."[30]

Carole Reynaud Paligot in the final chapter of this book considers contact in terms of linkages between political and scientific contexts in nineteenth and twentieth-century France. These, in close-knit collaboration, jointly gave rise to a republican, racialised and ultimately racist ideology which came to regiment contact according to its precepts. The roots of this process are to be found in the contact at home between professionals, functionaries, politicians, anthropologists and colonised peoples which is evocative of the circuitous, afar/within pressures which Smith discusses in Chapter 2. This contact was relayed through the fairs and exhibitions, first-hand contact as it were, but also, once again, through circulating texts authored by colonial administrators. This mode may perhaps be categorised as "civic description"[31] where the monographers fuelled learned debates at home. Paligot contends that these representations of scientific contact ultimately worked towards the production of racial postulates which in turn determined colonial and domestic policy, hence institutionally ordering but also disciplining contact within lawful and thus legitimate parameters.

This volume then considers contact and context, and attempts to weave these together in studies which address the interactions between them. The essays suggest ways in which individuals and institutions integrate context into contact situations, the ensuing interaction with Others, against this complex backdrop, may even ultimately and most often involuntarily and inevitably, render contact loci temporarily inactive by suppressing intersubjective relations and quashing the possibility of fruitful encounter outcomes. As Aimé Césaire so eloquently put it:

> "j'admets que mettre les civilisations différentes en contact les unes avec les autres est bien; que marier des mondes différents est excellent; qu'une civilisation, quel que soit son génie intime, à se replier sur elle-même, s'étiole; que l'échange est ici l'oxygène, et que la grande chance de l'Europe est d'avoir été un carrefour, et que, d'avoir été le lieu géométrique de toutes les idées, le réceptacle de toutes les philosophies, le lieu d'accueil de tous les sentiments en a fait le meilleur redistributeur d'énergie. Mais alors, je pose la question suivante: la colonisation a-t-elle vraiment *mis en contact* ? ou, si l'on préfère, de toutes les manières d'*établir le contact*, était-elle la meilleure? Je réponds *non.*"[32]

[30] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 2
[31] Ibid., 20.
[32] Césaire, *Discours*, 5.

PART I:

CONTACT AFAR

CHAPTER ONE

MAKING CONTACT(S): BOUGAINVILLE, LA PÉROUSE AND MARCHAND IN SEARCH OF CHIEFS

ODILE GANNIER

The French, on arrival in the South Pacific at the end of the eighteenth century, encountered rather novel and somewhat confusing island organisations. Making sense of these social, cultural and political phenomena involved necessary recourse to domestic models. Louis-Antoine de Bougainville was familiar with the philosophical schools of thought framing the Enlightenment but Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse, was more at home navigating than consorting with intellectuals or royalty. Etienne Marchand, sailing round the world for the commercial gain of Marseilles merchants, did not show a great interest in the classical tastes of the time either. He seemed rather more interested in Charles de Brosses's ideas as developed in *L'Histoire des Navigations aux Terres Australes* published in 1756. In spite of these socio-cultural variations, these Captains and their crews were necessarily products of the same philosophical and political times which constituted the essential contextual backdrop underlying their descriptions of the island peoples of the Pacific. In the space of just twenty three years, all these men sailed across the Pacific. Bougainville was in Tahiti in 1768, La Pérouse stopped off at Easter Island in 1786 and Marchand was in the Marquesas in 1791.[1] These three locations on a map of the Pacific form a triangle and this paper will adopt a comparative approach in the analysis of the three navigators' contacts with these Pacific peoples within the framework of French domestic context.

[1] Bougainville's voyage lasted three years from 1766 to 1769. La Pérouse left France in 1785 and disappeared in 1788. Marchand's voyage went from December 1790 to August 1792.

All three expeditions made stops, ranging from just a morning's stay to a ten-day halt. For ensuing commentary to hold any weight, the observations had to be (or at least appear to be) particularly astute. Keeping this in mind, it is particularly noteworthy that the remarks in question generally attest to a certain form of open-mindedness. This open-mindedness is apparent in that the navigators did not construe their contacts with the native populations as necessarily leading to conflict and conquest. With a view to claiming the archipelagos as official French territories Bougainville and Marchand (La Pérouse made flying visits) did attempt to establish strategic alliances based on a certain sense of complicity with the inhabitants. For the most part though, the remarks and observations show a decided interest in how society worked and there is no apparent focus on colonisation or conquest.

Ethnographical observation today is generally based on accurate and objective study. Nevertheless, as Homi Bhabha observes in *The Location of Culture*,[2] the colonial and ethnocentric power generally considered Others, as a whole, as a paradigm (the "savages") in a generalising discourse. Yet, seamen may very well have adopted alternative methods in approaching newly-discovered lands and peoples as they were not politicians but seafarers by trade and, in the particular case of Marchand (and Cook), they were not necessarily gentlemen by birth but rather self-made commanders. Due, nevertheless, to the strength of historical context, ethnocentrism was entirely possible especially in these cases because the observers were such obvious products of their monarchical, pyramidal time and thus, as this paper will attempt to show, in search of Kings even though the signs of kingship often proved rather difficult to pinpoint. Furthermore, Marchand and La Pérouse had already read previous accounts and their minds were largely made up as to the nature of island organisation. A few pieces were obviously missing and their job was to identify these and complete the puzzle.

> "I can only guess as to the manners and customs of these people as I am a stranger to their language and was able to observe them for only a day. But I have read the observations of those who have gone before me, I know them by heart and have only to add my own."[3]

An ethnohistorical attempt at reconstructing power relations in Tahiti is not within the scope of this paper. The focus here will be on the way in

[2] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
[3] La Pérouse, *Voyage autour du monde* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1931), 38-39. All the translations in this paper are mine unless otherwise indicated.

which the newcomers interpreted what they understood as demonstrations of power whether political, religious, judicial or economic to name but a few of its expressions. What structural clues were gleaned by the navigators during the contact process? How did the seafarers work towards elucidating this evidence and what were their highly significant interpretations of the nature of the political system? As E. E. Evans-Pritchard argues:

> "A total social structure, that is to say the entire structure of a given society, is composed of a number of subsidiary structures or systems, and we may speak of its kinship system, its economic system, its religious system and its political system. The social activities within these systems or structures are organized around institutions such as marriage, the family, markets, chieftainship, and so forth; and when we speak of the functions of these institutions we mean the part they play in the maintenance of the structure."[4]

Discovering Kings

Discovering who was chief was entirely paradoxical given the ideological framework of the period in question. On the one hand, this identification process was the obvious first step once contact had been made but it also meant going against the grain of the nature/culture dichotomy governing perceptions of savages. This opposition was the basic premise of political thought according to Rousseau and it persisted in spite of evidence to the contrary, as Helvetius proclaims:

> "There is no doubt that the state of the savage is better than the lot of our farmers. The savage does not fear imprisonment or taxes nor does he fear his lord and master's fury or the arbitrary power of his deputy. He is not continually beaten into submission, nor is he mocked by more powerful or richer than he. With no master or servitude, he is more robust than our farmers because he is the happiest. He is equal and above all enjoys his freedom so much desired but in vain by other nations."[5]

Raynal and Diderot present similar hypotheses. Travellers though usually observed pyramidal structures ordering the societies they had made contact with. The officers on their part considered themselves as being chiefs and as the ultimate judicial and executive authorities onboard ship.

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[4] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 13.
[5] Helvétius, *De l'esprit*, Discours I, 3.

They had then to be recognised as such on shore and as deserving of special treatment. They were ambassadors in sort though without specific political objectives. Marchand was in the merchant navy but he nevertheless raised a commemorative plaque on Ua Pou in the name of Louis XVI and remarked "Every time the inhabitants addressed me, they called Otouhou or Othou which signifies in their language, Chief or King."[6] "*Otou*" in Marquesan means "You." Either the word had another meaning in the past or Marchand assumed he was being addressed as Chief and being treated like one with all the attending honours that he thought a chief was entitled to. The Marquesans may well have thought of Marchand as representing a group of people the likes of which they had rarely or never seen before. Highly sensitive to the configuration of contact and namely to the way in which they were received by the Islanders, if they were carried on the islanders' shoulders for example, the Captains believed that they were dealing with Kings and Queens, as suited to their own station. This was obviously not always the case as the veritable chief (if one existed) may not have been available on such occasions. Chanal (travelling with Marchand) extrapolates on the title given to the Captain:

> "I am certain that they have chiefs and that they call them by the name of Othou. They gave this title to Captain Marchand whom they knew to be the commander of the ship. But the authority of these chiefs is so small and the respect shown to them is of so little consequence that it is difficult to separate them from the common people."[7]

The definition of this term came about as a result of pure supposition and was most probably a reciprocal name. Fleurieu interprets thus:

> "But this was not the title given to the Kings of Madre de Dios when the English visited the Bay. It seems likely that the French, not having sufficiently understood the inhabitants language, confused the name of the King and the word used to show the title and applied to the Captain the name of theirs as they make presents of their own names to their friends."[8]

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[6] Odile Gannier, ed., *Journal de bord d'Etienne Marchand* (Paris: Editions CTHS, 2005), 259.
[7] Chanal, *Le Voyage du Capitaine Marchand (1791): les Marquises et les Iles de la Révolution* (Papeete: Au Vent des Îles, 2003), 197.
[8] Claret de Fleurieu Charles Pierre, *Voyage autour du monde, pendant les années 1790, 1791, et 1792, par Etienne Marchand* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République an VI [1797]-an VIII [1800], 1797-1800), Tome 1, 147.

Fleurieu underlines the fact that on Cook's second voyage the chief calls himself Honoo and says he is *He-ka-ai* "which is a title which after Mr Forster means *Aree* of Tahiti or *Areekee* of the Friendly Isles."[9]

It is obvious then that the Captains felt that they had to find chiefs to negotiate with, chiefs who were on an equal footing with themselves, and rightly entitled to any attention paid to them in terms of friendship or gifts. The names of these Polynesian "chiefs" were the only ones to go down in history even though rather paradoxically the chiefs in question courteously adopted their counterparts' names as a sign of respect. Bougainville mentions "caciques" in his journal, as in the West Indies where the term was used to describe a mode of exercise of power, but he uses other terms in the published version of his journal such as lord or chief. Joseph Kabris, castaway in the Marquesas at the beginning of the nineteenth century, notes *quaitenouly* which he defined as Chief or King. This term is not mentioned elsewhere in French accounts of contact. Identifying chiefs was then fraught with difficulty, but only in theory as in practice, symbols of power were thought to be perfectly obvious, similar to those that Europeans used.

Where then were these chiefs to be found? How and over whom did they reign? The *Etoile*'s surgeon notes: "The flatlands are the most populous and from there to the point furthest north, a chief reigns until the banks of the next river from where another man is chief."[10] The status of chief was understood as being inextricably linked to jurisdiction over a specific area. In the Society Islands, the term *mataienaa* described this territorialisation but it was never cited by the Europeans. The term "district" however was thought to mean a slice of land measured from a point at the summit of the island fanning out to form a triangle down to the seashore. Vivez (travelling with Bougainville) noticed that the land was "divided up into sections bordered by rivers each having a chief, though they are all in subordination to another chief of all the lowlands."[11] The organising principle was then thought to be pyramidal and as a result the *arii* or the aristocracy was understood as hierarchically structured. The island was divided into six large chiefdoms. How important a chiefdom was depended on how many people the chief actually reigned over. Where it was located was incidental because chiefs did not have to necessarily possess central or particularly fertile areas. The chief's authority was consolidated by the respect shown to his family and relations. He also had

[9] Fleurieu, *Voyage autour du Monde*, 148.
[10] "Journal de Vivez, Ms de Rochefort" in Etienne Taillemite, ed., *Bougainville et ses compagnons* (Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1977), Tome II, 240.
[11] Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, Tome II, 241.

an entourage, a court of sorts (as opposed to guards) which attested to how powerful he was. The navigators were indeed welcomed by chiefs who were known throughout the land and not only in their own chiefdoms. But they were probably not the most powerful interlocutors available. Bougainville recounts: "In the first days of our visit, we were honoured by the visit of a chief of a neighbouring district. He came aboard with gifts of fruit, pigs, chickens and cloth. This lord was called Toutaa"[12] also mentioned in Cook's journal of the first voyage (an indication perhaps of the durability of this particular status position). Cook meets with Toutaa in 1769 and he is still one of the most important chiefs on the island. Power was hereditary and Toutaa was most probably Queen Obarea's brother.[13] Queen Obarea was Wallis' interlocutor in 1767. But other situations in the Marquesas in particular show that the power structure was not as rigid as this accepted configuration implies because Kabris and Robarts were able to "marry" into the chiefly families.

Given that Tahiti was not benignly anarchic, what then were the insignia of power for the navigators? Stature was obviously an important attribute symbolising power as was personal charisma. Roblet, surgeon on the *Solide*, notes: "We saw no chief of great authority, but those in the crowd that the naturals were attentive to enjoyed the privilege thanks to their size, to their manly dispositions and even to the numerous members

[12] Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 236.

[13] James Cook, 1st Voyage, Friday 29th April 1774: "One of these was the Woman called by the Dolphins the Queen of this Island; she first went to Mr. Banks's tent at the fort, where she was not known, till the Master, happening to go ashore, who knew her, and brought her on board with 2 Men and several Women, who seem'd to be all of her family. I made them all some presents or other, but to Oberiea (for that is this Woman's name) I gave several things, in return for which, as soon as I went on shore with her, she gave me a Hog and several Bunches of plaintains. These she caused to be carried from her Canoes up to the Fort in a kind of Procession, she and I bringing up the rear. This Woman is about 40 years of Age, and, like most of the other Women, very Masculine. She is head or chief of her own family or Tribe, but to all appearance hath no Authority over the rest of the Inhabitants, whatever she might have when the Dolphin was here. Hercules, whose real Name is Tootaha, is, to all appearance, the Chief Man of the Island, and hath generally visited us twice a week since we have been here, and came always attended by a number of Canoes and people; and at those times we were sure to have a supply, more or less, of everything the Island afforded, both from himself and from those that came with him, and it is a Chance thing that we get a Hog at any other time. He was with us at this Time, and did not appear very well pleased at the Notice we took of Oberiea."

of their families."[14] Physical beauty, stature and build were not though absolute criteria for kingliness. Some chiefs were rather unprepossessing as was Aoutourou who accompanied Bougainville back to Europe but who supposedly made up for his unattractiveness by his intelligence. An attractive man, idling under a shady tree and playing the flute for the Captain and his crew was not necessarily identified as being a chief. Nevertheless, though other characteristics were also considered prerequisites of power, physical attractiveness was more often than not perceived as being the principal chiefly attribute Charismatic presence was construed as being decisive and a stately physique and attitude would undoubtedly have been considered as majestic or kingly whereas uncertainty and weakness would not have corresponded to what was thought to be required of kings. Marchand makes this distinction in Tahuata:

> "I was introduced to a natural who said he was Otouhou. But it seemed to me that he was not really Otouhou but someone who hoped to make some gain from presents from us. For this man was trembling and shy of the honour I did to him by rubbing noses."[15]

Bougainville also notices how ordinary Toutaa was. In the *Voyage*, he is introduced as a force of nature; in the journal on the contrary a rather malicious reference is made to how fat His Majesty was.

Age was not a determining factor in legitimising sovereignty in the eyes of the navigators. The oldest members of the groups were thought to be the sages who did not though exercise any real authority. Bougainville is clear on this point in one of his most famous descriptions of Tahitian society:

> "We were welcomed by a great crowd . . . . The chief of the district led us to his house and we went inside. There were present there five or six women and a venerable old man. The women greeted us with their hands on their breasts intoning the word Tayo. The old man was our host's father. The years had made their respectable mark on this man as they do only on handsome figures. His white hair and beard and robust body and skin free of any wrinkle showed no signs of decrepitude."[16]

In reality, in groups like those described by the navigators, sovereignty was not necessarily outwardly discernible and this facet of power relations

[14] Gannier, *Journal de bord d'Etienne Marchand,* 283.
[15] Gannier, *Journal de bord d'Etienne Marchand,* 264.
[16] Bougainville, *Voyage*, 229.

was also acknowledged in the accounts. The King was more often than not naked and the little he did wear was not indicative of the extent of his powers. "All these chiefs and their wives are known by their clothes which are white shawls, moreover they have various black and blue patterns on diverse parts of their persons according to their position."[17] It was far from clear for the navigators that the chiefs' tattoos represented their exploits and were in general better drawn and more detailed. These few outward signs were understood as being expressions of personal preference rather than of established custom. Earrings and feathers were not described as being worn by chiefs only. Similarly "The highest chief's house bears no marks of distinction if only that it is better kept."[18] The furniture was ordinary though the statues were repositories of divine connection. The largest most beautiful house which one would have thought belonged to the chief was in fact the meeting house, the *fare pote'e*. In spite of these qualifications, Bougainville persisted in his belief that being a chief meant having the privilege of possessing a range of choice objects and being surrounded by a substantial entourage.

Power

Other less material aspects of the degree of power held were more difficult to identify for the observers. Authority and power were perceived in varying ways. "The difference in rank is marked, he reigns unconditionally" noted the one,[19] "but in all these situations their power is very limited"[20] decided another. The fact that Aoutourou insisted on remaining onboard ship was supposedly evidence that he was used to being obeyed. But Commerson writes: "They seem to obey one chief that they respect more than fear. They submit to other lesser family heads who reign over the land between rivers, the natural frontiers of these small states. Peace and harmony seem to always to exist between them all."[21] This observation is entirely in the "Bons Troglodytes"[22] vein. The chiefly function appears thus socially unstructured and disorganised. According to Bougainville: "The country seemed to us to be peaceful and generous. No civil war seems to rage on the island, there seems to be no hate between them though the island is divided into small districts with each a lord . . .

[17] Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, 241.
[18] Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, 241.
[19] Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, 398.
[20] Marchand, *Journal de bord*, 285.
[21] Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, 497.
[22] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, Letter XII.

they are constantly at war with the neighbouring islands."[23] The chief was understood as having a leadership role in war or in other words as far as "foreign affairs" were concerned. But on Easter Island, La Pérouse notes:

> "It is very probable that there are no new monuments on the island because there is no longer any unequalness between them and few wish to be King of a diminished people who eat nothing but potatoes and yams and live in a naked condition and conversely because there are no neighbouring isles they cannot be at war and have no need of a powerful Chief."[24]

In the Marquesas though, each valley had its chief and was at constant war with the neighbouring valleys. According to the navigators' accounts, it seems that the exchange of visits and gifts showed that the chiefs were willing to make the journey to the ships and did not intend allowing lesser chiefs to take their place in ensuing negotiations. Heightened awareness of events taking place on the island as well as deciding whether the navigators were hostile or not were most probably the foundations of power. The chief was often described as being particularly eloquent which most probably meant that his word was law for the people. As a result of this eloquence the chief was likely to be a natural ambassador to neighbouring groups in times of peace as well as in times of war because war was waged not only on the battlefront but also in the form of harangues and conciliations. One of the most important privileges the chief enjoyed was seemingly this representative role. Chiefs' eloquence had been so often reported on by travellers as the symbol of their effective power that it was interpreted at this time as an indubitable sign.[25]

> "This afternoon, one of the inhabitants who had come aboard earlier, indulged in a sort of parley of which we understood little, but as he was carrying in one hand a piece of white cloth fastened to a small stick, I guessed it to be an olive branch and was not far mistaken, once he had fastened it to the rigging all the naturals on ship showed a great joy."[26]

In the same vein, Bougainville had to negotiate with the chief in order to obtain permission to land his men and set up camp.

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[23] Bougainville, *Voyage*, p. 255.
[24] La Pérouse, *Voyage autour du monde*, 70.
[25] See Odile Gannier, "Le philosophe nu, ou les ressources d'une éloquence 'sauvage,'" in Sylviane Albertan-Coppola, ed., *Hommages à Michèle Duchet* (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2009) 69-91. See also Pierre Clastres, *Archéologie de la Violence. La guerre dans les sociétés primitives* (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 1997).
[26] Gannier, *Journal de bord d'Etienne Marchand*, 259.

> "Ereti came with his father and the other principal people of the district who had informed of our wish. He showed his displeasure at the idea. They held a second council after which Ereti asked me how long we intended to stay and was it forever and if not, for what period did we intend to stay?"[27]

How long the newcomers planned on staying was a bone of contention and the issue was resolved in pyramidal fashion where once the various members of the council had conferred, the resulting decision was announced by a single representative, Ereti in this case, described as an important member of the council and suitably grave. In Marchand's experience, on the contrary, people reacted with enthusiasm in similar contact situations[28] and negotiation proved to be unnecessary. However, the harangue, though usually pronounced by the Chief, could sometimes be enunciated by a spokesman or an aristocrat. The conclusion that the navigators came to was that chiefs were probably chosen for their wisdom and forethought and what struck Bougainville about the chief's father was his careful consideration and full knowledge of the situation.

> "This venerable gentleman seemed to have hardly noticed our arrival. He had withdrawn from our friendly advances without fear or astonishment. He was not overly curious and his attitude was far removed from the general joy that our arrival had made in the common people. His removed and worried air perhaps foresaw an end to the happy days that the arrival of a new race heralded in times to come."[29]

These attitudes may very well have been grounded in the construct of the "addresses of venerable old men," which were characteristic of the literary context of the period, especially as concerns the travel writing genre. Diderot used this motif in his *Supplement* when the aged Tahitian thus lectures on the evils of colonialist design on the part of the Europeans. Diderot saw reflected in Bougainville's simple description of the chief's father, a wise old councillor with prophetic foresight who though without any real power to his now deposed name had remained influential and ominously silent. This figure became then one of the most well-known fictional orators in exploration history. His long speech rich in rhetorical figures and in the use of the classical indignant tone reveals the nature of the process that had been initiated.

In addition to being honoured with harangues, the Captains were welcomed by the Tahitian chiefs with exchange ceremonies and feasting

[27] Bougainville, *Voyage*, 232.
[28] Gannier, *Journal de bord d'Etienne Marchand*, 269.
[29] Bougainville, *Voyage*, 230.