NOTES ON ANGLO-ALGONKIAN CONTACTS 1605-1624

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Résumé. Les contacts entre Anglais et Algonquins dans les années 1605-1624 ont été marqués par de fréquents éclats de violence, de trahison et d'animosité en général. Cette hostilité peut être attribuée pour une large part à une incapacité tant du côté des Anglais que des Algonquins à comprendre ou à accepter leur conception respective du monde.
Not inappropriately, a moderately thick historical fog envelops the first English ventures across the Atlantic. Fragmentary evidence points to pre-Columbian voyages from Bristol as early as 1480 or 1481—voyages whose objectives seem to have been the mythical "Isle of Brasil" and new fishing-banks rumored to exist far beyond Ireland. Later there were the more firmly substantiated voyages of John and Sebastian Cabot, but there seems to be no word of contacts with any aborigines.

Then, suddenly the fog lifts, briefly, and we learn for the year 1502 that "merchauntes of Bristoll" have been in the "newe founde launde" and have brought back three men taken there, dressed in skins and eating more or less raw meat. These native Americans may have been Montagnais, in which case this was the first recorded Anglo-Algonkian contact, but surely they were not Eskimo (Williamson 1962:215-16, 223; and Quinn 1974:117-8). What Henry VII thought of the Americans, and vice versa, is not important. The fact that the contact resulted in an abduction is.

Yet for a century, little or nothing grew out of this early raid. Henry VIII was disinterested, and his son barely lived to see Sebastian Cabot stir up a voyage to Cathay over the top of Russia—so to speak. Mary, she of England, had grave problems with her faith and her husband, and Elizabeth was shaky on her throne, at least until the other Mary, she of Scotland, was safely put under protective custody. Meanwhile, far-sighted or merely restless Englishmen were beginning to swarm the seas. Sir Humphrey Gilbert tried his hand at colonizing New England, and failed, and Sir Walter Ralegh followed suit in North Carolina—and failed. Only in 1602 did colonial activities begin again. In that year Captain Bartholomew Gosnold discovered and named Cape Cod and Martha's
Vineyard. More extensive contacts were made with the Algonkians there, yet even during his brief stay Gosnold found that initially friendly contacts ended in hostility. While we cannot say that there was any definite "pattern," Algonkians and English both had misgivings, each about the other, and showed it.

Briefly put, before 1605 contacts were too few to betoken much of anything, except for Ralegh's Roanoke colony. There, the baloon, or better voyage d'essai sent out on 1584 evoked such Anglo-Algonkian fraternity that Arthur Barlowe could report: "We found the people most gentle, loving, and faithful, void of all guile and treason . . ." (Quinn 1955:108). But when the first settlers arrived in 1585 this "sweet love" began to turn "to the sourest and most deadly hate" (Shakespeare, Richard II, III, ii, 135-136). And by June 1586, when Lane returned to England, the seeds of the colony's failure had been well planted: Indian greed for tools and weapons offsetting English greed for agricultural products and land, and perhaps above all, English violent overreaction to any contrariety manifested by any Indian, be he Algonkian or of other stock.

So much, until 1605. In that year, an event off the coast of Maine gave origin, eventually, to the permanent English settlement of Virginia, which then meant anything from where Florida left off to where French Canada began. One Captain George Waymouth, of Devon(?), appeared before Monhegan Island with a company of twenty-eight men. He sailed about for twelve days, and on May 30, 1605, and on another island much nearer the mainland, Anglo-Algonkian contacts were made with mutual cordiality. But by June 3, Waymouth's suspicions had been
aroused, and he sent Owen Griffin to a nearby point to take stock of the "savages" there. Griffin soon returned, reporting that he had counted 283, "every one [with] his bow and arrows, [and] with their dogs and wolves which they keep tame at command, and not anything to exchange at all." Thereupon the company decided that the Algonkians were "very treacherous", and, according to James Rosier's account, straightway determined "to take some of them" as soon as they could, lest, "being suspicious we had discovered their plots, they should absent themselves from us" (Rosier 1605). So, the very next day, the non-treacherous English (emulating their forerunners of 1502) kidnapped five, and appropriated two canoes and all their bows and arrows. These five proved to be, in the words of Sir Ferdinando Gorges (1658:3) the "means under God of putting on foot, and giving life to all our Plantations."

In fact, within less than a year after Waymouth returned with his purloined Algonkian men and artifacts, James I signed letters patent authorizing two English groups to colonize North America from Cape Fear to Passamaquoddy Bay, and within yet another year two of the Indians were back in Maine helping one group in the establishment of Sagadahoc colony. (What happened to the other there is not immediately pertinent.) Yet the colony was premature, Waymouth's thievery had damaged relations with the Algonkians, news from England was bad, and the winter catastrophic. Sagadahoc was abandoned.

Meanwhile the other group sent three ships towards modern Virginia. Delayed in starting, and much delayed in arriving, they had entered Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607. Christopher Newport, admiral of the
little fleet, hove to, and he and a small party went ashore, to be warmly welcomed by "Savages creeping upon all four," who charged them "very desperately," but were driven off by fire power (Percy 1686; Barbour 1969:134). Obviously, the English visitors were not wanted.

Four days later, across the mouth of the James River, another landing party was entertained by a more friendly tribe, under the overlordship of Powhatan, and Newport gave them "beads and other trifling jewels." Only a week passed, however, before the English were challenged, some miles upstream, "in a most warlike manner," and shortly after they had chosen a spot for their settlement, Jamestown, the nearest chieftain, or Werowance, sent some forty men to look into their activities. Nevertheless, Newport took off on an exploring expedition, this time with the redoubtable Captain John Smith in his party. Five days later, the same Werowance, his force greatly augmented by allies, stormed Jamestown and inflicted many casualties before the ships' ordnance drove him off.

Up till then, it appears that the colonists had done little to merit such treatment. True, they had fought back when attacked, but in principle they obeyed their instructions "not to offend the naturals" if they could "eschew it" (Barbour 1969:51). But they were not going to pack up and leave. Yet hunger, sickness, and death, combined with the ever-present Algonkian menace, both weakened their will and reduced their numbers. Refusing to starve, John Smith collected all the corn he could, then went foraging farther afield, only to be caught in a bog where he was surrounded by a band of Pamunkies on a deer-hunt. Captured, Smith was led before Powhatan for some sort of judgment, but in some way
or other Powhatan's favorite daughter, Pocahontas, intervened in whatever was taking place. The upshot was that Powhatan enlisted Smith as an ally and as a subject Werowance. He even gave him a small tribe and a village to govern, a few miles away. Perhaps Powhatan sensed that Smith could be valuable as an ally.

Although Smith declined the honor, he collaborated within limits by exercising fairness in barter and by restraining the murderous instincts of his fellow colonists so far as he could. In fact, some months later, on becoming president of the council by a kind of seniority rule, Smith evolved two sensible codes of action: first, for the colonists, that he who would not work should not eat; and second, for the Indians, that there would be peace "till they did us injury, upon condition that they should bring in provision" (Smith 1612:83). He obviously realized that the English could not live without Indian help, and as long as he in fact managed to control both sides, individual clashes between English and Algonkians gradually subsided.

Unknown to Smith, however, the Virginia Company in London had reached two decisions regarding the Indians: (1) that by accepting a cooper crown at Newport's hands, Powhatan had signified his subjection to James I, and was therefore responsible to him for the behavior of the tidewater Indians, a conception which Smith rejected and Powhatan certainly did not accept; and then (2), as of May, 1609, the new Governor, Sir Thomas Gates, was instructed to surprise and detain as prisoners all the Indian priests, even to execute them if needed, in order to convert Powhatan's peoples to Christianity, beginning by procuring children to educate in English manners and speech, and proceeding
then to seize Powhatan and make alliances with more distant Indian chiefs. Fortunately, Smith had left Jamestown before Gates arrived with the second decision. No one could have implemented this mad scheme of pious lords, knights, and merchants of London.

Smith, meanwhile, was exploring Powhatan's "empire," and taking a primitive census of its man-power, towns, resources, and so on. His general summary of his ideas about the Indians is this: "They are inconstant in everything but what fear constraineth them to keep, crafty, timorous, quick of apprehension and very ingenuous [intelligent, skillful]. Some are of disposition fearful, some bold, most [of them] cautelous [crafty?], all of them savage [uncivilized, in the European sense]. . . . They are soon moved to anger, and so malicious that they seldom forget an injury." In war, he adds, "their chief attempts are by stratagems, treacheries, or surprisals" (Smith 1612:19-20, 26).

Apparently Smith traded shrewdly, sometimes forcefully. Yet while he speaks of the "fury of the savages" more than once, he refers to but seven or eight English casualties during his year as president (from September 10, 1608), including deaths from sickness or hunger. He admits to having whipped, cudgelled, and imprisoned some "insolent savages," as he put it, and on other occasions threatened armed conflict. That is to say, he scared them into supplying the colony with the provisions it so desperately needed. This policy he justified by writing that if he had not done so, if he had taken revenge, "then by their loss we should have lost ourselves" (Smith 1612:74). Indians who were dead, or fled, did not grow corn for the colony, and although Powhatan did remove himself and his personal entourage from the vicinity, we know of less than a dozen
Indians who were killed by or because of John Smith.

Contrast this with the behavior of Captain Martin at Nansemond, who surprised "this poor naked king," and tried to take the island where he lived by force. A struggle not unnaturally followed, and George Percy reported with pride that he, Percy, not Martin, drove the Indians out, burned their houses, ransacked their temples, took out the corpses of their kings from their tombs, and carried away the pearls, copper, and bracelets with which they had been adorned -- not in revenge, but in outrage over Martin's faint-heartedness. Smith adds dryly that the Indians then retaliated and redeemed their king.

Smith sailed away about October 4, 1609. Percy was made president by a triumvirate of Smith's ancient foes, and a fortnight later sent Captain Ratcliffe to Kecoughtan to build an English fort. Martin then returned to Jamestown from the island he (and Percy) had seized, leaving thirty men behind to hold it. These soon mutinied, and seventeen of them were never heard of again. The rest were found later, dead, their mouths stuffed with bread, in Indian contempt. Ratcliffe shortly was sent to Powhatan to bargain for supplies, but his self-importance and complacency resulted in his own death, by torture, and the murder of thirty-four men. Thus began the "starving time", which left but sixty alive of five hundred colonists.

In May 1610, the shipwrecked triumvirate, Gates, Somers, and Newport, arrived at last from Bermuda, with a hundred and fifty colonists. Quickly sizing up the situation, they decided to abandon Jamestown and return to England. In vain. Just as the miserable remnants of the colony drifted down the James, there arrived fresh from London a fleet bearing a great
nobleman, a grandson of a first cousin of Queen Elizabeth. This was Thomas West, third or twelfth Baron De La Warr, newly appointed Lord Governor and Captain General of Virginia and of the colonies there planted.

So they all sailed back to Jamestown, where his lordship set about putting everything in order. That accomplished, Sir Thomas Gates "returned to Kecoughtan" to be revenged on the naked savages there. (He had never been there in person.) Taking with him a drummer to play and dance, and entice the terrified Indians out of hiding, Gates seized the first opportunity to have five of them murdered on the spot, with many others fatally maimed, and to put the rest to flight.

Soon thereafter, his lordship sent a messenger to Powhatan demanding the return of English arms and English men which he may or may not have had. Powhatan sent back what George Percy called a "proud and disdainful answer." Thereupon his lordship put Percy in command of seventy men to take revenge on the Paspheghs and Chickahominies -- not on Powhatan. The details are reminiscent of the Walloon atrocities during the "Long War" between the Empire and Turkey that had just ended.

Percy and his men killed fifteen or sixteen in the first village they chanced upon, and Percy's lieutenant took the Pasphegh queen and her children and one adult male prisoners. Percy demanded why he did not kill these, too, but the lieutenant merely said that Percy had them now, and could do what he wanted. So Percy had the lone male's head cut off, and commanded his men to burn down the Pasphegh houses and destroy their crops -- this from a man who had just escaped starvation himself. Then his men began to murmur because the queen and her children were put in English boats alive; a council was called, and it was decided "to put the
children to death, the which was effected by throwing them overboard and shooting out their brains in the water." But the men were still not pleased that the queen was spared, and when the party got back to Jamestown (after further vicious "vengeance") neither was the Lord Governor. From his sick-bed he sent word that the queen should be burned. But Percy did not deem that "fitting," and he commanded Captain Davis to give her a quicker dispatch. In obedience, Davis took two men and put the queen to the sword. But even after that, Percy expostulated, the "Savages still [continued] their malice" (Percy Ms:21-25). You are better spared the remaining sixteen pages of similar horrors.

With the arrival of Sir Thomas Dale, replacing the chronically ill Lord De La Warr, Percy returned to England, just in time to meet Captain Samuel Argall in Dover Road. Argall was on his way to Virginia for the third time, and his presence there was to prove a windfall for Anglo-Algonkian relations. So far as the Indians were concerned, Argall was a second Captain John Smith. (His other attributes need not concern us here.) Hardly had he arrived when he set out with Dale on a moderately effective trading voyage, followed by a more successful one up the Potomac, alone. Returning to the colony with corn, he sailed back again to explore for mines, to expand trade, and whatnot. He was extravagantly successful. Through a combination of accident, his own astuteness, and a penchant for getting along with the Indians, Argall managed to possess himself peacefully of Pocahontas and bring her back to Jamestown. Probably he had no more in mind than holding her for ransom in the form of supplies, but what happened was that in her person he brought peace, a previously highly uncertain aspect of Anglo-Algonkian relations. The details are
unimportant, but the fact is that from early 1613 to early 1618, when Powhatan died, Indians and Englishmen almost got along well together. Four years later the great massacre came close to ending everything.

Now, to revert back to the north: From the collapse of the Sagadahoc colony until John Smith coasted along the shores of what he named New England, the best that can be said is that sundry ships came to fish and sailed away again, and only the French established posts and even one permanent colony, Quebec — their settlements in Acadia were uprooted by the efficient Argall soon after he delivered Pocahontas to Jamestown. But Smith, with colonies ever on his mind, promoted an insignificant expedition to chase whales and look for gold, and ended by finding a sound basis for a settlement or two. The pelts of furry animals, he discovered, were valuable; but inexhaustible wealth lay in fish: cod-fish, salt-fish, green-fish, dry-fish, cor-fish, or any other kind.

On this, his only visit to New England, Smith's relations with the Algonkians he met were friendly and profitable, with two exceptions: once when a quarrel arose with one, the one collected three friends, crossed Cohasset harbor to some rocks, took position there, and arrows flew in return for gun-shot until Smith's boat was out of range; again, when Smith and eight or nine companions had it out near the future Plymouth settlement with forty or fifty Indians, over some trifle, with Indian casualties only, but peace was restored within an hour. But the master of the ship that was loading fish for sale in Spain while Smith was exploring and surveying only waited for Smith to take off for England before he seized two dozen Cape Cod Algonkians and loaded them also for sale in Spain.
This vile act, Smith wrote in his *Description of New England* (Smith, 1629:47) moved the Indians' hatred against the English; and it might indeed have had serious effects on Anglo-Algonkian relations when the Pilgrims arrived had it not been for the French, or so it seems. A French ship had been wrecked on Cape Cod, but the men survived only to be captured by the Nausets, who traded them to other tribes and murdered many. The Frenchmen, however, presented the Plymouth Indians with smallpox in gratitude, with which they were all shortly dead. Without this concatenation of events, the innocent Pilgrims, despite the blustering courage of Miles Standish, might well have been the victims of a *furor Americanus*.

Be that as it may, according to William Bradford the Pilgrims sailed for America with the notion that they would be "in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous, and most treacherous . . .", etc. (Morrison 1970:26). But in fact, arrived at Cape Cod, they had difficulty in even seeing them, at close hand. Later, however, at the bottom of the bay, a stray Pilgrim came crying, "Men, Indians!", accompanied by the whish of flying arrows. Anglo-Algonkian contact had been made.

Although no casualties resulted from this first encounter, the Indians continued to "skulk" around the Pilgrims, wherever they were, until the middle of March 1621, when a sachem from Pemaquid, Maine, named Samoset, boldly strode up to Plymouth and addressed them in broken English. Through him, the Pilgrims met Tisquantum and Massasoit, and in Bradford's words "made a peace" with the latter which lasted forty years.

More nearby Indians were not so tractable. During the winter 1621-1622, for example, the sachem of Narragansett sent a bundle of new arrows wrapped in a rattlesnake's skin as a challenge. Bradford returned it stuffed with
powder and shot. Yet there was little trouble until the year 1622 brought some fifty colonists sent out by Thomas Weston, an old ally of the Pilgrims who had broken with them. They were an intractable crew which, once they were settled at modern Weymouth, stirred up the first real Anglo-Algonkian trouble since the Pilgrims landed.

But these complications had not really taken shape when a passing fishing-boat brought word of the Indian massacre in Virginia. Although this tragedy for Anglo-Algonkian understanding is too well known to discuss here, a few circumstances should perhaps be pointed out. John Smith and Samuel Argall had vanished from the scene, and the ever-cautious Powhatan had died. With the beginnings of what has been called a boom in Virginia, the colonists felt themselves secure. A vainglorious governor had encouraged training Indians in the use of fire-arms, and he had just been replaced by a relatively young governor who seemed easy-going. As a result Powhatan's successor, Opechancanough, thought he saw a chance to annihilate the swaggering whitemen he had loathed for fifteen long years. The outcome was that an empire was destroyed; Powhatan's, not James's.

That was in 1622. Fifteen years later the Pequot War struck Boston and Plymouth, but Indian rivalries gave the victory to the colonials. In another few years, Opechancanough attempted another dislodgment in Virginia, only to be dislodged himself. Finally, a generation later, anglophile Massasoit's son, called King Philip, launched the last counterattack against the English in that part of America. There remained only Anglo-French rivalry in Europe and America to abet the surviving Algonkians in what was by then Anglo-America.
Let me conclude with a bit of conjecture that involves an attempt to turn time back. Three and a half to four centuries ago, English and Indian values differed as much as their languages, and both were greatly different from today's values. For example, it is inconceivable for us really to have everpresent in the back of our minds the concepts of 1600 A.D. of the sacredness of the King or the authority of the Bible. But by the same token, it was inconceivable for the English colonizers to consider that Powhatan was as sacred as James I, and the wishes of Okee as authoritative as the Pentateuch.

Apart from these political and religious tenets, we know from John Smith and others that, for example, Indian customs and traditions regarding property had their parallel, but the English were blind to this, and refused to recognize Indian rights of any sort. Contrariwise, the Indians tried to see the English point of view, though they had no custom that paralleled, say, the English punishment of death for the theft of a penny-whistle.

Broadly speaking, there were basic similarities between the Indians and the English that far outweighed the contrasts. In government, in religious rites, in social habits such as eating, marriage, or hospitality, the differences were those of manner, not of matter; but the English were incapable of seeing this. They steadfastly maintained that the God of the Indians was the Devil, and all Indian practices were his works.

The facts of the case were different. The Indians were at least as practical as the English, and probably more rational. True, such novelties as guns interested them (the noise startled them), but the English blunderbusses were no more going to bring Opechancanough to his
knees than Hitler's V-1's and V-2's would defeat the Londoners. So, while the English looked upon the Algonkians with a mixture of disdain, pity, and mistrust, the Algonkians regarded the English with "defiance, slyness, confident and sympathetic familiarity, fright, aggressive boldness, or scornful or apathetic indifference" (Leroy 1927:237).

To go beyond such generalities I feel is dangerous, though I have received explanations of Powhatan's policy from some, and of Indian territorial systems and hunting grounds from others, of "primitive" psychology and mysticism as well, and of why Jack of the Feathers wore feathers. And I have advanced a few hypotheses myself, in my book on Pocahontas. But today I have wanted only to present a few facts, not all of them known to you, I hope. Facts are what we need most, if we are ever to have a fair study of Anglo-Algonkian contacts and relations.
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