SAVAGE ISLAND OR SAVAGE HISTORY? AN INTERPRETATION OF EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT WITH NIUE

by Sue McLachlan

Introduction

Early European contact with Niue was limited. The first known, and recorded, visit to this Pacific island took place on the 21st of June 1774 when the British ship *Resolution* arrived at Niue and spent a day sailing down part of the coast. Captain James Cook and some of his men made two brief landings during which they engaged in limited encounters with the Niuean inhabitants.

The historical significance of this event from the past is that the ensuing actions and reactions of this incident restricted the time spent on Niue Island and influenced Cook's choice of name. Cook states "The conduct and aspect of these Islanders occasioned my nameing (sic) it 'Savage Island' " (Beaglehole 1959:437). The emotive connotation attached to the name 'Savage Island' is likely to have given pre-conceived value judgements of the people before any later European encounters, and perhaps predetermined expectations of Niuean behavior. Later records appear to indicate that violence was expected and therefore frequently made particular note (of all seemingly aggressive behavior, with very few observations or attempts to describe any other general Niuean customs, behavior, or ritual in detail. The Niueans interpreted the European label 'Savage Island' as meaning they were cannibals, which did little for their self esteem.

The wider implications of this visit are that Cook's interpretation of the situation resulted in them taking leave of 'Savage Island' without any further encounters with the people. The emotive context of these preliminary interactions became the focal point in the recording and justifying of the events, and inhibited wider observations and more objective descriptions of Niue and the Niueans. As a consequence of this the early recorded historical information about the inhabitants is limited.

Historians and many other writers appear to have accepted the views of Cook's party as a true and accurate version of events. Therefore these implicit value judgements of the "savage" inhabitants at that time have remained as a valid interpretation of historical events. Historians have not

seriously considered the possible interpretations of the actions of these early European territorial invaders from an indigenous viewpoint. Little attempt has been made to discover Niuean customs and ritual behavior to arrivals on their shores, or how they may have interpreted signs and symbols and behaviors of foreigners. This raises the issue that if events are viewed. from one bias then questions and issues tend to be asked and examined in terms of that bias, and questions that may elicit different information and interpretation may remain unasked and unanswered, thereby perpetuating a European-biased historical view of the Niueans for future generations. In my view there are enough assumptions and anomalies in the journals of Cook's party and other historical records to warrant re-examination, and possibly a re-interpretation, of Niuean behaviors and attitudes during the period of early European contact.

Discussion

The journals of Cook, Forster, and Sparrman reporting their visit to Niue indicate that these 18th century explorers did not consider that their actions may be transgressing other peoples' rights, or that these actions may be interpreted as acts of aggression from a indigenous viewpoint. It would appear that Cook's party adopted a superior stance of unquestioned right to land and establish a claim on other peoples' shores. They raised the British Colors (Forster 1777:433) and freely examined the possessions and property of the inhabitants (Beaglehole 1959:434, 435, 436).

Upon landing, Cook and his men took up defensive positions in the anticipation of aggression prior to any possible contact with the Niuean inhabitants (Beaglehole 1959:435). The landing party did not refrain from making use of their position of attack and superior weapons by firing on the inhabitants who appeared, before their reception had been adequately determined or resolved. Cook describes these actions as follows:

> I saw we should be exposed to be attacked by the Natives, if there were any, without our being able to defend ourselves. To prevent this as much as could be and to secure a retreat in case of an Attack, I ordered the Men to be drawn up on the rock from whence they had a view of the heights and only my self and four of the gentlemen went up to the [Niueans'] boats, where we had been but a very few Minutes before the Natives, I cannot say how many, rushed down the Chasm out of the wood upon us; the endeavours we made to bring them to a parly was to no purpose, they came with the ferocity of wild Boars and threw thier (sic)

> darts, two or three Muskets discharged in the air did not hinder one of them from advancing still farther and throwing a nother dart or rather a Spear which pass'd close over my shoulder; his courage would have cost him his life had not my musket missed fire, for I was not five paces from him when he threw his spear and had. resolved to shoot him to save myself, but I was glad afterwards that it happened otherwise. At this instant the party on the rock: began to fire at others who appeared on the heights, this abated the ardour of the party we were engaged with and gave us time to join our people when I caused the fireing (sic) to cease, the last discharge sent all the Indians to the woods from whence they did not return as long as we remained, we did not know that any were hurt. (Beaglehole 1959:436-7)

The implicit assumptions, exemplified in the above statement were that, as the locals did not attempt to parley, ignored the muskets fired in the air, and threw spears that nearly hit the Europeans, the Niueans were wild savages, dangerous and unable to be communicated with intelligently. These early explorers presumed that their attempts at communication or interaction were commonly understood ways of initiating contact between people. They did not account for the view that their behavior may have been considered improper format on other peoples' territory. The men from the *Resolution* regarded encounter behaviors as having universal interpretations. Cook's party assumed that to parley was a standard form of greeting, and that the noise of muskets fired in the air would be interpreted as a warning of the potential killing power of these weapons. The probability that the Niueans would not have had any experience with firearms and their dangers does not seem to have been considered. Cook makes the assumption that the throwing of the spears at such close range was a sign of intention to kill, and does not appear to take account of the fact that spears were familiar weapons to the Niueans, or that a person who was skilled in the use of the weapon may have intentionally controlled the near miss if he "was not five paces from him." (ibid). There is an imposition of European knowledge and 18th century ethnocentric views on the interpretation of the situation that occurred on Niue during Cook's visit.

After Cook's departure there was a time lapse of 53 years before the English missionary John Williams arrived at Niue in 1830. Williams provides the following description of his arrival.

> Arriving opposite to a sandy beach, and perceiving some natives on shore, we waved a white flag, which is the signal used to obtain friendly intercourse. Instead, however, of launching their little canoes, and accepting our invitation, they waved one in return; and, on perceiving this, we immediately lowered our boat and made for the shore; but on approaching it, we found the natives arranged in hostile array, as if to repel an invasion. Each of them had three or four spears, with his sling and a belt full of large stones. When they had arrived within one or two hundred yards of the reef, our natives lay upon their oars, spent a few moments in prayer, and then proceeded to the shore, making signs to the savages to lay down their weapons. This they did readily when they perceived that there were no Europeans in the boat; and, coming down to the extreme point of the reef, they bade our people welcome, by presenting the *utu,* or peace-offering.
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> This custom appears to be very general among the inhabitants of the Pacific Isles, and consists in presenting to the visiter (sic) a bread-fruit, a piece of cloth, or some other article, with the sacred cocoa-nut leaf, which they call *Tapaau,* attached to it; on receiving which the stranger returns some trifle, as a token of amity, and a kind of ratification that the intercourse shall be peaceable. This ceremony having been performed, the natives launched some of their canoes, and advancing towards our vessel, but evinced, by their cautious movements, and the respectful distance they kept, that they indulged in the most fearful apprehensions. (Williams 1837:294-5)

If we compare the format of establishing contact between Cook's party and Williams' approach there are some marked differences. Firstly, unlike Cook, Williams did not immediately launch a boat for shore but attempted to communicate off-shore. Williams assumed that the waving of a white flag was an internationally recognized signal of "friendly intercourse,)" and was surprised when the Niueans waved one in return instead of coming out to the ship in their canoes as he expected. Dening (1979:61) illustrates that the European assumption of a universal interpretation of peaceful intention in the symbol of white flags was not always given this connotation in the Pacific. He states (ibid) that holding white bark cloths "was ceremonial, a ritual whereby the Marquesans were bringing these Gods from Beyond the Skies under their control." It would

seem that the Niueans had similar symbols and that they were used in rituals to prevent evil from encroaching, rather than the European connotation of flags as invitations to approach.

> The *fue* was an emblem carried by the leading *toa,* to be thrown down before the enemy as a challenge. . . . It was handed down from father to eldest son, as it was thought to contain the family *mana.* Tofolia gives the following account: 'The *fue* was a very sacred thing, it was like a flag' . . . .
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> The Niueans also had a flag, *matini* consisting of a tapa cloth, or a yam leaf, bound to a stick. It was not carried in war, however, but was hoisted when a *patuiki* was anointed, and was also used in rain-making ceremonies. Niue traditions relate that the *matini* was brought to Niue from Tonga by Tihamau. (p. 26) It is interesting to note that the word *matini* does not appear in the Tongan vocabulary. In Samoa the word means a leaf sacrifice to keep away ghosts. Any flag is now called a *matini,* but the small signalling flags of ships are called *fue.* (Loeb 1926:95)

Given this ethos of flags one may well speculate on the reaction of the people of Niue to Cook's party "performing the idle ceremony of taking possession" (Forster 1777: 165). Niuean interpetation of these symbols may account for the fact that as the boat from Williams' ship approached the shore "the natives appeared to be arranged in hostile array" (1837:294). There is very little direct evidence to ascertain if it was customary for the Niueans to carry spears and stones when greeting arrivals but judging from Powell's account (1968:41) it would seem that spears were part of ritual shore greetings.

The local party from Williams' boat did not proceed directly to the shore but paused one to two hundred yards from the reef and made signs to the Niueans to lay down their weapons. Unfortunately Williams does not elaborate as to the type of signs that were made but they were obviously more effective than the gestures Cook's party made in their attempts to communicate. Williams assumes that the Niueans laid down their weapons when they saw there were no Europeans in the boat, but there are many other speculations that could be made just as readily. It could have been that, unlike Cook's party who carried muskets which are not unsimilar to clubs, Williams' party did not carry weapons. (This is not specifically stated anywhere in Williams' account.)

Alternatively, it may possibly be speculated that the seated posture of the boat load was more in accordance with Niuean custom than the upright stance of Cook's shore encounter and attempts to parley. Smith (1903: 177) states,

> The appropriate *(gali)* way of speaking in Niue in former days, was not to stand, but sit cross-legged, or kneel on one knee on the ground. This latter posture is frequent at the present time. . . . This is *maimaina,* deference, respect, a word which appears to be native to Niue. . . . There is another Niue word for this humble attitude, *hufeilo,* which apparently meant originally, to prostrate, to abase oneself to a conqueror, to beg one's life. The conquered formerly acted in this manner, kissing the feet of the conqueror and bringing a present at the same time. This was done in such a manner as not to give the victor time to refuse. Inferentially, if the present was accepted, the life of the petitioner was spared.

I think it would be fair to say that in Niuean terms Cook constantly adopted the stance of aggressor/conqueror and infringed on Niuean customs and rituals. For a start, Cook's armed party did not hesitate to land and set up their crew in defensive positions possibly accompanied by naval whistles of command, in accordance with Cook's disciplined approach to life. Smith (1903:201) states:

> The gods sometimes communicated with mankind through the proper channels, and they spoke in a whistling voice *(mapu* and *mafu).* The Niue folks have an objection to whistling on that account.

Despite the preliminary overtures Williams' party did not actually land before, or even after, the exchange of gifts took place (confirmed in Williams p. 296).

Loeb states (1926:67) "Trespass on fishing reserves was considered as much of a theft as trespass on the bush plantation" (Also see Ryan 1977:137, 138). Cook's party continued to trespass and infringe local customs on land:

> The captain with us walked into the chasm where we found four canoes. . . . Some were covered with coarse mats, and contained fishing-lines, spears and pieces of wood which appeared to have

> served as matches for fishing at night. The captain laid a small present of beads, nails, and medals on each canoe; but whilst he was so employed, I perceived a troop of natives coming down the chasm, and instantly acquainting our company of it, we all retired a few steps. Two of the natives, dressed with feathers, and blackened as the other before mentioned, advanced towards us with furious shouts, and spears in their hands. We called in friendly terms to them; but to no purpose. The captain endeavoured to discharge his musket, but it missed fire. He desired us to fire in our own defence, and the same thing happened to us all. The natives threw two spears. (Forster 1777:166)

It can be seen by this statement that from a Niuean point of view Cook and his men committed some very aggressive behavior. They transgressed by examining the canoes, and fishing equipment, some of which was subject to ritual and sacredness. (See Loeb 1926:96). Cook's laying of a present on each canoe would hardly have conformed to the Niuean ritual of gift exchange in terms of the manner of presentation, and the value of gift itself. Williams (1837:296, 297) states:

> We gave our wild guest a present, which consisted of a hatchet, a knife, a looking-glass, and a pair of scissors; none of which, however, did he appear to prize, not knowing their use; but just as he was leaving the vessel, he caught sight of a large mother-of-pearl shell, which one of our people was handling, and springing forward, he seized it from him, and appeared, from his frantic expressions of joy, to have obtained an article of superlative value.

Forster's account shows that Cook and his men did not adopt any posture of *maimaina* or *hufeilo* but maintained a superior stance and displayed immediate aggressive actions by raising their firearms.

In his description of the encounter with the Niueans, Cook states:

> two or three muskets discharged in the air did not hinder one of them from advancing still farther and throwing a nother dart or rather spear which pass'd close over my shoulder; his courage would have cost him his life had not my musket missed fire, for I was not five paces from him when he threw his spear (Beaglehole 1959:436-7).

Cook, whilst acknowledging the Niuean's courage, interpreted this action as an intention to kill. Perhaps it may be interpreted that the Niuean was testing Cook as a brave *toa.* Loeb states (1926:130-l):

> It was the custom of proficient *toa* to bend down on one knee when a spear was thrown at them, and catching the spear in mid air, hurl it back to the enemy.

Niueans were obviously very familiar with spears and their usage. Loeb (1926:129, 130) listed 11 types of spears that are individually named. To be able to identify so many spears by different labels for each one must surely signify that spears were an important part of the material culture. As Niuean male status was largely acquired according to one's prowess as a *toa* (warrior) it seems reasonable to assume that spear throwing skills were encouraged and possibly developed from an early age. If this was the case one could hardly expect a proficient spear thrower to miss Cook as a target from less than "five paces" (Beaglehole 1959:437). Therefore it may reasonably be assumed that Cook was not the direct target. A spear that was intentionally thrown to pass close over the shoulder places the recipient in a favorable body position if he were to acknowledge custom by catching the spear and returning it. This action would have put Cook in the position of acquiring the status of a proficient *toa* in terms of Niuean ethos and world view.

Thomson (1902:121) reports on a ritual he observed containing other speculations of the interpretation of encounters:

> The warriors now engaged in mimic duel. A short man brandished a paddle-club with both hands challenged another armed with a spear. Contorting his features into the most horrible grimaces, the club man rushed upon his antagonist, and appeared to be on the point of cracking his skull, when he seemed to take alarm at the spear and retired step by step before the others onset. Thus by alternate rushes the fight swayed to and fro, until both the duellists were out of breath and gave place to others. The feints were so cleverly done that more than once I feared for a moment that they had lost their heads in the excitement, and that one or the other would receive a dangerous wound. What they must have looked in war paint, with tangled locks over their eyes and matted beards chewed between their teeth, it was easy to imagine, and I think that the success of the performance, which was so popular that we had to interfere when we had had

> enough of it, was due to the fact that it was not play-acting at all, but actual warfare as it was waged in the old days; for as I shall presently explain, there is good reason to believe that hand-to-hand fighting was seldom more than a series of feints persisted in until the weaker vessel ran away, leaving his antagonist master of the field.

Thomson's description illuminates the dexterity of the Niuean warriors who clearly had excellent control over their weapons. It also appears to highlight the importance of ritual behavior in an encounter. This is likewise demonstrated in the following description where a Niuean is returning to his home after spending a period of time with the missionaries in Samoa:

> When the vessel arrived at Niue, it was determined that at first Fakafitienua alone should land. Good Captain Morgan took him in the boat to the reef; he jumped out, and swam ashore. The captain, who possessed a true missionary heart, watched with anxiety; he saw him reach the beach, and go directly to a cave in the rock; he took thence a spear. In a short time a native descended from the cliffs; he too, went to the cave and took a spear. They poised their weapons, brandished them, and seemed about to fight; when suddenly they dropped them, rushed together, and fondly embraced each other. (Powell 1868:41)

Tom Ryan provides another version of this event (but he does not specify the source):

> A missionary witnessed the scene as Fakafitifonua met his relatives on the beach: 'there was a peculiar and striking ceremony. He and another began by feuding with spears. When having finished the others threw him a *maro* and then they embraced each other. (Ryan 1977: 11)

This event would appear to indicate that spears were an important part of ritual behavior for arrivals to Niuean shores.

Cook describes encounter with Niueans in terms of his interpretation of behavior without any consideration of ritual, or how his aggressive behavior may have been interpreted by the Niueans. Dening (1979:64) in

discussing reports of early European contact states, “The very selectivity with which the Europeans described the chaos they witnessed is an indication of the values and assumptions which coloured their experience.” Cook assumed that advancing behavior and the throwing of spears was an intention to kill. He imposed his own values on the situation and if his musket had not misfired he would have killed the Niuean who advanced upon him. It would have been justifiable retaliatory behavior and the logical or inevitable outcome from an 18th century European viewpoint.

But, was killing the logical or inevitable outcome of aggressive encounters from a Niuean viewpoint? Smith (1903:211) discussing the use of weapons states, “There was an art displayed in avoiding *(kalo* or *patali)* the spears thrown”. Thomson (1902:128) speculates about Niuean intentions when he states,

> King Tongia, [Niuean King] it is true, could talk of little less than the warlike exploits of himself and his fathers. But one of his Majesty’s anecdotes has left me to wonder whether Niuean warfare often over-stepped the limits of beard-chewing. He was relating how an ancestor of his, the greatest warrior the world has known, met the second greatest warrior in single combat. The battle-light glowed in Tongia’s left eye as he described the weapons, the strength, the courage, and the ferocious aspect of the warriors. At his recital the stoutest heart must have quailed. But noticing that the battlefield of this historic duel was no larger than the dining room of a suburban villa, and knowing that only one of them could have come out alive from a combat in so confined a space, Mr. Lawes inquired which of them was killed. “Oh neither!” said the king, and passed lightly to other battle stories.

Despite the Royal Society and Navy’s instructions to Cook’s expedition to treat the island peoples with kindliness and humanity (which no doubt inhibited the recording of contrary behavior) there is evidence that the aggressive responses of Cook’s party did harm the Niueans.

> The effect of the small shot fortunately stopped the natives from rushing upon us, and gave us time to retreat to our men, who continued to fire with great eagerness, while any of the natives remained in sight. Two of these in particular, standing among the bushes, brandished their weapons in defiance a considerable while, but at last retired, one of them appearing to be wounded, by the dismal howl which we heard presently after. (Forster 1777: 166)

With the amount of firing that is openly acknowledged in all of the accounts and often at close range it would not be unreasonable to assume that more were wounded if not killed. However, although accounts freely speculate on the actions of the "savages" they seem reluctant to divulge the consequences of their own actions and reactions. For instance, Sparrman (1776:129) states "Although the small shot only whistled about the ears of our spiteful enemies (a few may have pierced the skin) it frightened them away." Cook is even more vague such as "we had reason to believe none were hurt" (p. 435) and "we did not know that any were hurt." (p. 437).

> The European foundered in his attempt to apply his values and his judgements to a society completely outside his experience. . . . He had no way of understanding his world except in terms of his own experience. . . . The European sometimes reacted violently to the situations he did not understand and tragedy resulted. (Dening 179:63)

Cook's ethnocentric interpretation of their encounter with the Niueans by virtue of the fact that it was recorded became the accepted bias, and the view of the Niuean people present at the encounter remained unknown and unrecorded to counteract the European view of the events. The power and the influence of the written word as accepted truth is aptly demonstrated when one examines some of the documents that form part of recorded Niuean history.

Cook's records predetermined European attitudes to the people of Niue for following generations of European visitors. The name "Savage Island' he bestowed upon Niue was intended as a summary statement of Cook's view of his encounter. This hostile act alone was influential in perpetuating these early European visitors' ethnocentric views in that it projected preconceived notions of expected savagery for following visitors to Niue who accepted without question Cook's emotive interpretation as accurate, and frequently seem to invoke unconfirmed speculations, and/or search for broad confirmatory evidence which often was more apparent than real.

After Cook, the next European visitor to Niuean shores was Williams whose views and motives for encounter were undoubtedly influenced by Cook's historical legacy, as the following statement shows:

> Waving to pass an island discovered by Captain Cook, which, in consequence of the ferocious character of its inhabitants, he

> called *'Savage Island,'* we determined to touch there, and leave with them the two Aitutakian teachers, to impart the knowledge of that Gospel by which, *savage* (sic) as they are, they will ultimately be civilized and blessed. (Williams 1837:293)

Even those who were not motivated by Missionary fervor to seek out likely candidates for conversion accepted the given label "Savage" as an unquestioned and predetermined fact as evidenced in the following account from a whaler's journal and published in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* 1840:

> This island is one of the discoveries of Cook which, from the attack made by the natives when he attempted to land there, he names "Savage Island."--All who have seen its wild and naked inhabitants can bear witness to the justness of its appellation. (Ward 1967: 177)

Other non-missionary visitors refer to Cook's account with the expectation of accuracy prior to landing and most seem influenced by the name of Savage Island and Cook's descriptive use of the term "wild boars." In his visit to Niue in 1849, British Admiralty Captain Erskine enlightens the reader as to the crew's preconceived expectations in the following description:

> As few of us had ever seen men in the savage state before, and these had been described by Captain Cook as more completely so than any of the islanders of the Pacific, it may be supposed that we looked at them with much interest, every telescope in the ship being pointed at the canoes. (Erskine 1853:25)

Likewise, in 1862, when the H.M.S. *Fawn* visited Niue, Hood's writing prior to arrival reveals that Cook's influential words were widespread:

> Our destination being in the first place, Niue or Savage Island regarding which little appears to be known. When that great navigator and most correct observer, Captain Cook discovered it, he succeeded as usual in landing, but did not manage to hold the slightest communication with the natives, who came down, he

> said, with the ferocity of "Wild boars." Hence the name he be stowed upon their island, which, by all accounts, it still deserves. (Hood 1863:9)

However it is in the missionary accounts that we find Cook's view reiterated and expanded by speculative statements often inadequately backed with any concrete evidence. In 1859 the missionary, Turner, landed on Niue and was amazed at the "civilized" development which he attributed to a decade of evangelical activities. Turner states (1861:523-4):

> . . . these are the children of the men who rushed out upon our great navigator Cook '"like wild boars," and who, for sixty years after his time, kept to the determination that no stranger should ever live on their island. They repeatedly rushed out upon parties of white men as they did upon Captain Cook, and were sometimes fired upon. Natives of other islands, who drifted there in distress, whether from Tonga, or Samoa, or elsewhere, were invariably killed. Any of their own people who went away in a ship, and came back, were killed.

Statements such as the above, and the following, seem concerned to present a negative and often unsubstantiated account of the behavior of the people of Niue and use Cook's view to validate their biases. Hutton's account of his missionary work further exemplifies this bias when he states:

> In the year 1774 Captain Cook discovered an island to the westward of the Hervey group, to which he gave the appropriate name of Savage Island. . . . The natives, subsequently estimated at 4000 souls, were in appearance and character not less repulsive than the land they inhabited, and would probably [have] remained in the same degraded condition to the present day had not the missionaries rightly judged that the lower they had fallen, the greater was the necessity for raising them. (Hutton 1874:134)

In my view, the missionaries could possibly be regarded as having an ulterior motive in reiterating and perpetuating Cook's classification of the Niueans as the most savage of the people of the Pacific. By re-emphasizing this impression of savages they elevated the worth of the work done by the missionaries in terms of transformation. Thus, these evangelists had a vested interest in reinforcing Cook's legacy. However, it seems to me

that the mere fact of the relatively short period in which this alleged transformation and drastic change in the Niuean character took place presents an anomaly which in turn makes the initial European character assessment of "violent savage" suspect.

In the European reports I was able to consult, I found (apart from castaway Brown's involuntary landing--see below) no specific evidence of Europeans actually landing on Niue between Cook's landing in 1774 and the missionaries Harbutt and Drummond's landing in 1857 (see Bibliography and Appendix I). The missionary contact period began in 1830, but the information they acquired for their accounts about the Niueans appears to be obtained in off-shore visits from shipboard observations, and hearsay or second-hand reports given to them by Aitutakian and Samoan missionaries, or Niueans who were in some stage of the process of "missionization." This being the case there may be grounds for inferring that selected information was requested and selected information was received.

European missionary sources acknowledge that, although converted Niueans, Peniamina and Fakafitienua were landed in 1846, real "progress" in evangelizing the "savages" was not made until the Samoan missionary teacher, Paulo, was landed in October 1849. Thus, according to the sequence of missionary events, transformation from violent savages to gentle Christians was accomplished in a period of eight years. When the missionaries, Harbutt and Drummond, actually landed on Niue in 1857 they were able to make direct observations of on-shore attitudes and behavior:

> The Savage Islanders must be a very ingenious and industrious people [and]. . . . The Savage Islanders are a remarkably mild and intelligent looking people. (Murray 1888:376, 377)

These types of direct observational statements present a marked contrast from previous missionary assessment statements of Niuean character.

Erskine, Captain of H.M.S. *Havannah,* visited Niue in July 1849, three months prior to the landing of Paulo, the Samoan teacher who, according to missionary accounts, "converted" the Niuean character. Erskine's description of his shipboard encounters with the Niueans lends credence to the inference that perhaps the interpretation of the Niueans as aggressive savages as perpetuated by the missionaries was suspect. Erskine offers views and descriptions of behavior that contradict previous emphases of character. He states:

> The expression of their countenances was intelligent and prepossessing. . . . They refused tobacco, which was offered to the first comers in the shape of cigars, lighted to show them the nature of it, saying it was "tabu"; nor would they touch it, putting our hands gently back. (p. 27). . . . One only ventured below into the gun-room, and he insisted upon somebody holding him by the hand, as if to secure him from injury (p. 28). . . . They seemed to have a remarkable regard for property. (p. 29). . . . Altogether they impressed me very favourably with their dispositions; nor did they seem to be at all wanting in natural capacity. (p. 30) (Erskine 1853:8-33)

If Erskine's account and evaluations of character are to be accepted then it would seem that the Niueans already possessed qualities that the missionaries attributed to the results of evangelical activities of Paulo. (See Appendix I for sequence of arrivals.)

Why were the Niueans labeled "Savages"? It seems their behavior was not the sole determinant when imposing this label upon the Niuean people. Appearances obviously had a profound influence upon the early European visitors. They placed the Niueans in the category of savages at the extreme end of the continuum of civilized and uncivilized people according to their 18th and 19th century world view. Forster (1777:435) declares, "their civilization little advanced, since they are savage, and go naked."

The Europeans viewed themselves as civilized and with this opinion came the connotation, overtly or covertly, that a civilized appearance meant being white, groomed, fully clothed, and constrained in physical behavior. The descriptions of the explorers all focussed on similar aspects of appearance in terms of nakedness, dark skin color, and signs of black painted skin and unruly behavior, as justifying evidence of savages. (Cook 1774:435, 438; Forster 1777:432, 433; Sparrman 1853:129). The missionaries likewise indicate their ethnocentric biases in their descriptions of appearance and behavior, many of them recounting Williams' description of the appearance and behavior of one man as a typical example.

> His appearance was truly terrific . . . his countenance most forbidding; his whole body was smeared with charcoal, his hair and beard were both long and grey, and the latter, plaited and twisted together, hung from his mouth like so many rats tails. He wore no clothing, except a narrow slip of cloth around his loins,

> for the purpose of passing a spear through or any other article he might wish to carry. On reaching the deck the old man was most frantic in his gesticulations, leaping about from place to place, and using the most vociferous exclamations at everything he saw. All attempts at conversation with him were entirely useless, as we could not persuade him to stand still for even a second. (Williams 1837:295)

Other descriptions further emphasize the missionary notion of acceptable appearance as being cleanliness, tidiness and modesty.

> One who saw some of them in 1840 describes them as "in a state of absolute nudity, not tatooed, (sic) but besmeared in a most diabolical fashion, and having long hair and a beard. (Powell 1868:28)

As the following extract demonstrates, if Niuean behavior and appearance did not accord with the British view the category of "savage" was considered most apt.

> When strangers visited them their excitement knew no bounds, and broke through all restraint. They realized most fully one is accustomed to form of the savage--wild, fierce, ungovernable. Many of them wore long hair, which hung down upon their shoulders in the most disorderly manner. Clothing they dispensed with as an unnecessary incumbrance. (Murray 1888:358)

An extract from the Rev. Lawes letter reporting on his landing 20th August 1861 claims:

> The people are very lively and energetic, and no doubt fully meriting the name which Captain Cook gave them. We could not help contrasting the two landings--the present and the past. Now they are all clothed, joyfully welcoming their missionary,--then they were naked savages, rushing down like wild boars upon their visitors. (Murray 1863:397)

The focus that is portrayed is that to be "very lively and energetic" is not the way of a disciplined restrained Englishman and unless one is fully clothed one cannot be termed as "civilized." Lawes' account also shows

that despite observed contradictory evidence a label such as “savage” has a long-lasting impact that recurrently seeks confirmation, inadvertently or otherwise.

There also appears to be a covert assumption of cannibalism attached to the label “savage,” as may be evidenced by the fact that in 1849 Captain Roger of the whaleship *Beaver* was charged with abandoning crew member Brown to the cannibals of Savage Island, but the case was discharged on a legal technicality (Ward 1967:170, 175). The Niueans according to Loeb were not cannibals but they

> believed Captain Cook called them [such] when he named Niue “Savage Island”. . . . The Niueans resent the use of the name “Savage Island” applied to their homeland by Captain Cook (“Savage” is translated as *kai tagata* cannibal). (Loeb 1926:30, 175)

Evidence from Williams’ 1830 visit supports the absence of cannibalism on Niue. After deciding not to leave Aitutakian missionaries on Niue in case their goods were stolen, Williams, not wishing to be thwarted in his attempt to impose Christian beliefs upon the Niueans, chose another alternative. He attempted to induce some Niueans to accompany them with the purpose of converting them en route, and returning them to missionize, and thus “civilize,” their own people. Williams admits it was with considerable difficulty that they succeeded in getting two youths to accompany them and he comments on the Niuean reaction at their departure.

> As soon, however, as the youths perceived we were losing sight of their land, they became frantic in the expressions of their grief, tearing their hair, and howling in the most affected manner. We had recourse to every expedient to inspire their confidence and assuage their grief, but for the first three or four days their incessant howlings were of the most heart-rending description; we could neither induce them to eat, drink or sleep. When animal food was offered to them they turned away with disgust, and howled most piteously: for having never seen it before they concluded that we were cooking and eating human flesh, that we had taken them aboard for the same purpose, and that when our present stock was exhausted they were to be put to death and devoured. (Williams 1837:298-99)

One would perhaps not be viewed as remiss for interpreting accounts such as the above as indicating that cruel acts of mental violation were committed against the Niueans by the missionaries. Other missionary accounts report the use of similar tactics of removing Niueans from the familiarity of their homeland which forced them to confront the conflicting attitudes and life-styles that were imposed upon them.

> [In 1840 the missionaries] succeeded in inducing three natives to come with them. These were brought to Pangopango and left there. One of them died shortly after their arrival; another a silly, thoughtless, young man left in a whaler after he had been some months on Tutuila and we heard no more of him; the third, who took the name of *Paulo,* turned out a steady thoughtful young man. He became an inmate in our family [the church] and continued with us till his death in 1852. He was for many years a member of the Church, and a remarkably consistent character in the main; and though he made one or two slips towards the close of his life, I cannot but hope that he was safe at last. (Murray: 165)

I have suggested that the early European visitors feared violence because of the "savage" appearance of the Niueans and sought to confirm their reactions to this appearance in their observations of Niuean actions during encounters. In the early part of this article I sought to demonstrate that the actions of Captain Cook and his men could be interpreted as aggressive acts by the Niueans who, therefore, could be seen to have been justified in reacting accordingly. However, despite violations committed by these early Europeans, the Niueans did not, in fact, harm them. I propose to examine other actions that indicate the Niueans were not as savage or violent as projected fears anticipated. A bias is prevalent in most accounts of early contact with Niue which frequently attempts to confirm Cook's view of the Niuean people, yet there is evidence to suggest that this was an unwarranted view.

After Cook's visit 56 years elapsed before the next written report of an encounter with Niueans and this came from John Williams. This missionary entrepreneur regarded the people as "the most wretched and degraded of any natives I have ever seen" and expressed the view "that religion which alone will be effectual in taming their ferocious dispositions, reforming their savage habits, and rendering intercourse with them safe and beneficial" (1837:299). In spite of Williams' opinion he obviously did not think they were violent to the point of randomly killing,

as, in response to a request from the missionary teachers from Aitutaki not to be left at Niue, Williams states (1837:298) "we, of course acceded to their request not however, apprehending that their lives would be in danger, though, in all probability they would have been plundered of everything they possessed."

European ethnocentric values and judgements can be detected, yet again, in the above quotes, but, was safe and beneficial intercourse really at issue? Further examples of Niuean actions bring into contention the claims that European visitors were not safe among the people of Niue:

> Williams himself did not land on Niue, and the first European to do so since Cook's visit seems to have been on October 27th 1837, when the New England whaleship, *Beaver*, forced overboard a seaman named Brown (Ward 1967:173). The Niueans fished him from the water, then held council as to whether or not an epidemic should be risked by allowing him to remain alive. Finally it was agreed that he should be given food and a canoe, and when a ship passed off the island he paddled out to it. (Ryan 1977:10 using W. G. Lawes to J. Tidman:19.4.1862)

One cannot help but contrast the actions of the Europeans and the actions of the Niueans as embodied in this situation. The behavior of the Europeans in forcing their fellowman into the sea off an island named Savage Island which the European crew believed to have been inhabited by cannibals, (refer Ward 1967:170), can hardly be viewed as anything less than a violent act of aggression. Contrast this with the humane behavior of the Niueans in rescuing the European from the sea, sparing his life when they thought their own lives may be at risk, and then providing him with sustenance and a highly valued means of survival by way of transport, and one is left wondering who are the savages? This occurrence is the first recorded onshore encounter between Niueans and Europeans since Cook's landing and would appear to be contrary evidence to the "hostile to all comers" view propagated by the missionaries.

Other instances of early contact with Europeans support the alternative view that it was not the intention of the Niueans to indiscriminately and unjustly harm visitors. On June 25th 1840 the vessel *Samoa* belonging to the London Missionary Society arrived at Niue:

> The party sailed on their important but perilous undertaking. Their danger arose chiefly from the smallness of the vessel. The

> Savage Islanders are bold, powerful men, and they have large numbers of canoes, which they manage with great dexterity, and in which they move with great celerity. Hence it would have been a very simple matter for them to have surrounded and taken possession of the little craft in which our party sailed and in that case, what a plight would they have been in! The natives came upon them in a very rough and boisterous manner, but a kind Providence watched over them, and the natives did not attempt to injure them. They kept buying up their clubs and spears as fast as they were able, and in that way strove to keep them disarmed. (Murray 1876:164-65)

This account gives some indications of the effects of preconceived notions. The Europeans expected "savages," they saw an ethnicity that they could not relate to in terms of their own values of appearance and behavior and experienced (and very likely projected) the emotion of fear. This state of emotion, in all probability, influenced their interpretation of the encounter. Even so, despite the bias of interpretation, the account does not produce any clear evidence of aggressive behavior.

If the missionaries had a vested interest in perpetuating Cook's view of the Niueans as the wildest of savages why did others not contend this view more strongly? Dening (1980: 18) states:

> Cook was an English hero, not a French one. French visitors to the Pacific of his day pointed to the violence of his ways, his attachment to property and discipline, the wounded and dead he left on many Pacific islands. They were correct. No matter how exercised he was to carry out the instructions of the Royal Society and Navy to treat the island peoples with kindliness and humanity, no matter how chagrined he was at the actions of his men, he never discovered how he could moderate the behaviour of others whose systems of social control he could not understand nor use, except by violence.

Perhaps the above statement illuminates the central issue. Cook was an *English* hero and most of the early accounts of the Niueans, missionaries included, are by Englishmen. Descriptive phrases such as "the great navigator" (Powell 1868:26; Hood 1863;9) "and most correct observer" (ibid.) indicate hero status, and history shows that it was not really "form" to question the words and actions of popular English heroes. These early English visitors to Niue not only admired Cook but to a large

extent could readily understand and identify with his Englishman's view of the world with its inherent expectations in terms of appearance and behavior. They, not infrequently, displayed an ethnocentric and an imperial attitude of superiority to other ethnic groups. For example, in 1873, British. Naval Commodore Goodenough (1876:189) addressed the Niue Fono as follows:

> As I stand here I cannot but remember that it is just a hundred years ago since the first English man who visited you--the great Captain Cook, was driven from your shores by you, with spears and clubs. He was succeeded by Williams, whom you would not receive, but who succeeded after a time in sending people to teach you. Now! how great is the change! Instead of spears and axes, I see everyone well clothed and well taught, and living in good houses.
>
> To whom do you owe this, and how has it come about? You owe it to the men who came from England to teach you and to live among you.

Goodenough interpreted the absence of spears, the symbolism of clothing, cleanliness and orderliness as a change from "savages" to a more civilized people he could understand, With paternalistic arrogance he attributed this change to the Englishmen who visited Niue. Clifford Geertz claims (1973:93):

> culture patterns have an intrinsic double aspect: they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves.

The evidence would suggest that once the missionaries had shaped superficial external changes of a cleaned, clothed, tidied Niuean appearance the English were now in a state of mind to perceive the Niuean character and attributes more clearly and accurately.

Conclusion

Symbols function as models by which we understand reality and they are models which we make into reality. Cook, and the visitors to Niue from the *Resolution*, assumed attitudes such as a right to go ashore on foreign soil and investigate foreigner's possessions, and to declare British Sovereignty. They made presuppositions of a universal interpretation of

encounter rituals and behaviors, such as showing a white flag, attempting to parley, and firing muskets. These were symbols which functioned as models of reality by which they understood reality. When the Niuean responses did not conform to their presuppositions, Cook's party focussed on aspects of empirical evidence, such as nakedness, blackness, spears and boisterousness, to shape reality to their understanding. These were symbols which represented the antithesis of their own behavior and appearance and they became the models for "savages" through which they interpreted events. Europeans who followed had the connotation of the label "savage" in their heads and when they visited Niue they searched for confirmation of their predictions in the symbols of nakedness, spears, etc.

Cognitive theorists maintain people use their own "Theory of the World" to enable them to predict phenomena. It is this ability to predict events that enables the human mind to comprehend and therefore learn from phenomena. If they are not able to predict then bewilderment or a state of confusion occurs. Cook and his men failed to predict Niuean reactions to their actions and confusion resulted. Hence, it is highly likely that they did not comprehend phenomena. In other words, that which was perceived was probably misinterpreted.

Cook's bias in his written account of the encounter with the Niueans had an impact on subsequent European visitors who perpetuated this bias until it became a largely uncontested, historical fact. The name "Savage Island," which the Niueans understandably resent, persisted for a very long time and is still occasionally used (see Appendix II).

Cook initiated attitudes to Niueans that resulted in a chain of events that cannot be obliterated from history. However, in my view, contradictory evidence and opinion has been presented that repudiates these attitudes to Niueans and demonstrates historical injustice.

In my opinion several counts of tragedy did result from Cook's visit to Niue. The aggressive actions and violent reactions of Cook's party probably resulted in physical tragedy for the Niuean people in that it appears highly likely that some of them were wounded if not killed.

A sociological tragedy occurred in that Cook's account of his interpretation of events is accepted as an impartial and accurate account of the behavior of the Niueans. This limited European viewpoint became the only point of view about the early Niueans to outsiders. It was widely known and readily accepted resulting in the imposition and perpetuation of this bias for generations to come. The jaundiced eyes that followed focussed dominantly on anything that could add to the claims of violent savages often to the neglect of any other aspects of the society.

By naming Niue "Savage Island," Cook placed his feelings firmly on the map for posterity. Not only did he influence travelers following him by the immediate emotive connotation attached to the word "savage," but, because this name was retained for a lengthy period of European history in the Pacific, it will remain forever as a referent in history. Thus Captain Cook's visit, albeit short, to the shores of Niue is, in my view, an historical tragedy.

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APPENDIX I

Notes in historical sequence on arrivals and departures that involved European contact with Niue as referred to in the literature consulted.

1774 (June 20th)	*Resolution*--British Explorer Cook landed.
?	Possibly a whaler--Missionary Williams reports.
1830 (June)	*Camden*--Missionary Williams visited and took 2 Niueans Uea and Niumanga.
1831	*Messenger of Peace* visited--Rev. Crook returned Uea and Niumanga.
?	Niumanga escaped on a whale? timber? ship.
? 1832	Peniamana brought to Samoa in American Whaler by Captain Simpson.
1837(October 27th)	John Brown put overboard from whaling ship *Beaver* by Captain William J. Rogers.
1840 or previous?	Whaling ship visited according to report in *Boston Daily Advertiser.*
1840 (June 25th)	Missionary vessel *Samoa,* Mr Hunkin visited--attempted to land Samoan Christians, 3 Niueans brought to Samoa.
1842 (April)	Missionary vessel *Camden,* Mr Buzacott visited--attempted to land Peniamina and Fakafitienua who had been brought to Samoa previously in a whale ship.
1846 (October)	*John Williams*--Captain Morgan, Rev. W. Gill, Rev. H. Nisbet visited. Peniamina and Fakafitienua landed.
1848	*John Williams* returned, missionaries Turner & Nisbet visited.
1849 (July 6th & 7th)	H.M.S. *Havannah*--Captain Erskine visited.
1849 (October)	Missionaries Murray & Sunderland visited and Samoan missionary teacher Paulo landed. Chief Laumahina taken to Samoa and 1st pig landed. 2 Niueans brought to Samoa.

1852 (June)	Missionaries Murray & Sunderland visited and Laumahina returned to Niue.
1852	British frigate *Eugenie* visited, damaged Niuean property and killed several Niueans.
1854 (January 1st)	Missionaries Murray & Sunderland visited.
? (November 24th)	Missionary Hardie visited.
1857 (August 1st, 2nd, 3rd)	Missionaries Harbutt & Drummond landed.
1858 (August, 2 nights)	Missionaries Stallworthy & Gill landed.
1859 (December 12)	Missionary Turner landed.
1861 (August 20)	Missionaries Murray, Rev. and Mrs Lawes and Mrs Pratt landed. The Lawes took up residence as first European Missionaries.
1862 (June 5)	H.M.S. *Fawn*--Captain Hood landed.
1862 (November)	*Trujillo,* --a blackbirder, took about 50 men.
1863 (January 28)	*Rosa Patricia,* --a blackbirder, took about 33 men.
1863 (March 9)	*Rosa Y. Carmen,* --a blackbirder, took about 19 men.
1866	H. W. Patterson, Samoan agent for Messrs Godefroy and Son of Hamburg, came as first resident trader.
1867	Mission ship *John Williams* wrecked at Lepetu, Mafeku.
1867	R. H. Head, agent for Trader Bully Hayes, came as a resident trader--married a Niuean woman.
1868	Rev. F. E. Lawes arrived to take up residence.
1872	Dr. George Lawes left Niue.
1872	Brig. *Ocean* Captain Lyons, wrecked at Tuapa.
1873 (November 4)	H.M.S. *Pearl.* Commodore Goodenough landed.
1877	Barque *Irole,* Captain Scott, wrecked at Tuapa.
1879	Sir Arthur Gordon visited and appointed Mr R. H. Head as Acting Deputy Commissioner.
1900	Basil Thompson, Envoy Plenipotentiary landed and proclaimed Niue a British Protectorate.
1900	Lord Ranfurly, Governor of New Zealand visited Niue and formally annexed the island.

APPENDIX II

In an attempt to establish the period in which Niue was called and/or referenced as Savage Island I consulted the following:

1. *New Zealand Navy--Hydrographic Department:* The Hydrographic Department informed me that they kept and issued current maps in use only. They still used one map which still had the label Savage Island and no reference to Niue on it. This was a small scale British Admiralty Chart and used as reference, showing the distance between places. Reference Chart B.A. 2683.

The N.Z. Navy Hydrographic Department also checked the "Pacific Islands Pilot" Volume II, 9th Edition, 1969. In this reference Niue was referred to as "Niue or Savage Island" and this was not changed in the last correction supplement No. 9 1981.

2. *The University of Auckland Library:* A brief search was made by the reference staff and the staff of the N.Z. and Pacific room to attempt to establish when and if there had been a specific name change from Savage Island to Niue. Some more recent publications were found that still referred to the name Savage Island, namely,

1977 *"Webster's New Geographical Dictionary."* G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts. (p. 850: "Niue or Savage Island".)

1978 *"The Penguin Encyclopedia of Places"* 2nd Edition. W. G. Moore, Penguin Books, England. (p. 563: "Niue [Savage] Island".)

3. *Pacific Islands Year Books, Pacific Publications, Sydney:* I consulted all the available editions of the Pacific Islands Year Books in the Auckland University Library. The following information was obtained:

The maps stated "Niue or Savage Island" up to and including 9th Edition 1963. After that "Niue" only was listed.

The section titles stated "Niue or Savage Island" up to and including 6th Edition 1950. After that "Niue" only was listed.

It was of interest to note the comments in the history section with reference to Cook, the name, and the Niueans. (see following)

Comments from Pacific Islands Year Books

1939 (3rd Edition) p. 61:

Niue was discovered in 1774 by Captain Cook, who gave it the name of Savage Island. The natives, however are quiet and peaceful, but, at the time of Captain Cook's visit they seem to have conducted themselves in a peculiar way.

1942 (4th Edition) p. 61:

Niue was discovered in 1774 by Captain Cook who gave it the name of Savage Island. The natives who are a rather remarkable section of the Polynesians--they are thought to be a remnant of a very early migration--were then fierce and unfriendly but now they are quiet and peaceful. They are very industrious, and are much in demand as labourers and sailors.

1944 (5th Edition) p. 99:

Comment as for 4th Edition.

1950 (6th Edition) p. 137:

Comment as for 4th & 5th Editions plus this sentence: Culturally they possess a slightly lower standard than other Polynesian groups.

1957 (7th Edition) p. 136:

Captain James Cook was the first European to visit Niue Island making three landings on the west coast on June 20 1774. He met with a hostile reception from the inhabitants and in consequence named the island "Savage Island." The name Savage Island is deeply resented by Niueans and is in fact seldom used.

1963 (9th Edition) p. 148:)

1968 (10th Edition) p. 157:) Comment as for 7th Edition.

1972 (11th Edition) p. 157:)

1977 (12 Edition) p. 243:

The European discoverer of Niue was Captain James Cook who made three landings on the west coast on June 20 1774. Because of the fierce appearance and hostile conduct of the islanders he called it Savage Island. This name persisted for more than a century but has now fallen into disuse, and deservedly so for it does not and probably never did describe the inhabitants.

1978 (13th Edition) p. 229:

Comment as for 12th Edition but stopping at the word disuse, omitting the last sentence phrase.

1981(14th Edition) p. 307:

Comment as for 13th Edition.