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FIRST CONTACT: EARLY ENGLISH ENCOUNTERS WITH NATIVES OF

RUSSIA, WEST AFRICA, AND THE AMERICAS, 1530-1614

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Melanie L. Perreault

1997

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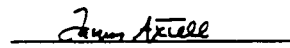
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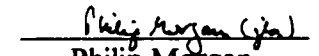Approved, August 1997

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the field of comparative history has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity as scholars attempt to understand the past in a global context. This study examines the early period of English exploration of the Atlantic world and the confrontation of English men and women with natives of geographically distinct regions. By comparing English interactions with Russians, West Africans, and North and South Americans during the contact period, this dissertation argues that the mutually constructed dialogue between the visiting English and the natives of each region was a struggle for power and control. In their efforts to construct the natives as being both recognizable and inferior, the English utilized contemporary notions of class and gender not only to understand the people they encountered, but as a strategy to make the natives submissive.

While the English noted that the natives of each region had different skin color, notions of racial hierarchy were not fixed in the sixteenth century. In fact, the English were more threatened by similarity than by difference during their early encounters. Convinced that they were a unique and superior people, the discovery of Russia as a distorted image of English society was cause for great consternation among the English visitors. In an effort to distance themselves from the apparently barbarous Russians, the English suggested that despite their outward signs of "civility," the Russian people had a fundamental flaw that allowed them to accept tyranny and oppression.

Despite their belief in the superiority of their society, the English focus on economic matters above all else during the first-contact period forced them to act within the parameters of native cultures. Not only did the English have to come to terms with the demands of unfamiliar environments, but they often had to meet the demands of native peoples. Natives in each region held considerable power based on their military prowess and their monopoly on local trade and information about the area. As vital allies, trading partners, and informants, the natives recognized their power and manipulated the English visitors at every opportunity.

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FIRST CONTACT: EARLY ENGLISH ENCOUNTERS WITH NATIVES OF RUSSIA, WEST AFRICA, AND THE AMERICAS, 1530-1614

INTRODUCTION

The world used to be smaller. An entire lifetime could be spent within the confines of a family farm, a local village, or tribal hunting grounds. You could go for days, months, even years without meeting a stranger; if you did encounter a new face, chances are it did not look much different from your own. The land was as familiar as the food you ate every day, each river, tree, and field a reminder that this was home. There were a few brave souls, of course, who dared to leave their families to travel long distances in search of trade or adventure and returned with stories of the strange sights they had seen. But for most travelers, the oceans presented the final limit beyond which they could only imagine what must be waiting for curious visitors.

In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, the world revealed itself to be much larger and more complex than it had seemed only a few generations earlier. Technological advances shrank the world by making long distances shorter, yet the subsequent confrontation of heretofore disconnected lands and peoples made the world seem improbably large. Such a vast array of colors, animals, religions, foods, and languages suddenly presented themselves to the scrutiny of outsiders that even people who had assumed that their culture was the norm from which all others differed began to turn a critical eye towards their surroundings. The result was nothing less than a transformation,

a new global awareness gained through an often bitter meeting of cultural and economic rivals.

Most studies of the great "Age of Exploration" fall into two major categories. The first, earlier historiography celebrated the triumph of Europeans in overcoming tremendous odds to find their way to distant lands, conquer the native peoples, and establish colonies based on European cultural imperatives. These studies emphasized narrative content, contained little critical analysis, and virtually ignored the perspective of the native peoples the Europeans encountered. More recent works have turned a much more critical eye towards the era of European exploration. These studies eschew narrative for an analytical approach, often focusing on a particular area rather than looking at the large picture, and emphasize the impact of exploration on the natives.[1]

Clearly, the Eurocentric tenor of many early exploration studies would be unacceptable today, but in offering much needed revisions to earlier scholarship, more recent works have often lost a valuable perspective to the encounters. Two problems stand out as the most significant failures of exploration studies. First, by focusing on individual regions or countries, the authors miss the truly global nature of the entire experience. Second, a lack of attention to narrative has caused some scholars to miss the important chronological development that shaped cultural interactions in the sixteenth century. This study is an attempt to resolve these problems by using a comparative

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[1] For examples of the first category of studies, see the many works of James A. Williamson, and, to a lesser extent, the works of Samuel Eliot Morison. My critique of these scholars should not be taken as a dismissal of their importance, however. Both scholars have conducted exhaustive research and have contributed a thorough understanding of European maritime history and the development of colonies.

approach to a critical analysis of English encounters with the natives of Russia, West Africa, and the Americas during the first contact period.

Historians and anthropologists often speak of "first contact" without defining what they mean by the term. Scholars in both disciplines have studied the earliest contact periods of many different cultures, but few have attempted to establish guidelines as to the limits or scope of a true "first contact." The assumption is that the phrase is self-explanatory or that everyone knows what it means. But without a clear definition of first contact, the dialogue between scholars of different disciplines and geographic regions can become mired in endless debates over semantic differences.[2]

One of the first assumptions that many scholars make, admittedly unconsciously, is that first contact is an event during which Europeans spread throughout the world, meeting new peoples, cultures, and lands along the way. Thus, first contact is primarily European-driven, an inevitable consequence of European expansion. What this interpretation misses, however, is that first contacts took place all around the world long before and after Europe's great period of expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While various African culture groups may have had more in common with each other than did, say, the Portuguese and the Bantu, it is folly to assume that all African, Asian, or American natives were the same and therefore meetings of different culture groups within these geographic regions were somehow insignificant or not worthy of being labeled first

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[2] Edward Schieffelin and Robert Crittenden have attempted to create a framework from which to analyze all first contacts. In their case study of encounters in New Guinea, they argue that there are three dimensions to a cultural first encounter: existential, socio-cultural, and historical. See *Like People You See in a Dream: First Contact in Six Papuan Societies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 5.

contacts. Clearly, most European-native contacts had consequences of more lasting import than did native-native contacts, but it is important to recognize that most native groups, and European, had met "others" before they met each other. Through these experiences, native groups had in place a way to explain the existence of different peoples before the Europeans arrived.

One school of thought maintains that the only "true" first contact is the very first time one culture meets another. Using this definition, the first Cabot voyage to Newfoundland in 1497 would qualify as the first English contact in North America. Subsequent voyages, including Cabot's second in 1498, by this view cannot be considered first contact because the English had already begun to form an image of the New World and its people, and the native Americans had developed their own impressions of the strangers from across the sea. Once the initial meeting took place, according to this view, interactions between Europeans and natives could never again take place in an environment free of bias, prejudice, and misconceptions, which would inevitably inform future relations. This interpretation places enormous stress on the importance of the very first encounter since it presumably sets the course for all future interactions.

An interesting feature of the argument for "pure" first contact is that members of the two cultures need not meet each other physically in order for there to have been sufficient interaction to constitute a legitimate first contact. As many historians and anthropologists have pointed out, the rumors of the approach of white men spread far faster than the actual presence of Europeans. Indians living in interior regions of North America already had an image of the Europeans long before they came face-to-face with

the first missionary, trader, or explorer in their particular geographic region. Natives also

felt the effects of first contact without ever having seen a European, or perhaps without

ever having heard of the newcomers. European plants and animals may have crossed the

new lands before the human invaders traveled from coast to coast. Trade goods often

preceded Europeans along traditional native exchange networks, spreading new

technology disassociated with the white skin of the manufacturers. European diseases

spread far more quickly than trade goods, bringing devastation to entire populations which

had no personal experience with Europeans. Once Europeans did arrive into these

affected regions, the terms of first contact had forever been altered by the "proto-contact"

contact.

      While there can be no doubt that natives felt the effects of Europeans before

actually meeting them, and clearly these effects had significant consequences, it is

unhelpful to assume that all subsequent meetings were somehow tainted and should not be

considered first contacts. Much of the problem seems to be definitional: what is a first

contact? There is little ambiguity in the word "first": everyone would agree that it is used

to describe something that has never been before. When linked with "contact," however,

the term "first" is open to negotiation. What does "contact" mean? If a few natives saw

Verrazzano coasting along North America's Atlantic seaboard in 1524, has first contact

taken place? I would argue that significant first contact has several distinct features that

distinguish it from merely incidental contact.

      The most important feature of a significant first contact is that it must be face-to-

face. Despite all the rumors, folk-tales, and published descriptions that may have preceded

contact on both sides of the encounter, no imagined character can fully prepare one group of people for meeting an alien other. Sixteenth-century sailors certainly had preconceived images of the natives they would encounter, but reality often did not mesh with imagination. Historians who focus on the intellectual or literary constructions of the "other" without reference to actual events during first contact miss one of the most significant subjects of early modern history. What matters in the final analysis is not just what people *thought* about first contact but what they *did* during first contact. Of course, thought and action are not mutually exclusive and thought (usually) precedes action, but a physical confrontation with another human being is drastically different from reading or hearing a description. Actions give rise to new thoughts and revise old images, furthering the impact of even the most spurious meetings. There is no substitute for a face-to-face encounter when it comes to first contact.

Secondly, a significant first contact must be of sufficient duration to allow for more than just cursory experiences to inform one culture group about another. This qualification eliminates reconnaissance voyages that cruised up and down the coasts of newly encountered lands without stopping to interact with the natives. While these voyages certainly began the process of informing each side about the other, observing passing Europeans from the shore is qualitatively different from negotiating terms of peace or trade. There is no set time limit which defines "sufficient duration"--a particular group of Europeans and natives may have more significant interaction in a twenty-four hour period than another group may have in two weeks. What is important is that the contact is sustained long enough for there to be mutual interaction--each side must acknowledge

the existence of the other.

The importance of mutual interaction raises the third major point of significant first contact--its two-sidedness. There are always two sides to first contact; what might be old news to one side could be completely new for the other. For example, many Africans living on the West Coast knew about Europeans from fifteenth-century Portuguese voyages and therefore were not surprised when the first Englishmen arrived a century later. This previous experience does not negate the importance of English first contact since African peoples and cultures were still new to the English. Subsequent groups of Englishmen could have first contacts with natives even after the first English arrived. What matters in this instance is that one side or the other *perceived* it to be a first contact and acted accordingly.

It is also important to recognize that first contacts do not occur in a vacuum. One of the most important players in any long-distance first contact situation is the natural environment in which the meeting takes place. Many first contacts do not have a significant environmental component: two cultures meeting in an environment familiar to both sides will not experience any problems adjusting to a new physical world. For sixteenth-century Europeans, however, the exotic and often dangerous environments they encountered in their travels offered a challenge as important as the human presence in the new lands. First contact took place not only on a human level but with new plants, animals, diseases, and other natural phenomena. Just as the human first contact always has two sides to it, so does environmental contact because Europeans carry imports from their own environments.

Another important factor affecting the development of first contact is the context of the meeting: what are the factors that caused two previously separate peoples to come together for the first time? The purpose of the visit helps determine the earliest interaction between two cultures and must be taken into consideration. For instance, an explorer under intense pressure to locate gold will ask different questions, behave differently, and probably describe a different society than a Jesuit on his first mission to the Indians. A slaver will have an agenda different from an explorer searching for the elusive Northwest Passage. A man contemplating establishing his family in a new land will look at the situation with a different eye than the sailor contracted only for the duration of a voyage. Likewise, native peoples bring their own self-serving agendas to the first meeting. Natives looking for a military alliance approach the Europeans in a different way than those simply looking to trade. The wide variety of agendas, both stated and unstated, on both sides of first contact makes any sweeping generalizations about the ideological background to the meetings unsatisfactory. Each event must be analyzed for underlying motives that might affect the development of contact.

First contact must also be analyzed in the context of the time. While some sixteenth-century theories (scientific and otherwise) about the nature of Africans, Asians, and Indians may be repugnant to modern sensibilities, twentieth-century moralizing often obscures the already sketchy accounts of initial meetings. Modern historians might be tempted to locate the beginnings of imperialism in the earliest encounters, but very few sixteenth-century English men or women viewed first contact as the precursor to a full-blown colonial system. It has become popular for historians and other scholars to dissect

documents, searching for hidden agendas and motives which the authors may not even have been aware of, or certainly would not have stated in black and white. But while it is important to ask questions of the sources, in many cases we can take the written explanation at face value. Though often couched in religious rhetoric, many accounts were not shy about assigning the potential for riches as the primary motive for first contact. If we accept avarice at its face value, then why should we simply dismiss other stated motives as a cynical ploy to divert attention from more materialistic goals? The key to understanding these documents is to identify the hidden agendas which make sense from a sixteenth-century viewpoint while also paying attention to what the author actually writes.

At a certain point, it becomes unhelpful to continue to consider interaction a first contact. Determining this point is perhaps the most difficult task facing scholars of this subject. There is no limit set in stone as to when first contact turns into something else, only vague impressions of a subtle shift in policy, approach, and demeanor. When the novelty wears off, when it no longer requires in-depth descriptions to explain the other, when interactions have become routinized, only then does first contact end. This shift is signaled more by behavior than attitude: Europeans continued to marvel at the peculiarities of foreign cultures well into the nineteenth century, but they knew how to behave with other people and knew what to expect in return. While authors could continue to write about the mysteries of foreign dominions, there was no question as to what the nature of the European/native relationship would be.

A final point to consider about first contact is that it is geographically limited.

Early reconnaissance and trade voyages were sporadic. Rather than spending a long time in one or two regions or proceeding incrementally down a coast, most expeditions skipped up and down the coastal areas they contacted. Because of this characteristic of early ventures, it is incorrect to assume that contact occurred in one region simply because it occurred in the surrounding regions. Thus, first contacts could occur along the same coast for several decades, despite the almost continual presence of European ships in the area. Scholars must evaluate each contact on its own to determine whether it fits into the category of "first contact."

This study examines first contact as a process rather than a discrete event. Through a comparative study of English first contact in Russia, West Africa, Guiana, and Virginia, I argue that the first-contact period was largely about control--who had it, how did they get it, and how could the English increase theirs. During the collision of cultures in the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, the English visitors had to come to terms with the often inexplicable environment, uncooperative natives, and mutinous English men and women.

The choice of regions examined here needs some explanation, as much for its absences as for its inclusions. While many scholars have identified the English experience in Ireland as the most important predecessor to their colonization of America, the model does not hold up to scrutiny. English activity in Ireland was primarily a military action, focused on subduing the natives at whatever cost, through extreme violence if necessary. Yet even though many individual participants in early English encounters with native Americans may have envisioned or even desired their activities to be centered around

military subjugation, the colonization of America was not a military occupation. Indeed, the most important formative experiences for the North America encounters took place in the freezing trade houses in Russia and the sweltering river basins of West Africa.[3]

The English often found themselves in situations where they were completely dependent on people they considered to be inherently inferior. The natives in each region had a surprising amount of control based on three primary sources of power: military (they could assist or hamper the English; economic (they could negotiate trade or simply refuse to trade entirely); and information (they held crucial knowledge of the environment, language, and other native groups). Confronted with the uncomfortable reality that they were not entirely in control of the situation, the English had to find some means to wrest control from the natives. Complete military subjugation was not an option in this early period; the English were outnumbered, operating in unfamiliar environments, and dependent on the goodwill of the natives for successful trade.

Instead, the English participants in first contact attempted to assert their control over the natives by placing them into categories that were both recognizable and inferior. Contemporary notions of the embedded power hierarchies of race, class, and gender provided the English with the framework with which to explain native behavior and to guide their interactions with the inhabitants of each region. The natives were not quick to

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[3] David Beers Quinn has been the chief promoter of the notion of Ireland as precursor to the North American colonial experience. See *Ireland and America: Their Early Associations, 1500-1640* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991). Nicholas Canny, among others, has also made the case for a connection between English experiences in Ireland and America in his "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 30(1973), 575-98.

give up their sources of power, however, and were often able to assert their own control over the situation.[4]

Rather than focusing on the academic debate that emerged once Europeans discovered that the world was full of people who looked and acted differently than they did, this study examines how these categories of analysis became manifest in the behavior of people directly confronted with natives in each region. It is one thing to sit back in a comfortable London parlor room discussing the nuances of the biblical sources for racial differences; it is quite another to be huddled in a makeshift fort, listening intently for any sounds that might signal the beginnings of an impending attack. The sources of this study are largely the writings of people directly involved in first contact. Through letters back home, journals, promotional pamphlets, and the occasional court case, the English visitors left a rich record of documents outlining their experiences. In an effort to understand the native perspective, I have used archaeological and anthropological sources as well as a growing ethnohistorical literature.

The issue of race and racism is central to many studies of early encounters between Europeans and others during the sixteenth century. Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro*, now almost thirty years old, still stands as the most

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[4] Michel Foucault was one of the first scholars to recognize the power of language to act as a medium through which to understand and construct behavior. Foucault argued that discourse weighed most heavily in the areas of sexuality and politics, linking desire and power through language. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 215-37. For a recent discussion of discourse theory as it relates to the early-contact period in particular, see Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5.

often cited work on English racial attitudes during the formative years of European

exploration. But Jordan's work, as insightful as it often is, has one major flaw: the failure

to account for chronological development in the early period. Jordan freely mixes

sixteenth and eighteenth-century documents to expose a deep-seated set of racial

prejudices that informed early interactions between the English and Africans. Subsequent

scholars have repeated Jordan's error and even transplanted it to the Anglo-Indian

relationship. The pattern as established by Jordan and his followers is to touch briefly a

few early contact sources, then jump rapidly into later documents, making little distinction

between literary representations of race and the first-hand accounts of encounters.[5]

A careful analysis of the early documents reveals, however, that sixteenth-century

racial ideology was quite different from eighteenth-century polemics about skin color and

the "Great Chain of Being." As a category with discursive power, race was almost absent

from the accounts written by people involved in the earliest encounters. Race was

important but in a surprising way. Of all the peoples the English encountered during the

first-contact period, the Russians received the bulk of English arguments that approached

racial inferiority. The general lack of emphasis on racial ideology during the early

encounters had more to do with utility than it did with feelings of racial tolerance or

solidarity. Since class and gender provided well-known, useful, and allegedly natural

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[5] Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972). Among the many subsequent studies that adopt Jordan's analysis are James Horn's *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), and Alden Vaughan's collection of essays, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

hierarchies with which to understand and frame power relationships, the English were much more likely to invoke class and gender rather than the abstract and as yet amorphous notions of racial difference. Significantly, the period immediately following the end of the early meetings of cultures witnessed the rise of racial ideology of the kind Jordan correctly identifies. But for the actual participants in first contact, class and gender became the most important and useful lenses through which they viewed and interacted with the people they encountered.

The tendency of many scholars to conflate literary representations of others with first-hand accounts also carries with it a subtle yet important problem. By focusing on images produced in a context outside the actual face-to-face meetings of peoples of different colors and cultures, studies based almost entirely on contemporary literature risk further marginalizing the native cultures in much the same way as the sixteenth-century authors did. While poems, plays, pamphlets, and novels can be valuable indicators of popular ideology, they miss a crucial aspect of the early encounters--native agency in directing the course of first contact. Much to the frustration of the English visitors, the natives in each region also viewed the English through culturally created lenses of race, class, and gender, and often stubbornly insisted that the English follow native customs. The first-contact period was a mutually constructed dialogue of different cultures, without a foreordained outcome.[6]

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[6] A recent example of scholarship that fails to properly account for the difference between literary and first-hand impressions of natives is Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before *Othello*: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans." *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 54(January 1997), 7-18. Curiously, the Vaughans note that some representations of sub-Saharan Africans "were largely neutral, especially in

Many of the participants in the dialogue have become household names in the four centuries since they encountered each other. Walter Ralegh has become something of a quixotic romantic hero, renowned for his determined search for gold. John Smith, Pocahontas, and Powhatan had the dubious distinction of becoming cartoon characters familiar to schoolchildren in America and throughout the world. Yet the names Anthony Jenkinson, William Towerson, and Charles Leigh conjure up no idealized two-dimensional figures in the minds of Disney's devotees. Their stories have largely been ignored, as have the stories of other nameless English men and women who left their homeland for the largely unknown environs of Russia, Africa, and the Americas. To begin to understand these travelers, we must first understand who they were, why they left, and what they thought about themselves and their country.

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merchant's accounts of voyages to Guinea" but dismiss the significance of the reports, arguing that "the purpose of such ventures was commercial, not ethnographic, and the narrators generally hewed close to their appointed task (42)."

CHAPTER ONE

The English Abroad: Who They Were, Why They Left,
and What They Thought

In retrospect, the men and women who boarded the cramped wooden vessels

bound for distant lands were on a grand journey destined to change the world forever.

But as they carried their few belongings--perhaps an extra shirt, a set of tools, a book or

two--onto the creaking deck, the travelers had more immediate concerns than the future

course of world history. The seasoned sailors among the group remembered other

voyages on other ships, hoping that their string of luck had not run out and that they

would again return to see their home port. First-timers worried about the stories they had

heard about ocean voyages. Would menacing pirates, a sudden storm, or a painful disease

bring a ignominious end to their voyage? Merchants thought about the money they could

make or lose, soldiers imagined the numerous enemies who might be on the receiving end

of their musket balls, and colonists hoped that the land they settled would be better than

the one they left behind.

Most of these voices have forever been lost, the stories they had to tell buried with

the bearer or fading into obsolescence through the passage of time. Fortunately, some

voices, usually of elite, educated men, have been preserved in the written accounts of the

contact period, in letters, journals, and promotional pamphlets. Other sources provide a

murkier picture of the events and people in distant lands through court cases, wills, and

archaeological remains. Through a careful reading of these fragments of the past, the

voices tell us who they were, why they left, and what they thought about their world.

i. Who They Were

It has become common practice for historians writing about the interaction between European and indigenous peoples to address the issue of the "other." Clearly it is important to understand the construction of the "other" as recorded in contemporary English accounts, but before we can attempt to explain how Englishmen confronted the existence of different people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we must first try to understand the visitors themselves. Who were these men (since the vast majority were men) who traveled across the seas? What beliefs and experiences did they hold in common that might affect their encounter with other people? What were their motives for participating in the voyages? An understanding of the sixteenth-century English mariner is an important first step in explaining the events during first contact. Sailors brought with them the background, beliefs, and traditions associated with their various classes, but they also belonged to a unique seafaring culture. When they approached people in foreign lands, they came as rich, poor, urban, rural, educated, illiterate men, but they also came as sailors.

It is from this background, from the general culture of sixteenth-century Englishmen and the particular culture of sailors, that the first interaction with new peoples in new lands took place. The sailors were above all else English, part of a community with

common ideas and beliefs which would affect their interpretation of events thousands of miles away from home. Confronted with strange sights and unusual behaviors, the sailors could only describe what their minds, shaped in England, were ready to accept.[1]

Unfortunately, very few documents exist to shed light on the lives of Tudor sailors. Even though modern historians are beginning to turn to non-traditional sources, for the most part history remains the study of the literate and the literate's point of view. Despite the fact that a surprising number of common seamen could sign their names, most accounts of sixteenth-century mariners were written by officers, investors, and educated Englishmen. The image of sailors contained in these accounts is something short of flattering. Historians who use these sources without a critical eye may simply pass on sixteenth-century stereotypes to twentieth-century readers.[2]

Many early histories of English sailors were quick to accept the report of elite observers as fact. In these accounts, the average sailor was an illiterate, ill-tempered, unkempt man who only looked out for himself and stumbled into sailing almost by accident. Sir Richard Hawkins's description of the difficulty of gathering his sailors is often cited as evidence of the character of the average mariner. Before embarking, Hawkins had to

> search all lodgings, taverns and alehouses. For some [sailors]

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[1] See Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 184.

[2] David B. Quinn's examination of the High Court of the Admiralty records for this period revealed that many seamen could sign their own names, an indication however imperfect, of a moderately high rate of literacy. See Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 215.

> would ever be taking their leave and never depart; some drink
> themselves so drunk that except they were carried aboard, they of
> themselves would not be able to go one step; others knowing the
> necessity of the time, feigned themselves sick; others to be indebted
> to their hosts, and forced me to ransom them; one his chest, another
> his sword; another his shirts; another his instruments for sea; and
> others, to benefit themselves of the imprest [money] given them,
> absented themselves; making a lewd living in deceiving all whose
> money they could lay hold of, which is a scandal too rife among our
> seamen.[3]

Once on board, according to the stereotype, sailors had little concern for hygiene, wore a

single set of clothes the entire voyage, and were kept under control only by the threat of

extreme physical punishment.[4]

Contemporary literature also contributed to the unflattering image of the sixteenth-

century seaman. English literature in the second half of the century had a steady increase

in nautical references. Though this increase might be a sign of growing interest in

overseas exploration, most sixteenth-century authors drew their nautical information from

classical sources, not contemporary. Greek romances typically portrayed the sailor as

either a bloodthirsty pirate or a coward, characters who also found similar treatment in

Elizabethan literature. To this list of stereotypical mariners Elizabethan authors added the

noble pirate and the steadfast "old salt," who managed to beat the odds and live

respectable lives amidst the chaos of ship life. Despite the potential for an admirable

mariner, there was a sense that the average sailor was decrepit and was only getting

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[3] Quoted in Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860: A Social Survey.* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1970), 32.

[4] For a relatively recent version of this image of the British sailor, see Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck* (London: J.M Dent, 1970).

worse as the increased demand for seamen in the late sixteenth century lowered standards even further.[5]

Like all stereotypes, this image has some basis in historical fact; yet English sailors were not the semi-humans depicted in Elizabethan literature and many contemporary accounts. New evidence from sources such as wills, court records, and probate inventories provides a more balanced picture of sixteenth-century mariners. A survey of depositions of sixteenth-century seamen shows that deep-sea sailors were overwhelmingly young single males, most in their twenties, with a few teenagers and older men. Of 89 testators in wills of Guinea sailors between 1553 and 1565, 20 were or had been married, and of the married men, only a few mentioned children, suggesting that their marriages were probably recent. The majority of these sailors had no settled domestic unit at home-- their wills often referred to their "hosts" and "hostesses," indicating that they stayed in lodgings between voyages.[6]

Given their youth and lack of strong familial and community ties, it is no surprise that English sailors had the reputation of being a shiftless bunch, but they had not all turned to the sea as a last resort. Though it is difficult to determine what classes of society sailors came from, most seemed to adopt the seafaring life through family

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[5] Harold Francis Watson, *The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama, 1550-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 46. In the popular imagination, the sailor was "the smelly, independent, drunken, loud-singing, and quarrelsome individual encountered near the quays and in and out of drinking places and brothels." Quinn, *England and Discovery*, 222.

[6] P.E.H Hair and J.D Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea, 1553-1565: The New Evidence of Their Wills* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 109, 111, 112.

connections. Boys who were apprenticed to sea masters usually began at age eleven and served seven to twelve years. Apprentices often had to come from families with some money, since they had to pay the master to teach their child the trade. A study of apprentices in Ipswich from 1596 to 1651 shows that a third came from a maritime background, 12% had fathers in the cloth industry, and the rest were mostly from families in handicrafts or trade. The majority of seamen did not have the luxury of a formal apprenticeship and so did not leave behind a contractual record. These men were the anonymous sailors, probably from the lower classes, who did the daily drudge work vital to the success of any venture but which did not bring them the recognition given their officers. Though many of these common seamen were skilled sea-farers, impressment brought many useless and unruly men on board the ships. Privateering missions were notorious for being filled with land-men trying to get rich, with no appreciable skills and very little discipline.[7]

Once sailors committed themselves to the seafaring life, they faced difficult living conditions. Richard Hakluyt the younger noted that "no kind of men of any profession in the common wealth pass their years in so great and continual hazard . . . and . . . of so many few grow to gray hairs." Besides the obvious dangers of shipwrecks and pirates, Elizabethan sailors faced other hardships that shortened their lives. Luke Foxe described the daily life of sailors in the early seventeenth century as consisting of "a hard cabin, cold and salt meat, broken sleeps, moldy bread, dead beer, wet clothes, want of fire." Of these

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[7] G.V Scammell, "Manning the English Merchant Service in the Sixteenth Century." *Mariner's Mirror* 56(1970), 131-54; Quinn, *England and Discovery*, 212-13.

hardships, poor diet probably had the greatest impact on the quality and length of the sailor's life. The 1570 victualling scale for the English navy was one pound of biscuit, a gallon of beer, and two pounds of meat for every man four days a week, cheese and dried fish for the other three days. On long voyages, these rations were often decreased due to unanticipated delays or spoilage. The consequences of a shortage of food were so severe that Walter Ralegh advised that "if any man steal any victuals, either by breaking into the hold or otherwise, he shall receive the punishment as of a thief or murderer of his fellows." Any sailor who ate more than his allotment of food was literally stealing food from the mouths of his shipmates and could hasten malnutrition or even starvation. [8]

While dietary problems could weaken sailors, inattention to hygiene on shipboard also contributed to the poor health of the mariners. Each ship had at least one sailor who was supposed to keep the ship reasonably clean, but he often fought a losing battle. Ignoring the direct orders of their officers, sailors often urinated, vomited, or threw leftover food into ballast areas, where waste collected, fermented, and created a noxious odor. By the end of a voyage, the smell became so bad that sailors often had to "rummage" the ship before returning home, a practice which involved bringing the ship near a beach, throwing the ballast overboard, spraying down the hold with vinegar, and

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[8] Quoted in Kenneth R. Andrews, "The Elizabethan Seamen." *Mariner's Mirror* 68(1982), 245-262, 246; John Hattendorf, ed., *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Cambridge: Navy Records Society, 1993), 102-103; Walter Ralegh, "Orders to be observed by the commanders of the fleet . . ." in *Fighting Instructions, 1530-1816* (London: Navy Records Society, 1905), 40.

replacing the ballast with clean stones or sand.[9] Modern food inspectors would identify such conditions as a health hazard waiting to happen, but sixteenth-century sailors knew nothing of the potential for bacterial infection aboard their ships.

The crude conditions aboard ship held other dangers for the mariner. The state of medical knowledge in sixteenth-century England was already low by modern standards, but the medical attention given sailors was reduced to the elemental. Low wages and hazardous journeys made it difficult to recruit qualified surgeons; physicians who signed on were expected to treat everyday ailments such as broken bones, venereal disease, and assorted illnesses, but they also had to contend with the mysterious symptoms of tropical disease.[10] Any surgical operation such as blood-letting or amputation was an invitation to infection on the filthy ships. In many cases, the treatment may have been worse than the original ailment or was simply an attempt to alleviate the suffering of a dying patient.

Sailors also suffered harsh punishment for any shipboard infractions. Sixteenth-century notions of punishment on dry land seem harsh to most modern observers, but discipline on board ship was even stricter. In 1568 the Royal Navy issued the Orders to be used in the King's or Queen's Majesties Ships or Navy, which described proper punishment for sailors caught swearing: a marlin spike was "clapt into their mouths, and tied behind their heads, and then [they had] to stand a whole hour, until their mouths be very bloody;

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[9] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, A.D 500-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 135.

[10] J.D Alsop, "Sea Surgeons, Health and England's Maritime Expansion: The West African Trade, 1553-1660." *Mariner's Mirror* 76(1990), 215-221.

[which was] an excellent cure for swearers."[11] Though it is doubtful whether the

prescribed punishment was used often, the very existence of such an order underlines the

peculiar culture aboard ship. Undisciplined sailors presented a serious threat on long-

distance voyages; captains were quick to assert their authority through public displays of

physical intimidation.

Ship masters could not be complete tyrants, however, and needed to recognize

their tenuous authority on a ship remote from the centers of judicial power in England.

Overzealous enforcement of discipline could result in mutiny or death. In light of such

potential problems, William Bourne cautioned that the master of a ship

> ought to be sober and wise, and not to be light or rash headed, nor
> to be furnish or hasty, but such a one as can well govern himself, for
> else it is not possible for him to govern his company well: he ought
> not to be simple, but he must be such a one as must keep his
> company in awe of him (by discretion) doing his company no injury
> or wrong . . . and the principal point in government is, to cause
> himself both to be feared and loved.[12]

To ensure this result, masters were to set a good example by serving God and seeing to it

that their men also kept to the faith. Bourne also stressed that the master "use no play at

the dice or cards, neither (as near he can) to suffer any, for the sufferance thereof may do

very much hurt in diverse respects."[13] Tensions on crowded ships were already high on

long voyages, and sailors did not need the added pressure of gambling debts to increase

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[11] Quoted in Bryan Bevan, *The Great Seamen of Elizabeth I* (London: Robert Hale, 1971), 38.

[12] William Bourne, *A Regiment for the Sea* (1574), ed. E.G.R Taylor (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1963), 170.

[13] Bourne, *Regiment for the Sea*, 171.

friction.

Thus far, the job description for a sixteenth-century mariner has been rather unattractive. The conditions on board the ships, their living quarters for months or even years, were primitive at best and dangerously unhealthy at worst. The food was often cold, rotten, or in short supply. Sailors who went to the ship's surgeon for medical care often exposed themselves to new problems which could be more dangerous than the original ailment. All sailors risked shipwrecks, harsh punishments, or death at the hands of unhappy natives or European enemies. And yet despite these conditions, many young Englishmen continued to join overseas expeditions voluntarily and repeatedly, making seafaring their life's work. Given the difficult life of the mariner, why would anybody choose to become a sailor? Though there were some impressments, especially later in the sixteenth century, the majority of seamen were not forced to accept a position on a ship. Were these men, as many contemporaries believed, simply desperate or irrational?[14]

A closer look at the life of the sailor reveals that not only was seafaring a valid option for many young men looking for a way to support themselves or a family, it held other attractions which, for some people, far outweighed any drawbacks. For members of the upper classes, seafaring held the potential of a profitable business. Investment in maritime trade could pay large dividends, and a few wealthy investors chose a "hands-on" approach by actually sailing on their ships. Other seamen of all classes believed they might reap quick rewards from piracy or privateering or could advance through the ranks to a

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[14] For a discussion of the poor living conditions aboard ship, see Quinn, *England and Discovery*, 204-207.

position of prestige, and other sailors simply joined on for an adventure or an escape. Living conditions in disease-ridden towns and overpopulated rural areas held their own dangers. Though not as dramatic as a death at sea, English men and women with their feet planted firmly on the ground faced periodic epidemics, starvation, and natural catastrophes. Confronted with the everyday difficulties of sixteenth-century life, sailors chose the potential risks and benefits of seafaring over the better-known hazards of English towns and countryside.[15]

Some members of the upper classes also may have joined the exotic expeditions out of a sense of obligation for their privileged status in society. In sixteenth-century England, gentlemen had a specific image that they tried to uphold even if reality did not quite fit. After surveying Elizabethan social literature, histories, and travel narratives, Carole Shammas found that "the tradition of adventurous martial conduct as a necessary proof of one's honor and as a way to power, wealth, and fame" was embedded in the literature and presumably in the minds of English gentlemen and nobles.[16] The goal of many gentlemen adventurers was to unite service to the monarch and state while maintaining a "war lord" image for themselves. By the end of the sixteenth century, noblemen had little need to take on the feudal military responsibilities of an earlier

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[15] Scammell, "Manning the English Merchant Service," 140. Captain Christopher Newport is an example of the potential social and economic mobility in the seafaring life. Newport began as a common sailor and worked his way up until he was in charge of the Virginia Company expeditions to America. See Quinn, *England and Discovery*, 209.

[16] Shammas, *The Elizabethan Gentlemen Adventurers and Western Planting* (Ph.D diss.: Johns Hopkins University, 1971), 94. Though Shammas's study focuses on the gentlemen involved in colonizing the Americas, her insights into the self-image of English gentlemen can be applied to men involved in other expeditions.

England--the growing bureaucratic state was assuming this role--but there remained a social need for the myth of such men. Asserting their willingness to risk their own lives for the greater glory of God, country, and themselves, members of the upper classes involved in foreign expeditions evoked traditions of a rapidly disappearing past to elevate their own status in a changing society.[17]

Of course, the gentlemen involved in long-distance voyages were not entirely focused on maintaining an image but also expected financial reward for their efforts. Sixteenth-century gentlemen originally envisioned colonization as an opportunity to collect gold and tribute from the pliant native populations, thereby lining their pockets while avoiding any participation in crass commercial activities not fitting their gentry status. But by the turn of the century, the English gentry began to recognize and accept the growing role of mercantile activities on the world stage. By framing their commercial activities as furthering the national interest, early seventeenth-century gentlemen could participate in the economic component of colonization without risking their social status.[18]

Indeed, one of the greatest incentives for joining an expedition, from the highest officer to the lowliest sailor, was the potential for profit far exceeding any business speculation on dry land. The right of pillage was one of the chief draws for sailors. One elite contemporary observed that "as for the business of pillage . . . there is nothing that

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[17] Shammas, *The Elizabethan Gentlemen Adventurers*, 116.

[18] Shammas, "English Commercial Development and American Colonization, 1560-1620," in K.R Andrews, N.P Canny, and P.E.H Hair, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480-1650* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1975), 151-74.

more bewitcheth them, nor anything wherein they promise themselves so loudly, nor delight in more manly."[19] Pillage consisted of anything loose on deck which was not part of the ship or cargo. Sailors could legitimately take all pillage, but were forbidden to plunder the cargo. After the crown had taken its fifth and the Lord Admiral his tenth, one third of the remaining cargo went to the crew, one third to the owner, and one third to the victualler.[20] Under this system, sailors fortunate enough to survive any venture that captured enemy ships could expect a significant bonus at the end of the expedition.

Sailors, especially on merchant ships, could also expect to supplement their wages through trade with other sailors and with natives in other countries. Some sailors simply traded their skills with their colleagues: one man could fix a pair of boots while another could sew shirts. If sailors lacked a tradable skill, they could always exchange goods with their shipmates. One of the major trade items within ships was food. The first recorded use of oranges on an English voyage to West Africa is evident in the 1562 will of Thomas Freeman, who traded the fruit along with cheese and hens with his shipmates. Freeman's trade is important not only for understanding the economic activity on board ships, but for providing historians with a more accurate picture of the sailors diet. While the navy passed regulations stipulating the minimum requirements for each sailor and victuallers provided the basic necessities for expeditions, sailors had sources of additional food.[21]

Trade outside the ship could be particularly lucrative for the experienced sailor,

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[19] Quoted in Bevan, *The Great Seamen of Elizabeth I*, 38.

[20] Lloyd, *The British Seaman*, 36.

[21] Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 138.

especially on voyages to exotic locations. Most mariners traveled to the same destination

on the majority of their voyages, preferring to use the knowledge gained on one trip to

help make the next easier and more profitable. In merchant ships, private trading by crew

members was a recognized custom encouraged as long as the side trading did not interfere

with the larger mission. In William Towerson's 1555 expedition to Guinea, sailors

bartered their hats, handkerchiefs, and daggers to Africans. Sailors' wills written at sea

make reference to gold, African cloth, and pepper.[22] Trade and plunder allowed sailors to

have a higher standard of living than many people living on the land; many mariners had

sea-chests, indicating that they had some possessions with enough value to want to keep

them secure. Items bequeathed by sailors included beds, clothes, furniture, and weapons,

all of which accompanied men on their voyages. Clearly, the sailor's life was not easy, but

it was also not the life of complete deprivation imagined by some historians and even

contemporary observers.[23]

The English participants in first contact were not a representative selection of

English society. The vast majority were of little social standing, whose job was to tend the

ships, fight any enemies who might present themselves, or ransack a foreign ship

unfortunate enough to cross paths with an English privateer. The composition of

passenger lists would change dramatically as colonization became a primary goal of

English overseas ventures; women, children, and various skilled artisans began to infiltrate

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[22] Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 125.

[23] J.D Alsop, "From Muscovy to Guinea: English Seamen of the Mid-Sixteenth Century." *Terrae Incognitae* 19(1987), 60; Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 342-55.

the unique fraternity of sailors by the late sixteenth century. Although the men and women huddled together in the cramped quarters of a ship might have emphasized the differences within the group rather than the similarities, the common factor of Englishness pervaded. To be English was to be confident in your own importance, certain of English superiority over other nations and peoples, and willing to fight if necessary to prove it.

ii. Why They Left

The assertion that the English were certain of the superiority of their society on the eve of colonization naturally begs the question, why did they leave? If England was the best land inhabited with the best people, what could have convinced thousands of men and women to leave their homeland in search of an uncertain future? The answer is simple but important in understanding the events of the contact period: the English were not so much fleeing England as looking to expand the opportunities created by what they believed to be a sound socio-economic system. This is not to say, however, that there were not reasons to flee England in the mid-sixteenth century.[24]

One explanation many historians have used to explain the timing of England's overseas expansion is the series of demographic shifts in the sixteenth century. Between 1557 and 1559, an epidemic of a violent form of influenza (known as the "English sweat") swept through England; the general population suffered a loss of approximately 10-20%

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[24] Only a tiny percentage of people leaving England had a quarrel with the basic social system. The Puritan Separatists who settled New England were a minority even within that region.

before it began to recover. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, however, the population of

England may have been as much as 35% higher than it was at the start. What was more

important than the raw numbers, however, was the contemporary belief that the

population was growing rapidly.[25]

The most visible population increase took place in cities. England was not very

urbanized in the mid-sixteenth century, and most towns were differentiated from villages

only by having a market or a specialized economy. The major urban center in England

was, of course, London, which had a population of 120,000 in 1550, rising to 200,000 by

1600. Most of London's population increase was due to immigration as people left the

country looking for greater opportunity in the city. Increasing population pressure and the

availability of urban labor encouraged Englishmen to look abroad for potential colonies,

but demographic changes do not explain why the English chose overseas expansion as a

possible solution to their problems. Other European countries experienced the same

changes at the same time but did not establish colonies thousands of miles from home.

Though population changes may have facilitated expansion, they were not in themselves

responsible for the development of empire.[26]

Closely connected with the demographic changes in sixteenth-century England was

the economic situation. According to contemporaries, commerce in the early sixteenth

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[25] David Michael Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England Under the Later Tudors, 1547-1603* (New York: Longman, 1992), 43; G.R Elton, "Contentment and Discontent on the Eve of Colonization," in Quinn, ed., *Early Maryland in a Wider World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 110.

[26] J.A Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550-1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), 78, 85.

century primarily was viewed as an activity limited to a small number of merchants who were given the task of venting English surplus goods, mainly wool and cloth, in exchange for other commodities. Until the mid-sixteenth century, the English export trade revolved almost entirely around a single commodity, cloth, which was shipped from London to Antwerp. As the English cloth trade increased, landowners found it more profitable to enclose their land for sheep than to grow crops. The enclosure movement involved three separate stages: the bringing together of scattered properties and the abolition of the intermixture of properties, the abolition of common rights to land, and the hedging, ditching, or fencing of separate properties. Enclosure was not simply an outgrowth of landowners' greed but in part a response to the increasing population and subsequent land hunger in the sixteenth century. With constant pressure on the land, enclosure seemed to be a more efficient method of land use than traditional agriculture.[27]

While wealthy landowners could extol the economic efficiency of enclosure, other members of English society were not as quick to sing the praises of the system. As raising sheep became a major economic pursuit, farmers neglected their agricultural fields, inflating prices throughout the markets. The final result of all of this inflation, one man argued in 1550, was that now people "have nothing, but goeth about in England from door to door, and ask their alms for God's sake. And because they will not beg, some of them doth steal, and then they be hanged, and thus the Realm doth decay."[28]

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[27] Shammas, "English Commercial Development," 162; Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth*, 207, 326.

[28] Furnivall, ed., *Four Supplications*, 102.

Many contemporary observers agreed that, whatever the cause, there did seem to be a rising population of restless poor in England by the mid-sixteenth century. The poor population was not a monolithic group, however, but was comprised of several subgroups.

William Harrison noted that

> the poor is commonly divided into three sorts, so that some are judged poor by impotency, as the fatherless child, the aged, the blind, and lame, and the diseased person that is judged incurable; the second are poor by casualty, as the wounded soldier, the decayed householder, and the sick person visited with grievous and painful diseases; the third consisteth of thriftless poor, as the rioter that hath consumed all, the vagabond that will abide nowhere but runneth up and down from place to place . . . and, finally, the rogue and strumpet.[29]

People belonging to the first two groups elicited a degree of sympathy and were supported by the local parish. Members of the third group of poor people engendered more hostility than sympathy and were the targets of physical and verbal abuse as well as legal remedies.

To many sixteenth-century English observers, the growing population of wandering poor people seemed increasingly alien, unlike their fellow countrymen and certainly distinct in all manner from the middle and upper classes.[30] Thomas Harman believed that he was performing a public service in 1566 by listing twenty-three types of dangerous poor people in his Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors. Included were rufflers [thieving beggars], uprightmen [leaders of robber bands], rogues, fresh-water

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[29] William Harrison, *The Description of England (1587)*, ed. George Edelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 180.

[30] See Karen Ordahl Kupperman's argument in *Settling With The Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), ch. 6.

mariners or whipjacks [beggars pretending shipwreck], and morts [female prostitutes or thieves]. Poor people even seemed to have their own language, with "a great number of odd words of their own devising, without all order or reason; and yet such is it as none but themselves are able to understand." This separate language was such a threat to the social order that "the first deviser thereof was hanged by the neck, a just reward no doubt, for his deserts and a common end to all of that profession." Who knew what sort of plots and devices a group of unrestrained beggars might hatch in their own language, free from the scrutiny of their betters? The social order could not tolerate an incomprehensible language which had the potential to isolate a lower class and remove it from the regulation of the upper classes.[31]

If sixteenth-century English observers did not approve of the poor having their own dialect, many did approve of social customs and legislation that helped ensure that the social classes would at least look different. To the dismay of less worldly Europeans, attention to fashion was a major concern for many members of the middle and upper classes. An anonymous writer derided the

> manifold and diverse changes of fashions which the man, and
> especially the woman, must wear upon both head and body.
> Sometime cap, sometime hood; now the French fashion, now the
> Spanish fashion, and then the Milan fashion; so that there is no end
> of consuming of substance, and that vainly, and all to please the
> proud foolish man and woman's fantasy.[32]

This attack on the vagaries of fashion was in the minority, however, since most English

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[31] Harrison, *Description of England*, 184.

[32] Furnivall, ed., *Four Supplications*, 103.

men and women agreed that outward appearance, including clothing, was partial evidence of inward status. Sumptuary laws sought to reinforce class distinctions in apparel by regulating what people could wear. Outward appearance and clothing would prove to be an important consideration for Englishmen as they made contact with peoples with different ideas about proper attire.

While enclosure could be interpreted as a source of dislocation for a large population of agricultural workers, consolidating lands was considered a positive step by many sixteenth-century English. Though there were several riots against enclosure, these actions were localized responses to specific grievances, not an attack on the movement as a whole. The fluid land market and rising agricultural prices in the mid-sixteenth century allowed many new members of the gentry to gain quick profits and accumulate substantial wealth. The result was a greater stratification of wealth, which helps explain why English society was so class conscious. To at least one segment of the English population, enclosure seemed to be a logical and beneficial strategy which would eventually benefit the entire country.[33]

If England had been allowed to continue on its course of economic development, it is likely that overseas exploration would have been delayed or even dismissed, but sixteenth-century Europeans were not given the luxury of a stable economy. When men such as Robert Thorne and Sebastian Cabot first tried to interest Henry VIII in

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[33] Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, 134, 159. The growth of the land market can be attributed to several factors, including the dissolution of the monasteries, the sale of crown lands to finance Henry VIII's penchant for warfare, and the break-up of large estates under Elizabeth, each of which opened new lands for use.

geographical and commercial expansion in the first part of the century, Henry showed little

willingness to gamble on an extended trade and seemed content to develop existing

markets. By mid-century, however, a series of international problems disrupted England's

international trade. The bankruptcies of the French and Spanish crowns in 1557, the

Dutch revolt of 1572, the sack of Antwerp in 1576, and the closing of the Antwerp port in

1583 all served to cripple the cloth trade.[34]

Rather than becoming conservative in a time of economic uncertainty, the

merchant community became more speculative and aggressive. The composition of

people involved in commerce changed as well; the gentry increasingly realized the

importance of mercantile activities. The Dutch provided a ready example of the benefits

of associating national power and a mercantile base. Thus, commerce could be interpreted

as a form of nationalism, furthering English power at the expense of other European

competitors. With the direct and indirect involvement of members of the upperclass,

commercial activities moved from the edge of English national interest to the center.[35]

When the English set out to explore the world in the sixteenth century, it was not a

rejection of the system they had inherited or the land in which they were born. Rather, the

participants in first contact sought to extend the best parts of their society while relieving

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[34] Palliser, *Age of Elizabeth*, 376.

[35] Shammas, "English Commercial Development," 162-167. Robert Brenner argues that the fundamental character of the English mercantile economy shifted in the sixteenth century as merchants looked increasingly to imports, which were dependent on securing international ports of trade. Thus, Brenner suggests, it was economic prosperity rather than economic dislocation which drove the English out into the Atlantic. See Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

pressures that threatened to dismantle the glory that was England. While disease,

population pressure, and economic uncertainty may have encouraged people to board

ships bound for distant lands, the passengers by and large did not view the problems as

endemic to English society. What was needed, many promoters of overseas ventures

argued, was a restoration of discipline, class distinctions, and economic prosperity.[36]

iii. What They Thought

While English society was certainly notable for the stratification evidenced by

wealth differential, sumptuary laws, and cultural distinctions, other forces served to unite

the English people. The most important unifying force in the sixteenth century was

religion. In England, Christianity was important on a national, local, and personal level.

Until the late seventeenth century, few people argued for a separation of religion and

state--in fact, religious toleration seemed to be an invitation to civil war. Central to

English Protestantism was the belief in a providential God, one who intervened constantly

in this world. Given the chaos and disorder that seemed to be so much a part of sixteenth-

century life, faith in God's power and forgiveness offered some comfort. Sudden death,

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[36] While modern historians might be able to argue that sixteenth-century England was a "second-rate European power with considerable potential economic resources but thinly populated, beset by social and economic problems, at odds over religion, and increasingly isolated from its traditional allies and trading partners," contemporary English observers would still have insisted on the superiority of their homeland compared with other countries. See David B. Quinn and A.N Ryan, *England's Sea Empire, 1550-1642* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), xi.

disease, catastrophic fires could all be explained as evidence of God's anger, but the promise of redemption in the afterlife was of great comfort to Christians who suffered in this life. While some English men and women may have held steadfast to pagan beliefs and others moved towards a more secular scientific explanation of events, the vast majority of English people understood themselves to be Christians and looked at the rest of the world from a Christian perspective.[37]

Though it is easy from the twentieth-century point of view to distinguish Christianity from science and from pagan beliefs, most Tudor Englishmen would have found such distinctions much more difficult to make. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the "scientific" world remained deeply rooted in the magical world. The antecedents of sixteenth-century science could be discovered in Renaissance Europe, which fostered a rebirth of Neoplatonism. According to advocates of Neoplatonist ideas, there were no hard distinctions between matter and spirit; since everything was in organic unity, investigators could learn about the world through palmistry or physiognomy, for example. Astronomers made precise, "scientific" measurements of stars and planets, only to apply their data to astrology in an effort to explain current events by the influence of heavenly bodies. Many European universities still held serious debates over the efficacy of magic well into the seventeenth century, and it was not always a given that science would prevail in a fair argument. Academic theories stood side by side with magical explanations: a scientists could express what modern observers would consider to be

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[37] Palliser, *Age of Elizabeth*, 381.

magical beliefs without experiencing any loss of academic credibility.[38]

The staying power of magical beliefs was particularly evident in rural England. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued that "magic is dominant when control of the environment is weak."[39] Intellectuals in urban centers were not directly dependent on the natural environment for their daily existence and thus could more easily distance themselves from magical beliefs. To the English country folk, however, the environment was a mystical entity complete with spirits and specific rituals that had to be followed if humans were to maintain a harmonious relationship with the land. The sixteenth century was an era in which people believed literally in signs, curses, and witchcraft. The Devil was not simply a figure who presided over Hell; he was an intervening force whose presence could be detected in the setbacks and casualties of everyday life. Almanacs recorded mysterious events such as the birth of a horned child or the sudden death of a cow and attributed earthly calamities to supernatural powers. Many English men and women, especially in rural areas, continued to believe in the existence of mythical animals such as dragons and unicorns well into the seventeenth century. Through oral tradition, these mystical beliefs were passed on to each new generation, becoming enmeshed in the mores and rituals of English life.[40]

To the vast majority of English people of all classes, the untamed natural world

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[38] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 223, 226.

[39] Quoted in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (London: Pantheon, 1983), 648.

[56] Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 80.

was a frightening spectacle, the antithesis of civilization. Many people considered forests to be particularly threatening; in popular folklore, forests were teeming with wild, inhuman creatures whose sole reason for existence was to molest humans. Farms and other managed lands showed the potential benefits to be gained through harnessing nature, but the English recognized that untamed lands covered most of the globe. In a society preoccupied with the importance of order, the wilderness seemed to be a vast expanse of plants and animals living in chaos. Although English observers recognized a distinct order and hierarchy in nature, anything beyond direct human control was viewed with suspicion. As creatures of nature, humans had to suppress their animalistic instincts and focus on their spiritual beings to overcome their nature and enjoy a unique relationship with God.[41]

The English fear of chaos and disorder in an untamed world was widespread and found expression in popular art. Shakespeare, whose plays were performed before members of the lower classes as well as the elite, struck a common chord in English men and women with his treatment of the natural world. Shakespeare suggested that civilized humans were separated from animals by their creation of comfortable living conditions and not by some outright superiority. In addressing the apparently savage Edgar, Lear claims that "unaccommodated man is no / more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art."[42] Removed from the physical trappings of civilization such as warm clothing, bedding, and housing, humans were in danger of returning to their natural, animalistic

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[41] Wallace Notestein, *English Folk: A Book of Characters* (New York, 1938), 223.

[42] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Alfred Harbrage (New York, 1959), III, iv: 101-102.

state.

Fortunately for the English, their local environment was sufficiently tame so that unlike people in other countries, they did not have to keep on constant guard against nature. William Harrison noted that "it is none of the least blessings wherewith God hath endued this island that it is void of noisome beasts, as lions, bears, leopards, wolves, and suchlike, by means whereof our countrymen may travel in safety." Even the perpetual rain and clouds characteristic of the English environment could be turned into a virtue if viewed from the right perspective. While some observers might believe the air to be "gross and nothing so pleasant as that is of the main [land]," due to the continual cloud cover, experience proved that English air "is no less pure, wholesome, and commodious than is that of other countries." Other lands may have had valuable resources and a tolerable climate, but patriotic English men and women knew that their environment was the most fit for developing a civilized population.[43]

All of these claims for the uniqueness of England and her people were part of a larger process taking place in the sixteenth century. If, as historians have argued, the Renaissance was about the discovery of man, in England the sixteenth century was about the discovery of the Englishman. A.L Rowse labels this period the "Elizabethan Discovery of England," claiming that the English were becoming increasingly self-aware during the century. By the mid-sixteenth century, English presses published literature celebrating England as a whole, cartographers created maps of local areas in great detail, and authors wrote histories and descriptions of counties and villages. Perhaps in part a reaction to an

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[43] Harrison, *Description of England,* 324, 429.

increase in reports of foreign lands and peoples, the English were determined to make record of their own society for posterity.[44]

While contemporary English men and women used environmental beliefs and the theory of diffusion to help explain England's uniqueness, modern historians have also argued that England and its people were distinct from other nations. In a controversial thesis, Alan Macfarlane has argued that "England has been inhabited since at least the thirteenth century by a people whose social, economic and legal system was in essence different not only from that of other peoples in Asia and Eastern Europe, but also in all probability from the Celtic and Continental countries of the same period." According to Macfarlane, England, alone among European countries, did not have a peasant society and was as capitalist in 1250 as it was in 1750. Modern individualism, which many scholars agree is an outgrowth of the development of capitalism, existed in England long before it did in other countries. Henry Osborn Taylor traced the origin of English individualism and self-assertion to William the Conqueror's refusal to do fealty to Pope Gregory the VII, which helped the English perceive themselves to be more independent than other nations.[45]

As the English turned a critical eye to their own society, the relationship between men, women, and the larger world invited intense scrutiny. English exploration coincided with a curious time in the history of gender relations in Europe. The social, economic, and

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[44] Alfred L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth: The Structure of Society* (New York: Collier Books, 1966); See also Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[45] Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property, and Social Transition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 165; Henry Osborn Taylor, *The English Mind* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 97.

political upheaval associated with the Reformation raised the possibility of a major transformation in gender roles. The sixteenth century was a time for reassessment of relationships: with God, country, neighbor, and family. During times of sweeping social changes, even ordinary circumstances can become infused with great significance as people struggle to make sense of the world around them. One aspect of society which seemed to require a thorough reworking was the status of women as individuals, family members, and citizens of the state. Although few women joined the earliest English expeditions to distant lands in the sixteenth century, the prominence of gender issues in contemporary England affected the manner in which English men both assessed native sex/gender systems and interacted with the people they encountered.

Before the Reformation, women's roles and status in society seemed to be clearly defined. In theological terms, women were inferior to men; thus, any discussion of gender roles began with the assumption that inequality was not an evil to be overcome, but a divinely sanctioned reality. By fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers, women could expect veneration in this life and reward in the next. Male scholars acknowledged that women were superior in some domains, such as humility, patience, and compassion, but these areas of superiority were hardly prerequisites for a life in the public sphere. While women were allowed to exercise considerable authority over day-to-day operations of the household, in most cases external concerns were left to the men. The ideal woman, then, was content with her domestic role, willing to cede religious and political authority to her

father or husband.[46]

Since theological arguments provided justification for the assignation of gender roles in the fifteenth century, it would seem logical that the religious upheavals of the Reformation would be accompanied by some sort of major transformation of women's lives. In fact, the Reformation did encourage an evaluation of women's status which, for a brief period, offered the possibility of less sharply defined roles.[47] Protestantism, with its emphasis on the nuclear family as the primary unit of religious activity, seemed to offer more opportunities for women's involvement than did the strictly male hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the opposite was true as convents, one of the few safety nets for Catholic women, fell victim to Henry VIII's quest for power and liquid capital. Without the option of becoming a nun, women had to turn to marriage as the only source for economic and social stability.[48]

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[46] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 70.

[47] Though the historiographical debate continues, most scholars have rejected the notion of a "Golden Age" for European women before the sixteenth century. This theory suggested that women had high status at one time and therefore could regain their important roles under the right conditions. The current emphasis is on the continuity of women's status in European history. See Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Judith Bennett, "Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide," in Ann-Louise Shapiro, ed. *Feminists Revision History* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 47-72.

[48] Sherrin Marshall Wyntjes, "Women in the Reformation Era," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History,* ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 186; Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 85.

Protestant theology itself was also responsible for a significant diminution in women's roles in the sixteenth century. The fundamental unit of religious instruction in Protestantism was the "spiritualized household," in which men wielded spiritual authority over their wives and children. In 1543, English law legitimized the male prerogative to head family religious behavior with the passage of an order forbidding Bible reading by women and lower-class men: noblemen, gentlemen, and merchants could read the Bible to their families, while noble and gentlewomen could engage in private study. Based on contemporary notions of appropriate class-specific behavior as well as gender stereotypes, the law clearly placed dependent males and all women outside the sphere of spiritual authority.[49]

If the Reformation had simply reinforced patriarchal notions of authority there would have been little need for laws dictating gender roles. However, the inconsistency of the Protestant message for women contributed to a period of confusion and tension over proper male and female behavior. At the same time that Protestant leaders relegated women to an inferior role in the transmission of religious values within the household, Protestant theology stressed the importance of individual agency in a proper relationship with God. The need to recognize individuality clashed with the antithetical intensification of patriarchal family structure in the sixteenth century, exposing gender roles which had

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[49] Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, 85. Although it was almost impossible to enforce this law, very few women outside of the upper classes could read anyway, let alone construct theological arguments based on biblical authority. The law seems to have been directed less at reading and possibly misinterpreting the Bible than women or lower-class men taking positions of authority normally reserved for upper-class men.

been accepted as natural only decades earlier. Marital advice books reflected the dilemma facing men and women: the literature described all of the characteristics and proper demeanor of a good wife and then continued to say that only a tyrannous husband would insist that his wife live up to such high expectations. Men were expected to act as good patriarchs and spiritual leaders, but nobody knew exactly what that meant.[50]

One of the difficulties facing anyone attempting to dictate gender roles in the sixteenth century was that while everybody agreed that men and women were different, the source of difference remained a topic for discussion. The public debate over women's nature began in earnest with the 1541 publication of *The Scholehouse of women*, a particularly misogynistic work attributed to Edward Gosynhill which systematically attacked women from beginning to end. The appearance of this book led to the publication of several defenses of women, which set off a battle between pro and anti-feminist authors. Edward Hake responded to pro-woman works in 1574 by arguing that such publications were only more evidence of the folly of educating young women, who had no intellectual authority since they tended to read "amorous books, vain stories and fond trifeling fancies." As for women who had already been educated, Hake maintained that "much better were it that they should unlearn that again which they have already learned, then miserably to abuse it as they do." Publishers seemed to have no qualms about printing a virulent attack one week and an eloquent defense the next. The debate

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[50] Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 156; Charles Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York: Elsevier Press, 1952), 148.

touched a public nerve and the books sold.[51]

While Hake and his colleagues were content to cite their own erudition as sufficient justification for their arguments, scholars searching for a biological explanation of difference turned to classical scholarship as their primary authority, focusing on the work of Aristotle and Galen. Aristotelians saw human anatomy and physiology as consisting of a single scale, with men being the ideal and women imperfect. The implication was that sex-based hierarchies were based on natural law and that any deviation would be futile. Galenists argued that men and women were equally perfect in their sex and thus were complementary. But supporters of Galen's viewpoint emphasized that even though there should not be a hierarchy of sex differences, distinct gender roles were natural and beneficial to society.[52]

The scholarly debate over the biological nature of women continued into the sixteenth century. The discussion centered around the Aristotelian contention that nature always attempted to create the most perfect thing, the "most completely formed, the best endowed with powers of procreation, and the hottest." Despite women's obvious role in childbearing, scientists continued to argue that men had the most important role in reproduction. According to many scholars, women were an incomplete version of male biological perfection, an empty vessel that could reach its full potential only with male

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[51] Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, 241; Edward Hake [1574], *A Touchstone for this time present*. Quoted in R.J Fehrenbach, "A Letter Sent By the Maydens of London[1567]," in *Women in the Renaissance*, Kirby Farrell, Elizabeth Hageman, and Arthur Kinney, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 29.

[52] Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 27.

intervention. Even as scientists gained greater anatomical knowledge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were still considered to be biologically inferior to men.[53]

Women's primary physiological problem, according to male scholars, was the tendency of the female body to lose control. Pregnancy, menstruation, and menopause were all evidence of a body with a will of its own. Such a loss of control would not be of concern for society as a whole if it only affected individual women, but the disorderly nature of women's bodies could have deleterious consequences for other people. It was only a small leap from an individual giving in to raw physical demands to society losing all sense of civilization. Contemporary popular literature often made a mockery of women's bodily functions, expressing unease at the potential for chaos and a concern for limiting the impact of such slippage to women themselves.[54]

The source of much of the fear of women's biology revolved around ambiguous feelings towards women's sexuality in the sixteenth century. The vice most often attributed to women in literature was "eroticism"--women were supposedly more lustful than men. Women's role as sexual beings was inextricably intertwined with their role as wives and mothers. A good woman was also a good lover, but kept sexual expression within the household and always with an eye towards being a dutiful wife and mother. English men and women recognized sexuality as a source of power, and emphasized the

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[53] Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 8, 44. Recent feminist scholars have argued that the cultural biases that contribute to the assessment of biologically based sex differences make any sex/gender dichotomy less clear-cut than had been previously acknowledged.

[54] Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, 177.

potential for women to use sexual attraction as a tool of control over men. Beautiful women might be able to charm unwilling men into an unwanted relationship, while women with particular sexual prowess might be able to force men into an unnatural domestic subjection. Thus, by giving in to their own sexual nature, women might inadvertently subvert the entire social order.[55]

The possibility that women might actually be able to wield power over men was particularly resonant in sixteenth-century England. The last woman to stake a claim to the English throne before the sixteenth century was Matilda, Henry I's only surviving legitimate child, in 1135. After Matilda's attempt failed, there was no serious debate over whether women could in fact succeed as a ruler. The general assumption was that England would be thrown into civil or foreign war and domestic chaos if a woman presumed to ascend to the throne. By the mid-sixteenth century, of course, the English could no longer ignore questions of the legitimacy of female succession. In 1554, Parliament passed a statute confirming that a queen regnant had all of the powers of former kings, but the order was not a recognition of women's fitness to rule. Rather, the statute passed out of concern over Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain and the fear that women's natural weakness would make her subservient to a foreign prince.[56]

The political crisis of Mary's reign sparked a furious debate which highlighted the often unspoken connections between gender and power in contemporary England. There was a general distaste for the idea of women being involved in politics at any level, and

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[55] Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, 27, 142.

[56] Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance*, 15.

certainly women should only govern in cases of extreme emergency or if the woman in question had extraordinary leadership qualities. Few people would have argued that Mary fulfilled the latter qualification, and it was a matter for debate whether her ascension to the throne solved or actually created a greater emergency. John Knox fired the opening salvo with the publication of *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558. Knox directed his attack at Mary, but also took aim at all female leaders for three basic reasons: "they were repugnant to the laws of nature; they were contrary to divine will; and they were a subversion of good order and justice." Clearly, Knox was incensed at Mary's attempt to reestablish Catholicism as much as he was concerned about an entire sex's ability to rule. Unfortunately for Knox, the Protestant successor which he so ardently wished to see ascend to the throne was also a woman, Elizabeth I.[57]

To sixteenth-century observers, Queen Elizabeth seemed to embody and confound all of the presumptions of gender, politics, and power which had been raised to public consciousness by mid-century. As Sir John Oglander noted, "There was nothing wanting that could be desired in a prince, but that she was a woman." Public reaction to Queen Elizabeth's reign is too complex an issue to be fully considered here; what is significant for the purposes of this study is the curious mixture of respect for the crown and reaction to Elizabeth's ambiguous sexuality among her subjects. Great leader or no, Elizabeth was still a woman, which meant she could not reach her full potential without having children. In the end, Elizabeth embodied both masculine and feminine ideals at the same time, leaving

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[57] Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 60; Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance*, 60.

her subjects with a curious role model.[58]

By the late sixteenth-century, then, English ideas about sexuality, gender, and power were thrown into chaos. At the highest level, a woman held a position traditionally reserved for men, steadfastly refusing to comply with the most basic demands of English womanhood (i.e marriage and family) while playing on gender stereotypes when it seemed most advantageous. Forced by necessity to become accustomed to a woman leader, English men and women had to reevaluate notions of gender and power. A survey of the street literature of the time shows a greater acknowledgment of women's power accompanied by a growing doubt of male omnipotence. Broadsides and pamphlets emphasized women's power, especially over sexual relations, by revealing male characters' fears of cuckoldry and sexual inadequacy. While women certainly did have other sources of power, including economic and religious, the popular image of women consciously using their sexuality to dominate men was a theme running throughout contemporary literature. Although it is impossible to determine whether individual participants in early exploration were active participants in the debate over women's status, the omnipresence of issues of gender and power at all levels of society make it likely that most English men and women were familiar with the subject, if not conversant with the scholarly debate. Not surprisingly, English visitors to new lands often referred obliquely to the gender debate in England when assessing the societies they encountered.[59]

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[58] John Oglander, quoted in Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance*, 186; See also Louis Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." *Representations* 1:2(Spring 1983), 63.

[59] Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, 256.

If the English were unsure of the precise similarities and differences between men and women, they had no such difficulty in identifying common ground between themselves and other European peoples. Although they were convinced that they were superior, the English acknowledged a general continuity between themselves and other peoples. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans lived in societies that stressed the universality of social norms and the high degree of cultural unity among all peoples, and thus were not prepared to create sharp distinctions between various types of humans. In the early sixteenth century, peoples were differentiated from each other as "nations," and the term "race" was used only in zoological categories applicable to animals. Unlike modern ethnologists, sixteenth-century observers would find the recognition of the "otherness" of the "other" almost unthinkable. In this intellectual climate, the first reports of different types of people did not cause a reevaluation of human typologies.[60]

The stress on the fundamental unity of all peoples in the sixteenth century was due in part to the influence of religion on virtually all intellectual thought. Since the Christian creation myth had as its very basis a monogenetic theory of human origins, any scholar who suggested polygenesis risked attack on theological as well as scientific grounds. All humans must come from the original humans, Adam and Eve. Some possibility for variation came after the Great Flood, but scholars were unsure about the effects of the flood on the subsequent course of human development. Confronted with the hard evidence of cultural difference, scholars looked for an explanation that could acknowledge

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[60] Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 358; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5.

variety without challenging the fundamental assumption that all humans were, at their very core, the same.

The answer that seemed to satisfy most people in the sixteenth century was that humans were the same during the remote past when they all lived in proximity, but that subsequent expansion caused the current mix of cultural and physical differences. This expansion, what modern ethnologists call diffusion, was not seen as a positive force in the sixteenth century. Scholars agreed that a culture that moved over a large geographic area inevitably became mixed up and corrupted. Geographic diffusion, with its cultural component, was a sign of the decay and degeneration of society that Renaissance philosophers had been observing for years. For many scholars, human history was the story of the unavoidable fall of human society from a Golden Age in the past to the tarnished present and the still darker future. As human groups became physically and chronologically more distant from their origins, they naturally lost the virtuous qualities that had characterized their cultures in an uncorrupted state. Following this argument, the next logical extension was to conclude that the further a people moved from their origins, the more corrupted would be their culture. Thus, scholars could begin to make assumptions about a foreign culture simply by calculating the number of miles its people had moved to get to its current location.[61]

The basis for the diffusion theory was the sixteenth-century European reliance on

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[61] Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 260, 265. Given the uncertainty of the precise location of the Garden of Eden, the sixteenth-century cultural diffusion model makes little sense to twentieth-century minds, especially in light of current anthropological theory which seems to suggest polygenetic origins of humans.

classical scholarship. European scholars constantly compared themselves to their Greek and Roman predecessors, filtering ancient ideas through the lens of Renaissance humanism. One of the central tenets of classical thought was that Italy and Greece were the center of civilization; the rest of the world could be divided into concentric circles radiating from the allegedly superior center. The more distant the region from the center, the more wild and unpredictable it and its inhabitants would be.[62]

Given this theory, it seemed logical that far-distant lands would be inhabited by monstrous races of humans. The expansion of the Greek world in the seventh century BC led to the creation of many stories of bizarre creatures. Homer's *Odyssey* is only one of many ancient texts that describe monsters such as the Cyclops. Perhaps the most extensive classical account of monstrous people is Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*. Pliny offered somewhat accurate descriptions of well-known lands but did not limit his account to such mundane regions. Using Greek sources and his own imagination, Pliny described a wide variety of marvelous humans, including people with dog heads or no heads at all.[63]

While the process of diffusion already began the differentiation between cultures, the creation of physical and cultural distinctions continued even after people arrived in what would appear to be their final destination. Sixteenth-century English observers were quite aware that people living nearby did not seem to have the same characteristics that,

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[62] J. H Elliot, "Renaissance Europe and America: A Blunted Impact?" in Fredi Chiappelli, ed. *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), v. 2, 21; Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 79.

[63] Mason, *Deconstructing America*, 79.

taken together, comprised the English people. The Irish, who certainly lived close to the English, provided a ready example of a people who shared the same geographic diffusion with the English but whose cultural decay was far greater.[64] Faced with this dilemma, scholars turned to another variable which could help explain cultural differences: physical environment.

According to contemporary scientific belief, the environment not only could affect the physical development of a people but would help determine their character and culture as well. The evidence for this theory was easily observable. Popular English belief held that the calm, intelligent temperament of the English people was due in part to the moderate climate of England. Anyone familiar with their European neighbors could see that the cold regions of any countries farther north than England "brings forth a dull inflexible people, obstinately affecting barbarous liberty and jealous of all authority."[65] A southern climate, such as that of Italy and Spain, produced a fiery, unstable temperament in its people.

Thus, the English already had a theoretical construct in place to help explain the existence of different people long before they had any personal knowledge of Africans, Indians, or other peoples. One of the major sources of information about other peoples came from a new literary genre in the sixteenth century, the travel guide. The first printing press in England began operation in 1477, roughly at the same time the initial European voyages were taking place. At first, English printers were slow to publish news of foreign

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[64] Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 367.

[65] Quinn, *NAW*, 1: 173.

exploration. The first printed English mention of the discovery of America did not come until 1509 with the publication of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, which had been published originally in Basle in 1494. Of 119 printed accounts of exploration published in Europe between 1493 and 1526, only one was in English. Interest in overseas voyages was limited to a select group of English men and women who had access to foreign accounts or had a personal contact with people directly involved in exploration. Perhaps patriotic English printers did not want to chronicle Spanish and Portuguese achievements, or perhaps they simply believed that the literate public was not interested in news of overseas encounters. Whatever the case, English printers soon made up for their earlier lack of attention.[66]

From 1480 to 1600, more than one hundred titles on geography and travel were printed in English. People who never left their town or village could read descriptions of France and Spain or of even more exotic locations such as Africa and America. Most of the early reports of long-distance travel were, understandably, translations of European accounts. The first English book on America, probably printed in 1511, was a translated compilation of two early Dutch tracts that used Vespucci's letters as a main source. The first paragraph of the first book set the tone for future accounts of the new lands:

> we saw many wonders of beasts and fowls that we have never seen
> before/ the people of this land have no king nor lord nor their god
> But all things is common/ this people goeth all naked But the men
> and women have on their head/neck/arms/Knees/and feet all with

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[66] John Parker, *Books to Build an Empire: A Bibliographical History of English Overseas Interests to 1620* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1965), 1, 18; Rudolf Hirsch, "Printed Reports on the Early Discoveries and Their Reception," in Chiappelli, *First Images of America*, 2: 539.

> feathers bound . . . These folk live like beasts without any
> reasonableness and the women be also as common. And the men
> hath conversation with the women/who that they been or who they
> first meet/is she his sister/his mother/his daughter/or any other
> kindred. And the women be very hot and disposed to
> lecherousness. And they eat also on[e] another. The man eateth
> his wife[,] his children/as we also have seen and they hang also the
> bodies or person's flesh in the smoke/as men do with us swine's
> flesh.[67]

Though it is impossible to tell whether any of the men directly involved in the English

expeditions overseas read this particular account, it is likely that they read or discussed

some descriptions of the new lands.

Though a few publishers began printing works on geography and exploration,

English readers gave such works a decidedly luke-warm reception in the first half of the

sixteenth century. Men who would be the most logical audience for books on overseas

expansion were preoccupied with establishing English nationalism at home by securing the

economic and political freedom of England from the influence of Rome and other

continental powers. Publishers had little incentive to print books that would not capture

the public's interest, so only a few books made it past the manuscript stage into print.

John Rastell's play, *A new interlude . . . of the four elements*, published in 1517, was the

first English plea for overseas empire, but Rastell had to publish it himself, and there was

only one edition. Rastell's nationalistic motive seemed clear:

> Oh what a thing had be than
> If that they that be English men

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[67] Richard Eden, trans. *Of the new landes and of the people founde by the messengers of the kynge of potungale named Emanuel* (Antwerp: Jan van Doesburch, 1511) in Edward Arber, ed., *The First Three English Books on America* (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1971), xxvii.

> Might have been the first of all
> That there should have taken possession
> And made first building and habitation,
> A memory perpetual!

In fact, Rastell's play was in part a reaction to an attempted voyage to the New World in 1517, which failed when Rastell's partners decided that piracy would be more profitable than an expedition.[68] Voyages for the greater glory of England would have to wait until investors could be reasonably sure of turning a profit.

By the mid-sixteenth century, English presses began producing texts claiming to offer information on foreign lands and people. A major factor in the growing interest in publishing geographical works was the emergence of Richard Eden as an advocate of exploration. In 1553, Eden translated and published two Spanish works on overseas navigation and trade, and in 1554 he published the *Decades of the New World*, which included translations of Peter Martyr and other European accounts as well as a history of Spanish exploration.[69] The 1555 edition included descriptions of Russia and an account of the first two English voyages to West Africa. Eden hoped that his book would be of use to future travelers, who could "learn by the example, damage, good success, and adventures of other[s], how to behave themselves and direct their voyage to their most commodity."[70] Explorers could also use Eden's account to lift their spirits if they were having no luck finding valuable commodities; stories of the great riches of the Spanish

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[68] Parker, *Books to Build an Empire*, 24, 33.

[69] Parker, *Books to Build an Empire*, 44.

[70] Arber, *First Three Books*, 6.

exploits should be enough to keep even the most downtrodden adventurer excited, Eden argued.

While Eden's book signaled a shift towards appealing to English nationalism to justify overseas expansion, most other scholarly works continued to focus on the character of the people and country in the new lands. In 1520, Johann Boemus published his *Ominum gentium mores*, a book designed to describe the variety of humans, their behavior, and their governments. An English vernacular translation of Boemus's work was published in 1555 under the title *The fardle of facions, conteining the aunciente maners, customes, and lawes, of the peoples enhabiting the two partes of the earth, called Affrike and Asie*.[71] Boemus set the precedent for future accounts of foreign lands: although it did not contain up-to-date information on recent explorations, the *Fardle of facions* broke down cultures into classes or categories of traits by which they might be analyzed or judged. Boemus included marriage and family, social organization, religion, funeral rites, weapons, warfare, justice, diet, and apparel as categories that might be compared cross-culturally to help identify differences between peoples.[72] This work, and the series of subsequent studies it inspired, was a first step toward what would become modern ethnological observation.

By the mid-sixteenth century, Englishmen had read enough accounts, admired enough foreign trade goods, and debated scientific theories ad nauseam to the point that they were ready to take their place in the arena of long-distance travel. English explorers

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[71] Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 133.

[72] Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 138.

entered the field of European expansion rather late in the game. In the late ninth century,

Scandinavian explorers managed to sail across the icy North Atlantic to establish a colony

in Iceland. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the ancestors of Erik the Red of Norway

led expeditions to the coast of North America.[73] While Englishmen focused on settling

internal disputes and strengthened their hold on the textile trade, other Europeans set their

sights on exotic lands. Eager to move beyond the confines of their geo-political

boundaries, some Europeans pointed to the time-worn tradition of the Crusades to justify

their expansion. Urban II's call for a crusade in 1095 sparked a massive attempt to

recapture the Holy lands from Muslim insurgents, setting the precedent for future

crusades. When Portuguese sailors under the auspices of King John I invaded the North

African town of Ceuta in 1415, they fashioned their attack as a blow against the Muslim

infidels.[74] Prince Henry of Portugal, whose support for expansion would cause historians

to dub him "The Navigator," managed to combine the rhetoric of an all-out crusade to

destroy all Muslim strongholds with the promise of economic rewards for participants.

The pairing of spiritual and economic rewards was an accepted part of the European

crusading spirit, dating back to the First Crusade in the eleventh century. As the earliest

crusaders discovered, however, no amount of religious or financial zeal could overcome

all of the difficulties involved in waging a battle over very long distances. A revolution in

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[73] Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 45. For a discussion of the Nordic voyages, see Erik Wahlgren, *The Vikings and America* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

[74] J.H Parry, *The Establishment of European Hegemony, 1415-1715: Trade and Exploration in the Age of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 11.

European hegemony would require a corresponding revolution in technology which would allow Europeans to haul large numbers of people and military equipment literally around the world.

Some English men and women had imagined the possibilities of discovering new lands and new peoples long before the sixteenth century, but the limits of technology kept long-distance oceanic travel limited to the realm of dreams. Four technological requirements had to be met before Europeans could successfully expand across the oceans. First, sailors needed large, fast vessels with sufficient storage space to make the trips economically worthwhile. Second, navigators needed equipment to find their way across the vast waters. Third, expansion to the most settled parts of the world required portable weaponry small enough to fit on a ship but effective enough to put down native resistance. Finally, engineers needed to master the only source of energy suitable for long-distance travel, wind power.[75]

Compared with the relatively slow, though steady, development of technology in earlier centuries, the sixteenth century saw a virtual revolution in sailing technology fueled by new inventions and adaptations of foreign equipment. Fifteenth-century navigators could fix their position only within sight of land; any ship venturing beyond the coastline risked the lives of all aboard. Though a crude form of the compass had been invented centuries earlier, use of the device was not widespread. By the end of the fifteenth century, navigators using a compass and celestial observations could come to an approximation of their position, but their estimations varied widely in their accuracy. Ship

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[75] Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, 105.

captains also had to contend with the vagaries of wind patterns in planning their travels. A one-way voyage was often simple--catch a wind stream or current that went directly to the destination. But the voyage home was hindered by the very winds which made the initial voyage possible because the square-rigged sails could not be used effectively in a head wind.

The crude technology that limited travel in the early fifteenth century gave way to more sophisticated navigation techniques and improved ships in the sixteenth century. Many of the technological innovations that facilitated long-distance travel were borrowed from non-European cultures which had recently come into contact with European sailors. Portuguese sailors were the first Europeans to follow the Arab example by using lateen sails for long-distance shipping.[76] The triangular shape of the Arab sail allowed for greater efficiency and made it easier to tack against prevailing winds. English ship builders experimented with a combination of lateen and square-rigged sails throughout the sixteenth century in an effort to design the most efficient ships. Builders also made ships narrower, with multiple decks capable of carrying larger loads.[77] Navigation of these large ships was made easier and more accurate in the sixteenth century with the invention of the cross-staff for celestial observations.[78] As observations became more sophisticated, so did the navigational charts of the oceans, and sailors no longer had to cling to the coastline.

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[76] Parry, *The Establishment of European Hegemony*, 22.

[77] David Beers Quinn, *North America From Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 85.

[78] Parry, *The Establishment of European Hegemony*, 20.

By the sixteenth century, the oceans had become a highway to new lands rather than moats of isolation.

When English sailors stepped off their ships to make first contact with new peoples and new lands, they brought with them beliefs, traditions, and experiences of their culture. Faced with the presence of different cultures, sixteenth-century sailors' behavior was guided by the limits of their own world, which was only now intruding upon another. As Englishmen, Christians, and mariners, the members of the first English expeditions to distant regions were not a microcosm of English society but a unique subset of the larger group. While sharing many of the same assumptions as their land-locked relatives, sixteenth-century sailors would find their preconceived notions about the new lands and people change significantly after first contact actually took place. Confronted with the first face-to-face meetings with distant natives, Englishmen were forced to question some of their own beliefs, while stubbornly ignoring aspects of first contact that might present a deeper challenge to the English world view. One of the most challenging encounters took place in the icy regions to the north of England, in the land of Ivan the Terrible.

CHAPTER TWO

The Fun-House Mirror: The English in Russia

> The cold is rare, the people rude, the prince so full
> > of pride,
> The Realm so stored with Monks and nuns, and
> > priests on every side.
> The manners are so Turkey like, the men so full of guile,
> The women wanton, temples stuffed with idols that defile
> The seats that sacred ought to be, the customs are so quaint,
> As if I could describe the whole, I fear my pen would faint.

In his 1568 poem based on first-hand experience with Russians, Sir George

Turberville summarized the feelings of the vast majority of Englishmen who visited the

land during the first contact period. The overall tenor of sixteenth-century English reports

of Russia and its people was sharply critical. While accounts of English first contact with

Africans and Americans were also often contemptuous of the natives they encountered,

the most virulent literary attacks on native peoples were reserved for the inhabitants of

Russia. Of all the peoples English sailors encountered in the sixteenth century, the

Russians were the most similar to the English in physical appearance, political structure,

religion, and gender conventions. By harshly attacking the institutions and beliefs that

seemed to be distorted shadows of the English norm, English authors were able to

maintain a sense of uniqueness and superiority, which might easily be questioned after

encountering many different societies at the same time.[1]

English visitors to Russia quickly decided that the natives were barbarous; the only question was the source of their lowly condition. The origins of Russian barbarism were an important consideration for sixteenth-century Englishmen trying to establish a profitable trade relationship with the Russians. Early experiences revealed that the natives would be difficult to control and that English workers living in Russia would also present a discipline problem for their superiors. Poor behavior on either side of the contact threatened to disrupt the delicate trade negotiations at the center of Anglo-Russian encounters in the sixteenth century.

If the cause of Russian natives' apparent misbehavior was circumstance rather than an inherent flaw, there was hope that a change in external factors could improve the situation. In assessing the condition of Russian peoples and their society, English visitors employed their own discourse of proper class and gender relations both to identify the apparent deviance from proper forms and to provide a framework for advocating change. Unfortunately for the English, the Russians had their own well-established discourse of class and gender and were frustratingly adamant in insisting upon the superiority of their system. What was most disturbing to English observers was that lower-class Englishmen found Russian notions of class and gender attractive, while upper-class Englishmen were

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[1] M.S. Anderson has argued that "The physical remoteness of Russia, the defects of its society, the limitations of its intellectual life, above all the essential strangeness and foreignness of the country, made it difficult for Englishmen to think of it as in any real sense part of Europe." Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553-1815* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1958), 28. Anderson is correct to note the intellectual separation of Russia from Europe by the English, but it was the *sameness* that was threatening.

forced to submit to Russian standards of proper behavior in order to conduct trade. The first-contact period witnessed a struggle between competing ideologies and people that held just enough in common to raise the possibility of an egalitarian relationship while consistently frustrating attempts to do so.

That the Russians were so difficult to convince of their own degradation suggested to the English that there might be inherent characteristics that caused the people to accept their allegedly inferior society. While no sixteenth-century Englishman would have used modern scientific constructions of racial difference to describe the Russians, many visitors did come to the conclusion that the natives were not victims of an oppressive system so much as fundamentally destined to create and maintain a barbaric society and were therefore incapable of improvement. For many observers, the final evidence for this theory came in the years immediately following the death of Ivan the Terrible, the Russian tsar whom many early visitors blamed for the degradation of his people. When Ivan died in 1584 and the oppression continued virtually unabated, the natural conclusion was that the Russian people were responsible for their own condition.

i. Getting Started

On May 9, 1553, Sebastian Cabot wrote a series of instructions, advice, and warnings for the men about to embark on a journey to unknown lands. The same combination of scientific, fanciful, and wishful thinking that allowed Europeans to argue for the existence of a Northwest Passage suggested that there ought also to be a Northeast

Passage to the riches of the Orient. Cabot's letter, intended for the voyage led by Sir Hugh Willoughby, cited his own experience as an explorer to counter skeptics who claimed that such an effort was fruitless, or at least would not provide a return on the initial investment. By following his advice to the letter, Cabot suggested, the adventurers would enrich themselves and serve their country well in the increasingly competitive arena of overseas trade.[2]

Behind virtually every order and piece of advice was an overwhelming concern for reaping profit. To critics who claimed that the environment likely to be encountered in such a voyage would be hostile at worst, barren and unprofitable at best, Cabot pointed out that various expeditions of Portuguese sailors to lands which "were to all Cosmographers and other writers both unknown, and also by appearances of reason void of experience thought and reputed uninhabitable for extremities of heats, and colds" in fact turned out to be "most rich, peopled, temperate, and so commodious, as all Europe hath not the like." Without absolutely guaranteeing success, Cabot reassured the adventurers that economic reward awaited Englishmen who risked their money, and in the case of the sailors, their lives, in the voyage to the Northeast.[3]

To maximize their chances of securing trade with a minimum of difficulty, Cabot suggested that the expedition's sailors and merchants follow a strict standard of behavior

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[2] Four years before Cabot's letter, Sigismund von Herberstein published his *Rerum Muscoviticarum Commentari*, a book that suggested that there was a northeast passage to Cathay. Samuel H. Baron, "Herberstein and the English 'Discovery' of Muscovy." *Terrae Incognitae* 18(1986), 45.

[3] Cabot, in Irwin R. Blacker, ed., *Hakluyt's Voyages* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 54.

with the natives they were sure to encounter. Cabot warned that some natives might approach the English ships and "if they find [the ships] not well watched, or warded, they will assault, desirous of the bodies of men, which they covet for meat."[4] Natives who did not practice cannibalism would not be quite so dangerous but could jeopardize the mission by refusing to trade if the English did not treat them properly. With this in mind, Cabot advised, "every nation and region is to be considered advisedly, and not to provoke them by any disdain, laughing, contempt, or such like." Some topics were certain to be riskier than others; in fact, the English sailors should not even attempt to discuss religion with the natives but should simply "pass over it in silence" so as not to offend.[5] Willoughby's mission was to return a profit to his investors and to establish trade networks for future voyages, not to engage in theological debate.

With Cabot's advice in mind and with the hopes of numerous entrepreneurs resting on his shoulders, Willoughby set sail on May 10, 1553, intending to traverse the "unknown" lands northeast of England. Even though Cabot, Willoughby, the investors, and the sailors all believed they were bound for lands that no Englishmen had never seen and would discover peoples never before encountered, in fact England and Russia had a history of contact pre-dating the 1553 expedition.

The West had been in contact with Russians long before Willoughby and his crew sailed the North Sea. Kiev and Novgorod were important commercial centers of trade with Western Europe, and although contact with Russians was sporadic, European visitors

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[4] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages,* 53.

[5] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages,* 52.

did gain first-hand knowledge of the country. By the early thirteenth century, however, the Tartar conquest of Kievan Russia caused a break in the economic bonds between Russia and the West. As interaction came to a virtual stand-still for over two hundred years, any Western European collective memory about Russia and its people had disappeared by the late Middle Ages. By the mid-fifteenth century, Tartar control began to give way to the Grand Duchy of Moscow and Europeans returned to Russia to forge commercial and military alliances. Although England did not participate in the renewed interaction, knowledge of Russia began to spread once again throughout Europe.[6]

In the tradition that encompassed most early modern discussions of unknown lands, including sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas, English information about the far-distant regions of the Russian empire was often based on rumor and legend. Siberia was the subject of much speculation and was said to be the home of dog-headed or even headless people. Sigismund Herberstein, whose description of Russia informed many sixteenth-century English accounts, reported the existence of a group of people who died every year on November 27, the feast day of St. George, "and at the next spring about the 23 day of April, they revive again as do frogs." Using Mandeville's *Travels* as a source, many English believed in the existence of the boronets, or "vegetable lamb," an animal that appeared to be a lamb, with the notable addition of a stalk attached to its stomach--after it had eaten all of the grass it could reach, it died. Other fantastic stories of Russian cannibals, stone cattle, and speechless men fired the imaginations of sixteenth-century

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[6] Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 2.

English.[7]

Written accounts of early English voyages to Russia are few and vary in reliability. There are two major sources of information: trade documents and royal embassy accounts. The limited number of printed accounts of early encounters was probably due to the insular nature of the Muscovy Company, which involved only a small number of investors who had little incentive to publish the written reports. In fact, members of the Muscovy Company feared that widespread circulation of the accounts would only serve to increase competition in the markets they intended to open. While reports destined for the Muscovy Company contained some inaccuracies and cultural misunderstandings, they are notable for a high degree of attention to detail. Documents associated with royal embassies provide great insight into the Anglo-Russian relationship at the highest levels of society but do not offer much information about life outside the inner circles of the royal courts in both countries.[8]

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[7] *PN*, 3: 408; Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 17-18.

[8] John Parker, *Books to Build an Empire: A Bibliographical History of English Overseas Interests to 1620* (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1965), 41. Historians are also hindered by the unfortunate destruction of the Muscovy Company's records for this early period in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Kenneth Andrews argues that early English reports of Russia are remarkably accurate and unbiased except in discussing religion, and "it would be unjust to accuse these observers of narrow-minded ethnocentricity or of fitting the facts to preconceived notions of Muscovy as a barbarous land, for in all the essentials it was as they described it." Reports of embassy missions, Andrews claims, were the primary source of English negative opinions of Russia and its people. Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 78. A quick survey of the surviving Muscovy Company correspondence, however, reveals that while some English observers were able to set aside any blatant biases or preconceptions, most reports contained inaccuracies, intended or otherwise. An excellent anthology of many of the major primary sources of early Anglo-Russian encounters is Lloyd E. Berry and

The most controversial description of early contact between Russia and England is paradoxically also one of the most informative accounts. Giles Fletcher's report of his 1588 embassy to Russia provides perhaps the most detailed early description of Russia, particularly its political institutions, but the author's vitriolic attack on the society reveals a personal bias which calls some of his observations into question. In part, Fletcher's pique at Russian society was due to the poor treatment he received at the hands of the Russian court. Fletcher's official report to Queen Elizabeth complained that "my whole entertainment from my first arrival until towards the very end, was such as in they had devised means of very purpose to show their utter disliking both of the trade of the Merchants and of the whole English nation." Upon learning that Fletcher intended to publish his book *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, the merchants of the Russia Company appealed to Sir William Cecil, Lord High Treasurer, to suppress the account. Given the fragile state of Anglo-Russian relations at the time, the merchants argued, publication of the book would "endanger both their people and goods now remaining there." The letter to Cecil listed eighteen instances in Fletcher's book that might be considered offensive but did not argue that any of it was false. The truth of the matter was that Fletcher's opinions were not out of line with other Englishmen's descriptions--the primary difference was that Fletcher intended to make his accusations public. The merchants' appeal was successful and the book was withdrawn from circulation until 1643.[9]

Robert O. Crumney, eds., *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyages* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

[9] Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, in Edward A. Bond, ed., *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Hakluyt Society Publications, 1ˢᵗ ser., v. 20,

The first English expedition to Russia resulted in moderate success for the investors but a disaster for many of the men who actually made the voyage. Willoughby's fleet consisted of three primary vessels: the *Bona Esperanza*, which Willoughby himself commanded, the *Edward Bonaventure* under the command of Richard Chancellor, and the *Bona Confidentia* commanded by an unknown master. A total of 116 men occupied the ships, including sailors, merchants, and one minister. A violent storm in late July separated the fleet off the coast of Norway, leaving Chancellor to push forward and complete the mission. Later, Chancellor learned that Willoughby and his men never returned from their voyage, apparently succumbing to the freezing temperatures of the northern climate. Despite the tragedy, Chancellor's contact with the Russian people opened the door for renewed interaction between England and Russia.[10]

The Muscovy Company itself was granted a charter in 1555 shortly after Chancellor's return. According to the company's own account of its origin, the impetus for forming such a trading association came from the highest levels of the English government, King Edward VI and his council. The company was organized as a joint-stock venture; a majority of the earliest members were London merchants. Many of the

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1856), 342, 352; The Russia Company's fear was well-founded. Ivan had already shown that he would retaliate to any unfavorable reports of his country by cutting off trade. When Anthony Jenkinson met with Ivan in 1572 to learn why the tsar had reneged on previous trade agreements, Ivan complained that he had confiscated letters from an English trader "wherein was written much against our Princely estate, and that in our empire were many unlawful things done, whereat we were much grieved." *PN*, 3: 174.

[10] Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 64; G. V. Scammell, *The World Encompassed: The First European Maritime Empires, 800-1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 472.

original merchants were also involved in other foreign trade activities, so they were familiar with the risks and rewards of long-distance trade. In 1566, the Muscovy Company changed its name to the Russia Company to reflect the growth of its activities outside of the regional confines of Muscovy.[11]

ii. Early Impressions

The first English encounter with Russians took place when Chancellor and his men stumbled across a group of fishermen. Chancellor accompanied a small group of English sailors sent to "know of them what Country it was, and what people, and of what manner of living they were." The natives fled at the sight of the approaching vessel, only to be captured by the inquisitive Englishmen. Once caught, the natives fell down at Chancellor's feet until he "looked pleasantly upon them, comforting them by signs and gestures, refusing those duties and reverences of theirs, and taking them up in all loving sort from the ground." After a brief discussion, the Englishmen learned that they were in a country called Russia which was under the rule of "Ivan Vasiliwich." Chancellor quickly assured the natives that the English posed no threat to Ivan's reign but simply wanted to engage in trade which would be to the benefit of both countries.[12]

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[11] Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company, 1553-1603* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1956), 3, 19.

[12] PN, 2: 248-49. Chancellor was following Cabot's instructions to learn the ways of the country "by some one such person as you may first either allure, or take to be brought aboard your ships," with care not to be violent.

Significantly, Chancellor's account makes no mention of the physical appearance of the Russians he encountered other than their clothing. The absence of extensive physical descriptions of Russians suggests that their physical appearance was not startling to the English observers. Giles Fletcher did note the Russians' swarthy skin and claimed that they were "for the most part of a large size and of very fleshly bodies, accounting it a grace to be somewhat gross and burley." Fletcher suggested that the rotund figure of the average Russian was due to inactivity and the swarthy skin color was a product of the extreme climate. George Turberville claimed that Russians were "flat-headed for the most," with a brown skin color he attributed to the smoke-filled rooms of Russian houses.[13]

For the most part, English descriptions of Russian people focused on apparel rather than physical attributes. Like English dress, proper Russian clothing was class-specific--an outside observer could determine the social status of an individual simply by the type of clothes he or she wore. Chancellor noted that Russian hats were an important signifier of class since "the loftier or higher their caps are, the greater is their birth supposed to be, and the greater reverence is given them by the common people." Giles Fletcher also described class variations in clothing material and style, which varied from

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[13] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 146; *PN*, 3: 131. For their part, the Russians were occasionally surprised by the English appearance. During the first meeting of the English and Ivan, the tsar called the visitors forward to receive a cup of drink. When they did, Ivan "took into his hand Master George Killingworth's beard, which reached over the table, and pleasantly delivered it [to] the Metropolitan, who seeming to bless it, said in Russe, this is God's gift." The beard, Henry Lane noted, "was not only thick, broad, and yellow colored, but in length five foot and two inches." *PN*, 3: 33.

intricate embroidered silk gowns for the upper classes to coarse leather garments for the poorest Russians.[14]

English observers also noted that there were regional differences in attire in Russia. While residents of the urban area of Moscow favored bright colors and silk, with many poor people having at least some silk trim to their otherwise plain clothing, Russians in frontier regions were more concerned with utility than fashion. In the northern regions, the nomadic tribes fought off the cold with "seal skins with the hairy side outwards, down as low as the knees, with their breeches and netherstocks of the same, both men and women." The roughness of the clothing reflected their lifestyle, which was "a wild and a savage life, roving still from one place of the country to another, without any property of house or land more to one than to another." The frightening appearance of the northern Russians led Edward Webbe to compare them "much like to Carbines or Horsemen ready to the war." The hairy clothing in particular evoked images of wild men roaming the frontier with few pretensions to civility. Sebastian Cabot had warned the English about such people, advising that "if you shall see them wear lion's or bear's skins . . . be not afraid of the sight: for such be worn oftentimes more to fear strangers, than for any other cause."[15]

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[14] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 91.

[15] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 99; Edward Arber, ed., *Edward Webbe: His Travailes* (London: Alexander Murray and Son, 1869), 17. Richard Chancellor observed that the Russians saved their best clothing for battle, during which "their desire is to be sumptuous in the field, and especially the nobles and gentlemen." *PN*, 2: 279. For a discussion of the "wild man" imagery in English thought, see Chapter Four below.

While the long, coarse attire of the northern Russians seemed to be a reflection of their savagery to the English, the visitors quickly adopted native clothing to help combat the difficult climate. Despite Cabot's suggestion that the temperatures might be moderate, when English sailors first encountered the realities of a Russian winter they "had their breath oftentimes so suddenly taken away, that they often fell down as men very near dead, so great is the sharpness of that cold climate." The cold winters also brought plenty of snow, which "falleth continually, and is sometime of a yard or two thick, but greater towards the north." To Englishmen used to an occasional dusting of snow, a Russian blizzard was an encumbrance to trade but also a work of wonder and fear.[16]

While English observers complained about the extremely cold temperatures, they seemed to take a perverse pleasure in describing the harshness of winter in Russia to their (presumably comfortable) readers in England. To illustrate the extremity of the cold, Giles Fletcher conducted his own experiment and reported that "water dropped down or cast up into the air, congealeth into ice before it come to the ground." As if the cold temperatures which he and his group encountered were not bad enough, Richard Chancellor claimed that more northern regions "are reported to be so cold, that the very ice or water which distilleth out of the moist wood which they lay upon the fire is presently congealed and frozen: the diversity growing so great, that in one and the self same firebrand, a man shall see both fire and ice." Chancellor's firebrand may have been apocryphal, but his willingness to believe the tale shows how deeply the Russian winter had impressed the

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[16] *PN*, 2: 254; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 5.

English visitors.[17]

The same northern regions that were a source of exaggerated stories of the cold were also a major source for valuable furs. Chancellor noted that there were not only plenty of fur-bearing animals in Russia but a preponderance of sables, which at the time were high fashion "worn about the necks of our Noble women and ladies." To the English, the prevalence of fur-bearing animals was not a simple coincidence of environment but the providence of God, who "provideth a natural remedy for [the Russians], to help the natural inconvenience of their country by the cold of the climate." God's benevolence in creating for the Russians the source of protection against the cold was extended to the English, who could export the furs to the fashion centers of Europe. Thus, the brutal temperatures could be interpreted as a blessing in disguise and further evidence of God's support of the English mission.[18]

English reports of harsh Russian winters were tempered by their assurances that the weather was changeable and winter eventually gave way to summer in all but the most northern regions. In fact, the winters seemed to actually create a more pleasant spring, since the abundance of snow blanketing the ground protected the soil from frost and, when melted, provided moisture for the herbs and plants that dotted the landscape. By the time summer arrived, the land had, in the eyes of the normally critical Giles Fletcher, "such a new hue and face of a country, the woods . . . so fresh and so sweet, the pastures and

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[17] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 5; *PN*, 2: 253.

[18] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 85; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 9.

meadows so green and well grown, . . . such variety of flowers , such noise of birds . . . that a man shall not lightly travel in a more pleasant country." The land around Moscow was particularly welcoming, "very fair, plain and pleasant, well inhabited, corn, pasture, meadows enough, rivers and woods fair and goodly." The lesson for English travelers was that generalizations about the Russian environment were not sufficient; the seasonality of the climate allowed even the most difficult of winters to be followed by temperate summers.[19]

Just as cold winters could be interpreted as a boon to trade through the proliferation of fur-bearing animals, so the moderate temperatures of summer yielded potential sources of wealth for the Merchant Adventurers. Once temperatures warmed in the summer, the country was full of game for the taking, including many types of birds, deer, sturgeon, and salmon. Michael Locke, a Russia Company agent, reported that the natural commodities of Russia included "salt, train oil, buffe hides, cow hides, tallow, furs of all kinds, iron, pitch, tar, ship masts, and timber, hemp, cables, and ropes for ships and other merchandise." One of the biggest potential sources of wealth was the abundant, if unglamorous, supply of flax and hemp, which quickly became a Russia Company mainstay through the creation of rope and coarse cloth manufacture.[20]

The biggest environmental drawback to living in Russia, according to the English, was not the cold winters but the prevalence of epidemic diseases. England itself was

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[19] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 6; Randolph in Edward Delmar Morgan and C. H. Coote, eds., *Early Voyages and Travels in Russia and Persia* (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 1st ser., v. 72, 1886), 246.

[20] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, ix, 10-11;

certainly not immune to periodic depredations of disease, but illness seemed to be more prevalent in Russia, which seemed "full of diseases, diverse and evil." One of the primary reasons that disease was such a constant threat in Russia was the common people's diet, which stood in stark contrast to the elaborate meals served at Ivan's table. Many English visitors remarked on the variety and quantity of dishes presented in formal dinners, even if they were not always complimentary about the taste. Jenkinson reported that Russians "have many sorts of meats and drinks when they banquet, and delight in eating of gross meats and stinking fish."[21]

While Jenkinson could afford to hold his nose at the offending food, many poor people in Russia had to make due with much less. Robert Best claimed that many Russians simply ate straw in the winter and "in the Summer they make good shift with grass, herbs, and roots." For Englishmen, diet was an important component of identity. Humans forced to eat food fit for grazing animals could not help but suffer harmful consequences. For their part, some Russians leveled criticism at the English diet. While traveling up the Volga River, Anthony Jenkinson encountered the "Nagayans," a Tartar group who only ate meat and drank milk. The Nagayans refused to eat bread or wheat, "mocking the Christians for the same, and disabling our strengths, saying we live by eating the top of a weed, and drink a drink made of the same." To this native group, meat was a source of strength while wheat could only weaken its consumers. The English insisted that their diet was superior and pointed to contemporary disasters in Russia to support

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[21] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 37.

their conclusions.[22]

In 1571, a plague epidemic forced the temporary cessation of all trade in Russia, as cities attempted in vain to enforce quarantines in order to slow the spread of disease. As is often the case in the most devastating epidemics, the illness was accompanied by a vicious circle of famine, weakness, and disease, with ghastly results. Anthony Jenkinson claimed that "the people have been enforced to eat bread made of bark of trees, besides many unclean things, yea and [it is] credibly reported for certain that in some places they have eaten one another." However desperate the conditions, cannibalism was unacceptable to the English, who considered the consumption of human flesh to be the antithesis of civility. Jenkinson further documented the results of the famine, noting that "the plague hath consumed (by credible report) this last year about three hundred thousand." Far from expressing sympathy for such a calamity, he concluded that this was "a just punishment of God for such a wicked nation."[23]

iii. Ivan "The Terrible" and the Terrible Society.

The English assessment of Russia as a "wicked nation" had many roots, but the most easily identifiable and most often condemned was its government. To English observers, all that was good and bad about Russian government was embodied in its leader at the time of first contact, Ivan IV, or Ivan "The Terrible." Ivan is a central figure

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[22] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 376; *PN*, 2: 453.

[23] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 337, 376.

in many of the surviving documents of the early contact period, testimony not only to his strong personality but also to the extreme centralization of power in Russia at the time. As tsar, Ivan was intimately involved in delicate negotiations with England's ambassadors, but he also micromanaged the English presence in his country, from the lowliest agent of the Russia Company to the queen's official representatives. Until his death in 1584, Ivan and subsequently his son Fedor and the Protector Boris Godunov, oversaw virtually all interactions and had an overwhelming impact both on the actual contact experience and the English assessment of Russian life.

Communication between the English and members of the Russian court was much easier than in any other first contact region. While Englishmen were forced to use signs and body language to try to communicate with natives in the rural fringes of the empire, the educated Russians in the important urban centers had a written language. By 1557, Russia Company agents were trying to learn the written language and circulated a copy of the Russian alphabet for all of their agents to learn. The cosmopolitan nature of Moscow and other trading centers also allowed for easier communication since the Russians were already conversant with several other languages by the time the English arrived. George Killingworth, a Russia Company merchant, advised in 1555 that all English letters to Ivan be written in "Polish, Dutch, Latin, or Italian." Although the English still often had to resort to interpreters, communication at the highest diplomatic and trade levels was relatively free of the misunderstandings that plagued other regions.[24]

English observers meeting face-to-face with the tsar were immediately impressed

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[24] *PN*, 2: 296, 394.

by Ivan's seemingly endless wealth and his insistence on ceremony. Clearly, Ivan intended

to send his visitors home with stories of wealth and splendor, and he would not have been

disappointed by the earliest reports. When Richard Chancellor met with Ivan in 1553, he

described a scene carefully constructed to represent Ivan's proper standing in the world:

> his seat was aloft, in a very royal throne, having on his head a
> Diademe, or Crown of gold, apparelled with a robe all of
> Goldsmiths work, and in his hand he held a Scepter garnished, and
> beset with precious stones: and besides all other notes and
> appearances of honor, there was a Majesty in his countenance
> proportionable with the excellency of his estate.

After this first meeting, Chancellor and a hundred other guests were treated to a formal

state dinner, in which "the tables were so laden with vessels of gold, that there was no

room for some to stand upon them." The message was clear: Ivan was not to be

dismissed as an inconsequential figure but treated as a great statesman. Clement Adams

observed that such a display "might very well have amazed our men and have dashed them

out of countenance," if not for Chancellor's example, who "being therewithall nothing

dismayed saluted, and did his duty to the Emperor, after the manner of England." The

men were engaged in a symbolic power struggle, determined to demonstrate their own

authority and autonomy at the outset of the relationship.[25]

  While Ivan was successful in creating an impressive aura around himself during

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[25] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 79, 81; *PN*, 2: 255-56. In fact, Ivan was so concerned that the English return to their country with a proper understanding of his wealth, he had his representatives call Robert Best and a few of his colleagues over to the palace just before their departure and "showed us a great number of the Emperor's jewels and rich robes, willing us to mark and behold them well, to the end that at our arrival into England we might make report of what we had seen there." Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 366.

initial meetings, the English assessment of Ivan the tsar and the person quickly

deteriorated. Jerome Horsey summed up most early impressions of Ivan as "a goodly man

of person and presence, well favored, high forehead, shrill voice . . . full of ready wisdom,

cruel, bloody, merciless." What began as a favorable description of the tsar ends with a

list of less than admirable characteristics. But it was these same characteristics that

enabled Ivan to maintain and even increase his power during a time of great difficulty in

Russia. The mid-sixteenth century in Russia was a period of famine, pestilence, Tartar

invasion, and war with Sweden and Poland. Robert Best returned to England from his

1557 visit claiming that Ivan was "not only beloved of his nobles and commons, but also in

great dread and fear through all his dominions, so that I think no prince in Christendom is

more feared of his own than he is, nor yet better beloved." Queen Elizabeth would soon

after stake a claim to the most "beloved" status, but it was Ivan's increasingly volatile

combination of cruelty and affection that led English observers to condemn his rule in

particular and Russian government in general.[26]

English descriptions of sixteenth-century Russian government virtually all conclude

that its leadership was tyrannical, corrupt, and overwhelmingly oppressive. While some

observers argued that the sole responsibility for such a disastrous system could be

assigned to Ivan himself, others maintained that the Russian people as a group had some

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[26] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 209; Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 368. Horsey was one of the few English defenders of Ivan's tactics, arguing that "the natural disposition of this nation was so wicked and evil, that if the old Emperor had not held so hard a hand and severe government over them, he could never have lived so long, for their treacherous and treasonable practices." Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 206.

sort of character flaw that made them not only accept tyranny but exercise tyrannical behavior themselves at any opportunity. The issue became something of a "chicken or egg" controversy: did living in an oppressive regime cause Russian people to be defective or did the tyranny rise as a consequence of the natural defects of the Russian people? The question was not an unimportant academic exercise for late sixteenth-century English men and women, who were quite concerned with their own status as a people. A significant component of the alleged uniqueness and, to their own eyes, superiority of the English people arose from their form of government and the character of the reigning monarch. The general consensus among the English was that a people who would allow an oppressive government to rule over them must have some fundamental flaws--the only question was the source.

As Ivan's reign wore on in the middle of the sixteenth century, the tsar gave English observers sufficient ammunition with which to condemn his rule. What impressed the English most about Ivan's policies was the apparently arbitrary nature of the creation and enforcement of rules under the tsar, and the cruelty with which perceived violators were punished. Edward Webbe was only twelve years old when he witnessed his first example of Ivan's cruelty, but the incident remained with him for the rest of his life. According to Webbe, when

> any Nobleman do offend the Emperor of Russia, the said Nobleman
> is taken and imprisoned with all his children and kinfolks, and the
> first great frost that cometh . . . there is a great hole made in the Ice
> over some great River, and then the party principal is put in, and
> after him his wife, his Children, and all other kinfolks.

Webbe's story was corroborated by several other observers, who all expressed astonishment at the severity of the punishment.[27]

By the late 1560s and into the 1570s and 1580s, however, Ivan's behavior became increasingly erratic towards his own people as well as the English visitors. In letters written home in 1566 and 1568, Anthony Jenkinson and Thomas Randolph both noted Ivan's campaign of violence against his own nobility. Jenkinson claimed that Ivan had recently executed or banished over four hundred nobles, often using gruesome methods, such as the torture executions of four noblemen: "one worried with bears, of another he cut off his nose, his tongue, his ears, and his lips, the third was set upon a pole, and the fourth he commanded to be knocked in the head, and put under the Ice in the River." Given the apparently random nature of Ivan's violence, it is no surprise that the English representatives in Russia were uneasy about their own safety. As official ambassador from Queen Elizabeth, Thomas Randolph could not avoid coming into direct contact with Ivan, but he intended to meet with the emperor as quickly as possible before returning to England "the sooner to be out of his country where heads go so fast to the pot."[28]

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[27] Webbe, *Travailes*, 18. Giles Fletcher reported that when Ivan had a fortified castle built in Narva, "when it was finished, for reward to the architect . . . he put out both his eyes, to make him unable to build the like again." *PN*, 3: 387.

[28] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 187, 287. People who worked closely with Ivan were most likely to be considered a threat. Jerome Bowes reported that an English doctor who had been sent to serve as one of Ivan's personal physicians "was roasted to death at the City of Moscow" for suspected treason. *PN*, 3: 324. To the English, Ivan's death seemed to be a fit ending based on his behavior. Jerome Horsey reported that just before his death, "the Emperor began grieviously to swell in his cods, with which he had most horribly offended above 50 years together, boasting of thousand virgins he had deflowered and thousands of children of his begetting destroyed." Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 199.

Ivan's instability threatened the success of English trade and diplomatic relations in Russia. When Anthony Jenkinson returned to Russia in 1571, he was distressed to learn that he had somehow fallen out of the emperor's favor. Jenkinson was detained at the city of Colmogro by a recurrence of the plague and complained of "neither having a gentleman to safeguard me, nor lodging appointed me, nor allowance of victuals according to the Country fashion for Ambassadors, which argued [Ivan's] grievous displeasure toward our nation." As if Ivan's slight were not enough, "the people of the Country perceiving the same, used towards me and my company great discourtesies." Although Ivan eventually met with Jenkinson and restored the English representative to his former good graces, the English now understood that their presence in Russia was tenuous at best, dependent primarily on the goodwill of an unpredictable leader. A significant portion of English resources, both in time and money, was devoted to trying to maintain friendly relations with the Russian government.[29]

One of the most striking components of early contact was the importance of gift-giving to both the trade and diplomatic missions, which were often intertwined. The merchants of the Russia Company and royal representatives quickly learned that each meeting with Russian officials involved some form of gift exchange, which could be as simple as a meal or as expensive as fine jewelry, depending on the importance of the individual to receive the gift. The exchange of gifts was central to the success of the

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[29] Jenkinson singled out Besson Mysserevy, one of Ivan's chief officers, as the most grievous offender at Colomogro. Not only did Mysserevy refuse to pay his debts to the English merchants, Jenkinson claimed, but also "hath spoken words of dishonor against the Queen's Majesty, as towards me her highness' ambassador. *PN*, 3: 172, 185.

English mission, particularly in the early years when both sides of the contact were negotiating to determine the nature of the developing relationship. Both the Russians and the English were concerned about maintaining a proper image through gift-giving. The most important aspect of gift exchange was that it had to be equal on both sides; if one group gave more or less than the other it was cause for great analysis as each side tried to discern the other's motives for sending such gifts.[30]

To the English, the purpose of gift-giving was to smooth the way for getting concessions, especially in trade, from the Russian government. Anyone perceived to be in a position of power or to have potential power was targeted with gifts. In 1567, the merchants of the Russia Company advised their representatives that "the benevolence of the young prince [Ivan, the emperor's eldest son] is to be sought and continued from time to time towards this Fellowship by some small gifts or otherwise as you shall know most meetest." Clearly, the merchants were anticipating the prince's eventual ascension to the throne and preparing him to look favorably upon the company and its employees. Unfortunately, the merchants could not have known that their careful plans were in vain since the young prince was soon to meet his death at the hands of his father, Ivan.[31]

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[30] Gift-giving and distribution of goods were an important aspect of Ivan's power. When any Russian man died without a male heir, the property reverted to the tsar, who then "bestoweth them among his courtiers, according to their deserts." *PN*, 2: 260. In an anthropological study of the forms and symbolic significance of gift-giving, Marcel Mauss argues for a broad definition of "gift" to include not only items of economic usefulness but also "acts of politeness" such as "banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs." Mauss stresses that reciprocity is the underlying principle of all gift exchange. See Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans., W.D Halls (New York: W.W Norton, 1990), 5.

[31] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 223.

While a prince not yet in power merited only "small gifts," reigning monarchs expected much more extensive presents. On one early embassy to Russia, Jerome Horsey delivered "jewels, chains, pearl, plate, gilt armour, halberds, pistols and pieces . . . and other costly things." In return he received a long list of expensive gifts, as well as "three thousand pounds of fine silver coin for a remembrance and earnest of his farther favor and love." On a later mission, Horsey gave gifts to Fedor on behalf of the English merchants, which included a "fighting bull, twelve mastiff dogs, two lions, three brace of greyhounds and three couple of very fair hounds" which were intended to encourage Fedor to "continue in my absence thy gracious favor towards them." Though the merchants' gifts could not match Queen Elizabeth's for cost, the men had done their homework and knew that the prince was a hunting aficionado. By selecting gifts which appealed directly to the prince's interests, the merchants clearly intended to suggest a more personal relationship with the Russian leader, which would benefit both parties.[32]

When gift-giving went well, as did the hunting package, it served to advance the Anglo-Russian relationship; when it went poorly, it threatened to disrupt the relationship entirely. At one point, a dispute over gift-giving actually escalated into an international incident pitting Elizabeth against the Russian leader and his advisors. The importance of the equality of gifts was central to the process--each side had to carefully assess the value of their gifts before delivery, always keeping in mind the value of earlier gifts. In a set of instructions to Thomas Randolph, who was to go to Ivan as Queen Elizabeth's ambassador in 1568, Randolph was ordered to present the tsar with "a rich standing cup . . . containing

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[32] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 222, 295.

in it great pieces of plate artificially wrought." Worried that Ivan would not be impressed by the gift, the queen's advisors told Randolph that when he presented the cup, "you shall recommend it for the Rarity of the fashion, assuring him that we do send him that same rather for the newness of the device than for the value, it being the first that ever was made in these parts of that manner." Ivan apparently accepted the cup graciously and the transaction was successful.[33]

English concern over the reception of their gifts carried over to trade goods. Since Ivan routinely revoked trading privileges for English merchants who fell out of his favor, English ambassadors continually renegotiated trade agreements with the Russian leader. Ivan maintained strict control over trade in his realm and was quick to express his dissatisfaction. When Jerome Bowes, acting as Elizabeth's official ambassador, attempted to negotiate a trade agreement in 1583, Ivan complained that "the English merchants did bring him nothing that was good, and compared old gaberdines of his own scarlet with such scarlets [that] were in the merchants' opinions, the best piece of cloth that ever came in Russia." Despite his best efforts to convince the tsar that English trade goods were of high quality, Bowes wryly noted that "nothing pleased that day."[34]

The diplomatic gift exchange escalated to international importance in 1588 when

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[33] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 242. The English also expected gifts and considered them important in assessing the status of the people they met. Stephen Burrough met a Russian man who did not present a gift upon meeting with the English, "therefore I regarded him but little." The Russian, aware that the English were snubbing him, returned with a gift
and assured Burrough that "his father was a gentleman." *PN*, 2: 330, 331.

[34] *PN*, 3: 471, 472.

Giles Fletcher reported that for some unknown reason, England had fallen out of the emperor's favor. Fedor was not subtle in expressing his displeasure, choosing to vent his anger on the gifts Fletcher brought with him. Fletcher wrote to Queen Elizabeth, claiming that "the presents sent by your Highness to the Emperor, and delivered to him . . . were the following day returned to me, and very contemptuously cast down before me." Both the giving and receiving of gifts created opportunities to make a statement about the relationship of the parties involved. In this case, Fedor believed that he had not been treated with the respect due so powerful a leader. After Elizabeth wrote a letter to the emperor complaining about the treatment of her representatives and her gifts, the tsar wrote back and argued that the gifts "were not such as they should be, and we for our part when we send our ambassador will likewise abate of ours." In Fedor's eyes, Elizabeth had failed to honor the unwritten equality rule of gifts, therefore she and her representatives in Russia would suffer the consequences.[35]

Fedor's extreme sensitivity to the intricacies of diplomatic negotiation created an atmosphere in which the English visitors were forced to walk on eggshells whenever issues of honor or respect arose. While disfavored people were much less likely to lose their heads under Fedor's rule than under his father Ivan's, Fedor wielded the power to cut off trade with similar results. Just after the gift debacle, Fedor became upset that Elizabeth's letters to him did not use the proper honorific titles, which he interpreted as a

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[35] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, cxvii, 343. Ivan's death set off an intense anti-English reaction throughout Russia; Russian merchants who had been upset at the tsar's economic policies flexed their muscle in the period shortly after his death. Samuel Baron, "Ivan the Terrible, Giles Fletcher, and the Muscovy Merchantry: A Reconsideration." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 56(1978), 574.

lack of respect. With this in mind, and with the advice of Russian representatives,

Elizabeth sent her reply addressed to:

> the right high, mighty, and noble prince, Theodore Ivanowich,
> Great Lord, King, and Great Duke of all of Russia, Volodemer,
> Mosco, Novgorod, King of Cazan and Astracan, Lord of Vobsko,
> and Great Duke of Smolensko, Otver, Ughory, Perme, Viatski,
> Bolgory,and other places, Lord and Great Duke of Novgorod in the
> low country, or Chernigo, Rezan, Polotsky, Obdorsky, Condinsky,
> and commander of all Sibierland and the north coasts; Great Lord
> over the country of Ivensky, Grisinsky; Emperor of Kabardinsky
> and of the country of Gosky, and Lord of many other countries, our
> most dear and loving brother, greeting.

Somewhat peevishly, Elizabeth explained that it was not the English tradition to use such

grandiose titles--the Queen of England did not bother listing the vast individual

"principalities, dukedoms, and earldoms, provinces, and countries" that she ruled. Clearly,

she was letting Fedor know that she could match him title for title if she wanted to, but

was secure enough in her command that she did not need to resort to such petty

behavior.[36]

While the wrath of the emperor might be placated by a few expensive gifts or fancy

titles, English people living in Russia also had to contend with an entire people who had

lived under tyranny all their lives. The institutions of Ivan's government were staffed with

people who did not seem to give a second thought to committing acts of brutality.

Edward Webbe noted that the Russians "execute very sharp laws among themselves, and

are a kind of Tyrannous people as appeareth by their customs." Russian people seemed

willing to replicate the emperor's violent and arbitrary behavior on a more local level. To

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[36] Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 375-76, 378.

the English, the justice system reflected the barbarism of the people involved. Giles Fletcher claimed that torture was regularly used to get confessions in criminal cases, including "breaking and wresting one of their ribs with a pair of hot tongs, or cutting their flesh under the nails, and such like." Members of the Russian military also engaged in deplorable behavior; when Ivan ordered a militia to attack a group of Dutch and Livonian merchant families living outside Moscow, the soldiers "stripped them naked, most barbarously ravished and deflowered both young and old women without respects, carrying diverse of the youngest and fairest maids to serve their wicked lusts away with them." The apparent acceptance of such behavior by a majority of Russians, the English believed, was certain evidence that the Russian people themselves were tyrannical.[37]

The effects of the oppressive system could even be seen in Russian housing and architecture. English descriptions of Russian towns and buildings show the visitors to be rather unimpressed by the architecture and image of Russian towns. Richard Chancellor's 1553 account described buildings "for beauty and fairness, nothing compared to ours." Chancellor went on to observe that "there are many Towns and villages also, but built out of order, and with no handsomeness." The complaint that the towns were "built out of order" was key--there seemed to be no plan to Russian towns in English eyes. Churches sprouted up in the middle of residential neighborhoods, houses were scattered about seemingly without pattern, and little attention was given to outward appearances. Utility was the chief concern in Russian architecture for the most part. Anthony Jenkinson noted that "the houses are four square without any iron or stone work, covered with birch barks

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[37] Webbe, *Travailes*, 17; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 68, 195.

and wood over the same." Russian housing was singularly unremarkable, a reflection of the lack of creativity under the oppressive society.[38]

The city of Moscow itself was surprisingly devoid of architectural splendor for a nation's capital. One observer was disappointed to discover that the buildings of Moscow were "all of Fir, except the Emperor's Court, which is of lime and stone." Of course, the city had been ravaged in the Tatar invasion of 1571, leaving many English observers to describe a burned-out, crumbling Moscow. The deterioration of Russian cities and the failure of many to rebuild after the military incursions were further evidence of the deleterious effects of tyranny. Fletcher argued that the ruined cities "showeth the decrease of the Russe people under this government." Lacking the will, incentive, and means to rebuild their towns, the dispirited Russian people simply walked among the ruins.[39]

iv. Ignorant Monks, Alcoholic Men, and Subservient Women

While the Russian government could be assigned a significant portion of the blame for the apparent barbarism of the people and society, the other major target of English accusations was the Russian religion. The spread of the Christian faith in Russia coincided with the centralization of state power in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Prince Vladimir's conversion to Christianity in 989 and his insistence on his subjects' conversion helped give Kievan Russia a sense of separateness and distinction from the nomadic tribes

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[38] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 78; Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 20.

[39] Webbe, *Travailes*, 17; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 18.

that constantly threatened to tear apart the struggling state. While Christianity offered Russians a common identity, however, it also opened the door to foreign influences in the highest levels of Russian society. Vladimir's conversion to the Greek Orthodox Christianity brought with it a series of foreign advisors, religious and political. Byzantine architects were brought to Moscow to build churches after the Greek model and also began to work on the construction of state buildings. The close ties between church and government were not unusual to sixteenth-century Englishmen; it was the apparent tendency of both to be ignorant and oppressive which brought the sharpest criticism from English observers.[40]

According to English accounts, the most striking aspect of Russian religious life from the highest levels of the Church to the lowliest citizen was the absolute ignorance of its practitioners. When the earliest English voyages arrived in Russia, one of the first habitations they encountered was the monastery at St. Nicholas. While the English sailors were usually grateful for the hospitality of the monks, who greeted them with food and drink, the Englishmen were not charitable in their descriptions of their hosts. Richard Chancellor opined that "as for whoredom and drunkenness there be none such living, and for extortion, they be the most abominable under the sun." Thomas Randolph described them as being "more in drink than in virtue or sobriety, full of superstition and in my judgement very hypocrits, unlearned in all things."[41]

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[40] Anthony Glenn Cross, ed., *Russia Under Western Eyes, 1517-1825* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 14-17.

[41] *PN*, 2: 238; Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 258.

Giles Fletcher argued that the ignorance of the clergy was no accident but a conscious effort of church leaders "wary to keep out all means that might bring any [learning] in: as fearing to have their own ignorance and ungodliness discovered." The result of this program of misinformation, according to the English, was that very few Russians knew the Lord's Prayer, the articles of the Christian faith, or even the Ten Commandments, since the Russians believed "such secret and holy things as they are should not rashly and imprudently be communicated with the common people." Of course, the English dismissed such explanations as the self-serving statements of clergymen incapable of transmitting knowledge to the people rather than a legitimate theological argument. After quizzing one friar on Christian doctrine and receiving unsatisfactory answers, Fletcher asked the man why he was a friar. The man reportedly answered "because he would eat his bread in peace." Clearly, Fletcher included this story to expose the alleged shallowness of Russian religious leaders.[42]

In addition to the apparent ignorance of the clergy, the Russian version of Christianity was also notable for its idolatry in English eyes. The Orthodox Church's celebration of images of saints caused much consternation among the Protestant observers. Most English visitors noted with dismay the presence of religious images in virtually every house, church, and government building. The combination of the ignorance of the clergy and the emphasis on images led to grievous errors, according to English beliefs. Robert Best noted that in the absence of educated clergy, "there are many and the

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[42] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 258; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 111, 116; *PN*, 2: 266.

most part of the poor in the country who, if one ask them how many gods there be, they will say a great many, meaning that every image which they have is a god." The images themselves seemed to have magical powers, particularly in times of great crisis such as war or plague. Richard Chancellor reported one group of Russians who responded to a crisis by sacrificing a person chosen by lottery, who by "illusions of the devil, or idol, he is again restored to life, and then doth reveal and deliver the causes of the present calamity. And by the means knowing how to pacify the idol, they are delivered from the imminent danger." The potential association of the religious idols with the work of the Devil was a persistent theme in English writing. Thus, not only were the Russians guilty of practicing an ignorant religion, they could possibly be involved in polytheism or Devil worship.[43]

While the English were confident that their own religious rituals were far superior to the Russian version, they were surprised and offended to learn that the Russians considered the English practices to be in error. The English abhorrence of anything that hinted at idol worship seemed strange to the Russians, since the "Russe which hath not a cross about his neck they esteem as no Christian man, and thereupon they say that we are no Christians, because we do not wear crosses as they do." In fact, Richard Chancellor talked to some Russians who had the gall to claim that the English "are but half Christians, and they themselves only to be the true and perfect church." Despite the Russians' assurance of the correctness of their religion, English visitors proudly pointed out that no

[43] Morgan and Coote, *Early Travels and Voyages*, 371; PN, 2: 269. Ivan himself seemed to hold some particularly strange beliefs which bordered on the heretical. Jerome Horsey reported Ivan's belief in the magical qualities of certain stones and gems and his consultation with witches just before his death. Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 200.

Englishman had converted to the Russian faith, except one Richard Relph, an apparently

unsavory character who entered "into the Russe profession: and so was rebaptised, living

now as much an idolater as before he was a rioter and unthrifty person." Relph's

conversion served only to prove the English contention that the Russian Church was

bankrupt of religious or moral authority, full of the "foolish and childish dotages of such

ignorant barbarians."[44]

As much as the English despised the Russian version of Christianity, they had to

exercise discretion when speaking to the natives about their religion. After all, their

primary (or even secondary) objective in Russia was not to convert the natives to the true

faith but to exact as much trade as they could. Any criticism that angered the Russians

threatened this trade and, as some Englishmen discovered, their very well-being. Despite

Sebastian Cabot's pre-contact warning to avoid any discussion of religion with the natives,

some English visitors could not resist the temptation. After an agent of the Russia

Company in Persia had been killed apparently for criticizing the native religion, the

merchants of the company sent their chief agent in Moscow instructions designed to

eliminate such future problems. The merchants ordered "all our countrymen to be

advertised . . . both those which be and shall be resident in Persia and Russia, in any ways

not to utter any misliking of the Religion or government but to seem only to follow the

trade of merchandise." English agents needed to focus on the task at hand rather than

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[44] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 373; *PN*, 2: 268; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 124.

antagonize their trading partners with religious debates.[45]

The results of living under such a system for an extended period could be clearly identified by observing the Russian people. A few of the earliest English accounts of the Russians suggested that the natives had some admirable qualities that might serve as an example to English men and women. The generosity with which Russians shared their food and drink with English strangers was commendable, far exceeding expectations. Many English observers noted the Russians' willingness to accept hardship without complaining as a particularly valuable attribute in a difficult climate. After describing the poor food, clothing, and living conditions of Russian soldiers, Richard Chancellor asked "how justly may this barbarous and rude Russe condemn the daintiness and richness of our Captains, who living in a soil and air much more temperate, yet commonly use furred boots, or cloaks?" Chancellor viewed the soldiers' willingness to accept onerous conditions without question or complaint as a quality to be emulated. When extended to the general population of Russia, however, this same quality became a major point of criticism.[46]

English characterizations of Russian people alternated between expressing sympathy for their living conditions and harsh attacks on the people as deserving their own

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[45] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 217.

[46] *PN*, 2: 259. Giles Fletcher took this same attribute that Chancellor praised and argued that it was another example of the failure of Russian society. According to Fletcher, the fact that Russian soldiers faced hardship without question was less important than their inability to get anything done due to their "servile condition, that will not suffer any great courage or valour to grow in the soldier." Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 77.

(unhappy) fate. Robert Best embraced both approaches when he observed that

> there is no people in the world, as I suppose, that live so miserably
> as do the poverty in those parts: and the most part of them that
> have sufficient for themselves, and also to relieve others that need,
> are so unmerciful that they care not how many they see die of
> famine or hunger in the streets.

Ivan had a severe solution to the problem. Jerome Horsey reported Ivan's "deed of

charity" after a famine in 1575, during which "the towns, streets, and ways swarmed with

the rags, idle beggars and counterfeit cripples." The Russian tsar announced that the poor

would receive alms on a certain day, and "out of some thousands that came, 700 of the

most vilest and counterfeits were all knocked in the heads and cast into the great lake, for

the fish to receive their dole there." Horsey did not explicitly disapprove of Ivan's social

engineering project, perhaps envisioning the wandering poor who were allegedly such a

burden on English society.[47]

Poverty was so pervasive and charity so infrequent, according to the English, that

many Russians appeared willing to take drastic measures to survive. Chancellor claimed

that "there are some among them, that use willingly make themselves, their wives, and

children, bondslaves unto rich men, to have a little money at the first into their hands, and

so for ever after content themselves with meat and drink." To the shocked Englishman,

this was certain evidence of how "little accompt do they make of liberty." The members

of the Russia Company were willing to use Russian slave labor to manufacture goods for

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[47] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 376; *PN*, 2: 235; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 208.

the trade, but balked at the concept of a free person selling himself into slavery.[48]

The agents of the Russia Company had ambivalent feelings about slavery--although they were not comfortable with the apparent ease with which Russians accepted slavery of their own people, the English were not totally shocked. While traveling along the Volga River Anthony Jenkinson came across Astracan, where a recent plague had devastated the population. "At my being there," Jenkinson claimed, "I could have brought many goodly Tartar's children . . . to say, a boy or a wench for a loaf of bread worth six pence in England, but we had more need of victuals at that time than of any such merchandise." Security concerns also figured into the English decision whether to use Russian slaves. Russia Company leaders worried that "certain Englishmen did make forays and showed themselves disorderly at the Narva in bringing away the subjects of Russia, whereby the fellowship's goods might have been in danger." As always, economic concerns were the bottom line for the English. Even if Russians were so debased as to sell themselves into slavery, the English had to be careful that they did not disrupt trade.[49]

One of the worst attributes of the Russians was their apparent inability to keep a promise. Early trade and diplomatic negotiations typically were marred by misunderstandings and confusion, which the English claimed were the result of Russian

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[48] *PN*, 2: 235. Although details are sketchy, it appears as though the Russia Company used slave labor at a very early date. In a 1567 letter to their agents in Moscow, the merchants asked for a report on the manufacture of coarse cloth: "we would understand how many slaves be set to that work, whether they be apt to that art; if need be we will send more men from hence, but if slaves there be docible it were better to train them up (for diverse considerations)than have many of our nation from hence except it be master of the work." Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 211.

[49] *PN*, 2: 455; Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 222.

deception. Anthony Jenkinson complained that the Russians were "great talkers and liars without any faith or trust in their words, flatterers and dissemblers." Giles Fletcher explained that when engaged in trade, "the Russe neither believeth any thing that another man speaketh, nor speaketh any thing himself worthy to be believed." Repeated English violations of agreements did nothing to convince the Russians to honor their own pledges. This mistrust on both sides of the early contact created an atmosphere of uncertainty that plagued interactions between ambassadors and traders.[50]

The Russian people were also capable of extraordinary violence and cruelty on occasion, which the English took as further evidence of their depravity. Hangings, burnings, and various forms of torture were an accepted part of sixteenth-century English life, but the level of violence in Russia seemed to be unusually high. When William Burroughs captured a group of Danish pirates and took them to Russia, the circumstances of their executions left an indelible mark on the English observers: "first great stakes [were] driven into the ground, and they spitted upon poles, as a man would put a Pig on a Spit, and so seven score were handled in that manner in very Tyrannous sort." Fletcher claimed that "the whole country is filled with rapine and murder. They make no account of the life of a man." Some of the stories of crimes he had heard "would scarcely be

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[50] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 37; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 152. Even high government officials were suspected of perpetual dishonesty. After meeting with the Russian ambassador to England in 1557, representatives of the Russia Company warned their agents in Moscow that the ambassador "is very mistrustful, and thinketh every man will beguile him. Therefore you had need to take heed how you have to do with him or any such, and to make your bargains plain, and to set them down in writing. For they be subtle people, and do not always speak the truth, and think other men to be like themselves." *PN*, 2: 391.

believed to be done among men, specially such as profess themselves Christians."[51]

One of the most notable criticisms of the Russian people was their alleged alcoholism. English sailors certainly were not teetotalers, but they were quick to condemn Russian people who seemed to be incapable of drinking in moderation. Alcohol was a prominent part of many celebrations in Russia, from religious festivities to formal dinners. Ivan's state dinners were famous for the variety and quantity of alcoholic beverages served. After one memorable dinner in which the drinking outpaced the eating, the English visitors reported that "because the Emperor would have us to be merry, he sent to our lodging the same Evening 3 barrels of mead of sundry sorts, of the quantity in all of one hogshead." The Russian version of Lent lasted almost two months, during which, it was reported, "there are but few Russes sober, but they are drunk day by day, and it is accounted for no reproach or shame among them."[52]

It was the lack of shame, more than the drinking itself, that seemed to the English to indicate that drinking was a flaw inherent in the Russian people rather than simply the vice of a few. Richard Chancellor characterized all Russians as "notable tospots" and would have found little argument from his fellow English observers. According to reports, dependence on alcohol plunged the already oppressed Russian people deeper into degrading behavior. Anthony Jenkinson wrote back to England with a story of "men, and women, that drunk away their children, and all their goods, at the Emperor's Tavern, and not being able to pay . . . the Taverner bringeth him out to the high way, and beats him

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[51] Webbe, *Travailes*, 19; Bond, *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 151.

[52] *PN*, 2: 433; Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia*, 27.

upon the legs" until passersby eventually pay the debt out of compassion. English writers alternated between pity and disgust when describing the prevalence of alcohol abuse in Russia. Those who saw it as a symptom of a tyrannical society explained that it was a natural result of living in a repressive system, while those who blamed it on a character flaw saw it as further proof of the Russian peoples' complicity in their own degradation. Whatever the root cause, alcohol was blamed in part for many of the most obvious ills in Russian society, including poverty, family violence, and the virtual enslavement of children sold to the highest bidder by their alcoholic parents.[53]

The biggest victims of Russian barbarity seemed to be native women. English sailors involved in the attempt to find the elusive Northeast Passage to the riches of Asia initially encountered a native society in which there seemed to be little distinction between gender roles. Stephen Burrough noted that women were among the first natives the English met as they cruised the northeast coast. Anthony Jenkinson was surprised to find that "in Lappia, they know no art nor faculty, but only shooting, which they exercise daily, as well men as women, and kill such beasts as serve them for food." In this region, native women seemed to be involved in activities which the English traditionally designated as masculine.[54]

As English sailors continued on their journey to the northeast, they encountered societies in which gender roles were in transition. One of the most important factors affecting women's status in Russian society was the spread of Orthodox Christianity

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[53] *PN*, 2: 267, 423.

[54] *PN*, 2: 368, 417.

beginning in the tenth century. Orthodox theologians argued that men's physical nature detracted from their ability to gain spiritual salvation. Women were in even greater danger than men, as they had greater flaws and were generally considered to be less spiritual than men.[55] The Orthodox church considered sexual intercourse to be evil even within the confines of marriage. Marital relations, though still undesirable, were allowed only because God was merciful enough to extend dispensation to married couples. As Christianity spread, so did patriarchal ideals, which taught that "as the prince answers to God, so a man answers to his prince, and a woman to her husband."[56] In the Orthodox world view, there was a distinct hierarchy that had to be adhered to if humans hoped to avoid chaos in this life and the hereafter.

Given the centrality of patriarchal notions to Russian society, it comes as no surprise to note that women were essentially left out of the institutionalized sources of power. One early collection of didactic literature summarized the feelings of many Russians regarding the proper power relationship between women and men: "There is no worse foolishness than to be ruled by a woman. Such men are spineless, shameless, foolish, dependent, servile, and simpletons."[57] Since women could not legitimately hold

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[55] Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 23, 37.

[56] N. L Pushkareva, "Women in the Medieval Russian Family of the Tenth Through Fifteenth Centuries," in Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Englel, and Christine D. Worobec, eds.
Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37.

[57] Pushkareva, "Women in the Medieval Russian Family," 38.

authority over men, they necessarily could not participate in government. Across Russia, women were excluded from the *skhod*, or village assemblies comprised of male heads-of-households. The skhod held tremendous authority over local issues, such as land distribution and crop management, and served as an electorate to select village elders. Even widowed women, who for all intents and purposes were heads of households, could not vote or even speak at assembly meetings.[58]

While the spread of Orthodox Christianity certainly strengthened patriarchal notions in medieval Russia, women were not simply victims of male assertions of power but were able to use some of the new patriarchal ideology to their advantage. One of the basic sources of power for Russian women of all classes was their role in reproduction. Under Orthodox canon law, women could not have sexual intercourse while menstruating or for forty days after giving birth. Russian ideas about the impurity of childbirth were much stronger than Judeo-Christian ideals. Since pregnant women were supposed to be polluted physically, childbirth was primarily a female affair, allowing women a sense of community and control over the earliest stages of newborn life.[59]

Ironically, Orthodox Christianity's overwhelmingly negative view of female sexuality also bestowed power on Russia's women. According to Orthodox belief, God's original creation was devoid of sexuality. Eve occupied a distinctly asexual status as Adam's companion, existing as a helpmate and source of spiritual love. Sexual desire was

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[58] Clements, et al, *Russia's Women*, 5.

[59] Christine D. Worobec, "Accommodation and Resistance," in Clements, et al, *Russia's Women*, 20; Levin, in Ibid., 48.

not a natural or intended consequence of the creation of Eve but a product of the disobedience that allowed sin to enter the world. Since Eve's transgression was biologically passed down to her successors, all women were prone to the sin of sexual lasciviousness. One of the primary functions of the Russian family, then, was to protect women's precarious honor and, by association, family honor as a whole. As a discreet threat to family honor, Russian women were a protected class, removed from the dangers and temptations men faced in their lives.[60]

But Russia's women did not simply use their status as a protected class to lead their lives behind closed doors; they actually extended their privileges as females into public arenas. One of the trademarks of a patriarchal culture is that while society denies women the right to institutional power, it elevates women's social esteem.[61] In many cases, patriarchal systems give women a sense of dignity which may be missing from more superficially egalitarian societies which mask significant handicaps to women's authority. Russian women took an active role in protecting their own special status, often using the courts as a means to affirm that they had retained the right to womanly privileges when there might be some question. A comparative study of male and female litigation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shows that, in general, women sued against allegations that attacked their sexual modesty, while men sued for a wide range of allegations, including criminal behavior, failure to pay taxes, and insults to social rank. Thus, women

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[60] Levin, *Sex and Society*, 46; Worobec, "Accommodation and Resistance," 21.

[61] Nancy Shields Kollman, "Women's Honor in Early Modern Russia," in *Russia's Women*, 72.

used the very institutions from which they were excluded under the patriarchal system to help insure that the few benefits of patriarchy were not denied them.[62]

Of course, such protection did not come without a price; while Russian women theoretically benefitted from reduced exposure to temptation and vice, restrictions on women's behavior limited their social and economic options. Although all women experienced some restrictions, the degree to which they were enforced was directly dependent on the class of the women involved. Families struggling to secure a subsistence through agriculture could not afford to sequester women from contact with the outside world. Likewise, poor women in larger towns and villages were active participants in the surrounding economic system and markets and could not avoid almost daily interactions with non-family members. The women who experienced the most tangible restrictions on their personal lives were members of the middle and upper classes.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the same political and economic forces that led to a centralization of power in the hands of Muscovite tsars also contributed to increased concern with the seclusion of elite women. This concern was institutionalized with the creation of the *terem*, separate living quarters for women. Under sequestration, women could have visitors and could occasionally leave to manage the household but could not interact with men, even of their own family, unless absolutely necessary. The *terem* was conceived not as a punishment for women but as a way to insure that women of high social status could not socialize with just anyone, which might lead to undesirable

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[62] Kollman. "Women's Honor in Early Modern Russia," 62. Women could not themselves initiate a lawsuit and had to have a man sue on their behalf.

marriages. Since kinship ties were such an important aspect of the political system, elite women's marriage choices were imbued with significance surpassing the individual household.[63]

One of the ways in which elite families sought to regulate behavior was through the use of proscriptive literature, most notably the *Domostroi*. Though its authorship is not certain, it seems that the *Domostroi* appeared in the 1550s during a particularly stable and prosperous period in Russia. The *Domostroi* contained advice for middle and upper class men and women regarding religion, obedience to superiors, raising children and managing servants, and proper moral conduct as well as more specific instructions on how to create a productive household economy. Written specifically for the upper classes and people who aspired to join the upper ranks of society, the *Domostroi* probably never had a wide readership, yet its impact reached outside these small circles. As policy makers and trendsetters, the *Domostroi's* readers were in a position to establish cultural norms for other group to follow.[64]

The *Domostroi* is significant not only for what it reveals about actual family life in sixteenth-century Muscovy but for its constructed image of the ideal family. Men were clearly in charge of their families; any other arrangement would invite chaos. According to the *Domostroi*:

> Husbands should instruct their wives lovingly and with due
> consideration. A wife should ask her husband every day about

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[63] Worobec, "Accommodation and Resistance," 18.

[64] Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, ed. and trans., *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 4.

matters of piety, so she will know how to save her soul, please her
husband, and structure her house well.

In case that was not clear enough, the author continued to advise the good wife to "obey

her husband in everything. Whatever the husband orders, she must accept with love; she

must fulfill his every command." As the primary source of authority within the family, the

husband/father should be consulted on all issues pertaining to the household.[65]

Even though women did not necessarily have the final say in family decisions, they

did exercise a considerable amount of authority. Just as fears of women's sexuality gave

them power as people with special protection, so did the ideal woman gain respect for her

role as wife and mother. The author of the *Domostroi* maintained that "a good woman

makes her husband more honorable: first she will be blessed by having kept God's

commandment; second, she will be praised by other people." Basking in the reflected

glory of her husband's honor, the ideal woman would reap her own rewards in the next

life. In short, the *Domostroi* summarized, a good housewife "uses her intelligence, follows

her husband's instruction, and works hard."[66]

Of course, even the best intentioned woman could occasionally stray from the right

path. The *Domostroi* warned that "a woman should never under any circumstances drink

alcohol--wine, mead, or beer--nor should she receive it as a present." Alcohol was a

destroyer of households, inciting disruptive behavior that could destroy even the most well

managed family. Women especially had to be concerned about the dangers of alcohol,

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[65] Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, 49, 124.

[66] Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, 103, 127.

since "a drunk man is bad, but a drunk woman is not fit to be on the earth." If a husband

found his wife drunk or otherwise disobedient, it was his duty as head of the household to

correct her. In most cases, verbal instruction was enough to achieve the desired result,

but occasionally the husband had to resort to more coercive means. The *Domostroi*

advocated physical correction, but advised men to "beat her when you are alone together;

then forgive her and remonstrate with her. But when you beat her, do not do it in hatred,

do not lose control." Violence with a purpose was acceptable as long as men did not give

in to their emotions and cross the line between correction and sadism. Though the

Domostroi was intended as a manual for upper class society, much of the advice applied to

all socio-economic groups in Russia.[67] Men in all socio-economic classes were to be in

charge of their family and the readers of the *Domostroi* were to be an example for the rest

of the country.

The Russian women English men encountered in the first-contact period were not

a cross-section of Russian society but representatives of only a tiny fragment of Russian

womanhood. Aside from brief meetings with native women they met along the way,

English men's only interaction with Russian women in this early period came in the urban

centers of Muscovy. As we have already seen, women in the elite circles of Muscovy

belonged to a distinct culture with specific guidelines for proper gender behavior. Since

English men could not interact with Russian women on an individual level, most English

observations of Russian women came from second-hand reports or public displays such as

weddings. Therefore, any English descriptions of Russian women must be taken with a

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[67] Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, 132, 138, 143.

large grain of salt.

Not surprisingly, the first thing that English men noticed about Russian women was their physical appearance. To the critical English eye, Russian women were something short of attractive. Both men and women "had a dark and sallow complexion, their skins being tanned and parched both with cold and heat." Women seemed to have the worst skin, which Giles Fletcher attributed to their working around hot stoves all day.[68] English men did note that Russian women seemed to care about their appearance but were not very complimentary about the methods or results. Russian women of all classes were fond of cosmetics, which their fathers and husbands were obliged to purchase. Anthony Jenkinson observed that the use of cosmetics

> is such a common practice among them, that it is counted for no
> shame: they grease their faces with such colors, that a man may
> discerne them hanging on their faces almost a flight shoot off: I
> cannot so well liken them as to a miller's wife, for they look as
> though they were beaten about the face with a bag of meal, but
> their eyebrows they color as black as jet.[69]

Fletcher explained that Russian men were willing to spend a significant portion of their hard-earned money on cosmetics since they "delight themselves much to see then of foul women to become such fair images."[70]

For English men, the use of cosmetics was not simply another curiosity to note regarding native women but was loaded with meaning for their own society. Sixteenth-

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[68] Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 147.

[69] *PN*, 2: 447.

[70] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 147.

century English ideals of feminine beauty centered around the contrasting colors of white skin and red lips and cheeks. To achieve the desired results, many women resorted to cosmetics or other devices, such as rubbing their cheeks vigorously or actually smearing their own blood on their faces before entering the company of men. To some critics, the use of cosmetics was an affront to God and evidence of excess pride. Women who wore cosmetics were also subject to being mistaken for prostitutes, since the use of artificial beauty enhancers was considered an enticement to vice.[71] Thomas Draiton waxed poetic in his condemnation of cosmetics:

> Describe what is fair painting of the face,
> It is a thing proceeds from want of grace:
> Which thing deformity did first beget,
> And is on the earth the greatest counterfeit.

If English women wearing cosmetics could come under such condemnation, it is no surprise that English men were quick to comment on native Russian strategies to enhance beauty.[72] By offering such sharp criticism of native women, English men were simultaneously critiquing women in their own society. Readers of the accounts could surely recognize in the unfavorable descriptions of Russian women images of similarly maligned women in England.

While it was easy for English men to agree on the nature of women's physical

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[71] Charles Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York: Elsevier Press, 1952), 197-200. For a discussion of English women and cosmetics in the sixteenth century, see Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 89-90.

[72] Thomas Draiton, in Thomas Tuke [1616] *A Treatise against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women.* Quoted in Camden, *Elizabethan Woman*, 177.

appearance, English observers had mixed feelings about the overall character of Russian women's lives. Though women appeared in the first contact narratives only in sketchy details, English men consistently drew attention to the degree to which Russian women were under the complete control of their men. The manifestation of this control depended on the economic class of the people involved. Richard Chancellor noticed that some poor Russian men "sell their wives and children to be bawds and drudges to the buyer." While the men Chancellor described might be acting outside the norms of accepted behavior, Giles Fletcher observed a similar transaction that seemed to be more institutionalized. According to Fletcher, if a man owed a debt or a fine for criminal conviction and did not pay it one year later,

> it is lawful for him to sell his wife and children, either outright or
> for a certain term of years. And if the price of them do not amount
> to the full payment, the creditor may take them to be his bondslaves
> for years or forever, according as the value of the debt requireth.

Poor women and children thus became a form of barter for their men during times of severe economic distress.[73]

While wife-selling seemed to be the last resort for men in difficult economic circumstances, English men did witness other examples of differential treatment of women that seemed to be class-based. Fletcher claimed that "in living with their wives, they show themselves to be but of barbarous condition: using them as servants rather than wives. Except the noble-women, which are, or seem to be, of more estimation with their husbands than the rest of the meaner sort." In Fletcher's eyes, Russian women performed

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[73] *PN*, 2: 235; Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 67.

virtually all of the thankless tasks necessary for basic survival while their husbands carelessly drank away the meager earnings their wives acquired. To add insult to injury, husbands "of the meaner sort" did not even acknowledge women's sacrifices by assigning them an elevated social status.[74]

English observers did point out, however, that women of a certain socio-economic class were in fact held in high estimation and that this status came with a distinct set of rewards and expectations. These were the women to whom the set of principles outlined in the *Domostroi* were supposed to be not an unreachable ideal but a realistic standard for everyday life. The seclusion of elite women made it difficult for the English visitors to form an educated opinion about their lifestyle. Anthony Jenkinson complained that in Moscow "they use to keep their wives very closely, I mean those that be of any reputation, so that a man shall not see one of them but at a chance, when she goeth to church at Christmas or at Easter, or else going to visit some of her friends." These occasional glimpses of upper-class women probably served to pique English men's curiosity, but actual face-to-face encounters with elite women were elusive. Although they were never sold to pay a debt, elite women faced certain risks that poor women did not. Fletcher reported that an upper-class man who disliked his wife for any reason "may go into a monastery and shire himself a friar by pretence of devotion, and so leave his wife to shift for herself so well as she can." Faced with the financial crisis such desertio inevitably entailed, elite women sought to avoid abandonment by fulfilling their roles as wives and

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[74] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 134.

mothers.[75]

While poor and rich men occasionally resorted to class-specific methods of controlling their wives, husbands of all classes were prone to use physical correction to enforce their will. Jenkinson claimed that it was a common rule among Russians that "if a woman be not beaten with a whip once a week, she will not be good, and therefore they look for it orderly." Lest English readers mistake this practice as another case of men abusing their privileges, Jenkinson added that "the women say, that if their husbands did not beat them, they should not love them." Jenkinson did not give his outright support to this theory but also did not follow the observation with the condemnations that he was so ready to apply to other aspects of Russian life. Violence against women in England and in Russia was an accepted means of correcting an unruly wife; Russia's system was only remarkable for the regularity of the beatings.[76]

The male prerogative to use physical correction to control their wives was a part of a larger social system that sought to establish male dominance. As English observers noted, Russian wedding ceremonies served to reify a husband's authority over their wives. This process began well before the actual marriage ceremony and was actually ritualized in the courting process. When a man decided to formalize his intentions, he sent his intended a "small chest or box, wherin is a whip, needles, thread, silk, linen cloth, shears, and such necessaries as she shall occupy when she is a wife." He also included niceties such as raisins or figs, "giving her to understand, that if she do offend, she must be beaten with the

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[75] *PN*, 2: 447; Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 134.

[76] *PN*, 2: 446.

whip, and by the needles, thread, cloth, etc, that she should apply herself diligently to sew

. . . and by the raisins or fruits he meaneth if she do well, no good thing shalbe withdrawn

from her." A potential wife had to demonstrate her ability to perform the domestic

obligations of a good woman and also had to project a proper sexual reputation. If a

woman had not previously been married, "her father and friends are bound besides to

assure her a maiden," a requirement that, as Giles Fletcher noted, "breedeth many brabbles

and quarrels at law." There was no corresponding requirement for potential husbands,

who were expected to have some sexual experience.[77]

The wedding ceremony itself served to reinforce the husband's authority over his

wife that had already begun during the courtship. Though ceremonies differed by

geographic region and the economic resources of the participants, all seemed to include at

least one ritual symbolizing the hierarchical nature of the husband/wife relationship. In

one common practice, the couple each drank from a cup, which the man then tossed to the

ground. The first person to crush the cup "must have the victory and be master at all

times after, which commonly happeneth to the man." In another version of the wedding

ceremony, the bride actually fell down at the groom's feet, "knocking her head upon his

shoe, in token of her subjection and obedience." The groom's responsibility then was to

"casteth the lap of his gown or uppergarment over the bride, in token of his duty to

protect and cherish her." Clearly, the ceremony was a symbolic representation of the

couple's willingness to assume the gender-based obligations of a respectable household.[78]

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[77] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 131; *PN*, 2: 445.

[78] PN, 2: 445; Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, 132.

While the narratives of first contact in Russia contained more information about women than did the accounts of Africa, the limited nature of these observations was due in part to the particular social situation in Muscovy but was also a product of English men's failure to consider women as a subject of inherent interest outside of their relations with Russian men. The topics the narrators did mention in detail--cosmetics, physical violence, and wedding ceremonies--were all issues immediately recognizable in contemporary England. More subtle notions, such as Russian ideas of sexual honor, were difficult to grasp and did not have direct parallels in England. The final image is that of people with little agency other than control of their physical appearance, subjected to complete domination by overbearing, alcoholic husbands.

To Fletcher, at least, the blame for the apparently barbarous behavior of the Russians fell squarely on the system in which they lived rather than on an inherent flaw of the people. The overwhelming oppression of the tyrannous Russian government created a situation in which "there is no servant nor bondslave more awed by his master, nor kept down in a more servile subjection, than the poor people are" in Russia. Fletcher argued that there was no incentive in Russia for poor people to work themselves out of their situation. If they managed to make any sort of profit, it would be taken away, so that the people were "discouraged from their labors." Despite examples of barbarous behavior which he cited throughout his narrative, Fletcher maintained that Russians "are of reasonable capacities, if they had those means that some other nations have to train up their wits in good nurture and learning." The ignorance of the Russian people, Fletcher suggested, was a deliberate governmental policy designed to maintain a tyrannous

system.[79]

While English travelers to Russia were forthright in their condemnations of Russian behavior, they were much less willing to turn a critical eye to their own actions while guests in a foreign land. Since most of the written accounts of this early period center around diplomatic negotiations, it is virtually impossible to provide an accurate portrayal of Anglo-Russian relations at the most common level, that of English traders, agents, and craftsmen with their Russian counterparts. Surely these negotiations must have differed significantly from the elaborately scripted meetings of high government officials and their representatives, but a general lack of information leaves the historian attempting to fill in the blanks with educated speculation and careful reading of sources that offer glimpses into the everyday lives of English residents in Russia. One of the best sources is a series of letters from the members of the Russia Company to their agents in Moscow.

By the mid-1560s, company stockholders at home became concerned about the behavior of their representatives in Russia. The agents and other workers attached to the company seemed to be acquiring habits that not only shed a bad light on the English people in general but, more importantly, threatened the financial well-being of the company. The implied financial distress of the Russia Company was greatly exaggerated to bolster the merchants' complaints about their employees' behavior, but it was significant that the problems were virtually all expressed in monetary terms. Nobody wanted the English representatives to reflect poorly on their country, but the final straw came when

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[79] *PN*, 2: 267, 423.

the employees' activities seemed to divert attention from their duties at the company's cost. In 1561, the company ordered Anthony Jenkinson to visit the trading houses at Colmogro, Vologda, and Moscow to "see and consider if any misorder be amongst our servants and apprentices, whereby you think we might hereafter be put to hinderance or loss of any part of our goods or privilege there." Alarmed by rumors of embezzlement and unruly behavior, the Russia Company was determined to restore discipline.[80]

According to the London merchants, the employees in Russia had one major fault that was the source of most of their behavioral problems: the workers allegedly were living a lifestyle more suitable to English nobility than to commoners. In a letter to William Rowley, chief company agent in Moscow, the merchants complained that "the charges of housekeeping are double as much as they were wont to be, which causeth us to judge a riotousness, remissness, and idleness of our servants." The merchants ordered Rowley to observe strict food rations for all employees in an effort to keep costs down, but they realized that the workers themselves could not possibly be consuming as much food and drink as was being used. The mystery of the diminishing supplies was solved when the merchants learned that "our servants and stipendaries have accustomed to give wine and meat to comers and goers to our houses, that the same may be left by little and little." While the employees might be tempted to argue that this generosity was simply good business, a way of establishing friendly relations, the merchants argued that "we know the

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[80] *PN*, 3: 13. The original Russia Company articles seemed to anticipate some of the problems, warning agents to "void of all quarreling, fighting, or vexation, abstain from all excess of drinking as much as may be, and in all to use and behave themselves as to quiet merchants doth." *PN*, 2: 287.

manner of the country is not to welcome with wine except we have brought up this corruption, therefore if this tipling be not left we will send no more wine." The instructions clearly ignored the Russian tradition of welcoming guests with food and drink since the company men in London did not consider such behavior as part of the trade process. In their eyes, the English workers were simply taking advantage of their position to enjoy life at company expense.[81]

The London merchants' vision of the proper lifestyle for their employees was an almost Spartan existence, one that offered no distractions from the economic task at hand. Some of their complaints seem ludicrous to modern readers but reveal the ideal plan while at the same time exposing the hopelessness of trying to exert absolute control of employees in distant lands. Company leaders scrutinized even the smallest details of their employees' lives, searching for ways to cut costs. The merchants informed Rowley that "we understand that our servants keep dogs, bears, and other superfluous burdens" and ordered him "to use your discretion for the banishment thereof." The Russia Company could not be expected to support unproductive pets that added nothing to the company coffers.[82]

Another unnecessary financial drain on the company was the excessive number of personal servants employed in Russia. Even the lowliest English employee seemed to have personal servants which, the company charged, "engenderth pride, contempt of you [Rowley] and us in our servants, corrupteth their manners, agility, and industry, besides

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[81] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 214.

[82] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 215.

the great charge." Russia Company employees seemed to be forgetting their station in life;
as servants to the company, they were not to have servants of their own. Such pretensions
could only have deleterious effects both on the individual employee and the overall trade.[83]

Servants employing Russian servants was bad enough, but the English employees
also allegedly carried themselves about the streets of Moscow as if they were members of
the upper class. Their behavior seemed to be a dangerous overturning of class hierarchy,
which was curious in a society supposed to be so tightly controlled by tyranny. The
merchants claimed "It is notorious what excess of apparel and utter countenance is used
by our servants, the[y] ride and go like lords." Rumor had it that Russia Company
employees of even the lowest stature were wearing costly silk robes and riding horses at
Company expense when they should have been wearing plain attire and walking to work
except in extraordinary circumstances. In their letter to Rowley, the merchants argued
that "such excessiveness corrupteth all good natures, bringeth obloquy to our nation,
causeth us to allow great wages, and finally our purse must bear all." The merchants
created a standard list of plain apparel to be allotted to each worker and advised that if
"you find any apprentice that is not willing to observe this proportion, ship him home as an
unprofitable servant." As for riding horses, it was to be absolutely forbidden to lower-

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[83] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 215. The English employees of the
Russia Company demanded an unreasonable wage. Richard Gray, an agent in charge of
overseeing rope-making, complained that the English workers would not work for less
than seven pounds a year, "therefore," he concluded, "I would have three Russes at the
least to spin, five of them will be as good as these three [English workers], and will not be
so chargeable all, as one of these would be." *PN*, 2: 395.

class employees.[84]

The battle between the merchants and their employees over proper clothing and living reveals the diverging attitudes of English people resident in England and involved in the Russian trade and those actually living in Russia. To the London merchants, horses were a luxury to be enjoyed by gentlemen; to the employees in Russia, horses were a necessary component of successful trade. When Robert Best was in Russia in 1557, he noted that Ivan immediately sent each English visitor a horse "to ride from place to place as we had occasion, for that the streets of Moscow are very foul and mirie in the Summer." Financial considerations were the final determinant over which tradition would be followed when Russian practices clashed with English practices. Even if fancy clothing was standard for Russians in Moscow, company apprentices must wear plain clothing. The merchants were so determined that this rule be followed that they declared "if it be against the manner of that country *we will make it the manner* rather than forbear our money with loss to clothe them in velvets or silks." It was more acceptable to the merchants to try to alter Russian fashion sensibilities than to cut into their profit. The people who had to change were the Russians, not the English visitors, in order for the trade to be successful.[85]

What is most significant about the merchants' concerns was their fear that their employees' behavior was deteriorating while they lived in Russia. In Russia, unlike Africa or North and South America, there was no fear that somehow the physical environment

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[84] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 214-215, 227.

[85] Morgan and Coote, *Early Voyages and Travels*, 214-15 (my emphasis), 358.

would turn otherwise civilized Englishmen into wild savages--if anything the cold temperatures might dull a person's wits. Likewise, the English did not express any fears that continued contact with the less civilized Russians might spread savagery to the English. As English citizens, the Russia Company employees could avoid the worst aspects of the tyrannical Russian government as long as they avoided conflict with local leaders. The biggest danger for Englishmen in Russia was that they might be given free reign for their own corrupt nature once they were freed from the restraints of English society. The merchants learned that "certain of our servants and stipendaries be suspected of whoredom, incontinency, drunkenness, and idleness." Some Englishmen and Russians certainly were engaging in this behavior, but it was the belief that these acts went unpunished that most concerned the English merchants. Without the fear of law and in the absence of a clearly understood social hierarchy, the population of native and English commoners in Russia seemed to be an unregulated mass with pretensions to the advantages of their superiors.

What seemed to be happening in Russia was a dangerous upset of class hierarchy, curiously allowed in a culture that was in all other ways tyrannical. To many English observers, the tyranny and oppression itself caused its subjects to act on their most base feelings. The oppressive Russian government brought out the worst in people, making even the upper classes servile. At the heart of all of the problems with Russian society, in the English evaluation, was an absence of leadership, a moral vacuum. At the highest level, the country was run by an erratic dictator more concerned with his own wealth than the welfare of his people. Religious leaders seemed content to allow the people to wallow

in ignorance rather than expose their own inadequacies. In short, there were no models of proper behavior in Russian society; therefore it should come as no surprise that few Russians seemed to measure up to English standards of behavior. Barbarism was the expected result of such a society.

English perceptions of Russian barbarity differed from their assessment of African and South and North American natives for one fundamental reason--the Russians did not have to be barbarous. For Englishmen struggling to explain the Russian society to their colleagues back home, the most striking aspect of Russian barbarism was that it was not necessarily an inherent characteristic. In fact, the English and the Russians seemed to share many attributes that indicated the Russians could be a "civilized" people. Physically, the Russians did not appear to be much different from the English--a little shorter perhaps, a bit heavier, and a slightly darker complexion, all of which could be explained away as mere circumstance. The environment, although a bit colder, was familiar and did not appear to harbor exotic animals. The political structure was certainly recognizable to the English, with a single strong monarch looking to solidify his control over his dominions. Christianity was the official religion of the land, and the country was full of monasteries and churches.

The problem, of course, was that all of these attributes seemed to be distorted versions of English society, and were therefore deserving of greater criticism than if they had been entirely foreign. To be a Christian meant something entirely different to the Orthodox Russians than it did to the English. The emperor himself was a mockery to the idea of benevolent leadership so richly embodied for the English in the person of Queen

Elizabeth. English critics of Russian society distanced themselves from a system that appeared to be a corruption of their own system, which they believed to be clearly superior. That Russian barbarism might not be entirely attributable to the oppressive actions of government leaders only made it worse--the Russian people seemed to accept a system that made them barbarous.

CHAPTER THREE

African Landlords and English Strangers:
Trade and Accommodation in West Africa, 1530-1566.

There are many stories to be told about early European encounters with the land

and people of West Africa. One story is an unrelenting, often brutal narrative of

inhumanity. Abduction, forced marches, and the linking of chains comprise the main

events of this tale as Europeans drawn to Africa in the hopes of gaining riches found their

wealth in the human cargo of the slave trade. But there is another, equally complex, story

which began before English investors calculated the precise amount of rations it would

take to feed a slave from the coast of West Africa to the final destination somewhere in

the Americas. In this earlier story, English visitors to Africa struggled--often

unsuccessfully--to find their way in a land shrouded in mystery, distorted in myth.

Both stories contain tales of violence, racism, and deplorable behavior, but there

were significant differences between the two. It would be a simplification to describe the

Africans as passive victims of the slave trade, but the development of the trade could not

have happened if Europeans did not have the upper hand in dictating the action of the

story. During first contact, however, the roles were often reversed as European visitors

tried to insert themselves into a narrative which had been thousands of years in the

making. English sailors and merchants arrived in West Africa determined to do whatever

was necessary to increase their wealth; often, this meant conforming to African norms.[1]

i. West Africa Before the English

When the first Englishmen arrived in Africa, most likely in the 1530 Hawkins voyage, it was not the first time they had heard of the exotic land to the south. The earliest European contact with western Africa was indirect, not face-to-face. West African traders since the time of the Crusades had been trading European goods through Berber and Arab intermediaries without ever having physically met a European. Portuguese sailors had reached the continent in the early fifteenth century, and from 1418, Prince Henry "The Navigator" sent ships every year to the African coast. The Portuguese constructed a fort at Arguim (north of the Senegal River) in 1448, the first European settlement on the West African coast. By the 1450s, Portuguese merchants had established an active trade. English goods comprised at least some of this trade, so it is possible that a few Englishmen might have actually accompanied Portuguese expeditions. The difficult task of reconstructing Portuguese activities is made even more frustrating for historians studying West Africa because the sailors and organizers followed a deliberate policy of silence about the continent in an effort to disguise their activities from the

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[1] Emily Bartels has recently argued that postcolonial critiques of Euro-African interactions "continue to read identity as difference, as the contested product of colonial encounters in which the West was always on top." But in this early period, as Bartels correctly notes, "the relation of the English adventurers to the people they encountered was anything but fixed." See Bartels, "*Othello* and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 54(Jan 1997), 46, 48.

curious eyes of their European competitors.[2]

In 1482, John Tintam and William Fabian were preparing an English fleet for a voyage to Guinea when Edward IV vetoed their plans. The English king had tried to secure approval for an English voyage to West Africa, petitioning Pope Sixtus IV the previous year:

> As it is advantageous to the Christian religion that wealth and other things, precious for their natural excellence, should be drawn into its power from the hands of the infidels, he willingly permits his subjects to pass over to any parts of Africa for traffic and the exchange of baser merchandise for nobler, provided this be sanctioned by the pope's authority.[3]

Despite the appeal to the furtherance of the Christian religion, Pope Sixtus did not lend his full support to the English entreaty. The Portuguese king, John II, was not prepared to share his country's monopoly on trade with Africa, and so put diplomatic pressure on the English monarch to end any such pretensions. John's protestations were sufficient to abort a similar plan in 1488.[4]

Although Englishmen did not have first-hand knowledge of Africa until the mid-

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[2] George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 121; Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420-1620* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 37, 38; P.E.H Hair and J.D Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea, 1553-1565: The New Evidence of Their Wills* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

[3] John William Blake, ed. *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560* (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 2nd ser., v. 86, 1942), 297.

[4] John Hatch, *The History of Britain in Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 12. Fifteenth-century Europeans did not distinguish Barbary from the rest of West Africa. "Guinea" was essentially the region between Cape Verde (just north of the Gambia River) and the Niger River delta.

sixteenth century, they did have a substantial body of knowledge from which to create a crude image of the land and its inhabitants. While English sailors did not travel to West Africa until the sixteenth century, Africans had lived in Britain from the Romano-British period. African troops taken in Roman occupations of North Africa and part of Sudan walked on Hadrian's wall around 200 AD. But English encounters with these African natives were substantially different from those in the sixteenth century. Sub-Saharan Africans seemed more alien to the English than did North Africans, both for cultural reasons and because the later contact occurred on African soil, far removed from the familiar English environment.[5]

For information about natives living in the more distant regions of Africa, the English could turn to various written accounts. Portuguese descriptions of Africa were not the earliest sources curious English men and women could consult; classical scholarship had a long tradition of detailed, if sensational, accounts of African life. Since very little solid information about the continent was available, classical references to Africa relied largely on speculation, especially for sub-Saharan Africa. Herodotus attempted to construct a description of people living in the Sahara, where "the huge serpents are found, and the lions ., . . and the creatures without heads whom the Libyans declare to have eyes in their breasts, and also the wild men and the wild women." Stories

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[5] Paul Edwards, "The Early African Presence in the British Isles," in Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield, eds., *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain: From Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (London: Avebury, 1992), 10. See also Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), chs 1-4; also James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

of "wild men" found particular resonance in England, which had a long-established folklore about such sub-human monsters.[6]

Classical accounts of Africa had more in common with sensational reports of the *National Enquirer* than they did to the steady reportage of the *New York Times*. Classical authors tended to emphasize the strange and shocking at the expense of the mundane, emphasizing the distance between the "civilized" and "primitive" worlds. Fantasy could readily be substituted for "fact," especially when discussing lands distant from the known civilizations in Egypt or Carthage. The consensus of classical scholars was that the inhabitants of distant Africa lacked civilization, any sort of social organization, or rules of conduct. If the primary attribute of Greco-Roman civilization was discipline, the (imagined) African society's primary characteristic was lack of it. Chaotic, violent, and unpredictable, sub-Saharan Africa was an object of curiosity rather than concern. As long as the two drastically different civilizations maintained their distance, there was no need or ability to check unsubstantiated rumors against "fact."[7]

Given the sixteenth-century reliance on classical scholarship, it is easy to understand how myths and allegations became translated into fact in the earliest European accounts of West Africa. One of the most important sources for information on Africa

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[6] Quoted in Katherine George, "The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa: 1400-1800." *Isis* (1958): 62-72, 62. See also Joseph E. Harris, ed. *Africa and Africans As Seen by Classical Writers* (Washington D.C: Howard University Press, 1981), and John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Art and Medieval Thought* (Cambridge, Mass, 1981), and Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 75-79.

[7] George, "The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa," 63-64.

was Leo Africanus' work, published in English as *A Geographical History of Africa* in 1600. Foreign editions of the treatise were listed in many sixteenth-century private libraries, including that of Richard Eden, who published the first English accounts of West Africa in 1555. Drawing on classical scholarship, Eden described the natives of Troglodytica, "whose inhabitants dwell in caves and dens; for these are their houses, and the flesh of serpents their meat, as writeth Pliny and Diodorus Siculus." Eden further asserted that "they have no speech but rather a grinning and chattering. There are also people without heads called Blemines, having their eyes and mouth in their breast." Eden's willingness to accept these descriptions uncritically and to pass them on as fact reveals not only the ignorance of many Europeans regarding Africa but the thirst for even the sketchiest details of the mysterious continent.[8]

Although Eden turned to classical sources, any satisfactory account of early English encounters must take into consideration the thousands of years of pre-English contact social development which played an important role in the outcome of first contact. Like all societies, the development of social systems in West Africa was partly dependent on environmental factors. The environment of this region contains startling diversity, with several different ecosystems within a confined area. There are five basic ecological zones across western Africa: desert, sahel, savanna, savanna-woodland, and forest. Each of these zones is determined primarily by a difference in annual rainfall amounts, which consequently determines the vegetational and faunal components of the local ecosystem.

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[8] Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971): 2; *PN,* 6: 340.

Annual rainfall amounts vary from less than 100 millimeters in the desert regions to 1,500+ millimeters in the southern forest system.[9]

Rainfall has another significant impact on the environmental composition of West Africa. The 1,000 millimeter rain barrier delimits the northernmost range of the tsetse fly, the vector for trypanosomes, or "sleeping sickness." Areas that fall under the tsetse zone are not suitable for pastoralization, and in fact cannot sustain any significant cattle population for an extended period of time. This zone has moved north and south over time as rainfall patterns have changed, and shady, wet microenvironments in more northern areas have harbored tsetse infestations, but in general the Gambia River marks the tsetse line in West Africa.[10]

Just as the Gambia River is an important ecological boundary, its waters also mark an important division of social and cultural constructions in African society. Culture groups north of the river raise cattle and grow sorghum and millet, while southern groups rely on rice as the staple of their diet. Stratified societies such as the Mandinka and Wolof were the rule to the north and east of the river, while noncentralized, or "stateless," societies were typical of southern regions. The savanna environment supported great ecological diversity, which allowed more stable social and political units since migration was limited. The dense vegetation of the forest regions south of the Gambia River

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[9] J.F.A Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 1: 2; Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 9. See also Graham Connah, *African Civilizations: Precolonial Cities and States in Tropical Africa: an Archaeological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 98-102, 123-128.

[10] Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 12, 22.

encouraged the development of more isolated social groups with similar cultural traits, but without a uniting hierarchy or political unit outside the individual group. In Atlantic Africa, political fragmentation was the norm, with states rarely controlling an area exceeding 1,500 square kilometers.[11]

The ecological and social diversity of West Africa facilitated the development of extended trade networks long before the first Europeans arrived. Trading across different ecosystems was a logical way to take advantage of the strengths of the local environment while supplementing its shortcomings with the strengths of another area. Thus, trans-Saharan trade caravans exchanged gold and other goods for metalware, silks, and beads that were not manufactured in West Africa. Trade networks of less distance operated throughout the region, exchanging food, cloth, salt, and other goods. The major rivers of the Niger, Senegal, and Gambia allowed relatively easy access from the interior to the coast, facilitating trade.[12]

Since trade was such an important facet of African life, natives developed cultural norms to ensure that travelers and traders would be well treated wherever they went. The establishment of "landlord-stranger" reciprocities required that travelers, or strangers, especially those with wealth or spiritual powers, be given food and hospitality. In return for hospitality, the "strangers" had obligations to the landlord. The stranger was required

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[11] Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 34; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105.

[12] Basil Davidson, *A History of West Africa to the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 155; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 17-21.

to give tribute, show deference, and engage in a pact of mutual protection. Landlord-stranger reciprocities could break down during times of severe crisis, such as famine or warfare, but otherwise they were the standard of acceptable behavior. Given the importance of trade, it is no surprise that in many communities merchants often held important positions of authority. Chiefs, kings, and elders needed to maintain wealth to fund local governments and courts and to purchase items for the ritual gift-giving, which was an important part of any leader's responsibilities. When Europeans arrived in West Africa, they had to conform to native trade traditions to be succeed.[13]

ii. Early Encounters, Environment, and Disease

The first known English voyage to West Africa was part of a series of expeditions from England to Brazil via Africa in the early 1530s. Hakluyt's brief account of the voyages in the *Principal Navigations* provides only sketchy details: William Hawkins (father of the soon-to-be famous John Hawkins) set out on a "tall and goodly ship of his own burthen of 250 tuns, called the Paul of Plymouth." Hawkins made contact with a group of natives, and "traffiqued with the negros, and took of them elephant's teeth, and other commodities which that place yieldeth." With his hold filled with ivory and other goods, Hawkins sailed to Brazil, establishing a trade pattern that would remain throughout

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[13] Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 38; Davidson, *History of West Africa*, 157. See V.R Dorjahn and Christopher Fyfe, "Landlord and Stranger: Change in Tenancy Relations in Sierra Leone." *Journal of African History*, 3, no. 3(1962), 391-97. Also Bruce L. Mouser, "Landlords-Strangers: A Process of Accommodation and Assimilation." *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8, no. 3(1975), 425-40.

the colonial period.[14]

Though it is impossible to determine the details of Hawkins's first contact experience in West Africa, it is clear that most of the interaction must have revolved around trade. Hawkins had probably heard about Africa and South America from Portuguese traders with whom he had traded at Antwerp, so commercial interests were in the back of his mind at the outset. There is no record of other English voyages to Africa until 1540, when Hawkins sent the *Paul* off with 940 hatchets, 940 combs, 375 knives, copper, lead, wool, and "19 dozen night cappes." Nine months later, the *Paul* returned to Plymouth with a load of brazilwood from South America and a dozen elephant tusks from West Africa. Clearly, the voyages of the 1530s were designed to test the waters for future trade. Hawkins learned what goods the Africans were most willing to exchange and, presumably, began to learn the native landlord-stranger reciprocities that were so important to African trade.[15]

Hawkins also established a pattern that would have important ramifications in Anglo-African interactions. For the most part, Africa was only a tangential concern for sixteenth-century Europeans. Both the Portuguese and the English viewed West Africa as a stop en route to the East. Since Africa, unlike the Americas, was not initially viewed as a target for exploitation, Europeans visitors could approach with a more open appraisal of

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[14] Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 299.

[15] James A. Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins: The Time and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927): 8; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 300, 301. Williamson's book stands as the most exhaustive account of the background to the Hawkins voyages, despite the author's occasionally racist asides and his hero worship of John Hawkins.

the natives and their land.

The information Hawkins gleaned during his voyages proved valuable for subsequent English ventures. Though there is no record of any English voyages to West Africa between 1542 and 1553, Thomas Windham traveled to Barbary in 1551 and 1552 and continued to gain a foothold for English trade on the continent. The sailors found that the inhabitants of Barbary were willing to trade sugar, dates, almonds, and molasses for English cloth, but also discovered that "the Portugals were much offended" by this new trade. Not to be intimidated by the ineffectual protests of a few Portuguese traders, a group of Englishmen began making plans to extend their trade down the African coast to the regions Hawkins had visited earlier.[16]

Although the English government tried to prevent voyages to West Africa in order to keep peace with the Portuguese, English merchants were able to circumvent regulations and conduct trade in the 1550s. Thomas Windham traveled to Guinea in 1553, followed the next year by John Lok's expedition to the same region. In response to Portuguese protests and the direct orders of Philip of Spain, who married England's Queen Mary, the English Privy Council forbade any more Guinea expeditions in 1555. Philip's unpopularity and merchant resentment against sweeping prohibitions against a potentially lucrative trade prompted merchants to ignore the Council's declaration and to prepare expeditions to West Africa. William Towerson led three separate expeditions to Guinea between 1555 and 1558.

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[16] Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 102; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 307.

Although there are no surviving records of English voyages to Guinea between 1558 and 1561, repeated official protests by Portuguese ambassadors to England suggest that there must have been some English activity off the West African coast. Queen Elizabeth responded in 1561 by declaring that English subjects would not conduct trade in any part of Africa under the dominion of the king of Portugal. As Elizabeth well knew, such a declaration was essentially meaningless since only a few areas were under the direct control of the Portuguese. Elizabeth pointed out that if the Portuguese really held dominion, they could simply order Africans not to trade with the English.[17]

Once English sailors dodged the pesky Portuguese and arrived in West Africa, they had to orient themselves to an unfamiliar environment. The crude state of navigational science in the sixteenth century encouraged sailors to provide detailed descriptions of the land they encountered in order to guide future expeditions. John Lok described "Cape Mensurado" to future sailors: "This cape may be easily known by reason that the rising of it is like a porpoise-head. Also toward the south-east there are three trees, whereof the easternmost tree is the highest and the middlemost is like a hay stack and the southermost like unto a gibbet." Despite the recent advances in navigational tools, sailors continued to rely on physical landmarks to identify their position. While the shape of a particular tree hardly seems a reliable signpost, English sailors were confident that their environmental observations would be accurate enough for subsequent travelers.[18]

The first English descriptions of the West African environment often emphasized

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[17] Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins*, 53, 59-60.

[18] *PN*, 6: 158.

the bizarre or the mysterious aspects of the land. Though English visitors to Russia also had to confront an environment unlike their homeland's, the difference was primarily a matter of degree--the winters were much colder in Russia than in England. Thus, adopting to the Russian environment did not involve a dramatic change in behavior or attitude. But English descriptions of the African environment often contained a sense of the exotic, of an unpredictable morass of plants, animals, and weather phenomena that conspired to make their lives miserable. What at first glance might seem to be a familiar environmental feature at second look only added to the alienation many Englishmen felt in Africa. Towerson's 1555 description of the land noted that Africa "is altogether woody, and all strange trees, whereof we knew none, and they were of many sorts, with great leaves like great docks, which be higher than any man is able to reach the top of them." The English were not particularly fond of forests in general; the foreboding trees of West Africa only added to their sense of unease. The Atlantic coast of sub-Saharan Africa was particularly uninviting, with dangerous surf, mangrove swamps, and a tangle of vegetation.[19]

One of the most noticeable differences between England and Africa was the climate. Used to the relatively cool, rainy climate of their home country, English sailors were not prepared for the tropical temperatures of the equatorial zone. As if the heat of the afternoon sun were not bad enough, Eden claimed that "some of our men of good credit, that were in this last voyage to Guinea, affirm earnestly that in the night season they felt a sensible heat to come from the beams of the moon." Eden acknowledged that

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[19] *PN*, 6: 186, Connah, *African Civilizations*, 121.

such reports might "be strange and insensible to us that inhabit cold regions," but given the peculiar nature of much of the information regarding Africa "yet doeth it stand with good reason that it may be so." Winter offered no relief in West Africa but was characterized by hot rain and scorching winds, so that the natives "seem at certain times to live, as it were, in furnaces, and in manner already halfway in purgatory or hell."[20]

In some cases, early reports of the West African environment conflated classical myths and legends with sixteenth-century eyewitness accounts. Richard Eden devoted a considerable portion of his 1555 *Decades* to a detailed description of the elephant. Eden began his discourse on solid ground, noting that "at this last voyage, was brought from Guinea the head of an elephant of such huge bigness that only the bones or cranew [cranium] thereof, besides the nether jaw and great tusks, weighed about two hundred weight." Since one of the purposes of Eden's account was to dispel any misconceptions about the newly encountered lands, he helpfully noted that the elephant's "great teeth, or tusks, grow in the upperjaw downward, and not in the nether jaw upward" as some artists had imagined."[21]

Once he established his authority, Eden's description degenerated into a fantasy which owed a greater debt to classical legends than to observed fact. Based primarily on Pliny's account, Eden attributed incredible characteristics to the elephant. While humans might be expected to be frightened of the animal from its huge size, Eden claimed that "of all beasts they are most gentle and tractable." In fact, the elephant was a great friend to

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[20] *PN*, 6: 170.

[21] *PN*, 6: 164.

humans: "If they happen to meet with a man in wilderness, being out of the way, gently they will go before him and bring him back into the plain way." The elephant's bitter enemy, Eden reported, was the dragon, which roamed the forests in search of blood.[22]

While Eden was able to describe a relatively benevolent elephant from the comfortable environs of London, Englishmen who actually confronted the animal in Africa told a much different story. After trading for "elephant teeth," a group of sailors decided to try their own luck at hunting the source of ivory. The visitors had heard tales of the fearsome beast and intended to be prepared. The hunters consisted of thirty men "all well armed with harquebusses, pikes, long bows, cross bows, partizans, long swords, and swords and bucklers." The group trudged through the exotic wilderness, always keeping a wary eye out for potential hazards. When they finally encountered two elephants, the English attacked and "struck [them] diverse times with harquebusses and long bows," but much to their amazement and dismay, the beasts "went away from us and hurt one of our men." Humbled by their encounter with the seemingly indestructible animals, the English thereafter were content to trade for ivory and leave the hunting to the natives.[23]

While the elephant seemed to be a threat only when provoked, other West African animals seemed to hold special animosity towards humans. When a group of English men attempted to navigate a river on the African interior, they "saw a great many monsters like unto horses . . . up in the water, sometime above, sometime beneath." The "monsters," most likely hippopotamuses, proceeded to attack the English pinnaces, knocking twenty-

[22] *PN*, 6: 165.

[23] *PN*, 6: 215.

six men into the water and causing the disappearance of two men, who "it is thought the monsters did [carry away], for they [the sailors] could swim very well and yet never [were seen]." Other ships rescued the remaining men and the sailors decided to abandon their venture after the monsters seemed to follow them around.[24]

Dangerous exotic animals presented an easily identifiable foe, but the biggest danger lurking in the African environment was unseen, microscopic diseases. Illness seemed to plague every English voyage to West Africa, resulting in alarming mortality rates and threatening the success of many first contact ventures. Thomas Windham's 1553 expedition was especially disastrous, since "of sevenscore men came home to Plymouth scarcely forty, and of them many died." William Towerson's 1558 trade mission was cut short when the leaders "took a view of all our men, both those that were whole and the sick also, and we found that in all the three ships were not above thirty sound men." The low numbers of healthy men forced Towerson to take drastic measures, even sinking one of the three ships in order to bring the survivors safely back to England.[25]

Death was an accepted risk sailors on every long-distance voyage took, but West Africa appeared to be particularly lethal. A traditional sailor's song of unknown origin summed up many mariner's feelings about the area:

> Beware and take care
> > Of the Bight of Benin
> For one that comes out
> > There are forty go in.

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[24] Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins*, 509-510.

[25] *PN*, 6: 151, 249.

While some English visitors died at the hands of the natives or European rivals, the vast majority succumbed to sickness. West Africa disease environments were linked with the semi-tropical nature of the land. Warm temperatures and a distinct rainy season created ideal conditions for "tropical" illnesses. Yellow fever, typhus, typhoid, and other diseases were all present on the West African coast but malaria was by far the most prevalent disease. The chief culprit in malaria is the *Plasmodium falciparum* parasite. The *Anopheles* mosquito transmits the parasite to human hosts, where it begins its path of destruction. Since the *Anopheles* mosquito breeds in areas of standing or brackish water, such as tidal swamps or marshes, the West African coast is a natural incubator for malaria.[26]

Another major illness in West Africa was amoebic dysentery. Unlike malaria or yellow fever, dysentery is not transmitted by a mosquito but through amoebal cysts from an infected host. Passed through the feces of a host, the cysts must be swallowed by another person to cause infection. The most common way to become exposed to the cysts is through drinking water that is also used as a repository for human or animal waste. The cysts attack the host's intestines and liver, causing severe ulcers in violent cases of dysentery. One of the major symptoms of the disease is the bloody stools of the victim, causing the English to name the affliction the "bloody flux."[27]

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[26] Song quoted in Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, 282; See Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, 73; R. Stephen Phillips, *Malaria* (London: Southhampton, 1983), 4.

[27] Though it is difficult to gauge the precise mortality rates for early English voyages to West Africa due to sketchy information, the rates for later expeditions during the slave trade are staggering. Approximately 1 of 3 Europeans died in their first four months in West Africa, and 3 of 5 were dead by the first year. See K.G Davies, "The Living and the

As English sailors struggled to survive in the unfamiliar and often dangerous environment, they also had to come to terms with the human inhabitants of West Africa. When English sailors first met West Africans face-to-face, the first thing they noticed was their skin color. From the earliest encounters, Africans were described as "black," though English sailors noted that there was some variation in skin color. John Lok described the people living on opposite banks of the Senegal River: "the inhabitants are of high stature and black, and, on the other side, of brown or tawny color and low stature." This variation in skin color and physical stature in such a small geographic region surprised Lok, as it probably did most Europeans reading his account.[28]

To English observers, color was imbued with symbolic importance. In the sixteenth century, the color black signified sorrow, mourning, and chastity and was associated with the Devil and evil. White was a symbol of virginity and innocence, and red symbolized a vendetta, cruelty, and readiness to fight. Though it is impossible to determine to what degree each individual sailor was conscious of the symbolic content of color, all English men and women undoubtedly recognized at least some association of black with undesirable characteristics.[29]

Dead: White Mortality in West Africa, 1684-1732," in Genovese and Engerman, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 93.

[28] *PN*, 6: 169.

[29] Don Cameron Allen, "Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance." *Philological Quarterly*, 15 (1936), 91. See also Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), ch. 1; Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

To sixteenth-century Europeans, the source of African blackness was a mystery that suggested several different explanations. The most generally accepted explanation for variation in skin color was environmental. It seemed logical that people living in regions exposed to the scorching sun would be darker than those living in more moderate climates. The evidence for this theory was available even within Europe--Spanish natives tended to have a "swarthy" appearance while Scandinavian people had a much lighter complexion. By the time English sailors arrived in West Africa, Europeans had already come into contact with natives in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. As early reports began to filter into Europe, it became clear that the natives in these regions did not all look alike. Richard Eden noted that it should be

> considered as a secret work of nature that, throughout all Africa
> under the equinotical line and near about the same on both sides,
> the regions are extreme[ly] hot and the people very black.
> Whereas, contrarily such regions of the West Indies as are under
> the same line are very temperate, and the people neither black nor
> with curled and short wool on their heads, as many Afric[ans] have,
> but of the color of an olive, with long and black hair on their heads.

Confronted with eyewitness accounts that noted dramatic differences between native peoples, Europeans had to reevaluate their understanding of the source and significance of skin color.[30]

For the Englishmen directly involved in first contact, skin color provided an immediate and easily recognizable indicator of status. Natives who approached the English ships in European-style clothing and spoke Portuguese were still clearly identifiable as Africans and would be treated accordingly. During the first documented

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[30] *PN*, 6: 176; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 11-20.

face-to-face meeting with the natives in West Africa, the English recorded being brought

to "the presence of the king, who, being a black Moor (though not so black as the rest) sat

in a great huge hall." Significantly, the symbol of authority, the person who gave orders

and expected them to be followed, was perceived to be (and perhaps was) less black than

his subjects. Confronted with a powerful leader whose skin color did not fit their concept

of authority, English observers hastened to qualify their descriptions of his blackness.[31]

English descriptions of African physical appearance during the first contact period

are few in number and surprisingly scant in detail. The obvious differences between

Africans and the English actually allowed the participants in first contact to simply

mention the darker physical appearance of the natives and then proceed to other

observations. Since everything else in Africa was unlike England, it was to be expected

that the inhabitants would appear different; it would have been greater cause for alarm had

they appeared the same as the English.[32]

The most frequently noted characteristic of the natives was not their blackness but

their sparse clothing. Towerson informed curious English readers that the Africans living

near the river of Sestos "are mighty big men and go all naked, except something before

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[31] *PN*, 6: 149. For a comparison of English descriptions of African and Native American skin color, see Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, ch. 1.

[32] Historians who have overemphasized the importance of dark skin color in English evaluations of natives typically use one or two sources to speak for the entire contact period amd then quickly jump to eighteenth and nineteenth-century concepts of race. In their most recent work, the Vaughans acknowledge that many English representations of West Africans "were largely neutral, especially in merchant's accounts of voyages to Guinea," but curiously give greater authority to authors of more "ethnographic" accounts who never set foot in Africa. "Before *Othello:* Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans." *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 54(January 1997), 42.

their privy parts." English visitors did note that there was some variety in the quality and amount of clothing Africans wore, but even the richest and most powerful natives walked around nonchalantly exposing a scandalous amount of skin. The captain of one native group presented himself to the English "clothed from the loins down with a cloth of that country making . . . and his cap of a certain cloth of the country also, and bare legged, and bare footed, and all bare above the loins, except his head." His servants were even more scantily clad, some of them wearing "nothing but a cloth betwixt their legs." The natives' sparse clothing stood in stark contrast to the modest coverings the English wore even in the sweltering heat of tropical Africa.[33]

To English observers, nakedness was a sign of savagery, more fit for animals than for humans. The failure of the Africans to cover their bodies was a clear difference from the European manner, a ready indication that the natives were culturally inferior to the English. The fact that even the "upper-class" Africans did not seem to be concerned about their clothing was particularly alien to the English, who viewed apparel as an important indicator of socio-economic status.

Some natives seemed to have developed a creative way to appear to be more fully dressed without having to adopt the cumbersome clothing which made the English so uncomfortable in Africa. Towerson reported that some Africans marked "the skin of their bodies with diverse works in manner of a leather jerkin." If the unrelenting heat encouraged natives to avoid excess apparel, perhaps the elaborate markings were a substitute for traditional English clothing such as a jacket or shirt. Towerson's description

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[33] *PN*, 6: 197.

clearly ignored the symbolic significance of African tattooing but it was a suggestion that however "savage" the method, the Africans were concerned with some type of covering for the naked skin. By comparing the African tatoo with a familiar piece of apparel, he made a distinct cultural difference seem less alien while at the same time implying that the leather jerkin was more suitable clothing.[34]

Despite their disapproval of native attire, English observations of Africans' relative nudity were not accompanied by extensive condemnations of the natives' savagery or sexual behavior, as was typical in other first-contact narratives of North and South America. In fact, West African moral systems and sexuality went virtually unmentioned in early reports. English accounts of first contact contain no direct references to sexuality, morality, or African marital customs. The absence of any social commentary is particularly striking since many of the societies the English encountered were polygynous. In the Americas, native polygyny caused great distress among the monogamous English.[35]

English reactions to native sexual behavior differed for two main reasons: the degree of perceived differences between the English and the group they were describing, and the context of contact. Unlike the Russians, the Africans were so clearly different from the English that it was to be expected that they would have different sexual mores. Since Russians were more similar physically to the English, descriptions of their allegedly

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[34] *PN*, 6: 184.

[35] Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 65. Winthrop Jordan correctly notes that the English characterized Africans as extremely lustful and libidinous, but these descriptions were taken from seventeenth-century sources, after the first contact period had ended. See Jordan, *White Over Black*, 32-40.

deviant sexual behavior became an important strategy for distancing the two peoples and identifying one more example of Russian barbarism. Issues of native sexuality also became important in regions where the English intended to colonize or to convert the natives, neither of which was seriously considered in Africa.[36]

Although early English accounts did not pay close attention to the sexual behavior of Africans during the contact period, they acknowledged the presence of native women from the earliest meetings. The women English sailors encountered in mid-sixteenth-century West Africa were part of a unique society whose gender roles were quite unlike those of England. Although many different culture groups lived along the coast of West Africa at the advent of the Englishmen, the majority seemed to have held similar conceptions of gender roles. The most immediately recognizable example of gender ideology was the division of labor between West African men and women. For the most part, women in agricultural societies did most of the farming, while the male head of the household controlled the use of land and other economic resources as well as the labor of his family members.[37]

While there clearly were gender divisions in West African societies, the degree to which such divisions were similar to English separation of spheres is debatable. Part of the difficulty arises as a result of twentieth-century notions of public versus private

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[36] A third possibility is that the English narrators strictly avoided the entire subject of sexuality in these early voyages to avoid potential accusations of sexual liaisons.

[37] Jeanne K. Henn, "Women in the Rural Economy: Past, Present, and Future," in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter, eds. *African Women South of the Sahara* (New York: Longman, 1984), 4.

activities. In highly stratified societies, the public sphere can be defined as those political and economic activities that extend beyond the localized family unit. In sixteenth-century Africa, however, most of these activities were embedded in domestic units, making such easy distinctions impossible.[38] That public/private distinctions were blurred in many West African societies is significant; anthropologists looking at cross-cultural comparisons of gender systems have argued that the degree to which women exercise power and authority within the public sphere is a key indicator of their overall status.[39]

West African women were involved extensively in farming, trading, and other economic activities and in pre-colonial Africa often played important political and religious roles that involved working outside of the home. West African women were queen-mothers, queen-sisters, chiefs, and office holders in towns and villages. Unlike most Western societies, West Africans recognized two social domains, one dominated by men and another dominated by women. Each of these spheres was hierarchically ordered independently of the other, allowing women to exercise considerable influence over the public activities of their own domain. Many African women had their own trade guilds, spoke publicly on taxation, and could testify on their own behalf in court or formal hearings. As wives, women were expected to show deference to their husbands, but as mothers, women were given deference and authority. For the most part, then, gender

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[38] Niara Sudarkasa, "Female Employment and Family Organization in West Africa," in Filomina Chioma Steady, ed., *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* (Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman, 1981), 52.

[39] See Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds. *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

relationships in West Africa were notable for the complementarity of male/female roles.[40] In both state and stateless societies, "power, authority, and influence within the 'domestic sphere' was de facto power, authority, and influence at certain levels within the 'public sphere.'"[41]

Given the relatively high degree of West African women's activity in the public sphere, the most striking aspect of early contact with Englishmen was its almost entirely male cast. Without exception, English sailors negotiated with African men in all but the most trivial exchanges. Women rarely appear in the early narratives and only in passing references. John Lok noted that "some of their women wear on their bare arms certain foresleeves made of the plates of beaten gold. On their fingers also they wear rings, made of golden wires, with a knot or wreath." Clearly, what interested Lok and his readers most was not the women themselves but the existence of gold jewelry in West Africa. As always, trade was the most important concern for English observers; women's rings demonstrated the potential for a lucrative gold market, which in and of itself could justify future missions.[42]

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[40] Sudarkasa, "'The Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies." *Feminist Studies*, 12:1(Spring 1986), 91. For a similar argument regarding Andean cultures, see Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987)*. Complementarity of gender roles should not be mistaken for equality of status. Though it is important to recognize the parallel gender organization of many West African societies (as opposed to the hierarchical structure in Europe) most social scientists agree that there are few, if any, examples of truly egalitarian gender systems in history.

[41]Sudarkasa, "Female Employment and Family Organization in West Africa," 49.

[42] *PN*, 6: 343.

With their attention focused on trade negotiations with African men, the English overlooked evidence of African women's participation in economic decision-making. When Towerson prepared to conduct a trade meeting in 1555, a native "captain" brought his wife along with one hundred men, "and many others brought their wives also." The captain's wife even accompanied her husband aboard the English ship during the actual negotiations. While Towerson failed to record the woman's role in this particular trade, the inherent danger involved in meeting with Europeans who were beginning to develop a reputation for abducting Africans suggests that she was not participating simply as a lark.[43]

The English sailor's inability or unwillingness to recognize African women's authority was not necessarily a conscious effort to dismiss women but a complex reaction to the specific circumstances of contact and their own background as members of a patriarchal society. Although English readers were interested in sailors' descriptions of native cultures, the most important purpose of exploration narratives was to describe potential economic activities. In the early contact period, West African women may have played an important role in internal trade, but the only West Africans engaging in external trade were men. For English observers, legitimate authority rested in those natives who could negotiate treaties, acquire trade goods on a large scale, and mass human resources on short notice. In every case, African male leaders could fulfill the Englishmen's needs, so there was no incentive to appeal to African women for assistance. English sailors were not interested in the dynamics of internal commercial activities as long as they were

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[43] *PN*, 6: 208.

provided with the goods for long-distance trade; therefore they had no reason to recognize women's power.

In fact, sixteenth-century English sailors not only ignored the important roles of West African women but devalued native women in general. In the narrative of his 1555-1556 voyage to Guinea, William Towerson claimed that "the men and women go so alike that one cannot know a man from a woman but by their breasts, which for the most part be very foul and long, hanging down low like the udder of a goat." Later, Towerson interrupted a discussion of native foliage to make the observation that "Divers of the women have such exceeding long breasts that some of them will lay the same on the ground and lie down by them."[44]

Towerson's remarks might be dismissed as the musings of one man obsessed with women's breasts, but placed in concert with other English descriptions of native women in all the societies they encountered, they must be considered part of the larger issues of gender and power in the sixteenth century. By making a direct comparison between African women and animals—Towerson, whether consciously or not—devalued their humanity. Towerson's account also located women in a paragraph in which he discussed the natural wonders of Africa, further associating women with "nature" in direct contrast

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[44] *PN*, 6: 367, 369. On Englishmen's fascination with African women's breasts, see Jennifer L. Morgan, "'Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1700." *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 54(Jan 1997), 168. Morgan argues that by comparing women with goats, Towerson "gave readers only two analogies through which to view and understand African women—beasts and monsters." Morgan, 181. While Morgan's attention to the intersection of race and gender is valuable, her analysis suffers from a lack of attention to chronological development.

with African men, who often displayed great cunning in negotiating trade agreements. The image of West African women that surfaced in the contact period was only a sketch of African womanhood, one that emphasized physical appearance and biology over any cultural contributions or individual achievements.[45]

The important roles of West African women were not the only major cultural components Europeans overlooked during the contact period. Unlike English descriptions of Russian society, early English accounts of Africa contain almost no mention of native religious practices. In part, this oversight was a result of the Europeans' general lack of interest in converting the natives. Although the Portuguese claimed that their efforts to Christianize the heathens was a justification for their singular presence in Africa, the English claimed otherwise. Martin Frobisher reported that while he was a prisoner in the Portuguese castle at Mina in 1555, the natives were "very ethnics and heathens, and not the fortieth of them Christened." Conversion of the natives to Christianity would have been particularly difficult if, as Frobisher claimed, there was not a single preacher in Mina.[46]

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[46] Lynda Boose has argued that sixteenth-century European men devalued African women in part out of fear of the racial implications of miscegenation, particularly in cases of white men and black women. The fact that the offspring of a union between a black woman and a white man had dark skin color challenged men's belief in the power of male parthenogenesis. The challenge to patriarchal assumptions, Boose claims, was that "black women controlled the power to resignify all offspring as the property of the mother." Boose, "'The Getting of a Lawful Race': Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman," in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 45-46.

[46] Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 360.

Content to keep their discussions with the natives focused on trade, the English who bothered to mention religion either declared that the Africans had no religion at all or that their practices were incomprehensible. John Hawkins reported that as for "their belief, I can hear of none that they have, but in such as they themselves imagine to see in their dreams, and so worship the pictures, whereof we saw some like unto devils." While there was some variation in religious beliefs throughout sixteenth-century West Africa, most West Africans believed in a remote creator who rarely interfered in this world and an animate group of soil, water, plant, and animal spirits that required appeasement through the intervention of ancestor deities. Dreams were an important mediator between the spiritual and natural worlds, occasionally requiring expert analysis to explain the deeper meaning. Unable or unwilling to understand native beliefs, Hawkins dismissed them as "idolatry." Since African "heathenism" did not interfere with trade or enslavement, it was not a major concern worthy of notice.[47]

While the English seemed content to label all Africans as "heathens," they did not categorize all Africans in a single behavioral group but noted important distinctions among the people with whom they interacted. There were "good" natives and "bad" natives, depending on the English experience. After meeting with the natives between the river de Sestos and Cape das Palmas, Towerson reported that "the language of the people of this place, as far as I could perceive, differeth not much from the language of those which

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[47] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 125. For a discussion of traditional West African religion, see Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, 35. Alleged African heathenism later became an important justification for their enslavement by Europeans. Winthrop Jordan argues that the lack of interest in converting Africans was connected to the overall impression of Africans as inherently different. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 22.

dwell where we watered before; but the people of this place be more gentle in nature than the other, and goodlier men; their building and apparel is all one with the others." If skin color, clothing, language, and housing all were the same, what defined these Africans as "goodlier men" in the eyes of the English? The answer is that these particular natives displayed a willingness to trade, which was vital to the English mission in Africa.[48]

Trade negotiations not only created an opportunity for African natives to display the relative "civility" of their particular group but were in themselves the means for Africans to attain greater civility in the European evaluation. During John Hawkins's 1564 voyage, the English encountered "the people of Cape Verde [who] are called Leophares, and counted the goodliest men of all other, saving the Congos." English observers were quick to note that these natives were "more civil than any other, because of their daily traffic with the Frenchmen, and are of nature very gentle and loving." In Africa, trade supplanted religious conversion as the fundamental means to bring "civility" to the natives. Of course, Hawkins intended to capture and sell these same "civil" Africans into slavery, so his appreciation of the presumably elevated status of the group of natives had its limitations.[49]

Another important indicator of civility for the English was government. English descriptions of their encounters with African leaders lacked the overwhelming condemnations typical of their colleagues' descriptions of Russian government. While Englishmen in Russia objected to what they perceived to be the tyranny of Ivan's rule,

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[48] *PN*, 6: 191.

[49] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 120.

Englishmen meeting with African leaders described the experience with a mixture of condescension and respect. The context of the meetings helped determine English reactions to the native governments. Many of the early descriptions of Russian government came as the result of official diplomatic embassies from the queen of England to the Russian tsar. By contrast, in Africa most meetings with native leaders involved the leaders of a particular expedition joining to request permission to trade in the local area. Since English visitors were not interested in establishing diplomatic ties other than to trade, they could dispense with the formal niceties that accompanied negotiations with Ivan in Russia.

That is not to say, however, that the English took meetings with African leaders lightly or thought them inconsequential. Although the African leaders did not have the fancy palaces, elaborate state dinners, and expensive gifts typical of Ivan's first meetings with the English, they did manage to display a degree of authority and formality which was surprising to many European visitors. William Towerson's description of his first encounter with an African leader captures the spirit of these meetings which were repeated up and down the coast of West Africa each time an English expedition arrived:

> the Captain of the Town came down being a grave man: and he
> came with his dart in his hand, and six tall men after him, every one
> with his dart and his target [shield], . . . and there came another of
> them which carried the Captain's stool: we saluted him, and put off
> our caps, and bowed ourselves, and he like one that thought well of
> himself, did not move his cap, nor scant bowed his body, and sat
> down very solemnly upon his stool.

By presenting himself in full military regalia, the native leader demanded respect and intended to impress his visitors with his power. Despite Towerson's patronizing comment

that the king "thought well of himself," the English were clearly impressed by the dignity of the procession.[50]

Towerson's meeting with a native leader took place in the somewhat informal atmosphere sitting around a stool, but the English reported that some African societies had more structured meeting places to conduct the business of government. When John Hawkins stopped at "the Islands called Sambula" in 1564, he came across a well-organized town and discovered that in the middle of the town there was "a house larger and higher than the other[s]" in which "the King or Captain sitteth in the midst, and the Elders upon the floor by him (for they give great reverence to their Elders) and the common sort sit around about them." The Portuguese assured the English visitors that this form of government was typical throughout West Africa.[51]

The activities of African governments outside trade were largely a mystery to the Europeans. Besides dispensing justice, one of the primary functions of native government, according to the English, was to regulate the division of resources. John Sparke, who left the most detailed account of Hawkin's second voyage, expressed his particular approval of the native government's decision to apportion goods based on the actual contribution of each man "so that nothing is common, but that which is unset by man's hands." By doling out resources in this manner, the Africans avoided many of the disputes that would later rage in the English colonies in America and insured that each person had incentive to

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[50] *PN*, 6: 196. Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 7.

[51] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 123-24.

work. "This," Sparke declared," surely I judge to be a very good order."[52]

While the English did not think that the scattered kingdoms of West Africa had any governments equal to their own, they did marvel at the African respect for their leaders. Thomas Windham's group reported that when African "noblemen" were in the presence of the king, "they never look him in the face, but sit cowering, as we upon our knees, so they upon their buttocks with their elbows upon their knees and their hands before their faces, not looking up until the king command them." Though the behavior was somewhat strange, the English admired the signs of deference. Unlike Ivan, who allegedly used violence and intimidation to force his subjects to cower before him, the African leaders earned respect simply through their presence.[53]

English visitors were not expected to show the same forms of deference to African leaders as were the natives but did have to display some accommodation for native rituals as part of the landlord-stranger arrangement. Customs differed in each kingdom and some were more elaborate (and more frustrating to the English) than others. William Towerson's group, eager to receive permission to begin trading, waited impatiently after learning that they must be brought before the King of Abaan three times before he would actually begin talking to them. Despite the inconvenience of many of these rituals, the English readily complied and even expressed admiration for the natives. After listening to English reports of African governments, Richard Eden admonished his readers that "the great reverence they [Africans] give to their king . . . is such that, if we would give as

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[52] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 24.

[53] *PN*, 6: 149.

much to Our Savior Christ, we should remove from our heads many plagues which we daily deserve for our contempt and impiety." For sixteenth-century English men and women, "reverence" was more appropriate for matters of religion than for government but a noteworthy trait nonetheless.[54]

Just as the English visitors to Russia used gift-giving as a way to establish and sustain a successful relationship with the locals during first contact, the first English traders in West Africa recognized the importance of offering gifts before negotiating with Africans. While gift-giving in both regions was considered a necessary prelude to trade, there were significant differences. The most obvious difference was primarily one of scale--gifts to Russian leaders were often quite expensive, particularly when they were exchanged between heads of state. The extensive list of goods delivered by official representatives of Ivan and Elizabeth far outweighed any gifts to African leaders both in quantity and monetary value. Whereas the exchange of gold, fine armor, and exotic animals often accompanied any meeting between English and Russian representatives, in Africa William Towerson greeted a native "captain" with "two elles of cloth, one latin basin, one white basin, a bottle, a great piece of beef, and six biscuit cakes." Although Ivan surely would have been offended by the paucity of such gifts, the African leader was content with the demonstration of goodwill and was willing to begin a friendly trade.[55]

The relative lowering of value of gift-giving in Africa as compared to Russia was not simply a result of the English taking advantage of natives who were too foolish to

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[54] PN, 6: 227, 149.

[55] *PN*, 6: 206.

demand better but a result of the particular circumstances of Anglo-African contact. In part, the lower volume of gift-giving in Africa was due to the absence of a single centralized monarch who was immediately recognized as the primary gatekeeper of successful trade. In Russia, all favors, political, economic, and social ultimately depended on the tsar's good wishes; expensive gifts could be considered a justifiable, if onerous, short-term expense guaranteeing long-term benefits. Since no single leader held similar control in West Africa, there was no opportunity or requirement for Queen Elizabeth, the bestower of most of the expensive gifts in Russia, to engage in similar activities on behalf of her subjects in Africa.

Another factor that helped limit gift-giving in Africa was that such exchanges were considered to be part of the landlord-stranger reciprocities which were such an important part of native culture. While gifts in Russia were important signifiers of power and prestige, in West Africa gifts were often a display of welcome and hospitality. As Towerson proceeded down the coast of West Africa in 1555, he met a local captain who came aboard and "brought me a goat and two great roots, and I gave him again a latin basin, a white basin, 6 manillios, and a bottle of Malmesie, and to his wife a small casket." The next day the native captain returned and offered to trade for a bottle of wine but Towerson "gave it him freely, and made him and his men drink besides." Neither side of this exchange pretended that their gifts were of great value; rather, the bestowal of food and useful goods symbolized a relationship that, in theory at least, was to extend beyond mere commercial interest.[56]

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[56] *PN*, 6: 208, 209.

In fact, during the early years of Anglo-African contact, English visitors often fashioned themselves as protectors of the natives. According to William Towerson, the natives complained that "the Portugals did much harm to their country and that they lived in fear of them." In response, Towerson and his men "comforted the captain and told him that he should not fear the Portugals, for we would defend him from them." The English then proceeded to present a display of their military strength, marching in formation and shooting their guns. By offering to protect the Africans from the incursions of the nefarious Portuguese, the English were positioning themselves in a category distinct from that of their European rivals. In this idealized version of the Anglo-African relationship, the Portuguese were out to exploit the Africans both for goods and labor, while the English were there merely to conduct a peaceful trade. Economic activities were, of course, at the center of attention in the protector/protected relationship. One group of natives reportedly approached the English and "requested that if the Portugals sought to hinder our traffic, to show them all the extremity that we could." Trade in Africa could be profitable, but only if the English were willing to use military force to defend themselves and the natives from the Portuguese.[57]

In this protector/protected relationship the natives were not just pawns or victims caught unwittingly in an international rivalry but active agents in shaping the nature and success of the relationship. As the "landlord" half of the relationship, the Africans could expect protection as one of the terms for trade. By appealing to the various European powers for military and economic assistance, African natives were able to play one

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[57] *PN*, 6: 218-20.

European group against another to secure the best possible terms under the circumstances. As English ships cruised the coast, the sailors and merchants encountered some Africans who would launch unprovoked attacks on the English when the Portuguese were nearby, and others who openly solicited English trade and protection. Some natives even served as spies, advising different European groups of their rival's movements. In one case, Towerson reported that "the Negros with their captain came to us and told us that the king of Portugal's ships were departed from the Castle, meaning the next day to plie the windward to come to us, giving us warning to take heed to ourselves." The natives further promised that "if they [the Portuguese] came by land, they would advertise us thereof." Certainly, other Africans were acting in the same capacity on behalf of the Portuguese. The native allies played a crucial role as informants to the English; in return they expected a sense of mutual obligation.[58]

Another important function of native allies was as translators and intermediaries between the English and African groups. It was common practice on virtually all first encounters with an unknown people to take a few natives back to England to learn the language, through force if necessary. During his second voyage, William Towerson used several natives who had been "removed" in his first expedition. In one instance, the English traders approached an unfamiliar town where the natives refused to approach the English to conduct trade. The mission eventually was successful when "by the persuasion

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[58] *PN*, 6: 220. Thornton points out that during this early period, both the Europeans and the Africans found it difficult to dominate the other militarily. Although they occasionally tried, Africans were largely unable to take European ships by storm, and Europeans had little success in their seaborne attacks on the mainland and were unwilling to risk much more dangerous land assaults. *Africa and Africans*, 38.

of our own Negros, one boat came to us, and with him we sent George our Negro ashore, and after he had talked with them, they came aboard our boats without fear." George repeated his important role several times throughout the second voyage, easing the way for peaceful trade.[59]

European attempts to communicate with the natives of West Africa were made difficult by the diversity of languages within a small region. There were over twenty-five distinct languages in the Guinea coast alone, which presented a significant challenge to the visitors. In 1436, Prince Henry of Portugal issued a command ordering Portuguese sailors to capture a native of the farthest point of their journey. The plan was to force the unlucky captive to live briefly in Portugal to learn the language before returning to his native land to act as translator. Using this strategy, the Portuguese quickly acquired translators for many of the different native groups, facilitating their interactions.[60]

By the time the English arrived in West Africa, the natives had long experience communicating with Europeans. Although he did not recognize it, some of the language Towerson reported as African was clearly a pidgin combination of Portuguese and African words. Phrases including "Begge come," which Towerson translated as "Give me bread," and words such as "Molta," which he explained meant "Much, or great store" had obvious Portuguese roots. The King of Benin, the English observed, "could speak the Portugal tongue, which he had learned of a child." Like the Portuguese, English merchants also

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[59] *PN*, 6: 217.

[60] Jeane Hein, "Portuguese Communication with Africans on the Searoute to India." *Terrae Incognitae* 25(1993), 42.

used native interpreters who had been in England. The English even left three of their own merchants in Benin in 1555 to learn the language and to forge a friendly relationship with the natives.[61]

While constructing alliances with European groups could work to the natives' advantage, it also backfired on occasion, leading to an increased violence. As Towerson's third expedition to West Africa began running out of food in 1558, he "went to the town of Shamma to speak with the captain, and he told me that there was no gold there to be had, nor so much as a hen to be bought, and all by reason of the accord, which he had made with the Portugals, and I, seeing that, departed peaceably from him." Four days later, after being frustrated in trade, Towerson went back to Shamma and "because the captain thereof was become subject to the Portugals, we burned [and looted] the town." What began as a cordial acknowledgement of the African arrangement with the Portuguese became an opportunity to punish the natives and to appropriate goods, all in the guise of English patriotism. Towerson could justify his attack on the Africans as a blow against the Portuguese interests, but in the end it was the natives who suffered.[62]

Challenging European rivals was an important aspect of the English overseas expeditions, but the primary occupation and chief source of frustration for English visitors to West Africa during the first-contact period was conducting trade with the natives. Economic concerns lurked behind every Anglo-African interaction and helped determine the course of the relationship. In Russia, English representatives could negotiate trade

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[61] *PN,* 6: 187, 200, 201, 318; Blake, *Europeans in West Africa,* 357.

[62] *PN,* 6: 247.

issues with a single person who could set trade policy for the entire country, but in the "stateless" societies of West Africa the English quickly learned that each native group held sovereignty over their own trade and had their own negotiators. Obviously, trying to get Ivan to agree to favorable economic terms was a difficult task in Russia, but the process was familiar to the English—each side made proposals, negotiated, reached a mutually beneficial agreement, and signed documents which outlined the rules of trade. In West Africa, the English soon learned, trade came wrapped in cultural norms that seemed to make little sense to the English, who valued profit above all else. In order to make a profit, the visitors had to adapt their economic activities to meet the local standards of behavior.[63]

Unfortunately for the English, African traders could afford to assert their will aggressively in the early trade. The uncomfortable truth was that "Europe offered nothing to Africa that Africa did not already produce." The majority of European trade goods consisted of various cloths, followed by metals such as iron and copper, but Africans had indigenous sources of these products. African participation in the Atlantic trade was motivated more by prestige than necessity, shaped by fashion rather than utility, and subject to the changing tastes of the natives.[64]

By the time the English arrived in West Africa in significant numbers, the Portuguese had been trading with the natives for eighty years. Given this extensive

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[63] This is not to say that in Russia once government policy was passed there was no negotiation on an individual and local level, but there was a set standard to which both sides could appeal if necessary.

[64] Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 44-45.

experience, it is no surprise that many Africans living in coastal areas were prepared to trade with the English from the moment they spotted the ships just offshore. In many cases, Africans initiated the trade by signalling to the English to come ashore or by actually approaching the ships in canoes. As William Towerson cruised down the coast in 1555, the native appeals for trade grew increasingly frequent and shipboard visits more common. During Towerson's second voyage to West Africa, the English traveled up "the river de Saint Andre" and were disappointed to find "no village, but certain wild negroes not accustomed to trade." Since there were many other native groups already prepared to trade, the English did not want to waste their time with the "wild negroes" and quickly left the area. It was clear to the participants on both sides of first contact that trade issues would be at the forefront of the relationship; all that was left to decide was the details.[65]

By the mid-sixteenth century, the English had learned enough about Africa through Portuguese sources and John Hawkins' earlier voyages so that the trade goods themselves were not a subject of much speculation. Before human cargo became a valuable commodity in the slave trade, the primary African goods that caught the eye of the English trader were gold, ivory, and malagueta pepper. Any expedition that could return to England with a substantial amount of any of these products could bring great reward to the investors and the individual sailors who made the journey.

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[65] *PN*, 6: 215. This incident should also serve as a reminder that contact was sporadic in many areas of West Africa; it was possible for some native groups to avoid interaction with Europeans long after nearby groups had established trade. The centrality of trade issues in the early interactions between Europeans and Africans is evident in the names Europeans gave to different parts of the coast, including the Grain [pepper] Coast, the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, and eventually, the Slave Coast. Connah, *African Civilizations*, 121.

The overwhelming desire for profit and the greed of some individuals involved in trade contributed to the demise of Thomas Windham's voyage to West Africa in 1553. When the group arrived in Guinea, they could have quickly filled their hold with pepper which, as they knew, was "much used in cold countries, and may there be sold for great advantage for exchange of other wares." Despite the apparent profitability of pepper, it paled in comparison to gold, which was more valuable and more glamorous but not readily available where Windham made his first stop. Rather than taking the pepper, Windham decided to forge ahead towards the area around the Portuguese castle at Mina, where gold was reportedly plentiful.[66]

After successfully trading for 150 pounds of gold, Windham allowed greed (and his own temperament) to lead him to a fatal mistake. Despite warnings that the tropical climate would surely begin to take the lives of many of his men if he pressed forward, Windham decided to go on to Benin for more trade. With his men dying all around him, Windham finally decided it was time to abandon the trade and sent for his shore party to return to the ship. The traders responded by "certifying him of the great quantity of pepper they had already gathered and looked daily for much more." The merchants asked Windham to "remember the great praise and name they should win, if they came home prosperously, and what shame of the contrary." By the time this message got back to the ship, Windham was already dead and the sailors decided to abandon the merchants still trading on shore and returned to England. Out of approximately 140 men, only 40 made it

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[66] *PN*, 6: 147.

back to England alive.[67]

Although at least one member of Windham's crew had previous experience with the West African environment, prejudice and jealousy caused the English sailors to base their behavior on ignorance rather than knowledge gleaned from earlier encounters. Antonio Pinteado, the Portuguese pilot of Windham's voyage, had sailed the West African coast before and knew of the environmental dangers it presented. When the expedition seemed to be progressing too slowly, Pinteado cautioned that they risked running into the African winter, which was dangerous "not for cold but for smothering heat with close and cloudy air and storming weather of such putrefying quality that it rotted the coats off their backs." The pilot's warnings fell on deaf ears, as Windham responded with an apparently irrational rage.[68]

Unaccustomed to the West African environment, English sailors fell victim to various tropical diseases with which they had no previous experience. Richard Eden attributed the high mortality rate of the 1553 voyage in part to a side effect of the severe climate. In an attempt to relieve themselves from the extreme heat, English sailors ignored warnings and jumped into cool water whenever they got the opportunity. Eden noted that the sailors, "not used before to such sudden and vehement alterations (then the which nothing is more dangerous), were thereby brought into swellings and agues." The

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[67] *PN*, 6: 150.

[68] Windham himself reportedly hated Pinteado, calling him a "whoreson Jew" and destroying the pilot's cabin. Windham's underlings followed his lead after his death, when "certain of the mariners and other officers did spit in his face, some calling him Jew, saying that he had brought them thither to kill them." *PN*, 6: 148, 151.

sickness took its toll on the Englishmen "insomuch that the later time of the year coming on caused them to die sometimes three and sometimes four and five in a day." The description of sailors going in and out of the water shortly before they all got sick suggests amoebic dysentery as the culprit, but it is impossible to determine for certain.[69]

While the high mortality of Windham's expedition highlights the potential dangers awaiting any trade mission to West Africa, the voyage also confirmed the potential for extraordinary profit. A second voyage for West Africa left England in October 1554 under the leadership of John Lok. Avoiding some of the mistakes of Windham's group, Lok's expedition returned with "four hundred pound weight and odd of gold, of two and twenty carats and one grain in fineness: also six and thirty buts of grains [of pepper], and about two hundred and fifty Elephant's teeth of all quantities." Richard Eden claimed to have measured some of the elephant tusks back in England and was astonished to discover that "some of them were as big as a man's thigh above the knee, and weighed about fourscore and ten pound weight a piece." It was clear that the natural commodities of Africa were worth risking English lives if the natives could be convinced to trade for a reasonable price.[70]

In exchange for African goods, English traders offered manufactured products and food. During one expedition, the English met with a group of Africans to declare "what ware and merchandise we had, as woolen cloth, linen cloth, iron, cheese and other things." The natives answered that "they had civet, musk, gold, and grains, which," the English

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[69] *PN*, 6: 150.

[70] *PN*, 6: 163.

noted, "pleased our captains and merchants very well." While to modern sensibilities it may seem that trading cloth and cheese for gold and ivory was inherently unequal, value was in the eye of the beholder. Since the Africans had been exposed to European goods long before the English arrived, they had firm ideas about what they wanted and what they would offer in exchange. To the English, the native demands often seemed to be based on whimsy rather than on any objective standard of value. After beginning a successful trade, William Towerson and a group of traders "took some of every sort of our merchandise with us, and showed it to the Negroes, but they esteemed it not, but made light of it . . . which yesterday they did buy." The bewildered Englishmen could not understand how the value of their goods had seemingly changed overnight. The answer was that the Africans were sending a message--the English were visitors and the natives were in charge.[71]

African traders were notorious for their tough negotiating skills during the first contact period. In a typical trade agreement, European merchants received the right to trade by appealing to the ruler of each native group for permission. Once the ruler granted the right of trade, European merchants proceeded to negotiate with their native counterparts for African goods. English merchants in John Lok's 1554 voyage learned that the natives were "very wary people in their bargaining, and will not lose one spark of gold of any value." English merchants and natives argued about every detail surrounding the trade, including standard weights and measures, prices, and quality of goods. The English quickly discovered that the Africans had the upper hand in trade. With French,

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[71] *PN*, 6: 271, 184. Since Africans were primarily interested in European goods to use as prestige items, their demands were subject to the whims of fashion. Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 50.

Portuguese, and English ships all cruising the coast looking for similar trade, the natives could afford to make certain demands on the visitors. Above all else, the African traders demanded to be treated with respect. Merchants in Lok's voyage warned their colleagues that "they that shall have to do with them [Africans], must use them gently; for they will not traffic or bring any wares, if they be evil used." As the English would soon learn, the Africans were willing and able to disrupt trade and to threaten the very presence of Europeans on the coast of Africa if they were mistreated.[72]

Since African trade was supposed to be conducted under the unwritten cultural understandings of the landlord-stranger relationship, any perceived violation of this trust could result in a cessation of trade at best, violence at worst. While the English merchants themselves tried to adhere to the African cultural norms as best they could, they could not always control the sometimes unruly behavior of the sailors and other Englishmen who accompanied them. In one memorable case, a sailor "either stole a musket-cat, or took her away by force" from a group of Africans. The theft not only ended the English opportunity to trade with that particular group, but as the English moved on they discovered that "the fame of their misusage so prevented them that the people of that [new] place, also, offended thereby, would bring in no wares; insomuch that they were

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[72] *PN*, 6: 173. One group of English merchants explained the process for receiving permission to trade in Benin in 1554: they first had to meet "the King of Benin, in whose country they might neither buy nor sell until they had obtained the said king's license; for the obtaining whereof they resorted to his court, obtained his safe conduct with much favor, and after freely and liberally trafficked there." Blake, *Europeans in West Africa*, 357. The merchants probably exaggerated the ease and liberality of the trade agreement in order to ward off Portuguese accusations of intruding upon their rightful trade. For a discussion of trade negotiations with African rulers, see Hatch, *History of Britain in Africa*, 43.

enforced either to restore the cat, or pay for her at their price, before they could traffic there." During Towerson's 1555 voyage, a sailor "plucked a gourd, wherewith the negroes were offended, and came many of them to our men with their darts and great targets, and made signs to them to depart." By stealing the animal and the food, the English sailors had betrayed the sense of reciprocity and trust that was vital to African trade. The fact that a group of natives not directly involved in the cat-stealing incident would choose not to trade with the English until restitution was made shows the determination of many Africans to maintain as much of their cultural values as possible in the post-contact world.[73]

As the first-contact period continued, the English became increasingly frustrated with their trade in Africa. One of the main sources of frustration was a result of competition for trade from other European powers. African traders were skilled negotiators, deftly playing one group of merchants off another. With so many different Europeans vying for their goods, the Africans could and did demand nothing but the best. In some areas, the English claimed to be at a distinct disadvantage since "the negroes perceived the difference in cloth betwixt ours and that which the Frenchmen had, which was better and broader than ours." Annoyed Englishmen occasionally purchased cloth from French traders in Africa in order to have a marketable exchange item.[74]

It was a buyer's market in mid-sixteenth-century Africa, making quality of goods essential for successful trade. Quantity was also an important issue as the African market

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[73] *PN*, 6: 173, 186.

[74] *PN*, 6: 224.

for European goods became saturated shortly after the English arrival. After a friendly

meeting with a group of natives and their ruler, Towerson's men looked forward to a

rewarding trade. Their hopes were dashed when the African leader

> willed our men at their coming home to speak to our king to send
> men and provision into his country to build a castle, and to bring
> tailors with them to make them apparel and good wares, and they
> should be sure to sell them; but for the present, the Frenchmen had
> filled them full of cloth.

The English greeted the ruler's message with mixed feelings: they were grateful for his

friendliness and apparent willingness to take the relationship with the English to a more

permanent level, but they were disappointed that they did not come out of the exchange

any richer personally.[75]

When trade negotiations at the highest level seemed to taper off, the Englishmen

on Towerson's second voyage decided to try to advance trade individually rather than to

allow a small group of men to be responsible for all economic decisions. After a couple of

weeks of conducting trade on behalf of their investors, the men "went ashore every man

for himself" and "took a good quantity of gold." Towerson himself reported that he

managed to trade for "four pound and two ounces and a half of gold." As much as

investors detested individual trade, it was a time-worn tradition of long-distance voyages

that sailors have some opportunity to conduct their own personal trade as a reward for

risking their lives on the venture. The success of Towerson's men suggests that they were

either willing to take a lesser profit when trading individually or that the more personal

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[75] *PN*, 6: 226.

negotiations were more acceptable to the natives.[76]

By Towerson's third voyage, in 1558, trade with the natives had become exceedingly difficult. First of all, the English had to contend with the almost constant presence of ships from other countries. The English spent more time and effort hiding from the Portuguese than they did looking for natives with whom to trade. When they did locate Africans and attempted to establish trade, they often found it virtually impossible. One promising venture turned sour when "neither the captain nor the negroes durst traffic with us, but enticed us from place to place, and all to no purpose." Africans also successfully used the strategy of simply refusing to come to the English when they landed looking for trade. Without native allies to supply them with goods and necessary supplies, the English could not remain on the coast for long. After one group of natives stopped talking to the English and left the town, the hungry, ill Englishmen were desperate and "took twelve goats and fourteen hens, which we found in the town, and went aboard without doing any further hurt to the town." If the natives were not willing to negotiate a fair bargain, the English would respond with force.[77]

Not surprisingly, increasing animosity between the English and some natives

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[76] *PN*, 6: 219. For evidence of private trading activities during first contact in West Africa, see Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 5. Many sailors' wills seem to suggest that some sailors had excess English goods that could be used to trade. Others bequeathed small amounts of African cloth and gold to various friends and relatives.

[77] *PN*, 6: 247, 245. Towerson seemed to have particularly bad luck finding natives who were willing to trade. During his second voyage a native who was eager to trade approached the English ships in his own boat, only to capsize and drown in sight of the English sailors and a group of distressed natives on shore. *PN*, 6:, 216.

resulted in escalating violence associated with the trade. Shortly after Towerson's men took the goats and hens, a group of natives threatened a small group of English traders. In response, "the company resisted them, and slew and hurt diverse of them, and having put them all to flight, burned their town and broke all their boats." By destroying the town, the English were not simply giving vent to their anger and frustrations but sending a signal that the English would meet force with force if necessary. Yet at no time during the first-contact period was there uniformity in the Anglo-African relationship--the English could trade happily with one group of natives and two days later have to force trade or even fight for survival with another group. The overwhelming diversity of African groups and the decentralization of power which allowed for the development of many different kingdoms created a situation in which the English could never be sure whether a particular group would greet their overtures to trade with open arms or hostility.[78]

iii. The Slave Trade and the Demise of First Contact

The deterioration of the Anglo-African relationship coincided with a new development in the English search for profit on the African coast--the slave trade. Though English participation in the slave trade was minimal during the first-contact period, the gradual increase in slaving activity was enough to disrupt trade and to destroy the relationship that was at its foundation. After witnessing the effect of the slave trade on the Portuguese-African relationship, the English knew that their entry into the sale of human

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[78] *PN*, 6: 245.

cargo would certainly result in a backlash against the relatively peaceful meetings they had

had thus far with Africans. With this in mind, when John Hawkins proposed the first

official slaving voyage, he promised to contain his activities to the area between Cape

Verde and Sierra Leone, avoiding the valuable Gold Coast regions to the south. If trade

was in fact disrupted, he argued, it would be in the pepper-producing regions, leaving the

gold areas unscathed.[79]

Hawkins set forth on the first of three slaving missions in 1562, followed by

expeditions in 1564 and 1567. Each of these missions was characterized by violent

struggles between Africans and Englishmen and the natives did not surrender easily.

Hawkins's original plan seems to have been to take as many slaves as possible from

Portuguese slavers, either through trade or force, but he also was prepared to abduct

natives if necessary. Africans responded to the slave raids with military attacks on the

English, during which both sides suffered many losses. In one early raid, Hawkins lost

"seven of our best men" and had twenty-seven men injured; for their efforts, the English

took only ten slaves.[80]

Eventually, the English began to ally with Africans not to conduct trade or to fight

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[79] Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins*, 79. The first known Portuguese slaving expedition took place in 1441, five years after the Portuguese first encountered Africans face-to-face; the construction of forts soon followed. See Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance*, 38-46.

[80] Blacker, *Hakluyt's Voyages*, 126. Thornton argues that the African slave trade should not be considered an alien system imposed on the Africans from outside, but a system that "grew out of and was rationalized by the African societies who participated in it and had complete control over it until the slaves were loaded onto European ships for transfer to Atlantic societies." *Africa and Africans*, 74.

off the Portuguese but to fight other Africans. Most of these alliances were the result of increased slaving activity which pitted one group of natives against another in a destructive struggle. By the time William Hawkins launched his third slaving voyage in 1567, Africans and Europeans alike recognized that forging military alliances was an act of preservation for the former group and of economic calculation for the latter. During this voyage, Hawkins claimed to have been approached by two representatives of native groups who enlisted his aid in helping fight a native rival. In return, the allies promised to "help him to negros." After consulting with the Africans about fighting strategy, Hawkins sent ninety men to fight a battle that lasted two days, injured more than twenty Englishmen and countless Africans, and resulted in a stalemate.[81]

By the third slaving mission, many Africans simply fled at the sight of the English ships moving down the coast. The English slave traders tried to use the established practices of the Anglo-African trade in order to capture some slaves. In one instance, Hawkins's men approached a group of natives and "with margaritas and other wares which the negroes esteem they enticed the negroes to come to them and to fetch them water . . . thinking to set upon them and take them." Instead, the Africans sensed what was about to happen and quickly left, avoiding the English trap. This attempted subversion of the landlord-stranger reciprocities fundamentally altered the Anglo-African relationship and, despite Hawkins's assurances otherwise, adversely affected even intended peaceful relations between the natives and English visitors.[82]

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[81] Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins*, 510-11.

[82] Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins*, 505.

By the mid-1560s, the combination of an increased Portuguese presence and growing African resistance to slave raids resulted in a sharp decline in the Anglo-African trade and the end of the first-contact period. When George Fenner's expedition arrived in the Cape Verde region in 1566, the group was optimistic that they could engage in a rewarding trade and prepared a group to negotiate with the natives. Despite the concerns of some of the members of the expedition, the trading party took the advice of William Bats, the captain of one of the ships, and went ashore without any armor, for "he said, that although the people were black and naked, yet they were civil." At first, the natives seemed to be willing to trade and negotiations proceeded pleasantly. The trade was a ruse, however, which became apparent when the Africans suddenly grabbed three members of the landing party. The English soon learned that the natives were retaliating for an abduction of three of their own men allegedly taken by Englishmen only a few weeks before. After the English inquired as to a satisfactory ransom to secure the return of their comrades, the Africans informed them that "we should not have our men although we would give our three ships with their furniture." Since the natives appeared to be unmovable, the English paid a group of Frenchmen to stay and try to get the prisoners released while the expedition continued down the coast.[83]

Although Fenner's group was able to conduct some trade, most of the natives they saw disappeared into the interior upon spying the ship. Clearly, the natives believed they could no longer trust the English to trade peacefully as they had before. In fact, Fenner's group had greater success forcing trade with the Portuguese they encountered than they

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[83] *PN*, 6: 270, 272-73.

did with the Africans. The violent reaction of the natives to the apparent abduction of three of their men stood in stark contrast to earlier episodes in which the English took Africans away to learn the English language and facilitate trade. While the natives were not happy when William Towerson's group took several Africans back to England in 1555, their return in 1556 was greeted "with much joy." Towerson's actions earned him the trust necessary to engage in trade and established his reputation as a man of his word. By the time Fenner's group arrived in West Africa, the English betrayal of the African trust made it impossible to convince the natives that the visitors had anything but the worst intentions.[84]

The introduction of English slaving was the last chapter in the first-contact story. The natives who had successfully directed trade according to their own social norms now had to contend with the actions of visitors who had little incentive to comply with African traditions. As interactions between Europeans and Africans increasingly focused on slavery, all other activities faded to the background. The English assessment of African peoples and cultures, never high to begin with, declined as it became intertwined within the context of forced servitude.[85]

During the first-contact period, English visitors to Africa were convinced of their own superiority but were often forced to interact with Africans within the guidelines of

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[84] *PN*, 6, 217.

[86] This is not to say that the English abruptly switched only to slaving expeditions after 1566--there were continued missions intending to conduct peaceful trade. In fact, Hawkins's three slaving voyages did not look promising and were not followed up for almost a century. But the character of the Anglo-African interactions was fundamentally altered. Bartels, "*Othello* and Africa," 52.

native culture. Whereas in Russia the English believed they had to criticize institutions

and beliefs that were superficially similar to their own, in Africa the differences were so

readily apparent that they went virtually unmentioned. African religion, government, and

physical appearance were so unlike the English versions that they allowed the English to

focus their reports primarily on trade. Since there was no question of any other type of

relationship at this point, there was no need to be concerned about converting the natives

or establishing diplomatic ties. The fact that there were such obvious differences allowed

the visitors to express a certain degree of respect for some native customs, or at least to

refrain from attacking them.[86]

Unaccustomed to the environment, many English visitors became ill and even died

until the voyagers had gained enough experience to adapt their behavior to the realities of

life in Africa. Likewise, successful trade depended partly on the English willingness to

accommodate their negotiations to the long-established "landlord-stranger" tradition of

West Africa. English first contact in Africa was a process of trial and error, alternating

peaceful negotiations with incidents of brutal violence. From a twentieth-century

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[87] Alden and Virginia Vaughan argue that "the persistent message about Africans in *Principal Navigations* is that they are remarkably dark, frequently untrustworthy or dangerous, and radically different not only from the English but, implicitly, from all other humans. And the specific qualities--physical, political, social, religious--that set them apart are invariably painted in deeply pejorative terms." The Vaughans admittedly come to this conclusion by using sources other than merchant accounts, which they dismiss as ignoring all natives except the ones they bartered with, yet they are willing to use accounts from people who had never *visited* Africa. See "Before *Othello:* English Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54:1(January 1997), 33. But Russians were accused of having even *greater* deficiencies in all of these areas other than skin color, which the English argued was darker than their own. It should come as no surprise that the English described Africans as "remarkably dark," because compared with other people, they *were*.

perspective, it is easy to identify the roots of the slave trade in the behavior of the English sailors and merchants in mid-sixteenth-century Africa, but the concept of such a system was largely absent in the minds of those involved in early encounters with the people of West Africa. By the late sixteenth century, however, the rules had changed and the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship had completely vanished.

CHAPTER FOUR

Roanoke: The Accidental Colony

As Thomas Harriot stood on the shores of coastal North Carolina in 1586 he imagined the possibility of English colonization of America. Certainly the deteriorating conditions, real or imagined, of the Old World added incentive to cross the Atlantic to start a new society based on English principles but without the detritus of the modern age. The growing perception of England as a country plagued by rising crime, landless poor, and overcrowded cities only made America seem more attractive by comparison. From his brief experience in the Roanoke area, Harriot was confident that the land the English visitors had dubbed "Virginia" held numerous sources of profit. The native inhabitants, Harriot claimed, did not present a serious obstacle to English colonial ambitions. In fact, Harriot assured potential investors and settlers that in time the natives would learn to "honor, obey, fear, and love us."[1]

Consciously evoking the traditional marriage vows outlined in the Book of Common Prayer, Harriot cast the English in the role of groom, the natives as bride, with all the attendant notions of power and control. Unlike the traditional marriage vows, however, Harriot added the wish that the natives would "fear" the English. Colonization of the Americas was to be like a marriage, but with the crucial acknowledgment that one

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[1] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 153.

side was forever to fear the other. The courtship was to be quick, for there were other aspirants to the bride. England's chief rival for America was the hated Spanish, who claimed prior conquest even as they focused most of their energy on exploiting the mineral-rich regions to the south. In establishing a permanent presence in North America, the English hoped to find their own source of riches while striking a blow against their European enemies.

English efforts in Roanoke occupied a somewhat ambiguous position in the history of overseas ventures, uniting features of the trading outpost experience of Russia and West Africa with the more ambitious program later employed in Jamestown. The earliest plans for Roanoke identified the island as an ideal site from which to attack the Spanish treasure fleet in the West Indies. Although the English did not initially intend to settle a colony of planters on Roanoke Island, a combination of misinformation and misfortune resulted in Roanoke's place in history as the location of England's first serious attempt to colonize the New World. At various times during the contact period, Roanoke was a military outpost, a trading fort, and a home to the first English women and children in America.

The English confusion over the precise status of their presence in Roanoke was parlayed into their relationship with the natives. To those Englishmen who saw the island primarily as a military outpost from which to attack Spanish interests in the West Indies, the natives were at best a nuisance who needed to be forced into strict submission, using whatever means necessary. But a friendly relationship with the Indians was crucial for the English who hoped to establish a settlement of householders and farmers. The English

sent mixed messages to the natives, alternating periods of hostility and violence with appeals for peace and cooperation. The Indians were not simply complacent victims of English indecision, however, and tried to manipulate the relationship to their advantage whenever possible. But the Indians themselves were unsure of their own goals for the Anglo-Indian relationship. While the English showed a predilection for spontaneous violence, they could also be important trading partners and allies in the almost constant warfare between rival Indian groups. The same weapons that terrified the Indians could become important assets when turned against local enemies.

English anxiety about their relationship with the Indians and the land they inhabited was heightened by the possibility that they might establish permanent households in America. While Englishmen in Russia and West Africa could expect to serve a short time in the foreign land before eventually returning to England, one of the stated goals of the expeditions to Roanoke was to decide whether the land was fit for the English to raise subsequent generations of English children. The difference between these experiences was crucial--English agents in Russia and merchants in West Africa lived *in* the foreign countries but never became *of* them. The English could therefore accommodate to native customs and the strange environment without compromising their fundamental Englishness. There was no effort to re-make Russia and West Africa after their own country even though the English believed their society to be superior. In America, however, the native land and people had to be able to accommodate the English without altering their culture or indeed, their very physical beings. Although the first English visitors determined that Roanoke itself did not meet the criteria necessary for permanent

colonization, the land became the unintended bridge between the temporary occupancy of isolated footholds in Russia and West Africa and the permanence of Jamestown.

The man most closely associated with English efforts in Roanoke would later champion Guiana as an ideal location for English colonization. But in 1583 Walter Ralegh had his attention focused on the Atlantic coast of North America. The first English pamphlets advocating colonization had appeared just a year earlier, including Richard Hakluyt the Younger's *Diverse voyages touching the discoverie of America*. In an atmosphere of growing excitement about the potential rewards awaiting discovery in America, Ralegh used his position as a favorite of Queen Elizabeth to secure a patent to "discover, search, find out, and view such remote, heathen, and barbarous lands, countries, and territories, not actually possessed of any Christian prince." Under the patent issued in March 1584, Ralegh enjoyed broad rights to govern the colony as he wished, as long as he had established a permanent base within seven years.[2]

The first English expedition to Roanoke set sail in April 1584 and was assigned the task of identifying a site for Ralegh's colony. Led by Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe, the members of the reconnaissance voyage spent several months in America. The men returned to England in August and their favorable reports boosted plans that were already underway to send another, larger expedition to Roanoke. In April 1585, Sir Richard Grenville led a group of Englishmen in the first attempt to actually colonize the land. The governor of the colony, Ralph Lane, was to oversee the settlement of 107 men. Ralegh

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[2] Quinn, *Set Fair For Roanoke*, Voyages and Colonies, 1584-1606 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 8; Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 267.

sent a supply mission in 1586, but by then Lane's group had already abandoned the colony, returning to England with Sir Francis Drake. Sir Richard Grenville left fifteen men to maintain possession of the land in the name of England and Ralegh and returned home. These tentative footholds in America set the stage for the first major attempt to colonize Virginia, the famous "Lost Colony" of 1587.

i. "The Golden Mean": Helpful Natives and an Ideal Land

Early arguments for the colonization of the New World were largely based on contemporary scientific beliefs that indicated that America would be an idyllic land for English habitation. Promoters of colonization painted an almost mythical picture of the lands awaiting colonists, contending that "the wise Creator of the universal globe, hath placed a golden mean betwixt two extremes . . . betwixt the hot and cold: and every creature . . . within the compass of that golden mean, is made most apt and fit, for man to use." The "golden mean" was a geographic region in which the hot and cold extremes of all other regions were mixed together to create a moderate climate ideal for the English constitution. The pre-contact image of the American environment largely lacked the image of West African monsters and malevolent beasts that fueled the imagination of English men and women.[3]

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[3] Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan*, in Peter Force, *Tracts and Other Papers*, 4 vols. (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1963), vol 2, 11. For a discussion of the English understanding of climate, see Karen Kupperman, "The Puzzle of the American Climate in

The 1584 expedition's first encounter with the New World environment was not as welcoming as the golden mean theory suggested it should be. During a watering stop in Puerto Rico, Barlowe reported that "we found the air very unwholesome, and our men grew for the most part ill disposed." The sickly sailors quickly prepared to continue their journey, hoping for a more hospitable environment in a more northern clime. Even before they set foot in Virginia, Barlowe's group found indications that the new land would be an improvement. As they approached the coast of North Carolina's Outer Banks, the sailors "found shoal water, which smelled so sweetly, and was so strong a smell, as if we had been in the midst of some delicate garden." To the sea-weary sailors, the scent of approaching land was as intoxicating as the most expensive perfume. Barlowe explicitly compared the American environment with the "barren and fruitless" woods of Russia, arguing that even a cursory glance indicated that the Virginia coastline offered more abundance.[4]

Once the Englishmen landed at Roanoke, they began to assess the surrounding land. Early reports of the natural world served to inflate the English image of the American environment. While the creation of this image benefitted the colonization effort by stirring up interest in the project, the distorted vision of the land would have serious consequences for the men and women who arrived in America expecting an ideal setting for their new lives. Although some of the misleading reports of the environment were due to the relatively short duration of the earliest contact, other accounts deliberately

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the Early Colonial Period," *American Historical Review*, 87(1982), 1262-89.

[4] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 276, 277.

downplayed any environmental deficiencies while emphasizing the most optimistic appraisals of the land.

Ralph Lane's 1585 assessment of the Roanoke environment highlighted the benefits of the land without entirely assuaging skeptics' doubts about the potential rewards of settling Virginia. The climate of Roanoke "is so wholesome," Lane asserted, "yet somewhat tending to heat, as that we have not had one sick since we entered into the country; but sundry that came sick, are recovered of long diseases." Besides being remarkably healthy, the environment seemed to hold great promise of future profit. In a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham, Lane claimed that there were "so many, so rare, and so singular commodities . . . of this her Majesty's new kingdom of Virginia, as all the kingdoms and states of Christendom." Lane's report seemed to confirm Barlowe's assessment made a year earlier, that the fertile land was a virtual paradise which "bringeth forth all things in abundance, as in the first creation, without toil or labor." By their estimation, future English plantations could expend little time and energy on sustenance and could concentrate on profit.[5]

In fact, Lane maintained that the overwhelming plenty of the Roanoke environment suggested that God intended the English to make use of the land. How else could it be explained that the commodities were found "with very small search, and which do present themselves upon the upper face of the earth?" Future colonists not content to simply collect the natural bounty of the land could expect that English farming techniques would prosper in the New World. As a "virgin land," the soil of Virginia allegedly had "never

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[5] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 290, 289, 280.

been labored with man's hand" and promised outstanding fertility. Although the English

recognized that the native inhabitants practiced their own form of agriculture, it did not

meet English standards for proper cultivation. Richard Grenville claimed that the new

land "once by our industry manured will prove most fertile."[6]

Another member of the expedition argued that the land held enough valuable

commodities to justify further English involvement. In his *Brief and True Report*, Thomas

Harriot included an extensive list of the potential sources of profit, including ship's stores,

fur, and exotic products such as silk, sugar, oranges, and lemons, which Harriot believed

would prosper "seeing that they grow in the same climate, in the south part of Spain and in

Barbary." Like Lane, Harriot believed that the overwhelming fertility of the soil would

free English colonists from toiling in fields and would reduce the costs of supporting

colonization efforts. The primary source of native food, Harriot noted, was "Pagatowr, a

kind of grain so called by the inhabitants: the same in the West Indies is called maize:

Englishmen call it Guinea wheat or turkey wheat." The native corn, Harriot explained,

was superior to imported English grains since the rapid growth and ease of planting made

it so "one man may prepare and husband so much ground . . . with less than four and

twenty hours labor, as shall yield him victual in a large proportion for a twelvemonth."[7]

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[6] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 289, 293.

[7] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 143, 144, 145. Other Englishmen were not so exuberant about the value of corn. the English herbalist John Gerard argued that "Turkey wheat doth nourish far less than either wheat, rye, barley, or oats. The bread which is made thereof is meanly white . . . it is of hard digestion, and yieldeth to the body little or no nourishment; it slowly descendeth and bindeth the belly . . . the barbarous Indians, which know no better, are constrained to make a virtue of necessity, and think it a good food; whereas we may easily judge, that it nourisheth but little, and is of hard and evil digestion, a more convenient

English belief in the ease of maize agriculture led to many difficulties for the early colonies. One of the most obvious differences between English farming and Indian techniques was the use of fertilizers. The soil in Virginia was so fertile, the English claimed, that the Indians "never fatten with muck, dung, or any thing, neither plow nor dig it as we in England." Even careless planting could have success. In one experiment, Barlowe's men put some English peas into the ground, "and in ten days they were fourteen inches high." Later faced with a shortage of food, the colonists believed that the natives were lazy or were holding back deliberately. New settlers were not prepared for the intensive labor of clearing, planting, and harvesting corn.[8]

The crops that the English believed to be produced with virtually no labor actually involved careful preparation. In late March to early July, both Indian men and women cleared the fields using wooden hoes. After clearing, they scraped the earth into small mounds in which they deposited several seeds, including corn, beans, and various types of gourd vegetables. Harvest took place from July to September, culminating in various native rituals and celebrations of the abundance. The annual growing season of 250 days allowed the Indians to harvest two crops from the same field during ideal years.[9]

Oblivious to the considerable labor that went into producing native crops, the

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food for swine than for man." See John Gerard, *The herball, or Generall historie of plantes* (London: 1636), 83. For a discussion of the evolution and importance of maize agriculture, see Albert E. Cowdry, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1983).

[8] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 144, 279.

[9] Christian Feest, "North Carolina Algonquians." *HNAI*, 15: 271, 273.

English painted an image of a land overflowing with products ripe for the taking. The climate was healthy, the temperatures moderate, the soil fertile, and the natural commodities valuable. All that was needed was assurance that the native population would support, or at least not hinder, English designs for Roanoke.

Just the English hoped to discover an ideal environment in Roanoke, they also hoped to find a native population ready and willing to play their role in the English plans. If the Roanoke colony was to be primarily a safe harbor from which to support privateering efforts in the West Indies, the Indians would occupy only a supporting position in the overall scheme. Ideally, the natives would provide the expeditions with food supplies until the English could begin their own plantations. In addition, the natives would engage in peaceful trade with visiting ships. Under this system, interactions between the natives and the English would be limited largely to business transactions as they were in Russia and West Africa. English colonization promoters gave great emphasis to the responsibility of potential colonists to convert the Indians to Christianity, but proselytization was low on the list of priorities for the men who set foot in America.

The English did not expect to encounter any major military obstacles from the Indians. One advisor to Walter Ralegh noted that the natives would probably pose little threat since they were "naked men," but suggested that settlements have enough military equipment to "prevent the invasion of the Spaniards." Not only would the Spanish object to any English presence in the area they claimed as their own, but the planned privateering activities were certain to provoke a quick response. Defense of the colony, therefore, was

focused outward to the Atlantic rather than inward toward the natives.[10]

The people who occupied the land the English intended to colonize were part of the major cultural group of Algonquian-speaking Indians who predominated along the northeastern Atlantic coast. The North Carolina Algonquians were bordered on the north by the Virginia Algonquians, who at that time were experiencing the political and military struggle of the growing Powhatan chiefdom. To the west and south, the Carolina Algonquians were faced with Iroquoian tribes. By 1585, the total population of Carolina Algonquians probably reached 7,000 or more inhabitants, a substantial number, making good relations crucial for the English. The Indians themselves also had a vested interest in the outcome of the Anglo-Indian relationship. Weakened by war with the Iroquoian Indians to the south and other tribes on the mainland, the Indians of the Roanoke area initially sought an allegiance with the latest arrivals to their area.[11]

The initial meeting between the English and the Indians of Virginia seemed to follow the ideal scenario precisely. Two days after arriving in Roanoke, Arthur Barlowe and his men caught their first sight of the natives. Both groups viewed each other warily, but the English eventually approached an Indian. After a brief conversation in which neither side understood a word from the other, the English "brought him with his own good liking, aboard the ships, and gave him a shirt, a hat, and some other things, and made

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[10] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 274.

[11] Feest, "Carolina Algonquians," *HNAI*, 271-72; J. Frederick Fausz, "Patterns of Anglo-Indian Aggression and Accommodation Along the Mid-Atlantic Coast, 1584-1634," in William Fitzhugh, ed., *Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions, 1000-1800* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 232.

him taste of our wine, and our meat, which he liked very well: and after having viewed both barks, he departed." Upon returning to land, the Indian immediately began fishing, leaving a pile of fish for each ship "which after he had (as much as he might,) requited the former benefits received, he departed out of our sight."[12]

To the English, this first meeting encapsulated everything they envisioned for the ideal Anglo-Indian relationship: the English displayed their benevolence while demonstrating their technological superiority and the Indian fulfilled his role of gratefully supplying food for the visitors. The meeting also served several important symbolic functions. By sharing food and wine, the English were able to demonstrate their hospitality while introducing the Indian to English food, an important symbol of English culture and civility. At the same time, the gifts of English clothing demonstrated their belief in the importance of attire as a signifier of status while taking the first steps toward establishing a potentially lucrative market for English cloth. As further evidence of the goodwill of the natives towards outsiders, Barlowe reported that twenty-six years earlier, a ship sank off the coast, "whereof some of the people were saved, and those were white people, whom the country people preserved." Clearly, Barlowe suggested, the natives held no special animosity towards Europeans and could be brought to an amicable relationship with the colonists.[13]

One of the most important hurdles the English had to overcome in order to establish a good relationship with the Indians was language. The English recognized that

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[12] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 277.

[13] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 280.

the success of the early missions depended in part on their ability to communicate effectively with the natives. With this in mind, the leaders of early reconnaissance missions instructed their captains to "note the diversity of their [native] languages and in what places their speech beginneth to alter as near you can." Their experience in West Africa taught the English that in many cases, languages could vary significantly within a small geographic region. Unlike West Africa, however, the natives of North America did not greet them already speaking a pidgin form of a European language, making a difficult task even more challenging.[14]

For the most part, initial communication between the English and the Indians of Virginia was a rudimentary form of sign language. When the members of the 1584 mission encountered an Indian for the first time, the native uttered "many things not understood by us." The next day, Barlowe met with Granganimeo, a native leader who beckoned the English to approach, then made "all signs of joy, and welcome, striking on his head, and his breast, and afterwards on ours, to show we were all one, smiling, and making show the best he could, of all love and familiarity." Granganimeo also gave a long speech, but it was the body language and signs that the English believed they could interpret. During the late sixteenth century, European scholars argued that there was a "universal language of gestures" that linked people of even the most drastically different cultures. By paying close attention to facial expressions, hand gestures, and general physical stance, they argued, communication could take place without even a rudimentary

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[14] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 245. There were some exceptions, of course, most notably the settlers' good fortune in New England to meet the English-speaking Samoset and Squanto shortly after their arrival. The English in Virginia had no such luck, however.

shared language.[15]

Of course, the interpretation of body language was an inexact science at best, fraught with potential for serious misunderstandings based on cultural differences. Despite their confidence that they could understand the natives' "signs," the English ideally sought the services of a translator. Based on their experience in West Africa and other lands, the English decided that the most effective strategy to facilitate communication was to remove a native by persuasion or force and take him to England to learn English. Two of the most important acquisitions of the 1584 reconnaissance voyage Barlowe described as "lusty men, whose names were Wanchese and Manteo." While in England, Wanchese and Manteo began the process of learning English language and customs while also teaching Thomas Harriot a bit of Algonquian. Harriot, Manteo, and Wanchese all got the opportunity to use their new linguistic skills when they traveled to Roanoke together in 1585.[16]

As translators, informants, and intermediaries, Wanchese and Manteo exercised a tremendous amount of power during the early encounters. Manteo's value to the colonists became apparent shortly after Lane and a group of men set out on their exploratory expedition to the Roanoke River. One night "about three of the clock," the English heard "certain savages call as we thought, Manteo." Hoping for "some friendly conference," Lane instructed Manteo to reply. Still hidden in the shadows, the Indians

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[15] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 277; Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of Americans Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 50:1(January 1997), 199.

[16] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 282.

"presently began a song, as we thought in token of our welcome to them." Much to the English surprise, however, Manteo quickly jumped up and grabbed his gun and announced that the Indians intended to attack the English. After a brief skirmish, the Indians retired with few injuries on either side. This incident reinforced the importance of having a reliable translator and was another example of the potential dangers of miscommunication based on cultural assumptions. To the English, the singing of a pleasant song was not considered a prelude to a military attack and so they were unprepared for the subsequent behavior.[17]

For the Indian translators themselves, their position must have been a mixed bag at best. Native translators found themselves in a curious position, often caught between two worlds while trying to establish their identity. Manteo was such a valuable asset that in English eyes, "he behaved himself toward us as a most faithful Englishman," surely the highest compliment an Englishman could give an Indian. To further mark his semi-English identity, Manteo was "christened in Roanoke, and called Lord thereof, and of Dasamonguepouke, in reward of his faithful service." The titles were largely empty since they had no foundation in native government structure, but they were symbolic of the cultural distance Manteo had moved during his service to the English. By bestowing the baptized Indian with a European title to Indian lands, the English hoped to place in power an ally who would acknowledge his ultimate subservience to Europeans. As the English would later learn, the native translators could also use their position to resist colonization. Before any solid plans for colonization could begin, however, the English had to evaluate

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[17] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 299.

the natives to determine whether they could live with the Indians.[18]

The initial English assessment of the physical appearance of the natives was generally favorable. Though Barlowe's use of the "white people" to describe Europeans suggests a consciousness of skin color as an important distinction between the English and the Indians, the first accounts downplayed physical differences. The natives' skin color was described as "yellowish," and their hair was "black for the most." The women, Harriot noted, "have small eyes, plain and flat noses, narrow foreheads, and broad mouths." To those readers who imagined a population of giants or otherwise bizarre humans, Harriot reported that the Indians were "of such a difference of stature only as we in England." Native bodies, the English agreed, were not much different from their own.[19]

What *was* different and often startling was the manner in which the Indians adorned their bodies. Although the natives' skin color itself was not considered to be strikingly different from the English, the natives often altered their skin color with dramatic results. Most native women tattooed their skin so that "their foreheads, cheeks, chin, arms, and legs are pounced." Few native men actually tattooed their skin, but when preparing for battle they "paint their bodies in the most terrible manner that they can devise." Indian hairstyles for men and women also differed, with women usually wearing

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[18] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 318, 319. For a recent study of the important roles of translators as cultural intermediaries, see Frances Kartunnen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1994); also Mary Connell Szasz, ed., *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

[19] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 150, 278; Paul Hulton and David B. Quinn, eds., *The American Drawings of John White, 2 vols.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pl. 124.

their hair fringed in the front and loose in the back while the men "cut the tops of their heads from the forehead to the nape of the neck," leaving a roach in the middle. The Indians also wore different adornments such as necklaces or feathers to indicate their social status or village origin.[20]

The use of special adornments to indicate status differential within native society was significant for the English, who were surprised to discover that basic attire was similar for most Indians regardless of their social standing. English observers often described native Americans as being "naked" even as they described the clothes that they wore. Thomas Harriot claimed that the Algonquians were "a people clothed with loose mantles made of deerskins, and aprons of the same round their middles, all else naked." For their part, the Indians also seemed to be interested in English clothing. Barlowe reported that the native name for Roanoke was "Wingandacoa," which Walter Ralegh later claimed actually meant "you wear good clothes, or gay clothes."[21]

The lack of emphasis on skin color and the favorable descriptions of native physical stature suggests that during the first contact period, English observers did not perceive a strict racial separation between themselves and the natives. John White's paintings of the Indians of the Roanoke area made an explicit argument for the connection of the races. After his paintings of the Algonquians, White included several pictures of

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[20] Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl 123, 124; Feest, "Carolina Algonquians," 276.

[21] Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility," 204. Modern linguists claim that Ralegh's correction was itself incorrect and that the Indians were actually providing the native word for the trees to which they believed the English to be pointing. Kupperman, *Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony* (Maryland: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), 17.

English ancestors, the Picts and the Britons. Adorned in body paint, wearing little clothing, and carrying crude weapons, the English forbearers appear strikingly similar to the previous images of the American natives. The implication was obvious: since English men and women had progressed from such humble origins, the Indians also had the potential to improve. Under the guidance of English colonists, the Indians would shed their physical differences along with the cultural. One of the areas of native society that might need to be transformed, according to the English, was the Indian gender system.[22]

The apparent physical similarities between native men and women caused problems during the earliest encounters when the English were involved in a series of military battles with the Indians. During one night raid at Roanoke, the colonists found that "it was dark, that they [Indians] being naked, and their men and women appareled all so like others, we knew not but that they were all men: and if that one of them . . . had not had her child at her back, she had been slain instead of a man." To compound their problems, the Indians the colonists had attacked were actually their allies.[23]

The fact that native men and women dressed in similar clothes was not only dangerous for the potential for military mishaps but might indicate deeper gender

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[22] Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl. 139-143. See Kupperman, *Roanoke*, and Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5, 13. Vaughan argues that "Anglo-Americans believed that American Indians were inherently like themselves and that they were approximately as light skinned as Europeans; they could--indeed would--be assimilated into colonial society as soon as they succumbed to English social norms and Christian theology (5)." Vaughan is correct about the opinion of many Englishmen writing in England, but the actual participants of the first encounters were not as optimistic about the quick assimilation of natives, despite their racial similarities.

[23] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 319.

difference. Clothing for the English was invested with symbolic significance: to a large extent, you were what you wore. Sumptuary laws enforced economic standards of dress, and social pressure regulated proper gender clothing. Men and women who did not adhere to fashion norms risked being accused of deviance. As Philip Stubbes explained in 1583, "Our apparel was given to us as a sign distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex; and therefore, one to wear the apparel of another sex, is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the verity of his own kind." Women wearing men's clothing, Stubbes argued, "may not improperly be called *hermaphroditi*, that is, monsters of both kinds, half women, half men." Though nobody accused the Indians of being hermaphrodites, the apparently similar attire of native men and women was a matter for concern. That Indian men and women seemed oblivious to standard English rules of dress might indicate sexual impropriety among the natives.[24]

English attention to the particular attire of native men and women was part of a greater concern with gender issues once permanent colonization became a possibility. In Ireland, where Englishmen also hoped to establish permanent colonies, gender concerns were at the forefront of the effort. Disorderly Irish women seemed to be out of control, inciting rebellion and threatening the social fabric of English settlements. To the colonizers, the unusual amount of power of Irish women was seen as evidence of native

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[24] Cited in Susan C. Shapiro, "Sex, Gender, and Fashion in Medieval and Early Modern Britain." *Journal of Popular Culture* 20:4(1987), 113, 116, 128. A pamphlet war broke out in England in 1620 after King James I ordered the clergy to publicly attack women who dressed like men. Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy About Women in England, 1540-1640* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 17.

barbarity and thus needed to be contained.[25]

English sailors traveling to the Americas did not find a population of rebellious native women waiting to disrupt their plans but did fashion the encounter in gendered images. By naming the land after the Virgin Queen Elizabeth, the English symbolically invested the environment with the idealized qualities of innocence and unfulfilled promised which they expected to nurture. Virginity was also a symbol of Queen Elizabeth's power, carefully controlled and manipulated in order to achieve desired results. "Virginia" was both an inscription of gender ideals and a statement of Elizabeth's empire in one of the most overt expressions of the intertwining of gender and power in the early modern period.[26]

The emphasis on the "virginity" of the land carried over into discussions of native women's sexuality. Since the first English expeditions to Roanoke were comprised entirely of men, the expectation that English sailors would be quick to engage in sexual relations with native women if given the opportunity was high. But English men were strictly prohibited from sexual liaisons with the natives. Indeed, even the natives thought it peculiar, the English reported, that "we had no women amongst us, neither that we did care for any of theirs." For those readers in England who doubted that the English sailors could possibly restrain themselves while living amongst half-naked women, Harriot

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[25] William Palmer, "Gender, Violence, and Rebellion in Tudor and Early Stuart Ireland," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23:1(1992), 699-715.

[26] Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Race, Gender, and Power in Colonial Virginia.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 15, 22. See also Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery." *Representations*, 31(Winter, 1991), 1-41.

explained that the natives themselves had a sense of sexual morality. Significantly, native morality was also connected to class, since "virgins of good parentage" marked themselves as such by wearing a distinct necklace. These young women also were careful not to expose themselves too much to prying English eyes, and "they lay their hands often upon their shoulders, and cover their breasts in token of maidenlike modesty."[27]

Native women in the Roanoke area seemed to command a surprising amount of power in English eyes. Most female assertions of power were the equivalent of the "deputy husband" role which colonial English women assumed in the absence of their husbands. In one of the first English encounters with North American women, Arthur Barlowe reported that "the wife of Grangyno, the King's brother, came running out to meet us very cheerfully and friendly, her husband was not then in the village: some of her people she commanded to draw our boat to the shore . . . others she appointed to carry us on their backs to the dry ground." Clearly, Granganimeo's wife was giving orders to men as well as women while her husband was away. Once she saw that her guests were safely ashore, the Indian woman returned to her more traditional female role and "took great pains to see all things ordered in the best manner she could, making great haste to dress some meat for us."[28]

Although the Roanoke voyages took place during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the Englishmen involved were more likely to identify power and authority with native men rather than women. Harriot's description of John White's drawing of a chief man notes

[27] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 153; Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, 2, pl. 125.

[28] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 279.

that native leaders "fold their arms together as they walk, or as they talk one with another in sign of wisdom." White's drawing of one of the "chief ladies of Secota," identified as the wife of a native leader, depicts the woman with her arms crossed but is silent about the significance. For the English, the ideal virtue for native women was modesty, therefore they interpreted the Indian girls' arm-folding as evidence of that quality. For men, however, wisdom and strength were more important character traits than sexual status, at least in the eyes of the English. In the end, English assessment of Indian gender roles revealed a society in need of mild transformation but with an admirable foundation upon which the English could build.[29]

Most writers agreed that the natives possessed many admirable qualities in addition to their physical stature and gender roles. Arthur Barlowe was particularly impressed with the honesty of Granganimeo. The native leader, Barlowe wrote, "was very just of his promise: for many times we delivered him merchandise upon his word, but ever he came within the day, and performed his promise." Barlowe's initial assessment of the natives determined that the Indians were "people most gentle, loving, and faithful, void of all guile, and treason, and such as lived after the manner of the golden age." Thomas Harriot claimed that the natives he encountered were "very ingenious" despite their lack of European tools and science, for "they show excellence of wit."[30]

Clearly, as advocates of colonization Barlowe and Harriot had reason to emphasize the positive aspects of the native character, but their descriptions were not entirely based

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[29] Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl. 124, 125.

[30] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 279, 280, 150.

on self-interest. Most English men and women who had contact with the Indians agreed

that whatever the deficiencies of the people, they were capable of improvement. The fact

that Barlowe could praise the peace-loving nature of the Indians in one sentence and

describe a violent fight shortly thereafter reveals that the English did not simply group all

natives in a single category. In fact, part of the English strategy, learned from the Spanish,

was to ally with the "good Indians" to fight the "bad" natives. The difficult task was to

decide which category best described each group of natives the English encountered,

especially when their relationship was volatile one day and harmonious the next.[31]

One key factor in assessing the nature of various Indian groups was an appraisal of

their government. Like their counterparts in Russia and West Africa, the Englishmen

involved in first contact in Virginia were without exception favorably impressed with the

native government and leaders. Determined from the very beginning of contact to

demonstrate their authority, the natives of the Roanoke area met the English with a formal

delegation. Arthur Barlowe described the first meeting with Granganimeo, the brother of

Wingina, the head of the Roanoke Indians one day after first contact on the island:

> his servants spread a long mat upon the ground, on which he sat

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[31] Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W Norton, 1975), 26. Karen Kupperman argues that English descriptions of native character were largely based on the pre-disposition of the writer--for example Harriot as a man of science, Lane as a military man would not describe the same Indian in the same way. See *Roanoke*, 57. David Beers Quinn maintains that in general, the English considered the Indians to be inferior, at best something above a servant but less than equal. See *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 237. James Axtell has argued that for the most part, English observers believed that the Indians were educable, but "were deficient in three essential qualities: order, industry, and manners." See *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 136.

> down, and at the other end of the mat four others of his company
> did the like: the rest of his men stood round him, somewhat afar
> off: when we came to shore to him with our weapons, he never
> moved from his place . . . nor never mistrusted any harm to be
> offered from us, but sitting still, he beckoned us to come, and sit by
> him, which we performed.

The meeting was very much like the English experience in West Africa. Native leaders approached the visitors but stopped short of actually going to them. Granganimeo was clearly in charge of the situation--he *beckoned* the English to come forward and they dutifully obliged. The authority of the native leaders was so great, Barlowe claimed, that "no people in the world carry more respect to their King, Nobility, and Governors, than these do."[32]

Despite their awe at the image of native leaders, the English were not quite sure what to make of the Indian form of government. In their struggle to make sense of the native system, the participants in first contact compared it with their own form of government. One major difficulty was that the language of English government was not adequate to describe what visitors found in Virginia: the colonists used words such as "nobles," "magistrates," and "governors" to describe people who did not really fit the English definition. The most perplexing aspect of native government was the apparent lack of a single all-powerful monarch. Thomas Harriot explained that "in some places of the country, one only town belongeth to the government of a werowance or chief lord, in other some two or three, in some six, eight, and more."[33]

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[32] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 278.

[33] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 150. Francis Jennings was the first scholar to make this point: *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill:

By European standards, the government of the Carolina Algonquians was decentralized. At the time the English arrived, the island of Roanoke was administered by Granganimeo, the brother of the chief of the Roanoke tribe. Menatonon, "a man impotent in his limbs, but otherwise, for a savage, a very grave and wise man, "was the leader of the most powerful local group, the Choanoke Indians who lived around the Roanoke River on the mainland. Each tribe consisted of from one to as many as eighteen villages. Although there was no formal governmental organization above the tribal level, confederacies of different tribes were fairly common and there were many informal alliances of native groups. Harriot's emphasis on the fragmentation of native governmental power was designed in part to suggest that the Indians were incapable of organizing a major attack on the English. After all, Harriot noted, "the greatest werowance that yet we had dealing with, had but eighteen towns in his government, and [was] able to make not above seven or eight hundred fighting men at the most." Under these conditions, the English believed they could negotiate alliances with Indian leaders with little trouble. One of the ways to secure friendly relations with native leaders was to offer them access to European goods.[34]

Based on their experiences in other lands during the sixteenth century, proponents of colonization argued that gift-giving would be an important part of the Anglo-Indian relationship. In his 1583 account of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's expedition to America,

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University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 110, 114.

[34] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 290; Feest, "Carolina Algonquians," 277-78. While seven or eight hundred fighting men might have seemed like a substantial numerical advantage over the English, Harriot noted that the Indians had "no edge tools or weapons or iron or steel to offend us withal, neither know they how to make any." Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 150.

George Peckham proposed that in order to establish a successful colony, the English would have to earn Indian friendship. "There must be presented unto them *gratis*," Peckham explained, "some kinds of our petty merchandises and trifles," such as bells and beads. A liberal hand at gift-giving, Peckham argued, "will induce their barbarous natures to a liking and a mutual society with us." Once the English arrived in Virginia they had to adjust their gift-giving to meet the local customs. When Arthur Barlowe met with Granganimeo for the first time, he distributed gifts to all of the native men who appeared to have high status. Offended, Granganimeo stood and gathered all of the goods for himself, "making signs and tokens, that all things ought to be delivered unto him, and the rest were but his servants and followers." In Roanoke, the English were to bestow the majority of their gifts directly upon the native leader.[35]

Granganimeo was insistent upon his right to the English gifts because his power within native society depended in part on his ability to spread goods among his group. Unlike Ivan the Terrible or even Queen Elizabeth, North Carolina Algonquian leaders did not possess any coercive power to force their people to do their bidding. Instead, they relied on convincing the people that their decisions were best for the whole group. One way to cement loyalty was through the distribution of gifts. In order to maintain power, native leaders were required to continually distribute goods they had collected through tribute or gifts from other leaders. Accumulation of wealth such as that of the European monarchs was unacceptable, even as gift-giving gave way naturally to trade.[36]

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[35] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 44, 278.

[36] Kupperman, *Roanoke*, 51.

Trade negotiations with the natives of Virginia began on a positive note, leading

the English to believe that they could avoid some of the difficulties they had trading in

other areas. Having learned in West Africa how important it was to try to assert control

over trade from the very beginning, the English were determined to dictate the terms of

trade as much as possible. During Barlowe's 1584 reconnaissance mission, the visitors

attempted to establish a pattern they hoped would endure throughout the Anglo-Indian

relationship. After trading seventy skins for a tin dish and a copper kettle, the natives

"offered us very good exchange for our hatchets, and axes, and for knives, and would

have given anything for swords," but the English refused. The English not only did not

want to surrender their technological advantage, they wanted to leave the natives with the

impression that they were not dependent on trade. On another occasion, the natives

offered to "lay a great box of pearl" for English armor, but Barlowe refused "because we

would not make them know, that we esteemed thereof, until we understood in what places

of the country the pearl grew." With an eye towards future activities, Barlowe was willing

to forego quick profits in the hopes that the English could eventually monopolize the pearl

trade themselves.[37]

Though the English sought to control trade in Virginia, they carefully noted what

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[37] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 278, 279. In 1583, Christopher Carleill, appealing to the Muscovy Company to colonize North America, argued that trade in America would be better than in Russia because costs would be lower. "Albeit that for the present, we are not certainly able to promise any such like quantity as is now at the best time of the Moscovian trade brought from thence," Carleill argued, "so likewise is there not demanded any such proportion of daily expenses as was the first, and as yet is consumed in that of Moscovia and other." Carleill specifically cited expensive gifts to Ivan and the cost of embassies as cutting into profits. See Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 29.

items seemed to be most valuable to the natives. The early exchanges were a proving ground for future economic activities; through a process of trial and error, the English eventually learned what goods the natives desired. In this way, the natives began subtly shaping trade even as the English insisted that they were in charge. Ralph Lane reported that in his experience, the natives were "very desirous to have clothes, but especially of coarse cloth rather than silk, coarse canvass they also like well of, but copper carrieth the price of all, so it be made red." To the Algonquians, copper was a prestige item that signified high status.[38]

The natives often used English trade goods in surprising ways. During Barlowe's first trade, Granganimeo looked over the English goods, eventually selecting a tin dish "which he presently took up, and clapped it before his breast, and after made a hole in the brim thereof, and hung it about his neck, making signs, that it would defend him against his enemies' arrows." Granganimeo's actions, while a source of amusement to the English, served to transform an object that had a use and a value in the English world into an item with more value in his own. While the English believed they had outsmarted the natives by trading a few cheap goods for valuable skins, each side of the exchange could justifiably believe they had won the upper hand.[39]

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[38] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 293; Stephen Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," in Peter Wood, ed., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 153. For a discussion of the importance of copper to native society, see Chapter Six below.

[39] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 278. John White's drawing of a "chief man" shows an Indian leader wearing a rectangular copper pendant in a similar fashion to Granganimeo's tin dish. Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl. 125. Perhaps the most interesting

Just as trade negotiations were an important arena from which to judge the cultural values of each side of the encounter, religion was also a key element of cultural difference. The English were both relieved and concerned when they discovered that, despite rumors to the contrary, the natives of Virginia did have religious beliefs. On the one hand, the fact that the Indians had already showed some predisposition towards religion made it more likely that they could easily be converted to Christianity. On the other hand, the form of native religious practices was often disturbing to English visitors, who feared that native religion was actually a form of devil worship. Arthur Barlowe observed natives pray to their "idol," which, he claimed was "nothing else but a mere illusion of the Devil." Yet Barlowe also recognized a connection between the alleged idol worship and the former practiced of more "civilized" groups with direct ties to England's past. When the natives went to war, Barlowe explained, "they carry with them their idol, of whom they ask council, as the Romans were wont of the Oracle of Apollo." Barlowe's observation made the Indians' behavior understandable if not laudable and implied that the Indians, like the Romans of old, could eventually be brought to embrace Christianity.[40]

While some early reports included sensationalized accounts of native religion,

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example of native transformation of European goods to fit their own value system was the creation of coin beads. By taking European coins and rolling them into traditional hollow-tubed beads, the natives turned an item of otherwise little value within their exchange system to one which could be useful. See James Axtell "At the Water's Edge: Trading in the Sixteenth Century" in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 144-181 as well as chapter three of his most recent book, *The Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[40] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 281.

Thomas Harriot presented a more complex picture of Indian beliefs, which he learned by "having special familiarity with some of their priests." In his report, Harriot described native religion as having many different gods, but one paramount deity, a creation story, belief in the immortality of the soul, and an understanding of an afterlife somewhat resembling the Christian belief in heaven and hell. Although the natives showed a surprising depth of religious beliefs, Harriot argued, "they were not so sure grounded, nor gave such credit to their traditions and stories, but through conversing with us they were brought into great doubts of their own, and no small admiration of ours." By dismissing native beliefs as simply "traditions and stories," Harriot implied that converting the Indians would be a small matter of pointing out their errors and explaining Christian theology.[41]

Harriot's account of native religion was affected by his own Christianity, but he was more accurate than other reporters who dismissed Indian beliefs as mere idolatry. Algonquian religion centered around a plurality of gods and spirits, with one chief god who created minor gods. These minor gods in turn created the world and assumed human shape. Native idols represented the minor gods and held special powers that could be used for good or evil. The Algonquians also had priests who attended to temples and ossuaries, and "conjurors," who acted as seers or "medicine men." Central to native religion was a belief in an afterlife to which all humans retired after death. An individual's experience in the afterlife could be good or bad, depending on his or her behavior in the

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[41] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 152, 151.

world of the living.[42]

Although colonization promoters in England rhapsodized about the opportunity to spread Christianity to the heathen Indians, the actual participants found another, more practical use for their religion. One way the English sought to exert control over Indians during first contact was by encouraging, or at least not discouraging, native Americans to view the visitors as possessors of some divine, mysterious powers. During Barlowe's 1584 reconnaissance voyage to Roanoke, the natives "wondered marvelously when we were amongst them, at the whiteness of our skins, ever coveting to touch our breasts, and to view the same: besides they had our ships in marvelous admiration, and all things else was so strange unto them." Though the Indians were probably more amazed at the Englishmen's hairy chests rather than at their white skin, the fascination with the strangers and their relatively huge ships was understandable. When Ralph Lane's group arrived in 1585, they reinforced the native image of the English as supernatural beings. After Lane and his exploratory group returned safely from their nearly disastrous expedition to the Chesapeake, many natives "held opinion," Lane claimed, "that we be dead men returned into the world again, and that we do not remain dead but for a certain time, and that then we return again." Happy to gain any military advantage over the natives, Lane did nothing to discourage such talk.[43]

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[42] Feest, "North Carolina Algonquians," 278. Harriot was most critical of the "conjurors" who, he claimed, were "very familiar with devils, of whom they inquire what their enemies do, or other such things." Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl. 127.

[43] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 280, 301; Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37-40, 53-54.

The native comparison of a perceived spiritual power differential with the evident technological difference was significant, for the English immediately recognized that their technological advantage also conferred spiritual power. Thomas Harriot reported that English technology such as magnifying glasses, guns, books, and clocks "were so strange unto them, and so far exceeded their capacities to comprehend the reason and means how they should be made and done, that they thought they were rather the works of gods than of men, or at the leastwise they had been given and taught us of the gods." Harriot did not disabuse the natives of their beliefs, preferring to retain a potential source of power rather than attempt to explain the science behind the technology. The English did not consider the Indians to be incapable of ever understanding technology; rather, the natives were like children who could be educated at the proper moment.[44]

Perhaps the most important mysterious source of English power was their apparent ability to control disease. Shortly after the English colonists arrived in Roanoke, they noticed that the natives began falling victim to various illnesses. Harriot claimed that the sickness was not random but was targeted at specific native groups, for "there was no town where we had any subtle device practiced against us, we leaving it unpunished or not revenged . . . but that within a few days after our departure from every such town, the people began to die very fast." This "marvelous accident," as Harriot called it, instilled fear in the hearts of many natives, who were "persuaded that it was the work of our God through our means, and that we by him might kill and slay whom we would without

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[44] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 152.

weapons, and not come near them."[45]

Disease was an effective, if unintended, means of striking terror into the Indians, having a dual impact of psychological warfare and physical devastation. The unseen nature of the disease microbes was particularly disconcerting to the Indians. They accused the English of "shooting invisible bullets" that could attack at anytime, anywhere, even if the English were not nearby. In a desperate attempt to explain the horrific illnesses, native medicine men used the traditional cure of sucking the bodies of the afflicted to remove the foreign objects held responsible for the sickness. Using this method, Indian doctors claimed to have discovered "the strings wherewithal the invisible bullets were tied and cast." Other natives pointed to a recent eclipse of the sun and "a comet which began to appear but a few days before the beginning of the said sickness." In their struggle to combat the hidden attackers, the Indians appealed to a combination of traditional explanations and cures and also asked the English to intervene with their God. This was not an admission that their religious beliefs or medical practices were bankrupt but an expression of the Indians' openness to other explanations or cures, particularly during times of crisis.[46]

Thus far, the selection of Roanoke Island as the location for the first English colony in America seemed ideal in English eyes. The environment was healthy and held the potential for fantastic profits. The native population was cooperative and easily controllable through a combination of political negotiation, technological superiority, and

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[45] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 152.

[46] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 153.

supernatural forces. Divine providence seemed to have selected the area for the English. But there were signs of potential trouble for the colony. As the English would soon discover, there was an enormous gap between the idealized image they hoped to convey and the harsh realities of establishing a settlement thousands of miles from home in an unfamiliar land.

ii. Wild Men and Indians: An Image Tarnished

While English colonists could use their apparent "otherworldly" powers to help control native Americans, early settlement leaders had no such resources at hand to help control the English men and women in their charge. Indeed, to many colonial leaders, the biggest threat to their own authority came from within the ranks of the English settlers rather than the external challenge presented by the Indians. Much of the same language used to describe native men and women was also used to criticize lower-class English settlers. Like the Indians, English colonists were accused of being lazy, improvident, treacherous, and prone to thievery.[47]

Tension between English leaders and their settlers was evident from the earliest stages of the contact period. In a 1585 letter to Sir Philip Sidney, Ralph Lane complained about the difficulty of "having amongst the savages, the charge of wild men of mine own nation, whose unruliness is such as not to give leisure to the governor to be almost at any time from them." The use of the term "wild men" had specific connotations in

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[47] Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, 122-27.

seventeenth-century England. A frequent figure in literature, paintings, and children's stories, the wild man was "a symbol of incivility, of near bestiality, of untamed nature." The task of bringing "civility" to the natives was made difficult, if not impossible, by the added demands of reigning in the unruly English.[48]

Deeply embedded in English leaders' assessments of the behavior of their charges was an implicit understanding of social hierarchy. Confronted with challenges to their authority and an apparent upheaval of the social order, English leaders turned to their understanding of class to help explain the disruptive behavior and to frame their response. While Ralegh's solution in Guiana was simply to acknowledge that his men were largely uncontrollable and to try to make amends with native leaders, English leaders in Virginia sought to enforce class hierarchy. In the process and out of necessity, the leaders actually broke down presumptions of class privilege temporarily.

Class conflict was a part of the Virginia experience from the beginning. Two general types of people comprised Lane's Roanoke colonists: one group was made of soldiers and minor officials who received pay to perform their duties. The second group were the adventurers, men who had paid to come to the New World to find fame and fortune. The task before Lane was to find some way to control both groups; clearly, paying customers did not expect to be treated like common soldiers. Given his military background, Lane was not prone to coddle people of any class, so he decided to "set

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[48] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 292. For a discussion of the folkloric "wild man," see Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 36; Gary Nash, "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," in Edward Dudley and Maximillian Novak, eds. *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 56.

down discipline which was severely executed first at sea, and then afterward . . . in like sort continued at land." Lane extended his policy of severe discipline to his interaction with the natives.[49]

The first indication that the relationship between the English and the Indians might be violent came during Lane's abbreviated stay in Roanoke. In July 1585 the English claimed that an Indian stole a silver cup. The precipitating event seems minor, but the English reaction was swift and unrelenting. Not satisfied after requesting the return of the cup, the English "burnt and spoiled their corn, and town, all the people being fled." Clearly, the English were trying to send a message to the natives. However much colonial promoters desired good relations with the Indians, their choice of expedition leaders indicated they wanted to be prepared if the natives presented a military challenge. Richard Grenville and Ralph Lane had served in Ireland, and many of the early colonists were soldiers. Their experience told them that a firm, even violent, hand was necessary to instill order among the natives.[50]

The stolen cup incident was only the first in a series of events which would breed mistrust and escalating violence between the English and the Indians during first contact. With some justification, each side of the encounter suspected that the other was plotting against them. As it became clear that the English planned to stay on Roanoke, the natives

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[49] David Beers Quinn, *The Roanoke Voyages 2 vols.* (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 2nd ser., v. 104, 1955), 228. For a discussion of the social background of the colonists, see Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 89.

[50] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 286. For a discussion of the background of the Roanoke colonists, see Kupperman, *Roanoke*, 67.

most immediately affected by the English presence began to chafe under the continual demands for food. The death of Granganimeo eliminated a major English ally; shortly afterward, Wingina changed his name to Pemisapan, which may have been a war name adopted to signal his new attitude toward the visitors.[51]

When Ralph Lane told Pemisapan that he intended to explore the Roanoke River, the native leader claimed that Menatonan was gathering a meeting of allies to make plans to rid the country of the English. At the same time, Pemisapan apparently sent word to the Choanokes living alongside the water that Lane was on a mission to kill them. Lane managed to surprise Menatonan and took him captive. During his captivity, Menatonan told Lane about great riches to the west; Lane set out expecting native assistance along the way. In response to Pemisapan's rumor, however, the natives simply abandoned their settlements along the river, hoping to force the English to leave through hunger. Lane noted that the effort was so successful that "having passed three days voyage up the river, we could not meet a man, no find a grain of corn in any of their towns." The Indian strategy was a recognition of English military power but also correctly identified their weakness. An army marches on its stomach, and the English had empty bellies. Lane acknowledged that the tactic was clever, since "at that time we had no weirs for fish, neither could our men skill of the making of them, neither had we one grain of corn for seed to put into the ground." When the English group did not appear to be deterred, the Indians attacked, causing no serious physical injuries but encouraging the men to return to

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[51] Kupperman, *Roanoke*, 67.

their fort at Roanoke.[52]

The miraculous survival of Lane's group convinced the natives to reestablish a peaceful relationship with the English for a brief interlude before the violence resumed. Mutual distrust between the two groups was high; Lane noted that the Indians "held as good espial upon us, both night and day, as we did upon them." By May 1586, the Indians and the English were secretly planning full-scale attacks; on June 1, the English launched a "camisado," an ambush of the Indians that culminated in the beheading of Pemisapan. Lane's men abandoned the colony shortly after the raid, leaving the stability of future relations in grave doubt.[53]

As if the deteriorating relationship with the natives were not enough to convince the English that Roanoke might not be as ideal a location as originally believed, the idealized image of the environment began to falter under scrutiny. Although the English overwhelmingly emphasized the benefits of the Virginia environment, there were hints that all might not be perfect. While Lane remained at least somewhat convinced of the

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[52] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 298, 301. The English inability to construct fishing weirs was remarkable since Harriot included a description of the native device and John White made detailed drawings of the native traps. Hulton and Quinn, *Drawings of John White*, pl. 129.

[53] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 299, 304. Quinn suggests that the Indians may have abandoned their fields due to the beginning of the hunting season, but the act seems more deliberate. See Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 120. Kupperman argues that after Lane's experience, the English attitude towards natives was fundamentally altered: "There would be no grace period during which the Indians and the English would learn about each other." The English, according to Kupperman, had settled on force rather than kindness to get the Indians to do what they wanted. See *Roanoke*, 105. Although the violence undoubtedly raised the level of suspicion on both sides of the encounter, future meetings in Roanoke and Jamestown continued to demonstrate that however slim the possibility, the Indians and the English often sought to find a non-violent solution to their problems.

potential value of the environment, his experiences indicated that making a profit from the wilderness might not be as easy as he had initially hoped, a lesson he and his men learned the hard way. Lane's famous exploratory expedition up the Roanoke river in March 1586 was largely a fruitless quest for gold or other precious metals. His hopes raised by the Choanoke Indian leader Menatonan's testimony, Lane believed the rumor that an Indian settlement on the Roanoke River had a "marvelous and most strange mineral." Lane had only native descriptions of the mineral which, he reported, "they say is Wassador, which is copper, but they call by the name of Wassador every metal whatsoever." Not content to rely on Indian classification of the metal, Lane set out to discover its source. After almost one year in Roanoke, Lane had concluded that "the discovery of a good mine . . . or a passage to the Southsea . . . and nothing else can bring this country . . . to be inhabited by our nation." Lane had not abandoned his favorable impression of the environment, but he believed that only a quick and easy source of profit could justify the risk involved in overseas ventures.[54]

When Lane's colony failed, the discouraged settlers proceeded to give widely disparate accounts of their experience, particularly regarding the environment. The majority of reports were negative; ex-colonists complained about the poor food, primitive living conditions, lack of civilized amenities, and, most important, the absence of gold.

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[54] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 298. Lane conceded that if the metal were indeed only copper, "seeing the savages are able to melt it, it is one of the richest minerals in the world." *NAW*, 3: 300. Like the natives in Guiana, the Roanoke Indians were probably deliberately directing the English to distant lands after recognizing their greed for precious metals. David Beers Quinn argues that Menatonan was possibly trying to get rid of the English by sending them into the territory of the powerful Tuscarora Indians. *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 111-12.

Thomas Harvey, the chief merchant of the voyage, told anyone who would listen that the expedition had ruined him financially since there was nothing in America to buy or sell. Harriot argued that the bitter colonists were pampered city-dwellers who could not handle the wilderness and who had never even left the confines of the Roanoke settlement. Still, Harriot acknowledged that Roanoke's environment did limit its appeal as a potential site for a colony, particularly the lack of a deep-water harbor.

When the English began to assess their options for the next colonization effort, they did not have to look far. A more ideal location, both Harriot and Lane agreed, was the region around the Chesapeake Bay.[55] Lane noted that "the territory and soil of the Chesepians . . . was for pleasantness of seat, for the temperature of climate, for fertility of soil, and for the commodity of the sea . . . not to be excelled by any other whatsoever." Harriot claimed that during expeditions to the mainland, "we found the soil to be fatter; the trees greater and to grow thinner; the ground more firm and deeper mould . . . more plenty of their fruits; more abundance of beasts; the more inhabited with people." In short, the interior provided everything the Outer Banks did, *and more*. Everything was bigger and better, clearly suited to supporting a successful colony.[56]

The Chesapeake region also offered the English an opportunity to begin a relationship with the natives with a clean slate. Although they still believed that the natives posed no serious threat to potential colonists, the English discovery of the alleged plot against them made removal to a new site even more attractive. The large native

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[55] Quinn, *Set Fair for Roanoke*, 244.

[56] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 154, 295-96.

population around the Chesapeake would provide an even better market for English goods. At the same time, the Indians could easily supply the colony with food and the natural commodities of the region. With all of these advantages in mind, the colonizing expedition of 1587 set its sights firmly on the Chesapeake.

iv. The Accidental Colony

The new colonization effort was different in character from earlier expeditions. The most noticeable difference was the presence of 17 women and nine children among the 110 colonists. The inclusion of women and children in this group suggested that the English plans had shifted from establishing a military and trade outpost to forging a permanent plantation of English families. Success now would be measured not only in the amount of profit returned to England but in the ability of the settlers to replicate the best aspects of English society in the "savage" land. Good relations with the native would be key now that families were involved, not just soldiers and adventurers.

Unfortunately for the settlers, the 1587 colony could not escape the legacy of the Roanoke settlement. Under the governorship of John White, who had accompanied Lane's earlier colonization attempt, the new group of settlers were supposed to establish a colony on the Chesapeake Bay to take advantage of lessons learned in previous visits. Despite their orders, the pilot of White's ship and his sailors, eager to drop off the passengers and begin privateering, announced upon arriving at Roanoke that "the summer was far spent, wherefore he would land all the planters in no other place." A stronger

leader might have forced the pilot to carry out his orders, but "it booted not the Governor to contend with them" and White agreed to be left at Roanoke. White's rather quick acquiescence to the sailor's demands reveals that despite the general agreement that Roanoke was not an ideal location, it was acceptable.[57]

When the English decided to return to Roanoke in 1587, they were unsure what their reception would be. The new settlers had reason to be nervous. Thomas Harriot explained that before Lane's colony abandoned Roanoke, "some of our company . . . showed themselves too fierce in slaying some of the people in some towns, upon causes that on our part might easily enough been borne withal." Although Harriot believed that the Indians recognized that the violence was "on their part justly deserved," and that the English had nothing to fear, the colonists were uneasy. When White agreed to remain on the island rather than go to the Chesapeake, the physical environment of Roanoke was fixed and known; the biggest question mark for the English was the demeanor of the Indians.[58]

One week after arriving, the colonists had their answer. George Howe, foolishly ignoring orders to remain with the group, decided to search for food. A group of Indians "secretly hidden among the high reeds . . . espied our man wading in the water alone, almost naked, without any weapon, save only a small forked stick, catching crabs." The Indians "shot at him in the water, where they gave him sixteen wounds with their arrows:

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[57] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 316.

[58] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 153.

and after they had slain him with their wooden swords, beat his head in pieces."[59]

After Howe's death, the English naturally were apprehensive about their relationship with the Indians. Two days later, White sent twenty men to "learn the disposition of the people of the country towards us, and to renew our old friendship with them." Once again, the English relied on the services of Manteo, who acted as translator and intermediary to the Croatoan Indians they encountered. The native response upon meeting the English again reveals much about the previous relationship. As soon as the Indians learned that the English were not going to shoot them, they embraced the visitors, "desiring us not to gather or spill any of their corn, for they had but little." By 1587, the natives associated the English with destruction and greed and the diminishing of already scanty food supplies. The Croatoans also asked for "some token or badge" to clearly identify themselves as English allies to avoid being accidentally attacked as they had been during Lane's colony.[60]

White's policy towards the Indians was marked by the same indecision and lack of leadership that allowed him to accept being dropped off on a second-rate island. After the first meeting with the Croatoans, White sent word to the surrounding native towns that "if they would accept our friendship, we would willingly receive them again, and that all unfriendly dealings past on both parts, should be utterly forgiven, and forgotten." The problem, of course, was that neither side could forget the misdeeds of the other. When the native leaders failed to respond to White's appeal in a timely manner, the English

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[59] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 317, 318.

[60] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 317.

decided it was time to avenge Howe's death and the death of the 15 men Grenville left behind in 1586. The Roanoke Indians were alleged to be the perpetrators of both incidents, but a group of Croatoans were mistaken for enemies and attacked in a night raid. The blunder did nothing to ameliorate the concerns of the native allies and certainly contributed to growing Indian resentment towards the English interlopers. White's initial policy of diplomatic negotiations with the Indians quickly gave way to a more violent approach to asserting control over the natives. Unfortunately, White's actions were more fit for a military outpost than for the colonists he had; in the event of Indian reprisals, a settlement of soldiers would have a better chance of survival than the mixed population of families and soldiers under White's care.[61]

White also had difficulty controlling his colonists, who seemed to have little respect for his authority. When the settlers asked White to return to England for supplies, White initially declined, citing his fear that in his absence his possessions might be "pilfered away." The governor had already "found some proof" of the thievery of his colonists, "being but once from them but three days" and returning to find some of his property missing.[62]

White's initial refusal to return to England for supplies reveals much about the endeavor and White's own thinking. The governor of the colony cited two reasons for his reluctance: fear of thievery and the image his return would project. As soon as he arrived in England, White feared, his enemies would "slander falsely both him, and the action,

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[61] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 318-19.

[62] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 316, 319.

saying he went to Virginia, but politically, and to no other end, but to lead so many into a country, in which he never meant to stay himself, and there to leave them behind him." White's concern that his motivations might be called into question and his fortitude challenged proved to be true. White did return to England for supplies but was unable to complete his mission. Escalating conflict with Spain and a half-hearted response to White's continual entreaties for assistance for the abandoned colonists prevented the promised supply mission from ever setting sale. By the time the English revisited Roanoke, the settlers had disappeared and become the "Lost Colony."[63]

While events in Europe certainly contributed to the demise of the English colony, the primary causes of the failure were located firmly in America. After three years of experience, the English failed to understand the importance of locating their colony in an environmentally conducive area. Roanoke Island was not a disease-ridden tropical jungle or a unyielding desert, but it offered no quick economic rewards and the sandy soil was not as fertile as the English had hoped. The poor harbor made Roanoke an unfit location even for the proposed privateering base the earliest supporters envisioned. The colonists themselves contributed to the English difficulties: since the first colony primarily consisted of soldiers, their natural inclination was to treat the natives as a military problem, using quick and often violent force to assert their will. The relationship with the natives was forged under these conditions, making the transition to a colony of planters more difficult. And any examination of the causes of the failure of the Roanoke colony should also acknowledge the importance of the Indians themselves. After all, it was not the Spanish

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[63] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 319.

Armada that dispersed and possibly killed the English colonists, but an Indian raid. Without a continual supply of trade goods or military assistance in native warfare, the English offered no reciprocity to the Anglo-Indian relationship and became a clear liability.

By the end of the Roanoke experiment, Walter Ralegh had spent over 40,000 pounds trying to establish his colony in America. He needed desperately to restore not only his fortune but his declining reputation as well. Not content to give up on the idea of colonization, Ralegh insisted that it was possible to settle a colony in a land with cooperative natives and untold riches. Roanoke did not destroy Ralegh's dream but pushed it further south.

CHAPTER FIVE

"A Pleasing Dream of a Golden Fancy":
The English in Guiana, 1595-1625.

The maze of rivers was bewildering, even for the most experienced navigators. Trees loomed over the banks, pressing in on the wary travelers who struggled to maintain their course against the stubborn current. The sailors' claustrophobia was heightened by the knowledge that the forest offered innumerable hiding places from which the natives could observe them without being seen themselves. Short on food, pestered by insects, and still damp from the most recent rain shower, the men grumbled, perhaps even discussed mutiny, yet they forged ahead. What drove them were not visions of glory for God or country but dreams of riches. The first English contact experience in Guiana was shaped in large part by the quest for gold.[1]

But to reduce the initial English contact experience in Guiana to a misguided gold rush would be an oversimplification. In fact, Guiana became a viable prospect for the first permanent English colonies in the Americas, losing to Virginia only by circumstance. Like their counterparts in Russia and West Africa, the first English in Guiana had to establish a relationship with the natives while learning about the land. These responsibilities took on

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[1] The geographic region called "Guiana" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries comprised all of the land between the Amazon and Orinoco river basins on the northeast coast of South America. The western boundaries were indeterminate, extending as far west as the Andes mountains.

even greater importance once permanent settlement became a possibility. Successful

contact in Guiana would involve not only economic reward, as in Russia and West Africa,

but an English transition from visitors to residents.[2]

The central figure behind the English effort to colonize Guiana in the late sixteenth

and early seventeenth century was Sir Walter Ralegh. Driven by ego, determination, and

the desire for self-preservation, the embattled Ralegh encompassed in a single individual

the overwhelming optimism and the ultimate defeat of English plans for Guiana. Privy to

Spanish accounts of the region as well as English privateers' reports of the apparent riches

of the Guiana coast, Ralegh believed that colonization would ensure England's proper

place at the head of all nations and secure his own status at the top of English society. In

this atmosphere of national and personal aggrandizement, the reality of first contact

brought the English dream crashing to earth. Like the complex river systems that only

reluctantly ushered the English into the inner recesses of Guiana, the English experience

was full of twists and turns, dangerous rocky outbreaks and smooth-flowing currents, with

the potential for disaster or great reward seemingly just around the next bend.

Unfortunately for the English, optimism gave way to disappointment after they repeatedly

traveled around the "next bend" only to find another twist in the turgid river.[3]

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[2] Lawrence Keymis argued forcefully for Guiana as the ideal location for English settlements, declaring "All that I can wish, is that my life were a sufficient pledge, to justify, how much more easy, and more material, the course for Guiana would be than others, which requiring greater charge, yield not so large benefit and are subject to more doubtful events." *PN*, 10: 442.

[3] Ralegh's personal troubles in England at the time are well known. The apparent failure of his Roanoke colony and his secret marriage to Elizabeth Throckmorton placed him out of Queen Elizabeth's favor, to say the least. Guiana offered a chance of

In Russia and West Africa, the initial English contact experience was dictated largely by the demands of trade. Negotiations with native merchants and leaders revolved around economic activities to the exclusion of virtually everything else. When Ivan continually pressed Elizabeth to form a military alliance in a pact of mutual protection, the English queen brushed off the Russian tsar's entreaties diplomatically but firmly. As long as trade was going well the English did not care to invest themselves more thoroughly in the native societies they visited. In Guiana, however, the entire context of first contact shifted from establishing economic ties to creating a permanent English colony in a far distant land. From the very beginning, English designs in Guiana focused on the need to establish a harmonious relationship with the natives and their environment.

i. Origins of the Dream

Although there was never a substantial effort to support English activities in Guiana, by the late sixteenth century the English began to show greater interest in the area. Ralegh's first expedition to Guiana arrived in 1595 and provided the information for his "Discoverie," published the following year. English investors financed Ralegh's early efforts with 60,000 pounds--a huge sum for the time--and expected a return on their investment. Ralegh sent a pinnace under the command of Lawrence Keymis to learn more about the country in 1596, an effort which was followed shortly by a similar expedition under Leonard Berry. The first colonization attempt, led by Charles Leigh, arrived in the

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redemption, or so Ralegh hoped.

Wiapoco River in 1604 and lasted two years before it was abandoned. In 1609 Roger Harcourt renewed colonization efforts on a small scale, establishing a settlement of about twenty colonists. These first tentative footholds in Guiana set the stage for later colonization attempts.[4]

English interest in establishing a permanent base in the Amazon region dates back as early as 1553. Sebastian Cabot, who was busy acting as an advocate and advisor to the English expeditions to Russia, took time to send Charles V of Spain a letter warning him that plans were afoot to "raise an expedition for the Amazon . . . in which were to go four thousand soldiers, besides the mariners." The goal of the proposed expedition, Cabot claimed, was to build a fort at the mouth of the Amazon as a base from which to attack Spanish territories in Peru, which was known to be a "country abounding with mines of gold and silver." Although the alleged plans never resulted in an actual voyage and may have been simply Cabot's ploy to win Charles's favor, the motivations outlined in Cabot's letter were the same ones that drove later English efforts in Guiana. By establishing their presence in South America, the English hoped to challenge Spanish dominance in the New World and to fill their coffers with as much gold as they could carry. Both goals proved elusive.[5]

Although Cabot's report may have been fabricated, the English did become

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[4] In comparison, Ralegh's efforts in Virginia eleven years earlier cost 40,000 pounds. See Charles Nicholls, *The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado* (New York: William Morrow, 1995), 22.

[5] Joyce Lorimer, ed. *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon,* 1550-1646 (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 2nd ser., v. 171, 1989), 128.

involved in the region by the late sixteenth century. The English were primarily interested in the West Indies as a potential base from which to engage in privateering. Since the Spanish had a virtual monopoly on trade with the natives of the circum-Caribbean by the late sixteenth century, English merchants could not hope to conduct trade as they had in Russia and West Africa. Instead, they intended to profit politically and economically by interdicting Spanish trade. Francis Drake's voyage in 1585 specifically intended to plunder the Spanish treasure fleet or to destroy enough Spanish cities en route to make a serious dent in the Spanish wealth flowing out of the area. By the 1580s, large and small English expeditions swarmed over the West Indies, raiding coastal towns, commandeering Spanish supply ships, and plundering the flotas returning to Spain with their holds filled with South American products. Other English voyages engaged in a contraband tobacco trade with Spanish settlements. Between 1589 and 1595, the English made at least seventy-seven voyages to the Caribbean. While most English sailors were content to act as parasites on the Spanish host, others began to look to the interior of South America for less risky sources of wealth.[6]

The Spanish had been sending expeditions to the interior of Guiana since the 1530s, searching for a civilization that allegedly matched the Inca's in wealth. After a series of sporadic and occasionally disastrous excursions to the interior, the Spanish effort to find riches in Guiana became the life's work of a single man, Antonio de Berrio. During three exploratory missions between 1584 and 1591, Berrio became the Spanish authority on the still largely unknown lands between the Amazon and the Orinoco.

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[6] Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 283.

Berrio's knowledge would prove invaluable to Walter Ralegh, affirming the Englishman's belief that Guiana would be the ideal location for an English settlement.[7]

Written accounts of Guiana during first contact offer conflicting visions of the English experience. Many reporters use the language of a "golden world" and describe what is essentially a dreamland of almost unimaginable richness and limitless possibilities. The English story of first contact is told in several forms, ranging from outright promotional pamphlets to letters and evidence arising from court cases. The most famous account of Guiana is Ralegh's *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*. Based on his experience during his first voyage, it is overtly promotional in tenor. Similarly, Roger Harcourt's 1613 treatise, *A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana* served both as a narrative of the author's experiences and as a passionate plea for English colonization of Guiana.

Unlike in Russia and West Africa, colonization figured into some English plans for Guiana from the outset. Since the presence of the Spanish made it difficult for the English to justify settlement through right of discovery, proponents of colonization sought other arguments to support their cause. Ralegh conceded that the Spanish were in Guiana before he arrived, but explained that "it seemeth to me that this empire is reserved for her Majesty and the English nation, by reason of the hard success which . . . [the] Spaniards found in attempting the same." Pro-colonization pleas took on greater urgency in 1596, when rumors spread that the Spanish had just prepared an expedition of six hundred people to settle Guiana. Lawrence Keymis wondered how the English could be so casual

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[7] Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 283.

about the situation; the Spanish were on the verge of settling Guiana "whilst we only to entertain idle time, sit listening for Guiana news, and instantly forget it, as if it were nought else, but a pleasing dream of a golden fancy." Action, not somnolence, was required to make English visions a reality.[8]

ii. Searching For El Dorado

One of the most important goals of these early efforts was to gather information about the environment. While the first English in Russia complained about the cold climate, they did not include detailed descriptions of the local environment in their reports back home. Likewise, English reports of the West African environment focused on the difficulty of keeping European visitors alive for the short time they were to live in the exotic land to trade. In both cases, successful contact required an adaptation to the demands of the particular environment. English people living in Russia as representatives of the Muscovy Company could adopt native clothing to ward off the cold. In Africa, English sailors and traders attempted to adapt their behavior to the tropical environment but were often baffled by the strange diseases that did not seem to respond to contemporary medical treatments. Instead, most expeditions adopted the strategy of avoiding contact with the environment as much as possible. The goal was to get in, trade, and get out quickly. In both Russia and West Africa, then, the English conceived of their presence in a foreign environment as temporary, requiring adjustments in behavior that

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[8] *PN*, 10: 362, 444.

could be discarded once the visitors returned to the familiar environment of England. Once the English began to discuss the possibility of establishing permanent colonies in distant lands, however, their assessment of the new environment was invested with greater importance.

In order for a foreign environment to be a successful candidate for English colonization, it had to meet two basic requirements. First, the land had to be fit for the particular "constitution" of the English people. Not only did the environment have to be free of such obvious dangers as disease, dangerous animals, and hostile natives, it had to allow settlers to replicate (and, if possible, improve upon) standard English institutions and economic activities such as farming. Secondly, the foreign environment had to offer some sort of economic reward for armchair investors and the colonists who risked their lives in the venture. This reward had to come in the form of a product that offered quick return, such as valuable minerals or easily gathered natural commodities. Long-term economic success was certainly an important aspect of prospective colonies, but investors did not want to wait years before seeing some benefit from their money. In Guiana, English visitors found an environment that, debatably, met the first requirement and held out hope for the second.

Early English accounts created two distinct images of the Guiana environment during first contact. One image created in the eloquent pleas of colonization proponents was comparable to the Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise. The second image, often hidden in the same accounts, was of a wild, dangerous land that challenged even the hardiest English adventurer. Permanent colonization would require a reconciliation of

these competing perceptions. Until the English learned how to operate in the environment, exaggerated claims of the perfection of the land would only serve to disappoint and discourage colonists who discovered that reality did not meet their inflated expectations. In some cases, misinformation about the environment had serious, even deadly consequences.

The existence of two different images of Guiana was not necessarily always due to the ulterior motives of the narrators. The environment of the region called Guiana varies considerably, from the marshy, tropical coastal lands to the open grasslands of the modern-day Venezuelan plains, or llanos. Rainfall in the Amazon region ranges from a drenching 3,000-4,000 millimeters to a moderate 1,500 millimeters annually, creating a bewildering morass of vegetation and animals to challenge the most attentive observer. The struggle for individual reporters such as Ralegh to encompass such variety in sweeping generalizations led to many misunderstandings that frustrated English efforts to establish a foothold in Guiana.[9]

As English ships approached the coast of Guiana, the adventurers caught their first glimpse of the land. For many English men and women, the sight was not welcoming. One of the most disconcerting features of the land for many English visitors was the tropical forest. John Wilson explained the uneasiness of prospective colonists who "did see at their landing only mountains and hills covered with woods. And for that the most part of them had been householders in England, not accustomed unto such a strange

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9 Anna Roosevelt, ed. *Amazonian Indians: From Prehistory to Present* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 3.

country or nation, nor such a diet, for which cause they were so much discontented, that they cried to their captain, home, home." During Robert Dudley's 1595 exploration of the Orinoco river, the soldiers were forced to walk single file since "the woods were so thick that we had all our long march but a footpath to pass through." Leigh faced a potential mutiny while trying to plant his colony when the men became "discomforted with the sight of the woods which they were to fell." The soldiers were alarmed not only by the arduous labor involved in such a task but also by the realization of the isolation involved in creating a new settlement. The raw wilderness of Guiana discouraged some English men and women before they had the opportunity to explore the land in greater detail.[10]

English travelers to Guiana were understandably apprehensive about the climate of the region even before they arrived. As experience in West Africa proved, countries near the Equator could be expected to have uncomfortable, potentially dangerously high temperatures. Roger Harcourt's 1613 tract arguing for a permanent English colony in Guiana confronted rumors that the land was too hot for English settlement. Based on his experience, Harcourt claimed that the climate in Guiana was "inferior to none other under Heaven." Harcourt acknowledged that his observations contradicted contemporary scientific thought, but explained that "such are the wonderful works of God for the benefit of man, that . . . we find by late experience, that those regions which were in times past . .

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[10] George F. Warner, ed., *The Voyage of Robert Dudley to the West Indies, 1594-95* (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 2nd ser., v. 3, 1899), 45; Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 16: 319, 338. Wilson attributed the potential mutiny in Leigh's expedition to the climate, "which is much hotter than ours" as well as discontent that the English settlers "were constrained to live in such manner as the Indians themselves do." Ibid., 338.

. accounted uninhabitable, through extremity of drought and heat; are now found out to be inhabited, temperate, and healthful countries." Surely, Harcourt and others argued, the temperate climate of Guiana was evidence that God intended the land to be settled by the English.[11]

English assessments of the salubrity of the Guiana environment received mixed reviews, depending largely on the perspective of the individual writing the account. To those who clearly favored colonization, the Guiana environment was extraordinarily healthy despite the hardships associated with living in any wilderness. Many colonization advocates pointed to the relatively low mortality rates among English visitors to Guiana. Harcourt pointed out that in the three years his settlement had existed, out of thirty settlers "there died but six, whereof one was drowned, another was an old man of threescore years of age, and another took his death by his own disorder." In attempting to prove the healthiness of the environment, Ralegh unintentionally supported those who criticized the land. According to Ralegh's own account,

> the country is so healthful, as of an hundred persons and more
> (which lay without shift most sluttishly, and were every day almost
> melted with heat in rowing and marching, and suddenly wet again
> with great showers, and did eat of all sorts of corrupt fruits, and
> made meals of fresh fish without seasoning, of tortoises, of lagartos
> or crocodiles, and of all sorts good and bad, without either order or
> measure, and besides lodged in the open air every night) we lost not
> any one, nor had one ill disposed to my knowledge.

While Ralegh saw the lack of illness as the most important aspect of his description, other participants in first contact focused on the uncomfortable and potentially dangerous

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[11] Roger Harcourt, *A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana*, Alexander Harris, ed. (London: Hakluyt Society Publications, 2nd ser., v. 60, 1928), 130.

features of the environment that Ralegh believed to be inconsequential.[12]

The consensus of most English reports on the Guiana environment was that, while fewer English visitors died in Guiana than in West Africa, it was hardly a healthy land. There were two environmental culprits that seemed to be the primary sources of English illness in Guiana: excessive rain and excessive heat. Shortly after arriving for his 1596 reconnaissance of Guiana, Lawrence Keymis and his men were subjected to such extreme rain and wind that they became weak and sick. "If we had stayed any longer time out," Keymis predicted, "I doubt whether the greatest part of us had ever come aboard again." Charles Leigh's colony struggled to survive in Guiana after many of the men became ill, "some of Agues, some of fluxes, some of giddiness in their heads, whereby they would often fall down." Leigh blamed the illnesses on "the excessive heat of the sun in the day, and the extreme damp of the earth." Despite Harcourt's assurance that the temperatures in Guiana were moderate, heat-related illnesses plagued the English throughout the contact period.[13]

Disease was the foremost concern of English colonization proponents, but there were other unattractive environmental features which had the potential to disrupt English plans. Pesky insects, vicious alligators, and dangerous man-eating animals were all said to

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[12] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 400; *PN*, 10: 426.

[13] *PN*, 10: 457; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 314; Other colonization advocates argued that the warm temperatures were actually an advantage for Guiana. Roger Harcourt's 1613 defense of Guiana compared the colony with other struggling English settlements, claiming that "surely, if Virginia had not a sharp winter, which Guiana hath not . . . it would in a short time grow to be a more profitable place." Harris, *Relation of a Voyage to Guiana*, 55.

inhabit Guiana, but perhaps the most gruesome pest was the tiny hookworm. Charles Leigh described the worm as being "like unto a flea, [which] would creep into the feet especially, and under the nails, and would exceedingly torment us." Lacking shoes, one of Leigh's men was so troubled by the worms that he agreed to submit to the local cure. With the assistance of a helpful native, the English man poured hot wax on his feet, pulling the wax off once it cooled. The result, as Leigh noted, was that "the worms came out sticking in the same, seven or eight hundred in number." Proper preparation, especially providing enough shoes and stockings for everyone, would help future expeditions to avoid the same mistakes Leigh's men made.[14]

In fact, the few natural inconveniences of Guiana were largely discounted in the face of overwhelming evidence of the almost paradisiacal environment described by most colonization supporters. While the coastal region might be "very unhealthful, and little inhabited, by reason of the overflowing of the waters," most of the rest of Guiana held great promise as an ideal setting for English colonies. Ralegh offered the most effusive praise of the land, clearly selling an image to potential colonists and investors. Like Arthur Barlowe's 1584 report describing the idyllic environment of Roanoke, Ralegh's account served to elevate the expectations of potential investors and colonists. The interior of Guiana, Ralegh claimed, was nothing short of a pastoral vision: "hills so raised

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[14] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 314. The unfortunate Englishman managed to relieve himself of the worms, only to drown later in the expedition. The English fear of alligators was understandable. Ralegh reported that "there were thousands of those ugly serpents" in some areas of Guiana. In one memorable instance, an African member of Ralegh's expedition went swimming and was "in all our sights taken and devoured with one of those lagartos." *PN*, 10: 388.

here and there over the valleys, the river winding into diverse branches, the plains

adjoining without bush or stubble, all fair green grass, . . . the deer crossing in every path,

the birds towards the evening singing on every tree with a thousand tunes." The image

was of an Arcadia where little effort could produce bountiful rewards. Far from the

untamed wilderness that might be expected in such a land, Roger Harcourt described the

mixture of fields, woods, and streams as being "in such admirable order, as if they had

been planted artificially by handy labor." All that was missing to complete the image was

a few fences and grazing animals, which the English could readily supply. The land fairly

cried out for English inhabitants to come make use of it, to fulfill the natural promise that

the Indians seemed willing to neglect.[15]

Like Africa, the exotic environment of Guiana encouraged the spread of fanciful

rumors of bizarre humans inhabiting the darkest regions of the land. After talking to

native informants, Ralegh learned of a "nation of people, whose heads appear not above

their shoulders." The "Ewaipanoma" had eyes in their shoulders and mouths in the middle

of their chests, which Ralegh believed to be true since "every child in the provinces of

Arromaia and Canuri affirm the same." Lest skeptical Englishmen accuse Ralegh of giving

unwarranted credence to children's fables, Lawrence Keymis independently confirmed his

employer's description in a subsequent expedition to Guiana. A native leader, Keymis

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[15] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 378, 369; *PN*, 10: 404; Nicholls, *Creature in the Map*, 296.
While Ralegh could easily apply the pastoral tradition to help him describe some aspects of
the Guiana environment, other features gave him more difficulty, especially those such as
waterfalls that did not match any previous experience. See Mary B. Campbell, *The
Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca:
Cornell University Press, 1988), 222-26.

claimed, "certified me of the headless men, and that their mouths in their breasts are exceeding wide." Unfortunately, neither Ralegh nor Keymis could personally witness the strange people, but both men were certain that future visitors would encounter the headless men, especially since the local Indians assured the English that "it is no matter of difficulty to get one of them."[16]

Ralegh's willingness, along with other Englishmen, to report the existence of apparently fanciful people inhabiting Guiana was not simply a European construct of "wonder" imposed upon the unfamiliar land. In fact, native informants using traditional Guianan lore actively shaped Ralegh's image of bizarre humans. When natives reported to the curious English that there were indeed men with heads in their chests, they were simply transmitting indigenous beliefs in men with heads on their chests, an effect created by paints and ceramics. Not coincidentally, the native informants identified an enemy group with whom they were engaged in a struggle to control local trade routes on the Orinoco River as the strange men. Sensing that the English might hold antipathy for the headless men, the natives encouraged the English belief. For their part, the English needed to find "wonderful" creatures to support their contention that Guiana was an exotic land that surely contained wonderful wealth. The stories of men with heads in their chests were common to European and Guianan traditions; through their discussion of the bizarre humans, both the English and the Guianans sought to appropriate traditional stories to

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[16] *PN*, 10: 406, 465.

serve their needs.[17]

Though the English never did find the headless men, they did find people in Guiana whom they considered almost as exotic. When the English first arrived, they encountered natives who were generally wary of making contact with the visitors. Ralegh learned one reason why the natives were apprehensive when he captured a group of Arawaks, who "feared that we would have eaten them, or otherwise have put them to some cruel death." Apparently, just before Ralegh arrived, the Spanish began spreading rumors that the English were cannibals, come across the ocean to eat the Guianans. The ploy was as effective as it was ironic; the natives, whom the English feared would try to eat them, fled the English, in fear of being eaten. Other natives the English encountered avoided the visitors because they had never seen Europeans before. The complex maze of rivers in Guiana made it possible for Europeans unfamiliar with the land to miss an entire native group even as they established a relationship with their neighbors on all sides. While exploring the river Arraway, Michael Harcourt discovered a group of Guianans "which never had seen white men, or Christians before, and could not be drawn to any familiar commerce, or conversation." Since these natives could not fulfill the English need for either trade partners or informants, Harcourt quickly ended his attempt to initiate contact.

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[17] Neil Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text: The Interpretation of Ralegh's Discoverie of Guiana." *Current Anthropology* 36:1(Feb 1995), 58; Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 112-13. Recent scholarly attention to the Europeans' sense of wonder upon encountering the New World tends to miss the native participation in the creation of "myths." For an otherwise excellent examination of European encounters, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Though Harcourt had only a limited encounter with this particular group of natives, the English had sufficient experience with other natives to develop a detailed image of the native inhabitants.[18]

English descriptions of Guianans' physical appearance downplayed the importance of color, focusing instead on the natives' nakedness. Most English observers agreed with John Wilson's claim that "the men and women go all naked without any coverture at all." Far from being embarrassed or ashamed of the exposure of their sexual organs, the natives seemed to deliberately accentuate their appearance. Although William Davies also described the natives as "altogether naked," he noted that native men

> taketh a round cane as big as a penny candle, and two inches in
> length, through the which he pulls the foreskin of his yard, tying the
> skin with a piece of the rind of a tree about the bigness of a small
> pack thread, then making it fast about his middle, he continueth
> thus until he have occasion to use him.

Davies' description of the penis sheath, typical of several different native groups in the Amazon region, was a combination of wonder at the strange custom and aversion to the apparent ease of sexuality that it implied.[19]

To English observers, who regarded nakedness as a sign of incivility, the fact that some natives did wear clothing proved not only that certain native groups were more civil than others but that the natives could be convinced to adopt clothing. Thomas Masham noted that the people of the lower regions of Guiana "go naked" but claimed that "in the upper countries they go appareled." While it would seem to make sense that the natives

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[18] *PN*, 10: 390; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 390.

[19] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 348; Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlement*, 143.

living in the cool temperatures of the upper elevations would cover themselves as a response to their environment, Masham asserted that this was evidence "of a more civil disposition." Even within native groups, the English argued, it was possible to determine the relative civility of individuals based on the amount of clothing they wore. Roger Harcourt observed that "the better sort of men . . . do cover their privities, by wearing over them a little piece of cloth." In fact, Harcourt encountered several native leaders who were "attired in old clothes, which they had gotten of certain English men who . . . had traded there the year before." Harcourt's observation was important not only for the implication that the Guianans were a potential market for English cloth but also for the recognition that if native leaders could adopt English styles of clothing, the rest of the natives would soon follow.[20]

While clothing could be used to distinguish native groups, the English also noticed that some native groups marked themselves with various body decorations. Lawrence Keymis advised that the Iaos Indians, who were English allies, could be recognized by their tattoos. "With the tooth of a small beast like a rat," Keymis explained, "they race some their faces, some their bodies, after diverse forms, as if it were with the scratch of a pin, the print of which rasure can never be done away again during life." Although the English did not recognize it, the location of the tattoo as well as the design helped differentiate native groups. Most tattoos were placed on the forearms and were associated with puberty ordeals or hunting rituals. None of these symbolic uses of tattoos mattered to the English, who viewed the designs as a convenient, if savage, mark of

[20] *PN*, 11: 13; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 362.

distinction between the natives and the English and among the various native groups.[21]

Another noticeable characteristic of many native groups was the piercing of various body parts and adornment with jewelry. Tupinamba Indians often pierced their lower lips and placed green stones in the hole, much to the revulsion of many English observers. John Ley noted with transparent disgust that the "Taparawacur" Indians, probably Tupinambas, used the green stones to force their lower lips "so low as their chin." Other natives found equally distracting uses for jewelry. William Davies reported a certain group of natives whose men pierced their ears and their lips, and "at the bridge of the nose he hangs in a reed a small glass bead or button, which hang[s] directly afore his mouth, flies to and fro still as he speaks, wherein he takes great pride and pleasure." Where the natives saw signs of beauty, symbolic power, and evidence of courage or hunting prowess, the English only saw disfigurement and evidence of excess pride.[22]

While tattooing and piercing indicated the natives' willingness to endure pain to achieve the desired beautiful or fierce appearance, English observers also noted the widespread native use of dyes to adorn their bodies. Many native groups, the English noted, "make their bodies and faces red all over." John Wilson believed that the natives "have a great delight to paint themselves both men and women, and especially when they go to any feast." While Wilson recognized the ceremonial uses of body dyes, William Davies claimed there was a more practical reason for anointing the skin with the red dye.

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[21] *PN*, 10: 457; *Handbook of South American Indians*, gen. ed. Julian Steward, 20 vols. (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1948), 3: 834.

[22] Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlement*, 135, 143.

According to Davies, anyone who applied the dye would soon learn that "the mosquitoes or flies shall not offend them." For the pestered English, the dye could serve as a last-ditch effort to ward off the insects that plagued them. Unlike tattooing or piercing, body dye was a temporary adornment that could be removed.[23]

English focus on superficial distinctions between themselves and the natives of Guiana was in part a function of the need to describe a people who were different but not too different. By noting the strange adornments, the English could put the natives in a separate category from themselves without suggesting that they were beyond hope of change. Given proper guidance, the English implied, the Guianans could remove the piercings and body dyes and hide the tattoos under English clothing to create a more "civil" appearance. If the natives could not change at all, they would have been a major problem for the success of permanent colonies, reminding the settlers that "savagery" was nearby. Although no English man or woman would have argued that a simple change in outward appearance could have brought the Guianans to an equal status with Europeans, the notion that some of the natives' strangeness could be reduced through a change in attire reassured apprehensive colonists that Guiana could eventually become anglicized.

In the mean time, superficial differences could serve a valuable purpose in clearly defining the natives as non-English. The overwhelming presence of strange clothing, jewelry, and body designs created an image of Guianan natives physical appearance as so different that skin color was virtually unmentioned. In fact, very few English accounts of

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[23] Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlement*, 136, 348, 144. Use of body and face paint was widespread in the Amazon region. The most common pigment is red urucu extracted from the seeds of *Bixa orellana*. See *HSAI*, 3: 20.

first contact contain references to the color of native skin underneath all of the dye and

other distracting features. Francis Sparrey reported that the natives living in the llanos

region of modern-day Venezuela were "something black," but he was relying on second-

hand information. Ralegh described natives of different regions as having "tawny" skin.[24]

Ralegh's descriptions of native physical appearance often offered an idealized

picture of Guianans, regardless of skin color. According to Ralegh, the native men were

pictures of good health and solid stature. The men living near the Orinoco River had such

strong physical presence that Ralegh claimed that "in all my life, either in the Indies or in

Europe, did I never behold a more goodly or better favored people or a more manly."

Clearly, Ralegh's need to create an image of Guiana as an ideal location for a colony gave

him incentive to exaggerate their healthy appearance. The implication was that if the

Indians could be such excellent physical specimens, any English people living in Guiana

would surely prosper, especially after introducing English crops and domesticated animals.

In fact, Ralegh maintained that the natives of Guiana were not much different physically

from the English. This observation was important since one of the fears of potential

English colonists was that the environment of exotic lands would somehow cause future

generations to deteriorate, eventually losing the physical and mental superiority that the

ideal English environment harbored. For Ralegh, differences of skin color were de-

emphasized in order to highlight the similarities in physical appearance of the English and

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[24] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 303; *PN*, 10: 376.

natives.[25]

In fact, Ralegh's only suggestion that skin color might be an important line of distinction between the English and natives came only when he was describing native women. Ralegh praised the beauty of many women in Guiana. One woman in particular warranted special acknowledgment, a woman who "was very pleasant, knowing her own comeliness, and taking great pride therein." To further emphasize his favorable assessment of the woman, Ralegh claimed that "I have seen a Lady in England, so like to her, as but for the difference of color, I would have sworn might have been the same." Ralegh was treading on dangerous ground here. By comparing the native woman favorably not only to an English woman but a noblewoman at that, Ralegh risked offending the very people he was trying to get to support future expeditions. Admiring descriptions of native women's appearance also raised the specter of interracial sexual relationships, which were strictly prohibited. By clearly noting the "difference of color," Ralegh replaced the native woman in an untouchable category, despite all other physical similarities. English attention to issues of gender permeated all of their interactions in Guiana, from individual meetings with native women to the colonial experience as a whole. [26]

As English sailors approached the coast of Guiana, the very environment seemed to call out for a masculine English intervention to help it reach its full potential. Ralegh's

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[25] *PN*, 10: 384. For the influence of the environment on the "degeneration" of English colonists, see Chapter Six below.

[26] *PN*, 10: 394, 376.

famous observation that "Guiana is a Countrey that hath yet her Madenhead" was only one of many references that sexualized the New World environment. Lawrence Keymis argued forcefully that it was England's duty to populate Guiana; while people back in England fought bitterly over a tiny plot of land, in Guiana "whole shires of fruitful rich grounds, lying now waste for want of people, do prostitute themselves unto us, like a fair and beautiful woman, in the pride and flower of desired years." Setting aside Keymis's obvious refusal to acknowledge the existence of a large native population, his gendered metaphor assigns high priority to the need to establish an English (male) presence in the Americas. The consequences of failing such an obligation were disastrous: unused, the virgin land was so desirous of attention that it threatened to descend into prostitution.[27]

Proponents of an increased English presence in Guiana fashioned the intervention as a masculine defense not only of the feminized landscape but of helpless Indian women and children. Virtually every early account included testimony from native men begging the English to come protect them from the depredations of the Spanish. Native men (and English narrators) appealed to the English sense of manly obligations to protect women. After listing a series of Spanish abuses, one Indian man noted "that which is worst of all, [is] to be content, for safety of their lives, to leave their women, if a Spaniard chance but to set his eye on any of them to fancy her." Native men also put their wives and daughters at risk by leaving their women alone for extended periods while they went off to fight the

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[27] Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of Guiana* [1596] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968, 96; *PN*, 10: 487. For a discussion of Ralegh's use of sexual metaphors, see Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations*, 33(Winter, 1991), 1-41.

ubiquitous battles with other natives. Clearly, the English reporters argued, Indian men were not capable of meeting their responsibility of protecting their women and children from the dishonorable Spanish. In the absence of a strong male presence, it was the English duty to step in and fulfill the male role as protector.[28]

English fears of being compared with the Spanish led to the heightened attention to native women's sexuality in North and South America. Sixteenth-century English men and women did not have a high opinion of the Spanish in general, and early reports of Spanish activities in the New World only confirmed the English judgement. When English sailors arrived in South America, native men and women immediately began listing a litany of abuses suffered at the hands of the Spanish. To both the English and the native Americans, the most egregious Spanish offenses were directed towards native women. One of the first natives Lawrence Keymis met in Guiana was the leader of a group of northeast coastal Indians on the move because "when the Spaniards first began to borrow some of their wives, they all agreed to change their habitation" and move towards the Amazon River. The final event which prompted the relocation came a few years earlier, when a group of Spanish men attempted to abduct one of the leader's wives. The Indians responded by ambushing the retreating Spanish and killing ten of them while wounding the rest. Afterwards, the leader "thought it best to dwell far enough from them."[29]

If the testimony of aggrieved Indians was not enough to convict the Spanish of sexual impropriety with native women, the physical evidence was overwhelming. When

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[28] *PN*, 10: 472.

[29] *PN*, 10: 455.

Richard Hakluyt published Miles Philip's memoir of his 1568 visit to New Spain, readers

could see for themselves the deleterious effects of miscegenation. Philips estimated there

were 20,000 mestizos in New Spain, creating, in his opinion, an undue burden on society.

It was easy to see how a mestizo population could quickly grow after Keymis reported

that "notwithstanding their profession of Christianity, some of the Spaniards keep ten or

twelve women, thinking themselves well and surely blessed, howsoever they live, if their

town and houses be religiously crossed." Keymis's anti-Catholic bias is evident, but his

condemnation was directed at the hypocrisy of any Christian having sexual relations with

native women.[30]

While English visitors emphasized the moral laxity of Spanish men, they also noted

that Indian men occasionally viewed women as a sort of commodity to be exchanged or

appropriated. English observers often cited the abduction of native women as a primary

cause of Indian warfare. Ralegh encountered a cacique who "yielded for a chief cause that

in the wars with the Epuremei, they were spoiled of their women, and that their wives and

daughters were taken from them." The Indian leader went on to explain that "they war

more for women, then either gold or dominion. For the Lords of the countries desire

many children of their own bodies, to increase their race and kindreds, for in those consist

their greatest trust and strength." Captive native women were not only important for the

symbolic value involved in any kidnapping but particularly desirable for their reproductive

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[30] David Smits, "'Abominable Mixture': Toward the Repudiation of Anglo-Indian Intermarriage in Seventeenth-Century Virginia." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95: 2 (April 1987), 162; *PN*, 10: 463.

capacity.[31]

English reactions to the commodification of native women varied from casual acceptance to indignation. Francis Sparrey, an Englishman set ashore during Ralegh's 1595 voyage to Guiana, seemed to have little problem adopting the native attitude towards captives. During his travels, Sparrey came across the town of Camahla, "a place where they sell Women at certain times, in the manner of a Fair." Sparrey matter-of-factly reported that he "bought eight young Women, the eldest whereof I think never saw eighteen years, for one red-hasted knife which in England cost me one half-penny." Lest readers think that the trade in women was entirely a male-dominated enterprise, Sparrey noted that he ended up giving the women away to a few of his native friends at the request of "Warituc the Kings Daughter of Murrequito." Though he did not purchase any Indian women, Anthony Knivet was offered several wives as a reward for helping the Tamoye Indians fight off intruders from a rival group. Knivet refused, explaining that "it was not our custom to take wives out of our country." By appealing to English marital conventions, Knivet was able to circumvent native traditions that considered the presentation of women as gifts to be a great honor without offending his hosts.[32]

While English men were surprised to discover that native men regarded women as tokens, they were particularly critical of the gender division of labor in Guiana. To Englishmen observing native work patterns in Guiana, it appeared that Indian women performed virtually all the vital labor involved in maintaining a subsistence household,

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[31] Ralegh, *Discoverie*, 78.

[32] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 306-7.

while men did not even condescend to acknowledge women's contribution. Robert Harcourt claimed that "their wives (especially the elder sort) are as servants unto them, for they make their bread and drink, dress their meat, serve them at meals, and do all the other business about the house."[33] Men's labor seemed to be a vacation compared to the drudgery of women's work. Ralegh noted with a certain amount of contempt that "the men do nothing but hunt, fish, play, and drink, when they are out of the wars." The overwhelming amount of women's labor could have real consequences for Englishmen attempting to establish permanent settlements in the New World. Charles Leigh wrote his brother from Guiana: "I pray you sir send me more Weavers, for I know not how to get anything spun for them, for the women here are put to that extreme labor, that they have no time to spin." English settlers could not exploit native women's labor if Indian men already monopolized all of their wives' time with their own demands.[34]

Despite their professed dismay at the perceived inequality of Guianan men and women's labor, the English may actually have contributed to a growing disparity between the valuation of native labor. Traditional male activities such as hunting and warfare were facilitated by European manufactures in the post-contact world to a greater extent than were female activities. Native participation in trade relations with the visiting Europeans also privileged male power to make economic alliances with people outside the kin group. Through their interactions with the Guianans, the English favored male dominance and

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[33] *PN*, 10: 372. One wonders how much of Harcourt's description of Indian women's drudgery an English housewife would recognize as her own daily labors.

[34] Ralegh, *Discoverie*, 92; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 321.

dramatically, if unintentionally, altered native gender relations.[35]

Although English activities may have given native men more power relative to native women in the long term, the English were surprised at the gender-bending behavior of some Guianans. One of the native Guianan traditions that sparked the most interest among English male observers was the ritual associated with childbirth. English opinions on the subject varied from amusement to incredulity. Though the specific rituals varied in each tribal group, most had some aspects in common. As Anthony Knivet recorded:

> When the time commeth that any woman is to be delivered of child
> birth, she will go to the door and as soon as the Infant is born,
> presently the Father lyeth down in the net (as women do with us in
> child bed) and is visited by all his neighbors, and his wives serves
> him diligently.

English men, who were themselves usually far removed from the actual birth of their own children, were amazed to see native men presume to participate in childbirth, if only symbolically. Native taboos that regulated behavior both before and after birth were also the targets of English ridicule and suspicion. In most native groups, "no Indian, when his wife is great with child, will kill anything, fish nor flesh if it be female; for he believeth that if he should kill anything breeding, that for it his child should die." Dismissed as superstition, the native rituals seemed to have no significance beyond serving as more evidence of native ignorance and heathenism.[36]

Native American men's participation in the birthing ritual seemed particularly

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[35] Neil Whitehead, "The Ancient Amerindian Polities of the Amazon, the Orinoco, and the Atlantic Coast: A Preliminary Analysis of Their Passage from Antiquity to Extinction," in Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians*, 44.

[36] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 246, 247.

ridiculous to English observers who maintained that native women did not even experience much hardship in giving birth. The contrast was great indeed: while the men retired to a hammock and wallowed in the attentions of concerned women, their wives simply disappeared into the woods or a prepared room and came back with an infant. John Wilson, who claimed to have great knowledge of native birthing rituals, asserted that he "did not hear the women, once so much as to groan, or to make any moan at all in her time of travail." There were several reasons why English observers might be led to believe that native women experienced little if any pain in birth. One answer might be that English men saw native women as more animalistic and therefore less likely to have the pain of childbirth that was created as a punishment for Eve's transgressions. A simpler answer is that, as most observers noted, native women usually retired to the woods or to a separate building to give birth. Since men were rarely within earshot of a woman in labor, they would not have witnessed any expressions of pain.[37]

Perhaps the most famous group of women purported to exist in Guiana were, of course, the Amazons. The Amazon myth had a long and distinguished history well before the first Europeans arrived in the New World. Amazonian women made frequent appearances in classical tales and became an accepted part of travel literature. The

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[37] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 338-51, 348; A third answer, of course, is that native women did not in fact experience as much pain as European women due to various factors such as birthing position and amount of physical exercise before giving birth. While this argument may have some merit, cultural factors weighed heavily in both the assessment and experience of the birthing process and the expression of pain in general. On the childbirth experience in Europe, see Linda Pollack, "Embarking on a Rough Passage: The Experience of Pregnancy in Early Modern Society," in Valerie Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (New York, 1990), 45.

account of Marco Polo's travels described women living by themselves on an island in the Arabian Sea who cohabited with men from a near-by island for three months each year. John Mandeville was a little less clear on the precise location of Amazonia or Feminye, an island somewhere to the east which was the home of a militant group of women. While classical and medieval authors could not agree on the geographical location of an Amazonian society, popular belief and a significant body of scholarly work held that, in all likelihood, such a society did exist.[38]

Since such an exotic group of people must inhabit an exotic land, the sometimes mysterious New World environment seemed to be an ideal candidate to support the fabled group of women. Ralegh certainly believed this to be the case, despite the fact that he never saw any Amazons in person. Nevertheless, he reported that the Amazons lived "on the south side of the river in the Provinces of Tapago and their chiefest strengths . . . are in the Islands situate on the south side of the entrance." Ralegh's observations were the most specific yet to argue that the Amazons were not a myth. A trustworthy Indian claimed, and Ralegh believed, that the Amazons "do accompany with men but once a year, and for the time of one month, which I gather by their relation to be in April." The results of this consummation were mixed: if the woman gave birth to a son, they returned the child to the father; if the child was a girl, the Amazons rewarded the father with a present and then raised the child on their own. Ralegh was careful to point out that he was not so gullible as to believe all the myths surrounding Amazons, however, and remarked that "that the[y]

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[38] Abby Wettan Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983): 72-92 passim.

cut of[f] the right dug of the breast I do not find to be true."[39]

The fact that Ralegh relied on native informants for his description of Guianan Amazons reveals that fear of female-led societies was not limited to anxiety-ridden European males. The natives of Guiana had their own version of the Amazon story that pre-dated the European arrival. Just as the European sex/gender system was under increased scrutiny in the mid-sixteenth century, Guianan men faced challenges to their authority within native society. Native women's contribution of small fish to the Guianan diet may have caused increasing gender antagonism as native women's importance in securing sustenance increased. In their mutually constructed description of Amazon women, English and Guianan men were expressing common concerns about gender roles in their respective societies.[40]

Ralegh's concern with being as accurate as possible when describing the Amazons was due to the contradictory images the all-female society evoked in contemporary England. Elizabethan literature was full of references to the Amazons, as were travel narratives. Given the wider concern with changing gender roles in sixteenth-century England, it is no surprise that the prospect of a society of powerful women living without male guidance summoned up ambiguous feelings in many Englishmen. After all, English men and women lived in a society which was ruled by a strong woman; the existence of Amazons somehow suggested the negation of men, if not in fact then in terms of power. Direct comparisons between Queen Elizabeth and Amazons increased after the defeat of

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[39] Ralegh, *Discoverie*, 23-4.

[40] Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text," 58-59.

the Spanish Armada in 1588, but very few English writers were willing to make the connection and the queen herself seems to have rejected the notion. English sailors traveling to the North American coast also kept their eyes open for any sign of an all-female society but were less certain than Ralegh that such a place existed.[41]

Though the English were concerned that the existence of an all-female society might suggest that the natives of Guiana were to be feared, English assessment of the Indians primarily emphasized what the visitors perceived to be the natives' best qualities. In general, the English had a favorable impression of the native character, but they did notice some variation between different groups. Cruising along the Orinoco, Ralegh encountered the "Tivitivas," who were "a very goodly people and very valiant." John Wilson noted that at the English settlement at Wiapoco there were "three sorts" of Indians:

> the Yayes are a people very proud, and use much flouting and
> mocking of others, much given unto dancing, and are full of
> merriment, very ingenious, and very kind of nature. The Arawaks
> are a people of better carriage, and did use our company with better
> respect than the Yayes . . . the Suppayes are a people more crafty in
> their dealings, for they will not part with anything, but will have
> commodities for commodities.

Not surprisingly, the natives who gave the English the most difficult time trading were characterized with the worst attributes. But compared with the English vitriol against the character of the Russian people, the Guianans seemed to be an almost ideal group. Early

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[41] Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies," 66; Winifred Schleiner, "Divina Virago: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon." *Studies in Philology,* 75: 2(1978), 180. Ralegh's well-known troubles with Queen Elizabeth at this time may have made him even more sensitive to issues of gender and power than most of his contemporaries.

accounts of the natives do not contain abrasive condemnations of Guianan religion, government, or society.[42]

The issue of the natives' religion took on much greater significance once the English began to contemplate establishing permanent colonies in distant lands. The Russian version of Orthodox Christianity could simply be ridiculed or condemned and West African religious beliefs could be virtually overlooked since the English did not intend to settle these regions. Colonization forced the English to assess not only the natives' spiritual values but their own. All English colonization proponents agreed that converting the "heathen" natives was one of the most important goals of the settlements in the New World. Beyond simply saving the souls of otherwise damned peoples, conversion was a major step towards "civilizing" the natives, bringing them more in line with the English way of living. Conversion could help reduce the cultural distance between English settlers and their native neighbors, lowering the threat of native rebellion and the even more insidious, often unspoken fear that familiarity with seductive pagan beliefs might cause unwary English men and women to slip away from their Christian moorings.

Before they could begin the process of converting the natives, the English had to assess the Guianans' religious beliefs. The most difficult task for English observers was to determine what exactly constituted native religious behavior. Roger Harcourt wrote that "as touching religion, they have none amongst them, that I could perceive" and then

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[42] *PN*, 10: 382; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 347. The "Tivitivas" Ralegh described were probably Warao Indians. Nicholl, *Creature in the Map*, 130-33.

proceeded to offer some of the most detailed English descriptions of religion in Guiana. Harcourt and other Englishmen described a native religion, which they usually dismissed as "superstition," replete with deities, rituals, and an understanding of the creation and afterlife. Many English accounts claimed that the Guianans worshiped devils who could foretell the future and intervene in daily life. Other English reports claimed that the Guianans worshiped the sun, which was perhaps less threatening than worshiping the Devil, but to English eyes was still an error to be corrected.[43]

Clearly, the English knew that they had to address native religion if they were going to live in Guiana, but most observers agreed that a cautious approach was required during first contact. When Walter Ralegh learned that the natives often buried riches with their dead, he wisely passed up a desperately needed source of revenue in order to maintain good relations. Ralegh reasoned that "if we should have grieved them in their religion at first, before they had been taught better, and have digged up their graves, we had lost them all." Teaching the natives true religion involved recruiting clergymen to travel to Guiana. In a letter to England, Charles Leigh requested that his brother "send preachers, sober and discreet men, and such as are well persuaded of the Church government in England." Such men could bring the true faith to the natives while enforcing a sense of good order and hierarchy in the English settlements.[44]

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[43] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 377, 345; *PN*, 10: 464, 422. Though religious beliefs varied throughout Guiana, there were some characteristics which were common to all native groups in the region. Belief in animism was widespread, and ancestor worship and tribal heroes were important components of many groups. For a discussion of native religion, see HSAI, 3: 855-57.

[44] *PN*, 10: 425; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 323.

Leigh's request for Anglican missionaries demonstrated another important motivation for religious conversion of the natives: competition with the Spanish. Part of the English strategy in occupying Guiana was to argue that the Spanish had neglected the obligation to bring Christianity to the inhabitants. Lawrence Keymis charged that the Spanish "have in their doings preached naught else but avarice, rapine, blood, death, and destruction to those naked sheeplike creatures of God" in the Americas. The Spanish failure to convert natives was even more appalling to the English because the Guianans themselves seemed interested in learning about the visitors' religion. Harcourt claimed that conversion would be made easy since the natives "in a sort acknowledge their ignorance." Leigh claimed that the Guianans asked him "to send into England, for men to teach them to pray."[45]

Though the English were not able to identify the religious significance of many native ceremonies, they did notice that the Guianans had frequent festivals. Like the Russians, the Guianans were notable in English eyes for their excessive consumption of alcohol. Many early accounts describe English observers coming across a group of inebriated Guianans. Thomas Masham recalled approaching an Arawak town, "finding the people something pleasant, having drunk much that day, being as it seemed a festival day with them." Occasionally, Englishmen joined in the celebration, drinking until they were also "reasonable pleasant." After witnessing the drunken behavior at a funeral feast, Harcourt claimed that in alcohol consumption, the Guianans "exceeded all other nations whatsoever, accounting him that will be drunk first, the bravest fellow." Despite some

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[45] *PN*, 10: 488; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 311.

visitors' disapproval of the behavior, native use of alcohol in Guiana did not arouse the harsh condemnation it did in Russia. While the English identified a connection between drunkenness and violence, poverty, and religious deviance in Russia, they generally saw alcohol in Guiana in its celebratory function. As long as the Guianans did not allow their drunken behavior to disrupt their relationship with other people, the English did not feel obliged to alter a custom that by all accounts made the natives more pleasant.[46]

Just as the consumption of alcohol did not evoke the same reaction in Guiana as it did in Russia, the English were less critical of Guianan government. To English observers, native government in Guiana was much more similar to the West African's than to either their own or Russian forms of government. Like West Africa, Guiana was populated with "stateless" societies, with no clear hierarchy between native groups. The basic social unit was a settlement of fifteen to fifty members, rarely more than one hundred. Each group was led by a head man who was often advised by the older men of the group, but formal councils were not typical of this region. Roger Harcourt explained that "there is no settled government amongst them, only they acknowledge a superiority, which they will obey only was far as they please." The only noticeable mark of distinction between leaders and their followers was a few adornments. William Davies advised that the "king" of each group could be identified by a "crown of parrot's feathers" and a "chain of lion's teeth or claws" around his waist. Since the Guiana leaders seemed to lack the formal symbols of authority typical in England and other European countries, English

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[46] *PN*, 11: 7; *PN*, 10: 393; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 377.

visitors often assumed that native government was weak.[47]

Despite the lack of European trappings of power and authority, Guianan leaders exercised considerable control over their people and territories. Leadership in native societies was recognized on the basis of authority in two related realms: trading-military and theocratic-genealogical. Natives accumulated political power by building personal followings through manipulation of genealogy, warfare, or the display of special knowledge, including prophesy, the manufacture and use of poison, or sacred rituals. Through the creation of extended economic relationships, the Guianans developed a complex system of governance before the English arrived. Native chieftaincies encompassed several different levels of governance, from individual villages to a lordship comprising several river systems.[48]

The English were impressed with the great respect accorded leaders in Guiana. Ralegh was particularly taken with Topiawari, a native leader he encountered while exploring the Orinoco. After interrogating Topiawari about the land and its inhabitants, Ralegh "marveled to find a man of that gravity and judgement, and of so good discourse, that had no help of learning nor breed." Since "learning and breed" helped distinguish English leaders from their followers, the English were amazed to discover that there were

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[47] Alvin Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana, 1580-1803* (Barbados: Carib Research, 1987), 8; *HSAI*, 3: 849; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 372; Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlement*, 145. For a recent discussion of native government in Guiana, see Neil Whitehead, "Ancient Amerindian Polities," in Anna Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to the Present* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994): 33-53.

[47] Whitehead, "The Ancient Amerindian Polities," in Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians*, 39-40.

other traits that could determine a legitimate leader. John Wilson described a ceremony

in which the natives who were about to go to war chose their captain by whipping the

candidate until they drew blood, and even then the captain "never once moveth thereat.

By these means," Wilson suggested, "they try his patience and courage." For Guianans,

leadership rested in action rather than pedigree. The English came to appreciate the

Guianans' hands-on approach to leadership, particularly on the many occasions when they

needed native assistance.[49]

Given the convoluted geography of the region and the confusing number of native

groups, it is not surprising that native informants were more important in Guiana than in

any other region during the first contact period. Try as they might, the English often

found it impossible to distinguish one turn in a river from another. Lost exploring

expeditions risked becoming separated from the main group, exposing themselves to

potential attack from the Spanish or native enemies. During Lawrence Keymis's 1596

reconnaissance mission, a pinnace that had been separated from the group off the coast of

England eventually made it to Guiana, only to become lost searching for the pre-

determined meeting place on the Orinoco. After struggling for four weeks, the sailors in

the pinnace "were enforced to borrow a [native] pilot against his will" to direct the

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[49] *PN*, 10: 401; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 345. The use of the word "captain" to describe
native leaders seems to have come from the Guianans themselves. Ralegh claimed that
native leaders "are called in their own language Acarewana, and now of late since English,
French, and Spanish are come among them, they call themselves Captains, because they
perceive that the chiefest of every ship is called by that name." *PN*, 10: 353. Ralegh's
observations about the nature of native leadership may have been a sly criticism of English
leaders. As a "man of action," Ralegh took pride in his own ability to lead by example
rather than through formal education or an inherited position.

Englishmen to the river. Without the native guide, the pinnace would have been forced to attempt to return to England alone, a dangerous proposition given the prevalence of privateers in the Caribbean.[50]

Besides simply escorting the English to their destinations, native guides were crucial as interpreters of the diverse languages of the region. The most valuable interpreters were natives who had actually lived in England before being returned to Guiana to assist the English trade and colonization efforts. Some interpreters were better than others, even gaining a reputation for their skills. Charles Leigh pleaded for his brother to "procure Sir Walter Ralegh's Indian . . . for I want an interpreter exceedingly, here is but one, and he understandeth but little to any purpose." Roger Harcourt had the benefit of encountering a native who had apparently been living with John Gilbert in England before returning to Guiana, where he was "a great help to us, because he spoke our language much better than either of those that I brought with me." Interpreters were of little value if they could not clearly communicate one side of the conversation.[51]

From their experience during first contact in West Africa, the English had learned that simply abducting natives from their homeland and forcing them to become interpreters could be a dangerous proposition. Keymis pointed out that the Guianans are "impatient of

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[50] Keymis claimed that after the native pilot brought the English safely to the Orinoco "I would have returned him with reward to his contentment, but he would not." *PN*, 10: 477.

[51] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 323, 361. Acting as a guide could be dangerous for the natives. Ralegh's Indian pilot Ferdinando was attacked by a group of natives incensed that he had "brought a strange nation into their territory, to spoil and destroy them." Ferdinando eventually escaped his attackers and rejoined the English. *PN*, 10: 371.

such a wrong, as to have any of their people perforce taken from them, and will doubtless seek revenge." For evidence, Keymis reminded his colleagues that "the example of the like practice upon the coast of Guinea, in the year 1566 . . . may serve for our warning to look for no good, before they be satisfied for this injury." By making specific reference to George Fenner's difficulties in West Africa, Keymis hoped to encourage the English not to make the same mistakes. Thirty years after the disaster which brought the first contact period to an end in West Africa, the English needed to apply lessons learned the hard way to their conduct in Guiana.[52]

Although native guides who understood English were especially valuable, other native informants were important for their knowledge of their own country. Ralegh quickly learned that it would be impossible to travel extensively in Guiana in the short time he was there, especially once the rainy season made the rivers impassable. Instead, Ralegh adopted a strategy in which he "sought out all the aged men, and such as were great travelers" to learn about the geography and inhabitants of various regions. Roger Harcourt used native informants more than he originally intended; shortly after arriving in Guiana, it began raining so hard that the members of his group were "constrained to lie still and do nothing for the space of three weeks or a month." During this time Harcourt "conferred with the Indians" and learned "the state of the country; the manner of the government and living; how they stood with their neighbors in terms of peace, and war;

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[52] *PN*, 10: 477. Like their counterparts in West Africa, English expedition leaders in Guiana left crew members behind to learn the local languages and customs. In 1595, Ralegh left sixteen-year-old Hugh Goodwin behind to learn the language; Goodwin apparently lived only a few days or weeks before "tigers" attacked and killed him. Nicholls, *Creature in the Map*, 254.

and of what power and strength they were." Harcourt also learned about native food, commodities, and the climate during these discussions. In fact, the bulk of Harcourt's report was based on information gleaned by talking to Guianans rather than first-hand experience.[53]

Some of the information gathered in these discussions served as immediate practical advice to help make the English experience as painless as possible. Careful consultation with native informants could quickly reveal cures for any ailments that might arise as the English traveled through the unfamiliar environment. Ralegh described a notoriously dangerous river in interior Guiana, whose red-colored waters infected unsuspecting Europeans "with a grievous kind of flux." After asking the local natives how they managed to use the water without harm, Ralegh learned that "after the sun was near the middle of the sky, they used to fill their pots and pitchers with the water, but either before that time, or towards the setting of the sun it was dangerous to drink of, and in the night strong poison." Wilson was convinced that the natives knew of cures for various illnesses but refused to share the information with the English. By establishing a friendly relationship with the natives, they believed, the settlers could overcome the inconveniences of the environment.[54]

The natives of Guiana were important to the English not only as informants but as a steady source of vital supplies. Long-term stays in Guiana required that the English either discover a reliable source of subsistence on their own, or enlist the natives in

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[53] *PN*, 10: 371; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 367.

[54] *PN*, 10: 370; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 342.

providing food and other necessary products. The natives as well as the Europeans were keenly aware of the power this dependency bestowed upon the Guianans. Just as the West Africans could hurt European visitors simply by refusing to trade, in Guiana the natives could always exercise the option of refusing to supply European interlopers. According to Keymis, one of the reasons that the Spanish had not established a strong foothold in Guiana was that Antonio de Berrio "hath spent his time altogether in purveying of victuals, whereof there is such a scarcity, by reason that the Indians forsaking their houses, have not this half year planted any of their grounds, so that the Spaniards are enforced to seek their bread far off, and content themselves with little." While Keymis included this account to demonstrate the natives' dislike of the Spanish, the English also fell victim to similar behavior. John Ley's 1598 expedition to the Amazon went without much success because "the Indians thereabouts would not abide us, wherefore my men were discouraged, especially because our victuals were well spent." Clearly, any successful English colony would have to have the cooperation of at least one native group willing to supply the visitors with sufficient food to support a settlement through the early stages.[55]

Occasionally, native resistance came in the form of outright violence. John Ley was surprised to learn that the natives of the Amazon region were widely disparate in their initial treatment of the English. One group of natives, he noted, suddenly appeared with "their bows and arrows ready to shoot" without any apparent provocation. But other Indians "not a league off entreated our men well, and sought to avoid all suspicion of evil

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[55] *PN*, 10: 471; Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlements*, 133.

doing." The English could not predict whether the natives living around the next bend would be friendly or hostile based on their neighbors' behavior, adding to the general sense of unease for the visitors. Colonists also feared that their peaceful relationship with surrounding natives could descend into violence at any time. Charles Leigh learned of an apparent plot led by one of his native interpreters to remove his colony while they were still weak. Although the alleged betrayal never came to fruition, the incident reminded the English that they were vastly outnumbered, in a precarious position which could collapse at any moment.[56]

To help ensure that the Guianans would maintain a harmonious relationship with the English, expedition leaders needed to control the behavior of the men (and later women) under their charge. The earliest expeditions contained a wide variety of participants. A surprising number of members of the gentry made the voyage to Guiana, looking for adventure and riches. English ships also carried Africans, Indians, and various Europeans to the land. The majority of the people involved in the exploratory and colonization efforts, however, were common soldiers, sailors, and laborers, some let out of prison to assist the English mission. According to the somewhat biased accounts left by English leaders, the majority of their workers were a motley crew who had to be kept under constant supervision.

The narratives of first contact suggest that relations among the English were kept

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[56] Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlements*, 133-34. The alleged plotter in Leigh's case was foiled when a group of native women heard of the plot. The wives of native men living with the English as pledges "ran furiously upon him and tore his clothes such as he wore from him, and mightily beat him." Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 315. The women feared that the English would seek revenge for the plot by killing their husbands.

just below the boiling point in many groups. Expedition leaders did not trust their workers and struggled to exert control over the sometimes unruly bunch. Sailors and soldiers were under explicit orders not to upset the natives by stealing anything; Francis Wyatt recalled that during Dudley's expedition, "our soldiers were not permitted to take anything" since the leaders were "desirous to bring the Indians to converse with us in all kind of familiarity." At the same time, an exasperated Ralegh admitted that "I confess it was a very impatient work to keep the meaner sort from spoil and stealing" native goods. The men's behavior only confirmed the typically low English appraisal of the qualities of the average sailor and soldier. Acknowledging that he could not prevent the misbehavior of all of his charges, Ralegh claimed that "I caused by Indian interpreter at every place where we departed, to know of the loss or wrong done, and if ought were stolen or taken by violence, either the same was restored, and the party punished in their sight, or else was paid for "to their uttermost demand." Again, the English seem to have been trying to apply lessons learned in West Africa, where aggrieved natives refused to trade or even attacked the English over stolen goods.[57]

Part of maintaining a good relationship with the natives involved the exchange of gifts. Many of the earliest interactions between the English and Guianans were accompanied by unsolicited gift-giving from the natives to the strangers in their land.

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[57] Warner, *Voyage of Robert Dudley*, 46; *PN*, 10: 391. In a section of his colonization proposal intended for prospective colonists "of the meaner sort," Harcourt argued that the Guianans would be good neighbors, but "if willfully we offer them abuse, and harm issue, the fault is ours; for a worm being trodden on, will turn again." Harris, *A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana*, 133. The passage is as revealing of Harcourt's impression of the type of people who might be attracted to the colony as it is of the Guianan's behavior.

Since they did not have the expensive trade goods of the Russian tsar or the stockpiles of pepper, ivory, or gold of West Africa, the Guianans offered their visitors food and drink as a symbol of the desired relationship. Ralegh was surprised and pleased when Topariwaca, the leader of a group of natives on the Orinoco River, brought to their first meeting "diverse sorts of fruits, and . . . wine, bread, fish, and flesh" to feast the newcomers. For their part, the English did the best they could in return, offering the Guianans some "good Spanish wine" which, Ralegh observed, "above all things they love." On another occasion, a native leader presented Ralegh with all sorts of food and a live armadillo, which ended up in the Englishmen's stomachs later in their travels.[58]

In Guiana, gift-giving was less formalized than it was in Russia or West Africa. Not only did Guiana lack the single centralized power of a ruling monarch, as did West Africa, but there was no clearly established international trade arrangement in place before the English arrived. For the most part, gift-giving in Guiana could be more accurately described as hospitality rather than the more clearly defined economic exchanges in Russia or West Africa. While the English usually attempted to return native hospitality with their own, there was no clear valuation of gift exchange in these early encounters. Since political power in Guiana was closely related to control over people rather than through the redistribution of goods, gift exchange was less important to the Guianans than the presence of the English. Rather than fretting over whether the gift received was as valuable as the gift given, as Ivan did in Russia, in Guiana friendship and a mutual alliance were the expected return. The system closely approximated the "landlord-stranger"

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[58] *PN*, 10: 393, 399, 421.

reciprocities that were such an important aspect of West African life.[59]

The line between trade and gift-giving grew increasingly indistinct as it became clear to the natives that the English presence was not temporary. Since they could not possibly afford to extend unlimited hospitality to the visitors, the natives began to expect something tangible in exchange for their efforts. By the time John Wilson's group explored Guiana in 1606, natives demanded and received English goods in exchange for the services and supplies they had freely given as hospitality only a few years before. Wilson reported that for a single axe the natives provided his group with enough food to last two months. If the English wanted special food, such as a hen, they had to give the natives "some small trifles, as beads." If during the course of their travels the natives brought the English to "any of their friend Indian houses," the visitors were obligated to leave small goods such as knives or beads as a token of appreciation. Negotiations for such gifts took on a more overtly economic tone by the early seventeenth century, as each side tried to get the best of the other.[60]

While native hospitality was an important component of the early Anglo-Guiana relationship, the natives and visitors did trade purely for economic exchange from the beginning of contact. Although the natives had little experience in overseas trade upon the English arrival, they did have an extensive local trade system already in place. Native societies with access to scarce raw materials engaged in trade relations with other native

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[58] Whitehead, "Ancient Amerindian Polities" in Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians*, 40.

[60] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 347.

groups as part of strategy to maintain and develop inter-ethnic associations. Guianans did not have the stockpiles of goods that many West Africans did, but they were prepared to trade with the English immediately. As his first voyage made its way along the Guiana coast, Ralegh reported that the natives, although initially hesitant, eventually began to approach the English and "offered to traffique with us for such things as they had." The natives brought edible goods such as potatoes, corn, and peppers, as well as natural commodities such as cotton and flax. Exotic animals such as monkeys and parrots often found their way into the exchange, but by far the most prominent native trade good was tobacco.[61]

In exchange for the products of Guiana, the natives demanded a wide variety of English goods. Just as they did in Russia and West Africa, English traders in Guiana quickly learned that the natives could and would exert a considerable control over trade. During Robert Dudley's 1595 expedition down the Orinoco, he encountered a native leader who informed him that "by force they should have nothing but blows, yet if they would bring him hatchets, knives, and Jews-harps," they could establish a friendly trade. The natives knew exactly what they wanted in trade and were not shy about letting the English know what was acceptable and what was not. They demanded many of the same goods as the West Africans, including all sorts of metal tools, beads, cloth, and weapons.[62]

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[61] *PN*, 10: 381; Nelly Arvelo-Jimenez and Horacio Biord, "The Impact of Conquest on Contemporary Indigenous Peoples of the Guianan Shield: The System of Orinoco Regional Interdependence," in Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians*, 57.

[62] Warner, *Voyage of Robert Dudley*, 74. The English were careful not to give the Guianans substantial numbers of weapons in order to maintain their technological advantage over the natives. Roger Harcourt explained that the English traded weapons

Although the English traders in Guiana during first contact did not face the same competition from French, Spanish, and Portuguese traders as they did in West Africa, they were concerned with the potential for the market to collapse due to an inundation of European goods. To avoid a self-destructive trade, Ralegh advised that "for trading and exchanging with them it must be done by one or two for every ship for all the rest, and the price to be directed by the Cape Merchant, for otherwise all our commodities will be of small price, and greatly to our hinderance." After their experience in West Africa, the English had learned that unregulated trade played into the hands of the natives, who were able to negotiate the exchange at the English expense.[63]

One of the primary stated reasons for the English presence in Guiana was to protect the natives from the Spanish. According to English accounts, the Guianans themselves requested such protection repeatedly from the earliest arrival of the English. Keymis claimed that the Guianans promised to provide the English with anything they wanted, "desiring only that some force of men may remain with them to deliver them from

only "upon great occasion, by way of gifts to special persons." (Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 386.)

[63] *News of Sir Walter Ralegh* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1940), 28. Ralegh perhaps was responding to reports from the Jamestown colony, where the settlers complained that the natives could not be brought to a profitable trade since other English traders had undercut them. See Chapter Six below. The English did try to negotiate exclusive trade relationships with the natives if possible. In 1606, a group of Guianans informed John Wilson that "no other nation should trade there but we." (Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 350). To the natives, trade was only part of a relationship which also included a pact of mutual protection. By offering an exclusive relationship to Wilson's group, the Guianans were clearly maneuvering to solidify their status as English allies.

oppression and tyranny." One year later, Thomas Masham reported the natives' succinct request that the English "come and kill the Spaniards." The Guianans seemed resigned that the Europeans were going to be a permanent presence in their land. One native concluded that his people "will do well, without further dissembling of their necessity, either entertain [the English] their friends, else give place to the Spaniards their enemies." In return, the Guianans would help the English rid the land of the Spanish. Lawrence Keymis reported that a native leader vowed that the Indian nations "far and near were all agreed to join with us, and by all means possible to assist us in expelling and rooting out the Spanish from all parts of the land." The natives would not be passive beneficiaries of a war with the Spanish but would unite with the English to fight their common enemy.[64]

As a sign of friendship, the English were also supposed to become involved in the disputes of their native allies. When Charles Leigh's group began searching for a proper site for their plantation on the Wiapoco River, several different native groups approached the English and offered land for the settlement. The natives gave the English housing and food willingly but not unconditionally. Leigh's group settled into their new residence "with condition that he should aid and defend them against their enemies the Caribs and others." Harcourt assured the Guianans he met in 1608 that the English "made a long and dangerous voyage into those parts, to appease their dissensions, and defend them against the Caribs or other enemies." The English believed that their mere presence gave their native allies a psychological advantage over their enemies, therefore actual combat was

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[64] *PN*, 10: 472, 473, 456; *PN*, 11: 6. The generally friendly relations between the English and the natives is apparent in the subsequent use of Ralegh's name, "Waterali," as an honorific title. Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text," 59.

rare. The Guianans, however, expected their allies to participate fully in all of their battles. This conflicting notion of military alliance would become a source of increasing tension throughout the first-contact period, as the natives began to realize that an alliance with the English did not seem to be as reciprocal as they had anticipated. One group of native leaders complained to Harcourt that the English protection "was a thing they greatly desired, and had expected long, and now they made much doubt thereof, and said they were but words, having heretofore been promised the like, but nothing performed."[65]

iii. A Dream Deferred

Despite all the talk of converting the natives, bringing civility to an untamed land, and striking a blow against the Spanish menace, the primary reason most English men and women went to Guiana was to find gold. Rumors of vast reserves of gold antedated English involvement in Guiana, finding expression in native legends and the reports of early Spanish visitors, who naturally were receptive to any suggestion of the existence of the precious metal. Stories of the golden land of "El Dorado" circulated among the Spanish in the late 1530s, leading them to send several expeditions in search of the famed land; in 1585 Antonio de Berrio wrote to the Spanish king claiming "certain knowledge" of El Dorado. When Ralegh interrogated Berrio in 1595, the Spaniard rather foolishly shared the stories of great wealth with his English captor, giving the English added incentive to encroach upon Spanish possessions in Guiana. Ralegh wrote that "I have

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[65] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 311, 364, 366.

been assured by such of the Spaniards as have seen Manoa the imperial city of Guiana, which the Spaniards call El Dorado, that for the greatness, for the riches, and for the excellent seat, it far exceedeth any of the world." Throughout the rest of the English experience in Guiana, El Dorado would remain a mirage that held great promise from a distance only to disappear as the English explorers drew closer to its apparent location. [66]

Early English reports of Guiana seemed to confirm Spanish assertions that the land was overflowing with gold. Ralegh believed that in time the English would come to realize that Guiana "hath more quantity of gold by manifold than the best parts of the Indies, or Peru." It stood to reason that the Incas could not be the only civilization in the Americas to have vast reserves of wealth. Many Europeans also believed that the Guianans were actually the remnants of an Inca group who fled the Spanish and were therefore likely to possess hidden wealth. The comparison with Spanish Peru was also important because Ralegh and many of his colleagues believed that the influx of precious metals to the Spanish crown threatened to upset the balance of power in Europe. In order to ensure that England would not be left behind, the English had to find a reliable source of gold to counter their rivals.[67]

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[66] Nicholl, *Creature in the Map*, 30. Berrio told Ralegh about the ceremony of a certain native group in which the "emperor" and his supporters were all coated with gold dust "until they be shining from the foot to the head." Ralegh also based his belief on intercepted Spanish letters which described a town filled with gold. For Ralegh's evidence that El Dorado did exist, see *PN*, 10: 356-62.

[67] *PN*, 10: 341, 347. Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text," 62. Ralegh believed that the Spanish emphasis on gold was short-sighted; while he wanted gold, Ralegh envisioned Guiana as an agricultural and commercial center. As pressure mounted to find quick profits, Ralegh increasingly emphasized gold. Walker Chapman, *The Golden Dream: Seekers of El Dorado* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 313.

With visions of wealth and fame dangling before them, English explorers set out to find gold in Guiana. The conditions on these exploratory missions were often horrendous, testing even the most dedicated participants. During Ralegh's first search for gold he put one hundred men and all of their supplies in an open boat headed for the Orinoco River. Ralegh recalled that he and his men were

> all driven to lie in the rain and weather, in the open air, in the
> burning sun, and upon the hard boards, and to dress our meat, and
> to carry all manner of furniture in them, wherewith they were so
> pestered and unsavory, that what with victuals being most fish, with
> wet clothes of so many men thrust together, and the heat of the sun,
> I will undertake that there was never any prison in England, that
> could be found more unsavory and loathsome.

Despite such conditions, the group completed its exploratory mission without serious disturbances but did not find a significant source of gold.[68]

What was most frustrating was that the gold always seemed to be just out of reach. Like Tantalus's unending quest for food and drink, English efforts to find riches seemed doomed to perpetual disappointment in Guiana. Time and again, English visitors explained that while they did not actually bring back much gold, they could have if circumstances were different. To those cynics who pointed out that his men returned with nothing but fool's gold, Ralegh argued that he saw plenty of genuine gold, but he had "neither time nor men, nor instruments fit for labor" to take it. Robert Dudley explained that he would have gone looking for the mines of El Dorado but that his men were unruly

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[68] Ralegh complained that the conditions were particularly difficult for himself, since he had "for many years before been dieted and cared for in a sort more differing." *PN*, 10: 355. Ralegh's comments provide a glimpse of the class issues that divided the English expeditions.

and might have revolted. This process of "reference and deferral" characterized many early English accounts of Guiana, which often made specific references to places such as El Dorado or gold mines but always deferred their actual discovery to some future mission.[69]

Many seventeenth-century observers and modern readers have argued that the stories of gold were largely the invention of English men desperately searching for some redeeming value in Guiana, but this explanation misses one of the most important aspects of the story--native complicity in the creation and maintenance of the gold mine myths. Even before the English arrived in Guiana, the natives knew from experience with the Spanish that Europeans were fixated on the precious metal. Once it became clear that the visitors were not going to quickly abandon their search for gold, the natives were forced to develop a strategy to exert some control over the situation. By using stories of gold to manipulate Europeans in Guiana, the natives were able to restore something of their own agency in a process which seemed to be spinning out of control.

One popular native strategy was to claim that there was indeed an abundance of gold in Guiana but that it was in the hands of another native group, further up the river. Robert Dudley's 1595 expedition learned that while there was no gold on the coast, a local native claimed that in the interior "the savages there hanged rich pieces of gold about

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[69] *PN*, 10: 344; Warner, *Voyage of Robert Dudley*, 75. See Mary Fuller, "Ralegh's Fugitive Gold: Reference and Deferral in the Discoverie of Guiana," in Stephen Greenblatt, ed. *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Failing to actually send back shipments of gold, Ralegh's emphasis on the other wonders of the Guianan environment suggested that although he had not found it yet, there surely would be something wonderful discovered eventually. Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, 73.

their necks in the stead of breastplates." Thirteen years later, Roger Harcourt's group was about to give up hope of ever finding gold when an Indian gave him a few gold figurines allegedly from "the high country of Guiana." Since the English already presupposed the existence of gold, natives who wanted the visitors to leave their lands could achieve satisfactory results simply by asserting that another group of natives further removed could help them find what they were looking for.[70]

Alternatively, native groups that for various reasons sought the English presence could claim to know the location of gold mines in their lands. By the time Ralegh made his second expedition to Guiana in 1617, many Guianans recognized that the English could be important allies, offering trade goods and protection from the Spanish and native enemies. After a disastrous battle at São Thomé, the dispirited English expedition was preparing to return to the coast when a native leader sent food to the English, and "offered them a rich gold mine in his own country, knowing it to be the best argument to persuade their stay." Even promises of certain gold could not convince the English to remain in the area any longer, but the effort was noteworthy. The incident suggested to skeptical English men and women not only that there was gold in Guiana but that the natives were willing to share it.[71]

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[70] Warner, *Voyage of Robert Dudley*, 34; Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 387. Some natives may even have claimed that rival groups had gold as a way of encouraging the English to harass their enemies. During Charles Leigh's colonization attempt, local natives informed the English "that there was up in the Main very rich commodities, as also gold and silver, and especially in the river of Caliane, where the Caribs inhabit, who are enemies unto our Indians at Wiapoco." Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 340.

[71] Vincent Todd Harlow, *Ralegh's Last Voyage* (London: Argonaut Press, 1932), 310.

In fact, although there was no city of gold in Guiana, there was enough truth in the stories of El Dorado to entice Europeans to continue their efforts to find gold in the land. Native reports of a "Golden Man" who covered himself in gold dust were similar to known Muisca practices in Colombia. And the Amazon River basin was the site of active native production and distribution of goldwork, though probably not on the same level as Inca production. The actual presence of gold figurines and native traditions that incorporated gold made the English quest understandable. Perhaps their expectations were unrealistic, but English belief in the gold mines was not simply a far-fetched scheme to justify their presence in Guiana.[72]

The relentless pursuit of gold in Guiana overshadowed the entire first-contact experience, alternately raising English expectations to unrealistic heights only to come crashing down. The effect of this cycle was to lower morale among the members of expeditions. In some groups, morale was so low that the men threatened to revolt. The process of raising expectations often began before the English arrived in Guiana. Roger Harcourt explained that before his group left England, an unnamed man "filled my company so full of vain expectation, and golden hopes, that their insatiable and covetous minds . . . could not be satisfied with anything but only gold." After struggling through the wilderness with no evidence of gold, Harcourt claimed that "diverse unconstant persons of my unruly company began to murmur, to be discontented, to kindle discords

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[72] Whitehead, "The Historical Anthropology of Text," 60. For recent archaeological evidence of indigenous gold production and distribution, see Whitehead, "The Mazaruni Pectoral: A Golden Artefact Discovered in Guyana and the Historical Sources Concerning Native Metallurgy in the Caribbean, Orinoco, and Amazonia." *Archaeology and Anthropology*, 7:19, 19-58.

and dissensions, and to stir up mutiny, even almost to the confusion and ruin of us all."
Harcourt eventually got his men to calm down by pointing out that there were other
valuable commodities all around them if only they would look. William Davies took
perhaps the most optimistic view of any English visitor in 1608 when he observed that "in
these countries we could find neither gold nor silver ore, but great store of hens." Though
Davies tried to content himself with the knowledge that Guiana had sufficient food
supplies for potential colonists, the vast majority of English adventurers were not
interested in simply surviving--they wanted to make a profit.[73]

Of course, if English colonists could not be inspired to risk their lives in a journey
across the ocean merely to raise hens, other native natural products had the potential to
reward settlers. According to early reports, the very fertility of the land would allow
colonists to spend less effort on subsistence agriculture, freeing up time and energy to
devote to cash crops. By the early seventeenth century, two crops had already caught the
attention of investors in overseas voyages: sugar cane and tobacco. In a letter written to
his brother back in England, Charles Leigh claimed that "for sugar canes the world doth
not yield better soil for their increase, and whereas in Barbary it is fifteen or sixteen
months before they come to perfection, here they grow up in ten months." [74]

While the more rapid cultivation of sugar cane would help English farmers

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[73] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 386, 387. Expedition leaders often took a dim view of the
rank and file men they led. Ralegh warned Lawrence Keymis to be careful during his 1617
search for a gold mine, telling him "I know (a few gentlemen excepted) what a scum of
men you have." Harlow, *Ralegh's Last Voyage*, 325.

[74] Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, 16: 322

compete in the world market through an increase in the quantity of sugar, quality was the major selling point of Guiana's tobacco. Not only could the fertile soil support a large tobacco crop but the product was "the best of all those parts." The English had been conducting a contraband tobacco trade with the Spanish since at least 1605. The relative isolation of Spanish settlements in Trinidad and Guiana allowed the trade to continue, despite direct orders from both English and Spanish monarchs to end the illegal exchange. Between 1610 and 1612, the trade grew rapidly as demand for tobacco increased in Europe.[75]

Roger Harcourt acknowledged that although some English men and women, most notably King James I, disliked tobacco, "the generality of men in this kingdom doth with great affection entertain it." Tobacco could provide a colony with an important source of income, perhaps becoming "as great a benefit and profit to the undertakers, as ever the Spaniards gained by the best and richest silver mine in all their Indies, considering the charge of both." Since the natives seemed to have an unlimited supply of tobacco on hand, the English would not have to spend time, energy, and money growing the crop. Other products such as flax, silk, cotton, pepper, and sassafras promised to reward colonists and investors as well, making agriculture one of the primary attractions of the prospective colony. In order to make such ventures profitable, the English planned to rely

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[75] Purchas, *Pilgrimes,* 16: 371. For a discussion of English participation in the contraband tobacco trade, see Joyce Lorimer, "The English Contraband Tobacco Trade in Trinidad and Guiana, 1590-1617," in Kenneth Andrew, Nicholas Canny, and P.E.H Hair, eds, *Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480-1650* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 124-50.

on the labor and knowledge of the natives. [76]

This dependency on the natives was in part responsible for the failure of the earliest colonies. Shortly after his colony was established, Charles Leigh reported that the English were "for the most part sick, and the Indians not so kind to us as they promised." The natives stopped supplying the settlers with food, and Leigh did not have enough experienced farmers to grow their own. In 1604 Leigh wrote to his brother requesting one hundred men, "all laboring men and gardeners, for such are the fittest here for a time." When the relief ship finally arrived in 1606, the poor state of the English settlement "caused very much discontent amongst our freshwater sailors aboard." The new arrivals were particularly upset because the colonists "could not advertise them of any commodities the country yielded which would afford them present benefit, insomuch that they wished themselves in England again." The weary colonists decided to abandon Guiana; Charles Leigh never made it back, dying in the country which he was certain would eventually be prosperous for the English.[77]

Between 1611 and 1620, the English renewed their efforts to establish permanent settlements in Guiana and began several new plantations on the Amazon, hoping to avoid

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[76] Purchas, *Pilgrimes,* 16: 386. Harcourt's plan was to use the settlement at Wiapoco as a headquarters for a system of trading factories in Guiana. James A. Williamson, *English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon, 1604-1668* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 46. For a discussion of the native trade system, see *HSAI,* 3: 33. Of course, the native tobacco crop was *not* unlimited and it would require a substantial influx of labor for Guiana to become a profitable tobacco exporter, just as it would in North America. For native use of tobacco in Guiana, see Johannes Wilbert, *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 9-19.

[77] Purchas, *Pilgrimes,* 16: 312, 322, 339.

the difficulties of the first struggling colonies. Details about these small settlements are sketchy, especially since they were organized by independent adventurers rather than a single company or under the auspices of the English government. The colonists focused on tobacco rather than gold as a source of profit. By using the labor and the knowledge of the natives, the independent colonies managed to become immediately profitable. The extended growing season in Guiana allowed the natives to increase their tobacco production without seriously disrupting their subsistence cycle. Unlike North America, there was no "starving time" for the English colonists or the natives of Guiana. One 1622 report claimed that "the Christians which live in this country take no pains nor labor for any thing: the Indians both house them, work for them, bring them victuals, and their commodities." In return, the English gave the Indians "a small reward and price either of some iron work or glass beads, and such like contemptible things."[78]

The biggest threat to English settlements in Guiana was not hunger, disease, or violence from the natives but pressure from other European countries. By 1611 the Spanish began to look into English participation in the contraband tobacco trade and determined to stop it. One year later, a Spanish official arrived at São Thomé and began enforcing an order forbidding the cultivation of tobacco in any of the Spanish settlements in Trinidad and on the Orinoco. The order did not prevent all English ships from attempting to continue the trade, but it did make the long voyage more risky and less attractive. English attention shifted from the Orinoco to other Caribbean islands and

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[78] Williamson, *English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon*, 88. For a discussion of these early settlements, see Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlements*, 35-59.

Virginia.[79]

With the Orinoco essentially cut off from the English, their settlements near the Amazon seemed destined to benefit from increased activity. In 1619 James I chartered the Amazon Company, a joint-stock company led by Roger North, who had accompanied Ralegh on his second voyage to Guiana. Under pressure from the Spanish, who viewed the English activities as an intrusion upon their possessions, James I forbade North from carrying out his plans. North ignored the king's orders and established a colony of one hundred men in 1620. For the next five years, English plantations in Guiana reached their high point, but the stage was set for their ultimate failure. Due to a lack of organized leadership from England, the settlements quickly separated into increasingly smaller units, each contracting independently to sell their goods. The small, isolated plantations were a perfect target for English enemies. Believing that the Portuguese empire was in a state of decline, the English erroneously assumed that the beleaguered Portuguese would be unable to enforce their territorial claims. In 1625 a group of Portuguese and their native allies attacked the English settlements, killing at least sixty settlers before the rest retreated to the Wiapoco River. Along the way many of the stragglers were killed by hostile natives. English ambitions in Guiana never recovered, and the first-contact period came to an end.[80]

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[79] Lorimer, "The English Contraband Tobacco Trade," 142-50.

[80] Lorimer, *English and Irish Settlements*, 81-85. Williamson, *English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon*, 11, 100-106. There were a few half-hearted attempts to establish colonies after 1625, but by then English attention was transferred to the North American colonies.

However destructive the Spanish and Portuguese attacks on the English, the primary reason that the English were willing to give up their efforts in Guiana was the lack of available gold. Walter Ralegh knew that the absence of gold would prove to be his own undoing and the beginning of the end for English colonies in the region. Released from the Tower of London to make one last voyage in search of gold in 1617, Ralegh seemed destined for a bitter end. When Lawrence Keymis, Ralegh's trusted friend and ally in the Guiana enterprise, returned empty-handed from his expedition to find a purported gold mine near the Spanish settlement of Sao Thome, Ralegh knew his time had run out. Never mind that Ralegh's son had been killed in the debacle, the biggest tragedy was the failure to return with gold. Ralegh told Keymis that "had he brought to the King but one hundred weight of the ore, though with the loss of a hundred men, he had given his majesty satisfaction, and given our nation encouragement to have returned the next year with a greater force." Keymis ended up killing himself shortly after his friend's rebuke, and Ralegh returned to England a broken man.[81]

The dream had come to an end. While the English visitors during first contact had managed to establish a generally favorable relationship with the natives and had begun to understand the environment enough to make a profit from tobacco, they lacked the will and the logistical support to maintain a permanent presence in Guiana. Launched with visions of golden cities and untold wealth, the first contact experience dwindled rapidly when reality intruded upon the English effort. Just before his execution, Walter Ralegh gave one last defense of the land that saw the death of his son, his comrade, and ultimately

[81] Harlow, *Ralegh's Last Voyage*, 328.

his own reputation. "My one design was to go to a gold mine in Guiana," Ralegh

declared, "and tis not a feigned but a real thing that there is such a mine about three miles

from St. Thomas. . . these things are as sure as that there is a God." Though the English

would not abandon Guiana entirely for several years after Ralegh's death, the "pleasing

dream" had turned into a nightmare. Fortunately, there was another option for the restless

English, a place Ralegh had originally identified as an ideal location for English

settlements.[82]

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[82] Harlow, *Ralegh's Last Voyage*, 67. Williamson has argued that Ralegh never believed that a gold mine existed, and that his protestations to the contrary were a cynical ploy to get out of prison. See *English Colonies in Guiana and on the Amazon*, 78. While Ralegh's imprisonment may have encouraged exaggeration, the weight of native testimony and the very real evidence of gold figurines made Ralegh's beliefs genuine. For a discussion of the existence of a gold mine, see Lorimer, "The Location of Ralegh's Guiana Gold Mine." *Terrae Incognitae*, 14(1982), 77-95.

CHAPTER SIX

Diplomacy, Dependency, and Death:
Jamestown, 1607-1614

As Walter Ralegh served his first stretch in the Tower of London, other Englishmen stepped forward to champion the cause of overseas colonies. Alarmed by the success of the hated Spanish in the New World, England began to evaluate its status in the larger world. It was no longer enough to travel north to Russia or south to Africa; the new pull was westward, across the Atlantic. While Guiana seemed promising, the English hoped to identify a land less susceptible to periodic raids from other European powers. The effort would involve a different strategy for the English, one learned recently in nearby Ireland. Rather than simply send merchants to engage in trade with the natives of the distant lands, the English would establish permanent colonies to exploit the local resources and to open new markets. If successful, the colonies could reward investors beyond their highest hopes; if not, the English would essentially cede the Americas to their enemies. One of the most important keys to permanence, the English knew, was establishing control over the native population.

Before the English arrived in North America, they envisioned a close relationship with the natives. The ideal society called for close daily interaction between the English colonists and their Indian neighbors; their experiences in other lands suggested that such a

relationship, however difficult, would be mutually beneficial. The English would benefit from the creation of a reliable trading partner who could also serve as a vital informant about the land and its people. In a set of notes to Sir Humphrey Gilbert written in 1578, Richard Hakluyt the Younger advised that in a potential American colony

> nothing is more to be endeavored with the inland people than familiarity. For so may you discover all the natural commodities of their country, and also all their wants, all their strengths, all their weakness, and with whom they are at war, and with whom confederate in peace and amity, etc. which known, you may work many great effects of greatest consequence.

Friendly Indians living near the English settlement could also provide a convenient food supply and an instant source of labor. The greatest benefit for the Indians, the English argued, would be that through the example of the colonists "they will daily by little and little, forsake their barbarous and savage living, and grow to such order and civility with us." Colonization proponents believed that the development of strong ties between the English and native communities was vital to the success of the colonies.[1]

Under such circumstances, the need for the English to control the terms and conditions of first contact was crucial. In the other regions the English visited during the contact period, exerting control over the natives was primarily a matter of getting the best

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[1] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 24, 30. George Peckham argued that English experience in nearby regions justified the hopes, noting that in the West Indies, the natives "are easily reduced to civility both in manners and garments, which being so, what vent for our English clothes will thereby ensue." See Ibid., 49. Edmund Morgan has argued that on the eve of colonization, the English "had not given up hope of a biracial community, in which indigent Englishmen would work side by side with willing natives, under gentle English government." The biggest obstacle to this goal, Morgan suggests, is that the English sent the wrong people to meet this goal. See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W Norton, 1975), 44.

economic deal. In Virginia, economic concerns were certainly important, but control was literally a matter of life and death for the potential colonists.

While writers in England could easily draft a plan calling for the peaceful integration of colonists and Indians into a mutually rewarding relationship, the actual formation of close ties proved elusive. Permanent colonization involved a heightened responsibility to develop a stable relationship with the natives, while increasing the potential sources of friction between the peoples. First contact in Virginia was much more uncertain than it had been in Russia or West Africa, where the natives were already prepared to trade. The members of early American expeditions were not sure what their reception would be.[2]

In an ideal situation, the natives would recognize the superiority of the English, both in manners and technology, and would acquiesce to a system of benevolent leadership. The English would quickly establish prosperous settlements, returning a generous profit to the investors. Colonization promoters assumed that the Indians would happily (or with more forceful prodding) adopt a role somewhat akin to the English lower class--subservient, obedient, and grateful for the opportunity to raise their standards to that of the "civil" English. What they found, however, was a native population proud of its own culture, scornful of the English inability to provide for themselves, and willing to fight to prevent English encroachment. As if native resistance was not enough, the

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[2] Gary Nash argues that the English acquisition of native lands necessary for permanent colonization was "the beginning of a chain of events which governed the entire sociology of red-white relations." "The Image of the Indian in the Southern Colonial Mind," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 29(1972), 209.

English colonial leaders found it difficult to control the men and women of their own country. Notions of gender and class roles provided a readily available means of establishing discipline and control over their charges, both Indian and English.[3]

The English attempt to control the Indians through class distinctions was ultimately a failure because it did not recognize the fundamental fact that dominated the Anglo-Indian relationship during the first contact period--English dependency on the natives. The English unwittingly found themselves dependent on the Indians due to their ignorance of the American environment, the unreliability of supplies from England, and their inability or unwillingness to adapt to the situation. The Indian recognition of the visitors' dependency and their consequent manipulation of the relationship created an intolerable situation for the English. Despite any rhetoric to the contrary, the power in the Anglo-Indian relationship seemed to be tipped in favor of the natives. Every English appeal for native assistance was a reminder that the social control model was not working as it had been intended--members of a higher social rank should not have to grovel before their alleged inferiors. Attempts to restore the English to their superior status through non-coercive acts such as trade or symbolic rituals failed when native leaders refused to participate. As tensions rose between the Indians and the English, both sides turned to cultural notions of gender hierarchy to help explain their differences while simultaneously constructing the other as inferior. Increasingly frustrated, colonial leaders resorted to

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[3] Karen Kupperman argues that "the ideal version of the English-Indian relationship involved a tutelary relationship similar to that of older brother to younger and husband to wife." See Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1980), 170.

escalating violence as their community strategy shifted from integration to separation.

i. Early Encounters and Integration

After the failure of the Roanoke colony, English attention turned northward to the New England area for several expeditions until interest in Virginia returned in 1606. The renewed colonial venture under the leadership of Christopher Newport delivered John Smith and 103 other settlers. They were followed by the "First Supply" of 100 men in January 1608, the "Second Supply" in October, and the "Third Supply" in August 1609. The arrival of Sir Thomas Gates and Lord De La Warr in May 1610 signaled the beginning of the end of the first contact period in Virginia, forcing a fundamental change in the Anglo-Indian relationship. In 1607, however, the English were optimistic that they could avoid the mistakes of Roanoke and establish a successful colony in Virginia.

The location of Jamestown seemed ideal for the development of an English colony. With a deep-water harbor and a navigable river, "one of the famousest rivers that ever was found by any Christian," the settlement offered easy access to the ocean and the interior. The surrounding land was often compared to a garden, "having the pleasantest suckles, the ground all flowing over with fair flowers of sundry colors and kinds, as though it had been in any garden or orchard in England." The fertility of the soil was evident in the lush foliage, leaving little doubt that the colonists would be able to sustain themselves shortly

after establishing their settlement.[4]

Like Harriot's earlier report on the environment of Roanoke, early accounts of the Jamestown area emphasized the potential commodities of the natural world. But unlike the paradisiacal paeans to the Roanoke environment, John Smith's description of Virginia detailed the commodities, but also explained that it would take hard work to make a profit. Smith's attitude toward the natural world was largely shaped by Francis Bacon's notions of natural history and the need to find utility in nature. Bacon's framework for a proper natural history had three parts: first and foremost, it must be accurate (no false paradise); second, it had to express an understanding of the utility of natural phenomena; third, and most important to colonization supporters, it must include a sense of the potential economic benefits. After only a short time, Smith and other reporters identified lucrative, if unglamourous, sources of income in fishing, shipping materials and supplies, and the production of luxury goods such as exotic fruits and furs.[5]

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[4] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 271. Even the most bothersome aspects of the natural world were not a problem in the New World. Smith observed that "one thing is strange, that we could never perceive their vermin destroy our hens, eggs, nor chickens, nor do any hurt, nor their flies nor serpents anyway pernicious, where in the south parts of America they are always dangerous, and often deadly." Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 11. Smith's comparison with the "vermin" of South America was an attempt to identify at least one advantage the English had over the richer Spanish possessions. For an excellent description of the physical environment of the southeastern coastal region, see Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in the South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-34.

[5] Smith's admiration for Bacon's work led him to include several Bacon volumes in his library; Smith even corresponded with Bacon, sharing his own ideas about natural philosophy. James David Taylor, "'Base Commoditie:' Natural Resource and Natural History in Smith's *The Generall Historie*." *Environmental History Review* (Winter 1993), 73-89.

In fact, the environment seemed to have been particularly suited for the English. George Peckham discerned a clear divine invitation for English occupation of the land. According to Peckham, the "country doth (as it were with arm advanced) above the climates both of Spain and France, stretch out itself towards England only. In manner praying our aid and help." Indeed, the climate itself seemed particularly suited to the English body. Smith proclaimed that "heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for men's habitation being of our constitutions, were it fully manured and inhabited by industrious people." Although Smith acknowledged that some of the colonists occasionally "fell sick," the victims quickly recovered, further evidence that the country "doth agree well with English constitutions being once seasoned to the country."[6]

English concern with the climate in Virginia was accentuated by contemporary scientific belief in the impact of environmental factors on the human body. One of the major fears of prospective colonists was that Europeans exposed to a tropical climate for an extended period would experience significant physical degeneration. Natural philosophy explained that climatic factors dictated bodily variations but that these changes were only superficial since all matter was composed of the same elements. Still, English men and women convinced of the superiority and beauty of the English appearance were reluctant to risk even minor alterations to their physical bodies.[7]

Ironically, the failure of early English experiments with exotic plants in Virginia

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[6] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 42; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 143, 144.

[7] Mason, *Deconstructing America*, 60; Joyce E. Chaplin, "Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54(January 1997), 229-52.

may have helped convince colonists that the environment was not too tropical and was therefore acceptable as a permanent residence. Since the initial expeditions to Jamestown usually arrived in warm months, the reports home accurately described a hot, humid climate. The first settlers actually tried to plant lemons, pineapples, olives, and other tropical plants and continued their efforts even after the first attempts failed. While the poor results of the experiments may have put a damper on English plans to use Virginia as a source of exotic products, the English could console themselves with the knowledge that a more moderate climate would be less liable to have an adverse effect on settlers.[8]

What the English did not know was that there was a reason that Jamestown Island was the only piece of land in the immediate area not inhabited by the local Indians. The environment that appeared to be so inviting on the surface was actually a poor, even dangerous, choice for a settlement. The first colonists noted with little alarm that the surrounding lands were "low marshes" with long grasses which could serve as feed for livestock. Unfortunately, the marshes were also a breeding ground for disease. Another danger lurked just offshore in the James River. The river is an estuary system; each summer salt water invades thirty miles up the river, creating a salt plug on the freshwater-saltwater boundary. The plug traps sediments and organic wastes, making the James a breeding ground for bacteria. Colonists drank the same water they dumped their waste in, assuming that the pollution would be washed down the river. Typhoid, dysentery, and salt poisoning awaited anyone who consumed the contaminated water. One month after the English built their fort at Jamestown, the settlers started dying of "cruel diseases [such] as

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[8] Silver, *New Face on the Countryside*, 139-40.

swellings, fluxes, [and] burning fevers." Recognizing the problems, the Indians located

their own settlements further inland or up the river.[9]

Like the natural environment, the natives of North America seemed familiar to the

English visitors, more so than any other peoples the English encountered during first

contact. In part, the mild reaction to the native Americans' physical appearance was due

to their experiences in other lands. By the late sixteenth century, the English had already

become acquainted with peoples of many different colors, statures, and adornments,

making them less likely to be surprised by what they found in Virginia. The English were

also influenced by their need to make the natives of the land they planned to colonize as

"normal" as possible, while still highlighting enough difference to justify the Indians'

inferior status. Since the English recognized a connection between environment and

physical appearance, the presence of strikingly different-looking natives in America might

suggest that English settlers would eventually degenerate.

According to the English, the skin color of the Indians living in the Jamestown area

was rather unremarkable. All English observers noted that the native Americans skin was

somewhat darker than their own but the difference was considered slight. Many observers

claimed that darker skin color was not an inherent feature of the native appearance but the

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[9] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 272, 273; Carville Earle, "Environment, Disease, and Mortality
in Early Virginia." *Journal of Historical Geography* 5(1979), 391-401. According to the
English, a native leader argued early in 1607 that the natives in the surrounding area
should not get too upset at English colonization, since "they take but a little waste ground,
which doth you nor any of us any good." Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 272. Certainly, the English had
incentive to interpret the Indian's statement as inviting the English to take the land, but
there is little question that the Indians chose not to occupy the land immediately
surrounding the English settlement.

result of human intervention or environmental factors. John Smith claimed that the Indians of Virginia were "of a color brown when they are of any age, but they are born white." Other descriptions of skin color included "swart," "tawny," "dark olive," "chestnut," and "brown."[10] Smith explained that the different skin color of older Indians was due to a deliberate process of "tanning" children's skin, so that "after a year, no weather will hurt them." Other reports claimed that the skin color was simply a by-product of the dyes and paints the Virginians used.[11]

The belief that native skin color was acquired after birth raised the possibility that some English men and women might experience the same color changes. When Ralph Hamor went on an embassy to Powhatan, he stumbled across an Englishman who had lived among the Indians for three years. William Parker had "grown so like both in complexion and habit to the Indians," Hamor claimed, "that I only knew him by his tongue to be an Englishman." Hamor's observation reveals the complexity of racial identification in early seventeenth-century Virginia. While there seemed to be an association between complexion and behavior, Hamor made no suggestion of causality. In the end, the fundamental identifier of race was cultural--Parker spoke English. Clearly, an Indian who spoke the English tongue did not suddenly become English, but the perceived mutability of

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[10] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 278; For descriptions of skin color, see Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 276; *NAW*, 3: 351, 361; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 160. See also Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7-11.

[11] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 162; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 276. George Percy noted that occasionally the natives did not seem to lose the white skin they were born with. Shortly after he arrived in Virginia, Percy met "a savage boy about the age of ten years, which had a head of hair of a perfect yellow and a reasonable white skin, which is a miracle amongst all savages." Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 271.

skin color limited its ability to be used as a mark of distinction between the English and the Indians.[12]

In fact, English assessments of the physical appearance of North American natives often expressed admiration for their physique. Early reports described the Indians as "strong and well proportioned." While most native Americans seemed to be approximately the same size as Europeans, English visitors noticed that there were differences between native groups. When John Smith encountered a group of Susquehannock Indians for the first time, he reported with amazement that "such great and well proportioned men, are seldom seen, for they seemed like giants to the English." Although the thought of giant Indians roaming the woods on the outskirts of English settlements was disconcerting, the favorable evaluation of native physical stature was important for the colonization effort. Any environment that could produce and sustain such ideal physical specimens could surely support and even benefit future English settlers.[13]

Although English assessment of native American skin color and physical stature emphasized the similarities of the peoples, the overall appearance of the Indians certainly was quite unlike that of the English. The body paints that some observers claimed were

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[12] Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia [1615]* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1957), 44. Native Americans could also be mistaken for Europeans. During his second expedition exploring the Chesapeake, John Smith spotted a native "we supposed him [to be] some French man's son, because he had a thick black bush beard." The mysterious native turned out to be his friend, Mosco. Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 173.

[13] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 149. Given his short stature, Smith may have been more impressed than other English observers with the height of the native Americans.

the source of Indian skin color received mixed reviews from the English. Both men and women painted their skin but men typically had more elaborate designs, particularly when preparing to go to battle. Smith claimed that among native men, "he is the most gallant that is the most monstrous to behold." George Percy proved that for the English, beauty was in the eye of the beholder. The Kecoughtan Indians, George Percy wrote, had a variety of body paints: "some paint their bodies black, some red, with artificial knots of sundry lively colors, very beautiful and pleasing to the eye, in a braver fashion than they in the West Indies."[14]

If the English were somewhat ambivalent about the beauty of body paints, they were able to agree that traditional native clothing left little to the imagination. Percy noted that "they go altogether naked, but their privities are covered with beasts' skins." Unaccustomed to the amount of skin exposed, particularly during the hot summer months, English attention skipped quickly over the actual clothing to the "nakedness." For Anglican minister Alexander Whitaker, nudity evoked contradictory images. In the religious sense, nakedness was a quality to be admired, for "none other can be worthy of God, but those that lightly esteem of riches. Nakedness is the riches of nature." Yet Whitaker criticized the Indians he encountered because "they live naked in body as if their shame of sin deserved no covering." Symbolic nakedness recalled the innocence of life

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[14] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 161; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 270. While Smith was quick to criticize the native physical standards of beauty, he found the roles reversed on at least one occasion. When the captive Smith was brought before Powhatan for the first time, "more than two hundred of those grim courtiers stood wondering at him, as [if] he had been a monster." Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 150. To the Indians, Smith was as strange-looking as the natives were to the English.

before the Fall but actual exposed flesh suggested licentiousness.[15]

Careful observers noticed that there seemed to be a class dimension to native attire. John Smith explained that in Virginia, "the better sort use large mantles of deer skins not much differing in fashion from the Irish mantles. Some embroidered with white beads, some with copper, other[s] painted after their manner." One of the most significant artifacts of the contact period in Virginia is one of Powhatan's mantles, an elaborately ornamented garment. While the upper echelons of native society wore fancy clothing, Smith claimed, "the common sort have scarce to cover their nakedness but with grass, the leaves of trees, or such like." The scanty clothing of the natives usually consisted of a breechclout, a belt and an apron made of leather or the organic materials Smith described. In the winter, of course, the natives adopted more substantial clothing of animal skins and mocassins. For the most part, English experience in Roanoke had prepared them for the Indian appearance.[16]

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[15] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 150; Ibid., 5: 270; Alexander Whitaker, *Good Newes from Virginia* (New York: Scholar's Facsimile Series, 1936), 1, 24. For Indian clothing, see Christian Feest, "Virginia Algonquians," in *Handbook of North American Indians 15, Northeast*, ed. Bruce Trigger (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 260. Kupperman argues that by describing the natives as being naked, English writers made them appear more vulnerable. The description also made the environment seem appealing, since they did not have to protect themselves from the elements. See Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, 32.

[16] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 161. Powhatan's mantle is a garment made of four deer skins, embroidered with shell beads in a design symbolic of Powhatan's power. The design consists of a human figure (presumably Powhatan himself) flanked by a deer and a wolf, surrounded by 34 circles representing the tribes under Powhatan's rule. See Gregory Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," in Peter Wood, ed. *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 292-343.

Earlier encounters in other foreign lands also taught the English the importance of acquiring basic language skills. When the English began their colony at Jamestown, they recognized that good communication was crucial if they were to establish a permanent colony. As the first group of settlers sailed up the James River searching for a site for their plantation, the English spotted five Indians running on shore. A group of men set out in a small boat and "called to them in a sign of friendship," but the natives were wary "until they saw the captain lay his hand on his heart." The English had a similar reaction to the native spoken languages. When George Percy met several Paspaheghans in early May 1607, he noted that the English were welcomed with open arms but were startled when "an old savage made a long oration, making a foul noise, uttering his speech with a vehement action, but we knew little what they meant." To the English, the native languages often sounded harsh, especially when contrasted with welcoming body language. Still, there was something recognizable at the center of native languages, more so in some than in others. Peter Wynne reported that the "people of Monacon speak a far differing language from the subjects of Powhatan, their pronunciation being very like Welsh so that the gentlemen in our company desired me to be their interpreter."[17]

In sixteenth-century England, language was much more than simply a tool of communication but was a key to self-presentation: the language a person spoke was a

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[17] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 270, 285. The English had difficulty with a sense of dissonance between the actual feelings the natives were trying to communicate and the form of the communication. John Smith described one incident when the natives were "testifying their love . . . which they do with such vehemency and so great passion, that they sweat till they drop, and are so out of breath they can scarce speak. So that a man would take them to be exceeding angry or stark mad." Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 168.

crucial component of identity. In 1535, Henry VIII tried to outlaw the Welsh language because it was "nothing like, nor consonant to the natural Mother Tongue within this realm." For educated Englishmen used to reading and writing in Latin and Greek, their own vernacular was a constant reminder of their barbaric roots. Thus, when the gentlemen asked Wynne to converse with the Indians, they were simultaneously recognizing the foreignness within their own realm, an uncomfortable sign of the closeness of the English and Indians. The aural proximity of Welsh and Algonquian may also have been wishful thinking on the part of Englishmen searching for a pre-1492 English presence in the New World. Legend had it that the Welsh prince Mado ap Owen Gwynneth sailed westward in the twelfth century, perhaps establishing a settlement in the Americas. William Strachey and George Peckham both argued that there were Welsh settlements in Mexico and the West Indies and it was conceivable that the Algonquian language was evidence of a Anglo-American connection.[18]

Unfortunately, the Welsh experiment was not as successful as the English had hoped and they had to begin the difficult task of trying to learn enough of the native language to communicate effectively. English hesitance to learn the Indian language was not just a recognition of the difficulty involved but part of the overall power struggle taking place between the cultures. To the English, actually studying a language implied a degree of submission to the foreign culture. And on a practical level, leaving the terms of

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[18] Steven Mullaney, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance," in Greenblatt, *Representing the English Renaissance*, 80-81; Carol Sparks, "England and the Columbian Discoveries: The Attempt to Legitimize English Voyages to the New World." *Terrae Incognitae*, 22(1990), 6-7.

negotiation vague allowed a certain amount of leverage room to interpret Anglo-Indian communication with the best possible outcome for the English.[19]

The benefits of learning rudimentary Algonquian outweighed the drawbacks, however, and the English began to make a concerted effort to study Indian vocabulary. The language that the English passed on as Algonquian was probably actually a pidgin language that the Indians, assuming the English were the equivalent of children, created in order to communicate with the visitors. John Smith attached a list of 137 Indian words and phrases to his *Map of Virginia*; not surprisingly, many of the words were those that would facilitate trade, including object names and numbers. William Strachey attached a more extensive list of native words to his 1612 *Historie of Travel into Virginia Britannia*. By beginning the process of learning the native languages, the English were also able to learn more about Indian culture.[20]

One of the first native cultural institutions to come under English scrutiny was religion. Just as they had in all of the other lands they visited in the sixteenth century, the English had a negative impression of native religion. John Smith was convinced that the Powhatans were devil worshipers, claiming that their chief god "Oke" was the devil, who they served "more of fear than love." Many early English visitors to Virginia reported that

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[19] Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, 104.

[20] Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 102-3. For a discussion of the Algonquian language, see Frank T. Siebert, "Resurrecting Virginia Algonquian from the Dead: The Reconstituted and Historical Phonology of Powhatan," in James Crawford, ed., *Studies in Southeastern Indian Languages* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1975).

the Indians practiced child sacrifice as part of a yearly religious festival.[21]

In fact, the Powhatans acknowledged many different gods, the most powerful being the deity Smith knew as "Oke." Since Oke had the power to reward people with good weather, a good hunt, and good health, or alternatively could punish transgressors with illness or a poor harvest, the natives sought to appease the god through ritual offerings. The English interpreted native religious practices as demonic, failing to understand the immediate relationship between the Indians and the gods who could intervene in daily life. The alleged "child sacrifice" reported by several English observers was actually a coming-of-age ceremony called the *huskenaw*. The yearly event involved symbolic death rather than the gruesome stories spread by early English accounts.[22]

While the English tried to prevent any syncretization of the native religion with their own version of Christianity, the natives were quick to incorporate the concept of the English God into their own world view, especially when they were in need of assistance. Just as the Roanoke settlers did not dissuade the Indians from viewing English technological superiority as evidence of divine power, the Jamestown colonists occasionally encouraged the natives to view the English as possessing powers traditionally associated with very powerful spiritual beings. After a Chickahominy Indian nearly burned

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[21] Quinn, *NAW*, 3: 281; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 169. For descriptions of the apparent child sacrifice, see Whitaker, *Good Newes from Virginia*, 24 and Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 124.

[22] Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 80-81, 136; Feest, "Virginia Algonquians," 262. For the huskenaw ceremony, see Philip Barbour, "The Riddle of the Powhatan 'Black Boyes,'" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 88(1980), 148-54.

himself to death while imprisoned for theft at the Jamestown fort, Smith told another

Indian that "if hereafter they would not steal, he would make him alive again." A

generous serving of aquavitae later, the injured Indian "miraculously" came back to life but

was drunk and acting nonsensical. Smith promised to restore the unfortunate prisoner's

wits if his fellows promised good behavior. The next day, Smith presented a sober man to

the Indians. As Smith noted, "these and many other such petty accidents, so amazed and

affrighted both Powhatan and all his people that from all parts with presents they desired

peace, returning many stolen things that we neither demanded not thought of." On

another occasion, Smith reported that a werowance "did believe that our God as much

exceeded theirs as our guns did their bows and arrows, and many times did send to the

President, at Jamestown, men with presents, entreating them to pray to his God for rain,

for his gods would not send him any." During the early meetings, the English desire to

disabuse the Indians of their apparent religious errors was less important to the English

than the desire to maintain a perceived advantage in the Anglo-Indian relationship.[23]

As their experiences in Russia and West Africa showed, an important part of

developing a good relationship with the natives involved establishing close ties with native

leaders. Shortly after arriving in Virginia, George Percy and a group of English men met

with a Rappahannock leader who "entertained us in so modest and proud fashion, as

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[23] Barbour, *CWJS*, v. 1, 262, 172. While the natives often appealed to the English God to intercede in times of calamity, they also recognized the imperial aspect of religious conversion and criticized English religious beliefs as a form of resistance. While Ralph Lane was on his expedition up the Roanoke River, the Indians "grew not only into contempt of us, but also (contrary to their former reverend opinion in show, of the almighty God of heaven, and Jesus Christ . . . whom before they would acknowledge and confess the only God: now they began to blaspheme," (Quinn, *NAW*, v.3, 301).

though he had been a prince of civil government, holding his countenance without laughter or any such ill behavior." That the English were surprised by the natives' admirable behavior reveals the condescension with which they initially approached them. Powhatan presented an even more impressive figure to the English; his first meetings with the visitors were carefully orchestrated to emphasize his power. John Smith described Powhatan sitting upon "a throne at the upper end of the house, with such a majesty as I cannot express, nor yet have often seen, either in pagan or christian." Surrounded by the trappings of his authority, including chains of pearls, furs, and women, Powhatan successfully conveyed an image of a wealthy, powerful leader.[24] Gabriel Archer noted that Powhatan's dominion included "at least twenty several kingdoms, yet each king potent as a prince in his own territory." The English confusion was excusable, especially since the particular native government in the region they colonized was a recent invention.[25]

The creation of the Powhatan empire occurred shortly before the English arrived in Jamestown. The structure of such a large chiefdom was unusual for the Eastern Woodlands, which typically was home to fiercely independent native groups. Powhatan ruled as paramount chief over a group of approximately thirty tribes. Each tribe was

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[24] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 270; Barbour, *CWJS*, v. 1: 65. Smith argued that the source of Powhatan's power was violence, noting that "at the least frown of his brow, their greatest spirits will tremble with fear: and no marvel, for he is very terrible and tyrannous in punishing such as offend him."Barbour, *CWJS*, v. 1: 174. Smith's description of Powhatan was much like English descriptions of Ivan the Terrible, without the irrational rages. Although both men could and did occasionally enforce their will through sheer force, the English simply assumed that violence was the barbarous way to earn respect and did not consider other features such as leadership, gift-giving, and charisma.

[25] Quinn, *NAW*, v. 3, 150; Ibid., v. 5, 275.

required to pay tribute directly to Powhatan or risk a violent confrontation. Many of the designated leaders of tribes under Powhatan's rule were close relatives, which helped reduce the risk of a challenge to the paramount leader.[26]

The perceived absence of a European-style monarch in Virginia was seen as an obstacle to Anglo-Indian relations: rather than negotiating with an individual who had authority over an entire country such as Russia, the English faced the prospect of a never-ending series of meetings with various leaders in order to achieve their goals. To remedy the situation, the English decided to impose their own form of government on the unsuspecting natives.

When Christopher Newport arrived with a supply mission in September 1608, he brought orders to crown Powhatan to signify the native leader's authority in the eyes of the English king. When Newport sent word to Powhatan asking him to come to Jamestown to receive gifts from England, the chief replied: "If your king have sent me presents, I also am a king, and this my land, eight days I will stay to receive them. Your father is to come to me, not I to him." Newport followed Powhatan's wishes and made the journey to Powhatan's village. A bizarre scene ensued in which, after much ado, the

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[26] Axtell, *After Columbus*, 183-189; Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians*, 117; Potter, "Early English Effects," 154. While some scholars have argued that contact with Europeans provoked the creation of large native American states, the development of Powhatan's chiefdom preceded European arrival. The motivating factor during the Late Woodland period seems to have been a significant population increase that caused the expansion of tribal groups and the creation of complex societies in response to growing pressures. Turner, "Socio-Political Organization Within the Powhatan Chiefdom and the Effects of European Contact," in William Fitzhugh, ed., *Cultures in Contact: The Impact of European Contacts on Native American Cultural Institutions, 1000-1800* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 210.

English eventually got Powhatan to put on English clothing and a red cloak, "but a foul trouble there was to make him kneel to receive his crown, he neither knowing the majesty, nor meaning of a crown." Powhatan clearly recognized the subservience symbolized in kneeling before the English and refused to participate. After much persuasion and cajoling, and "by leaning hard on his shoulders, he a little stooped, and Newport put the crown on his head." While the English hoped that the ceremony would forge an alliance with the Powhatans and ease relations, John Smith claimed that "this stately kind of soliciting made him so much overvalue himself, that he respected us as much as nothing at all." Powhatan's behavior, in Smith's opinion, was not fitting for any Indian regardless of rank.[27]

Despite English efforts to formalize Powhatan's power, by European standards the native leader was actually quite restricted in his ability to command his people. Unlike the English, the various native groups of the Powhatan chiefdom had no overarching loyalty to a single monarch. A chiefdom by definition is a kin-oriented society with ranked positions and identifiable centers of socio-political, religious, and economic activities, but without the true economic and political class differentiations of a stratified state society. Without the power to command absolute obedience from all the people in his chiefdom, Powhatan could not create a unified policy towards the English for all Indians, no matter how ornate his crown.[28]

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[27] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 236, 237, 234. Powhatan consistently refused to be beckoned to Jamestown, insisting that the English travel to meet him.

[28] Turner, "Socio-Political Organization Within the Powhatan Chiefdom," 196.

ii. Developing Anglo-Indian Segregation

Powhatan's apparent inability or unwillingness to control the people under his command was a major source of difficulties from the English perspective. To most of the struggling colonists in Jamestown, the Indians in general were treacherous thieves who could not be trusted in the least. The colonists were quick to note, however, that the poor character of the natives was not attributable to simple ignorance but was in fact evidence of their wily ways. John Smith summarized the feelings of many participants in first contact when he argued that the Indians "are inconstant in everything, but what fear constraineth them to keep. Crafty, timorous, quick of apprehension, and very ingenuous." Alexander Whitaker warned that it would be a mistake to underestimate the Indians:

> let us not think that these men are so simple as some have supposed
> them: for they are of body lusty, strong, and very nimble: they are a
> very understanding generation, quick of apprehension, sudden in
> their dispatches, subtle in their dealings, exquisite in their
> inventions, and industrious in their labor.

Even as he condemned the natives' thievery, Gabriel Archer could not help but admire the Indians' technique. Archer claimed that the natives "are so practiced in this art [of stealing] that looking in our face they would with their foot between their toes convey a chisel knife, percer or any indifferent light thing: which having once conveyed they hold it an injury to take the same from them." The English tried to prevent pilfering from the fort by restricting native access and publicly punishing transgressors but were not able to put

an end to the stealing.[29]

The behavior that the English interpreted as thievery was actually rooted in the Indian cultural emphasis on reciprocity. When the Paspahegh Indians visited Jamestown for the first time, they expected gifts as a sign of hospitality, particularly since they brought a deer for the colonists. When the English failed to reciprocate, an Indian took a hatchet as a sort of "forced reciprocity."[30]

Overall, the Jamestown settlers had mixed feelings about the native character. It was understandable that the colonists, isolated in their fort, weakened by disease and hunger, and under constant threat of Indian (or Spanish) attack would expect nothing but the worst of the Indians; what was noteworthy was the English recognition that not all Indians were the same. Smith noted that the Pamunkey Indians did not steal from the English, and even Gabriel Archer had to acknowledge that while the Indians in general were "naturally given to treachery," during a trip up the James River the English encountered nothing but "most kind and loving people." English assessment of native character was further complicated by their religious beliefs. Although the early English inhabitants of Jamestown were not especially known for their piety, the Anglican minister

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[29] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 160; Alexander Whitaker, *Good Newes from Virginia*, 25; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 276. John Smith noted that "they seldom steal one from another, lest their conjurers should reveal it." See Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 160. While stealing within native groups was considered a serious crime, taking goods from outsiders was acceptable, and even praiseworthy for many Indians. Native leaders even had the right of first refusal over any goods stolen from the English. See Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians*, 116; Potter, "Early English Effects," 150.

[30] Martin Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown, 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 52:2(April 1995), 245.

Alexander Whitaker reminded his fellow settlers not to take too dim a view of the natives, for "one God created us, they have reasonable souls and intellectual faculties as well as we; we all have Adam for our common parent." Confronted by their religious beliefs and the occasional good behavior of the natives, the English created a decidedly ambivalent image of native character during first contact.[31]

One of the problems the English had in deciding whether the Indians were generally helpful or a hindrance to their plans was that the natives seemed so changeable in their attitudes towards the visitors. During their first sail up the James River, the English were pleased to discover that the natives freely shared their food with the visitors. Indian hospitality was often more than the English could absorb. Smith reported that it was a general custom that "what they give, not to take again, but you must either eat it, give it away, or carry it with you." In return for the food, Smith noted, "Captain Newport kindly requited their least favors with bells, pins, needles, beads, or glasses, which so contented them that his liberality made them follow us from place to place, and ever kindly to respect us." George Percy reported that upon first meeting the Kecoughtans, Newport rewarded native dancers with "beads and other trifling jewels." While the English were certainly

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[31] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 81; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 276; Whitaker, *Good Newes from Virginia*, 24. For Smith, one explanation for the better disposition of the natives living around the Pawtuxant River was that "they inhabit together, and not so dispersed as the rest," making them more civil. Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 148. Gary Nash argues that to the English "hostile and friendly Indians were seen as different only in their outward behavior," but in this early period, at least, the separation between behavior and character was often indistinguishable. *Red, White, and Black* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982), 55. Karen Kupperman points out that before 1640, all English writers argued that all men had to be descended from Adam and Eve and therefore could not be inherently and irrevocably different. *Settling with the Indians*, 108.

relieved to have found their generosity acknowledged, the process of gift-giving became

conflated with trade negotiations, leading to misunderstandings and disrupting English

trade negotiations at a crucial stage.[32]

In Algonquian society, social rank was closely related to the accumulation and

control of wealth. The strength of this association is evident in the Algonquian term

werowance, which can be translated as "he is rich." Indian leaders jealously guarded their

right to control the flow of goods through their dominions as a way of maintaining their

status in society. Gift-giving was an important demonstration of a werowance's prestige.

When the English arrived and began distributing goods to natives outside the inner circles

of power, it threatened to weaken one of the pillars of native society. What the English

saw as gifts designed to smooth the way for trade the native leaders viewed as a potential

threat to their authority.[33]

Despite the optimistic trade experience in Roanoke, the settlers of Jamestown

would quickly learn that the English experience in other regions during first contact was

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[32] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 69, 29; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 269. Even while Smith was held captive "each morning three women presented me three great platters of fine bread, more venison than ten men could devour" (Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 49). Gift-giving was an important part of the power struggle between the English and the natives. By giving such generous food, Powhatan made his claim to power and authority, while simultaneously displaying his wealth.

[33] Stephen Potter, "Early English Effects on Virginia Algonquian Exchange and Tribute in the Tidewater Potomac," in Peter Wood, ed., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 151-72; See also Feest, "Virginia Algonquians," 261. When Uttamatomakkin, an Indian who accompanied Pocahontas to England, met James I, the English king failed to produce a gift. Uttamatomakkin then doubted that the Englishman really was a king. Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 43.

an apt model for what would happen in Virginia. No matter how hard they tried to control the exchange, the uncomfortable truth was that while the natives could take or leave trade during the early period, the English had to trade in order to survive and to make a profit. Although the English attempted to hide their dependency, the natives shrewdly negotiated the best possible terms for exchange.

One of the difficulties facing the English in the contact period was that the Indians did not seem to share their understanding of the trading process. The Indians had a well established coastal/inland trade long before the English arrived and expected the Europeans to follow long-standing native traditions. When John Smith tried to negotiate with Powhatan for some corn, the Indian leader "seeming to despise the nature of a merchant, did scorn to sell, but we freely should give him, and he liberally would requite us." Powhatan explained to Christopher Newport that powerful leaders should not engage in minor trade, arguing that "it is not agreeable with my greatness in this peddling manner to trade for trifles." Instead, Powhatan suggested, Newport should "lay down all your commodities together, what I like I will take, and in recompense give you that I think fitting their value."[34]

To John Smith, Powhatan's offer was simply part of his devious plan to take advantage of the English. Since Newport was interested not only in trade but in fostering

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[34] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 316; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 217. Powhatan may also have been reluctant to trade corn because of its special meaning in Indian agriculture. While they were quick to share corn during feasts, actually trading corn for other goods was not a traditional Indian practice. Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown," 247. For a discussion of the ceremonial importance of corn, see Silver, *New Face on the Countryside*, 41.

good relations with the Indians, he ignored Smith's warning and agreed to the arrangement. Smith claimed that the English received only four bushels of corn rather than the twenty hogsheads they had expected. Clearly, the primary source of difficulty was the multiple meanings of trade for the participants on both sides. The importance of trade as a symbol of power and control was not lost on any of the men negotiating trade during first contact. For Smith, trade was primarily an economic matter, with added power dimensions. If the natives would not trade at a fair price, he would force it; any challenge to his offer was a challenge to his authority. For Newport, trade was an entree into future relations with the natives and an opportunity to express English good will. Powhatan viewed trade as an extension of his power to take tribute from people in his dominions and to bestow gifts on his favored acquaintances. Trade thus became part of the attempt of both the English and the Indians to control the actions of the other.[35]

One of the most important lessons the English learned in Roanoke was the type of trade goods the Indians most desired. The English discovered that the key to commanding leverage in trade negotiations was to be able to offer copper in exchange for Indian products. Copper was such an important prestige item in Algonquian society that Powhatan himself monopolized the distribution of the precious metal to his followers. In the early seventeenth century, Powhatan's supply of copper was cut off due to the disintegrating relationship between the Powhatan and the Indians on their western border.

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[35] Potter, "Early English Effects," 151. The disagreement with Newport, according to Smith, "bred some unkindness between our two captains." See Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 217. For a discussion of Powhatan's tribute system, see Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians*, 109-112. Powhatan was very guarded about trade, considering any attempt to usurp his prerogative to approve all trade as an affront to his authority.

The Monacan Indians were the source of much of Powhatan's copper; as the two Indian groups struggled for control of the disputed borderlands, the native copper trade came to a virtual standstill.[36]

Recent archaeological excavations of the original Jamestown fort reveal that the English colonists came to Virginia prepared to become the major supplier of copper for Indian society. While the Roanoke colonists seemed to have traded pre-manufactured copper goods for Indian products, the assemblage of artifacts at Jamestown reveals that the English brought sheet copper with them to Virginia. Rather than trading recycled copper objects, the colonists at Jamestown fashioned tubular beads and triangular-shaped pendants specifically designed for the Indians. Clearly, the Jamestown settlers recognized both the importance of copper to native societies and also the most desired forms for trading with the Indians.[37]

Smith's difficulties in negotiating an acceptable trade with Powhatan and his people was due not only to divergent views of trade but to the activities of his own countrymen. Perhaps recalling the difficulties encountered in West Africa when European trade goods flooded the market, the English tried to establish strict control over the flow of goods to the Indians in Virginia. This strategy did not last long, however, and when Newport's first supply mission arrived the colonists were so happy to welcome the latest additions to their

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[36] Jeffrey L. Hantman, "Between Powhatan and Quirank: Reconstructing Monacan Culture and History in the Context of Jamestown," *American Anthropologist*, 92(1990), 676-690.

[37] Kelso, William et al, "Jamestown Rediscovery 1995 Field Report," Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1995, 48-49.

company that they let the mariners trade without restriction. The result was that soon there "could not be had for a pound of copper, which before was sold for an ounce." The trade was further complicated by Newport's generous gifts to Powhatan. Eventually, the colony tried to regulate trade through legal measures. One of Dale's laws stated that "no man of what condition soever shall barter, truck, or trade with the Indians, except he be thereunto appointed by lawful authority, upon pain of death."[38]

That such a law would be included in a set of laws designed to instill martial discipline among unruly colonists reveals the vital importance the English placed on their ability to control trade with the Indians. During the first contact period, the English control of trade was literally a matter of life and death. Shortly after Newport left to fetch supplies for the first colonists, Smith appealed to the Kecoughtan Indians to trade goods for food for the hungry settlers. Recognizing that the English were in dire straits, the Kecoughtans "with careless kindness offered us little pieces of bread and small handfuls of beans or wheat, for a hatchet or a piece of copper." For his part, Smith "in like scorn offered them like commodities." The power play over trade became even more desperate during the "starving time," when William Strachey observed that the Indians "so had our men abased, and to such a contempt, had they brought the value of our copper, that a piece which would have brought a bushel of their corn in former time, would not now buy a little cade [cask] or a basket of pottle [two quarts]." Strachey blamed English sailors for the problems, claiming that they surreptitiously traded with the Indians at night, so that

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[38] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 215; David H. Flaherty, ed., *Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martiall* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 15.

when legitimate traders negotiated for goods in the daytime, "the Indians would laugh and scorn the same, telling us what bargains they met withall by night." Strachey claimed that such behavior was responsible for "the death and starving of many a worldly spirit." The loss of control over the natives was directly related to the loss of control over English subjects.[39]

Unfortunately for colonial promoters, the English involved in early encounters showed a distressing tendency to emulate what they perceived to be the worst aspects of acceptable behavior in the lands they visited. In Russia, the low-ranking employees of the Muscovy Company embraced and flaunted a lifestyle that, to their employers, exceeded the traditional bounds of people in their station in life. Meanwhile, members of the upper class struggled to garner the proper respect they believed was their due from upper-class Russians, particularly government representatives. In Virginia, the colonists also seemed to have reversed class roles, producing idle laborers and powerless leaders. The key question to be answered was whether this apparent alteration in society was due to internal or external factors. Internal factors, such as poor leaders or lazy colonists, could be remedied simply by exporting better people. External factors, such as the environment or the influence of the "savages," presented a greater problem since adjusting to them might mean a fundamental change in English behavior or attitudes. Not surprisingly, most English participants in first contact chose to blame internal problems for the difficulties the colony faced.

Leaders in Jamestown attempted to place the blame for many of the problems in

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[39] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 35; Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 292.

the colony on either the unproductive gentlemen or the unruly underclass, depending on the view of the critic. Jamestown had an unusually high percentage of gentlemen at its founding. Of the first 105 colonists, 36 were classified as gentlemen; after the second supply, the Jamestown population had six times the proportion of gentlemen in English society. John Smith, who did not himself grow up with any privileges of the aristocracy, tried to establish control by upsetting traditional English class roles. Smith complained that while the colony foundered on the brink of starvation, "most of our chiefest men [were] either sick or discontented the rest being in such despair, as they would rather starve and rot with idleness, than be persuaded to do anything for their own relief without constraint." As Smith well knew, part of being an English gentleman was the ability to have leisure time. While gentlemen passed laws in England to try to force commoners to work harder, they reveled in their own free time, an important distinction between classes.[40]

By 1608 Smith forced the gentlemen in his group to labor, a step never taken in Roanoke. Smith's accusations and actions led to a war of words between the leaders of the colony, with each side trying to cast the other as the laziest and most selfish. Not surprisingly, the disagreement centered around the issue of provisions. Edward Wingfield defended his behavior in Jamestown: "it is further said," Wingfield wrote, "I did much banquet and riot, [but] I never had but one squirrel roasted, whereof I gave part to Master Ratcliffe then sick." The chief offenders, Wingfield maintained, were Smith and his

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[40] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 35. For a discussion of English class roles and the problems in early Jamestown, see Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 62-64, 84.

followers, whose "spits have night and day been endangered to break their backs so laden with swans, geese, ducks, etc., how many times their flesh pots have swelled, many hungry eyes did behold to their great longing."[41]

For his part, William Strachey placed the blame for the poor state of the colony by 1610 squarely on the shoulders of the unruly colonists. To those critics who suggested that the empty bellies of the settlers revealed the poor quality of the land, Strachey advised they "remember that if riot and sloth should both meet in any one of their best families, in a country most stored with abundance and plenty in England, what better could befall unto the inhabitants." The problem was not the land; it was the people who seemed to have forgotten their station in life. Strachey blamed "the headless multitude (some neither of quality nor religion) not employed to the end for which they were sent hither, no not compelled (since in themselves unwilling) to sow corn for their bellies." The fault was twofold: first, the common people were not working as they should, and second, a vacuum of leadership allowed the idleness to continue. Although Strachey excused the men "of quality" and "religion," the rest of the population were guilty of upsetting class roles, with disastrous results.[42]

Many witnesses agreed that the starving time of 1609-10 was in large part a result of the laziness of the settlers. Thomas Gates was astonished at the colonists' apparent unwillingness to exert even minimal effort to improve their situation. Gates claimed that he had "seen some of them eat their fish raw, rather than they would go a stone's cast to

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[41] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 281.

[42] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 290.

fetch wood and dress it." Clearly, the fact that the natives attacked any Englishmen who ventured outside the fort had much to do with their hesitancy to search for firewood, but Gates chose to ignore the most obvious explanation for the settlers' behavior and attribute it to a character flaw.[43]

That the flaw was inherent and not something acquired in the country was evident after repeated influxes of new colonists did not seem to improve the situation but to worsen it. The most worthless group of settlers seemed to arrive in Thomas Gates's second fleet, which arrived in Jamestown in August 1611. With the rapid increase in population (almost 600 new colonists in three months) Thomas Dale decided to take 200 men to establish a permanent settlement at Henrico. In a letter sent back to England shortly after the disastrous effort, Dale vented his frustration, asking

> how such people as we are enforced to bring over hither by
> peradventure, and gathering them up in such riotous, lazy, and
> infected places can entertain themselves with other thoughts or put
> on other behavior than what accompanies such disordered persons,
> so profane, so riotous, so full of mutiny and treasonable
> intendments, as I am well to witness in a parcel of 300 which I
> brought with men, or which well may I say not many give testimony
> beside their names that they are Christians.

The behavior of the people, however irritating, was not inexplicable. In fact, it was to be expected of lower-class English men and women. Significantly, Dale did not specifically single out a particular segment of his charges as being of an unruly class--all of the people

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[43] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 299. Karen Kupperman has argued that the inexplicable "laziness" of the colonists may have been due in part to the effects of salt poisoning. The general apathy of the colonists Kupperman attributes to a psychological reaction to their virtual captivity within the Jamestown fort. "Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown." *Journal of American History*, 66(June 1979), 24-40.

had the undesirable characteristics. By reducing all of the people to a lower-class category, Dale could explain the behavior of the colonists from all socio-economic backgrounds as well as devise a strategy for returning order.[44]

What the colonists needed, Dale and other leaders determined, was discipline and a reinstatement of proper social hierarchy. The task called for a minor re-invention of roles; while class privilege did not disappear in Virginia, the obligations were slightly different from those in England. Since a struggling settlement could not afford to have a significant portion of its population idle or unproductive, the gentlemen of the colony would have to sacrifice their leisure time to set a good example for the rest of the population. When upper-class men actually did dirty their hands with manual labor, Strachey reported, "I have heard the inferior people, with alacrity of spirit profess, that they should never refuse to do their best in the practices of their sciences and knowledges, when such worthy, and noble gentlemen, go in and out before them . . . no less [to] help them with their hand, than defend them with the sword." Strachey and other colonial leaders appealed to gentlemen to forego, temporarily, their traditional averral of manual labor to inspire the intended laborers to meet their obligations.[45]

If simply setting a good example was not enough to instill discipline and good order in Virginia, the colonial leaders were willing to force compliance with a heavy hand. When several men involved in his expedition to Henrico ran away to live with the Indians, Dale decided to set an example of his own. Of the recaptured runaways, "some he

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[44] Quoted in Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 322.

[45] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 291.

appointed to be hanged some burned some to be broken upon wheels, others to be staked and shot to death." "All these extreme and cruel tortures," George Percy explained, "he used and inflicted upon them to terrify the rest for attempting the like." Corporal punishment was an accepted form of correction in the seventeenth century, particularly for members of the lower classes and soldiers.[46]

The codification of this strategy came in the form of a series of laws drawn up from 1609 to 1612, which comprised the first written application of English common law in America. The day after Thomas Gates arrived in May 1610 he published the new laws, to which Thomas Dale later added laws specific to officers and soldiers. The *Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* were a hodgepodge of statutes. The laws seem harsh by modern standards, requiring the death penalty for offenses ranging form repeatedly missing church services to slandering the local and Company leaders, but they were intended to enforce discipline through fear and intimidation. In fact, the death penalty was rarely used except for the most heinous crimes.[47]

The publication of the laws in England in 1612 reveals that the authors had ulterior motives--not only did they want to establish control over the settlers but they hoped to reassure nervous investors that the colonial leaders would not allow the settlement to descend into anarchy. By publicizing the harsh directives, however, the Virginia Company risked scaring off potential colonists. Ralph Hamor explained that Dale's efforts

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[46] George Percy, "A Trewe Relacyon." *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 3(1922), 280; Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians*, 127.

[47] Flaherty, *Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martiall*, iv.

were only a temporary solution, since "it was no mean trouble to him, to reduce his people, so timely to good order, being of so ill a condition as may well witness his severe and strict imprinted book of Articles, then needful with all severity and extremity to be executed, now much mitigated." Thus, the laws were much like Ralph Lane's policies in Roanoke and revealed the same intent--harsh discipline to maintain good order. The association of violence and order was not unusual for seventeenth-century English men and women, and colonization promoters expected that a certain level of physical force would be necessary to keep both the colonists and their native neighbors in line.[48]

After the experience at Roanoke, English colonial promoters were forced to recognize the potential for violence without abandoning their original plan for a close Anglo-Indian relationship. In the letters patent issued to Sir Thomas Gates in 1606, the Virginia Company ordered that the colonists

> shall from time to time well entreat those savages in those parts,
> and use all good means to draw the savages and heathen people . . .
> to the true service and knowledge of God, and that all, just, kind
> and charitable courses shall be holden with such of them, as shall
> conform themselves to any good and sociable traffique and dealing
> with the subjects . . . which shall be planted there.

Though the directive was vague about the specific tactics to be employed, the promoters believed that a successful trade and peaceful relationship depended on the settlers setting a good example for the natives who were to live in their midst. Still, the London Council advised the colonists not to allow the natives to establish themselves between the English colony and the sea, "for you cannot carry yourselves so towards them but they will grow

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[48] Hamor, "A True Discourse on the Present State of Virginia," 27.

discontented with your habitation and be ready to guide and assist any nation that shall come to invade you." No matter how well the English treated the natives, it was to be expected that the Indians would eventually resent the foreign incursion on their land. The task before the colonists was not to avoid conflict entirely but to lessen its impact.[49]

Not surprisingly, violence was a part of the Anglo-Indian relationship from the very beginning at Jamestown. Unlike all the other areas visited during the first-contact period, there was no grace period of relatively amicable relations. The first night the settlers landed on the Chesapeake Bay, "there came savages creeping upon all four" who "charged us very desperately in the faces, hurt Captain Gabriel Archer in both his hands, and a sailor in two places of the body very dangerous." After this reception, the English quite naturally viewed the natives with suspicion, searching for signs of imminent attack. When a group of natives sailed past the Jamestown site the first night the English landed, the colonists immediately sounded an alarm, causing the natives to run away. English fears seemed to be warranted four days later when the werowance of the local Paspahegh Indians arrived at Jamestown "with one hundred savages armed, which guarded him in a very warlike manner with bows and arrows, thinking at that time to execute their villainy." The suspicious English did not allow the Indians within their fort, despite the appearance

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[49] Barbour, *Jamestown Voyages,* 43, 50. The London Company expected the colonists to endeavor to maintain good relations with the natives, but not to trust them. Company leaders advised that "above all things do not advertise the killing of any of your men that the country people may know it if they perceive they are but common men and that with the loss of many of their they may diminish any part of yours they will make many adventures upon you." Ibid., 52. The leaders hoped that the English settlers could appear to be god-like, impervious to the Indian arrows and thus reduce the Indian incentive to launch attacks.

two days later of forty natives bringing a gift of a deer; to the English, the natives "came more in villainy than any love they bear us."[50]

After the initial skirmishes, incidents of violence between the colonists and the Indians before 1609 were limited in their scope and objectives. The English use of violence had two primary goals during this period: punishment for a perceived wrong and to force the natives to provide sustenance for the colony. For the Indians, violence served primarily as a means to test the strength of the English or as resistance to English aggression. There was no all-out attempt by either side to completely eliminate the other; neither the English nor the Indians believed they had the capability to achieve a total victory and each side still considered the other a potentially valuable ally.

Before 1609, the English viewed their use of violence as an immediate punishment not simply as vengeance but a way to teach the natives a lesson. Since the Indians were to be a part of colonial society, they had to learn acceptable behavior quickly, and violence fit the English pedagogy. During the first meeting with the Paspaheghs at Jamestown, one of the colonists caught an Indian stealing a hatchet, "whereupon he took it from him by force, and also struck him over the arm." John Smith was quick to use physical correction: after being led around the woods in a fruitless search for a "glistering mineral

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[50] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 268-69, 271. The apparently unprovoked native violence upon first meeting the English may have been retribution for an earlier event. When the Pamunkey Indians captured John Smith in 1607, they brought him before several different Indian groups "to see if any of them knew him for one of those, which had been some two or three years before us in a river amongst them northward, and taken away some Indians from them, by force." Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 282. The all-male population of the early English ventures may also have contributed to native suspicions of their intent, since native war parties were traditionally all-male. See Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 64, 66.

stone," he refused to pay the previously agreed upon copper to his guide, "but for his scoffing and abusing us, I gave him twenty lashes with a rope."[51]

The violence associated with forcing the Indians to supply the English colony with food arose out of a misunderstanding of the abundance of native food supplies, suspicion that the natives were deliberately withholding food as a means of ridding themselves of the colony, and sheer desperation on the part of the hungry colonists. The most famous incident, one which would have long-lasting ramifications for the Anglo-Indian relationship, occurred in January 1609, when Smith confronted Powhatan, who appeared to be reneging on an agreement to trade for corn. After issuing several only slightly veiled threats, Smith succeeded in having his boat loaded with corn. Two days later, Smith challenged Powhatan's brother Opechancanough to a one-on-one fight--the winner was to receive corn or copper. Opechancanough tried instead to ambush the English, but Smith "in such rage snatched the king by his long lock [of hair] in the midst of his men, with his pistol ready bent against his breast." The Englishman's grabbing of Opechancanough's scalplock was deeply offensive to the native leader; to the Algonquians, the scalplock was sacred, a "physical manifestation of the soul." The Indian leader may have remembered the incident as he planned the 1622 attack that killed 347 colonists. Smith then addressed Opechancanough's people, declaring that "you promised to freight my ship ere I departed, and so I shall, or I mean to load her with your dead carcasses."[52]

As John Smith well knew, the threat of violence accompanied by a small

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[51] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 271; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 95.

[52] Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 202; Ibid., 1: 253; Axtell, *After Columbus*, 23.

demonstration of force rather than unbridled violence was an effective means of forcing

the Indians to provide food for the English. After describing all the difficulties and danger

associated with negotiating for corn, Smith observed that people in England "may think it

strange there should be this stir for a little corn, but had it been gold with more ease we

would have got it; and had it wanted, the whole colony had starved." To critics who

suggested that the English should have been more violent with the natives, Smith

explained that "only with fearing them, we got what they had. Whereas if we had taken

revenge, then by their loss we should have lost ourselves." Smith knew from experience

that the Indians could simply abandon their villages and fields if treated too harshly,

leaving the colonists to certain starvation. Though his frank acknowledgment of English

dependency on the natives did not make him any more popular among the nominal leaders

of the colony, Smith's strategy was largely successful in securing food for the settlers.

Smith chose to walk a delicate line, using enough violence to make his threats credible

without chasing the Indians away permanently.[53]

Under Smith's brief leadership, episodes of violence were interspersed with periods

of peace during which it appeared that the hopes of an integrated society might come to

fruition. During his second meeting with Powhatan in 1607, Smith promised to ally with

the native leader against his enemies. Powhatan then declared Smith "a werowance of

Powhatan." But neither side was willing to grant the other equal status. The famous

incident during which Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas allegedly "saved" Smith from

certain execution was likely a ritual symbolizing his adoption into the Powhatan

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[53] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 256.

community while also establishing his subordinate status. The "coronation" of Powhatan ten months later served a similar purpose for the English.[54]

Though each side believed they were inherently superior to the other, by 1608 the Indians and the English recognized the sources of power the other side had. For his part, Powhatan readily acknowledged that English technological superiority and Smith's fierce resolve to avenge any wrongs had the potential to make the Indians' lives miserable. "Think you I am so simple not to know," Powhatan asked Smith, "it is better to eat good meat, lie well, and sleep quietly with my women and children, laugh and be merry with you, have copper, hatchets, or what I want, being your friend; than be forced to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots, and such trash, and be so hunted by you that I can neither rest, eat, nor sleep." While acknowledging the English capability to employ such measures, Powhatan also asked Smith "what can you get by war, when we can hide our provision and fly to the woods, whereby you must famish by wronging us your friends." Powhatan's speech was a realistic appraisal of each group's sources and limits of power early in the relationship. Rather than reducing tensions by highlighting the growing interdependence of the Powhatans and the English, however, the frank assessment actually raised tensions as each side maneuvered to establish themselves as being clearly in charge.[55]

The delicate balance between the Indians and the English began to deteriorate in

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[54] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 67.

[55] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 247; J. Frederick Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609-1614." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98:1(January, 1990), 18.

August 1609 with the arrival of the third supply of settlers. Already struggling to feed themselves, the colonists were not prepared to support the 250 new settlers who burdened Jamestown. Smith responded to the crisis by dispersing the colonists, essentially forcing smaller groups to fend for themselves. The increased presence of settlers on native lands was too much for the Indians, who resented the encroachment and were hard pressed to meet the subsistence demands of their own people, let alone the English. With Smith on a ship to England nursing his wounds from a gunpowder accident, the Indians began a sustained siege of Jamestown designed to rid the country of the intruders.[56]

The Indians made it clear that the root of their anger was the repeated English theft of food, without thought of native needs. Recognizing the English dependency on native food supplies, the Indians were determined to use their advantage. Instead of launching an all-out assault on the fort, which was certain to involve massive loss of life, the natives chose to attack the English when they came searching for Indian food. One group of colonists who went in search of corn were found "slain with their mouths stopped full of bread being done as it seemeth in contempt and scorn that others might expect the like when they should come to seek for bread and relief amongst them." The scattered colonists quickly retreated to Jamestown during the new offensive, facilitating what was essentially a native blockade of the fort. Any settler who ventured outside the walls in search of food faced certain Indian attack. The renewed violence resulted in the infamous "starving time."[57]

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[56] Fausz, "England's First Indian War," 21-27.

[57] Percy, "A Trewe Relacyon," 265.

With little or no food left, the English colonists ate whatever they could find, including snakes, rats, and dogs. Some desperate colonists, George Percy claimed, were forced "to do those things which seem incredible as to dig up dead corpses out of graves and to eat them and some have licked up the blood which hath fallen from their weak fellows." Of 270 colonists in Jamestown in 1609, only 90 survived the famine, disease, and Indian violence. The starving time revealed to the English the dangers of dependency--they could not possibly force their will on the people who held the keys to the storehouse.[58]

By the summer of 1610, it was clear to both sides of the contact that the strategy of creating an integrated society of Indians and English was a failure. In response to an English embassy asking Powhatan to end the siege, he told the English that "either we should depart his country, or confine ourselves to Jamestown only, without searching further up into his land, or rivers, or otherwise, he would give in command to his people to kill us." The arrival of Lord De La Warr in June 1610 ushered in a new Virginia Company policy toward the natives of Virginia. Rather than continuing the policy of appeasement, the company directed De La Warr and his group of 150 colonists to pursue a punitive policy of military pacification. The result was a major escalation of the war and an increase in atrocities on both sides; organized raids marked by systematic slaughter replaced the more sporadic violence of earlier meetings. The intensified fighting signalled

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[58] Percy, "Trewe Relacyon," 267; Fausz, "England's First Indian War," 55.

the beginning of the end of the first contact period in Virginia.[59]

The policy of separation was made clear in the Laws of 1610. The new instructions called for the colonists to subjugate the nearby Indians and become friendly with distant native groups. Using this strategy, the colonists would be able to continue trading with natives without having to risk dependency on the local Indians. Dependency, and the consequent lowering of English status in the eyes of the natives, was the root of many of the difficulties between the English and their neighbors. In this case, familiarity truly did breed contempt. Hereafter, interaction between the local natives and the English colonists was to be strictly regulated.[60]

The relationship between the Indians and the English was a stalemate. Political and economic negotiations had failed as each side refused to acquiesce quietly to the other's cultural demands. Violence bred more violence as the English and the Indians struggled to assert power and control in the woods of Virginia. What was needed, both sides agreed, was a sense of stability, an understandable hierarchy that would have meaning in both cultures. Since politics, trade, and religion seemed to offer little common

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[59] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 298; Fausz, "England's First Indian War," 30. Gary Nash has argued that Dale's policy after 1610 was simply a continuation of Smith's policy of intimidation, but the scale and intent of Dale's actions were clearly a departure from Smith's. See Nash, "Image of the American Indian," 215. George Percy's "True Relation" provides the most detailed account of the escalating violence from both the Indians and the English.

[60] The Laws stipulated that "No soldier may speak or have any private conference with any of the savages, without leave of his captain, nor his captain without leave of his chief officer, upon pain of death." All colonists were also forbidden to live amongst the Indians. See Flaherty, *Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martiall*, 35, 20. For a discussion of the Virginia Company's instruction to Sir Thomas Gates ordering him to make the natives tributaries, see Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 318.

ground from which to establish order, the Indians and the English turned to gender as a means of understanding and attempting to regulate the other's behavior.

iii. Contesting Masculinities

The struggle between the English and the Indians centered not only on economic and political issues but involved a collision of gender systems. Deeply embedded in every cultural encounter is a confrontation between gender systems, sometimes sharply contrasting, sometimes variations on the same theme. When English sailors first arrived in distant lands, they and the natives they encountered created not a single frontier but many frontiers. The "gender frontier" involved issues of power and control as well as associated notions of masculinity and femininity. Like economic, political, and geographic frontiers, the gender frontier was not a static, well-defined entity but was under constant negotiation as both sides of the encounter adjusted their cultural imperatives to reflect the new realities of post-contact life. Although gender issues were an important consideration for the English and the natives of each region they visited in the sixteenth century, the prospect of permanent settlements in Virginia gave added urgency to the desire of each side of the encounter to enforce their gender norms on the other.[61]

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[61] Kathleen Brown proposed the notion of "gender frontiers" in her article "Brave New World: Women's and Gender History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 50:2(April 1993), 311-28. Brown suggested that "by examining the confrontations of different gender systems, including the gendered patterns of colonial domination, historians can assess how challenges to 'natural' categories of gender shaped colonial encounters (318)."

English colonization of the Americas was in part a contest of masculinities. By employing the discursive strategy of feminizing both the native inhabitants and their environment, the English intended not only to justify their presence in the New World but to devise a set of strategies with which to make the natives both recognizable and inferior. The location of the colonies on the edge of the known world heightened English anxiety about the potential societies they would encounter, but also raised the possibility that they could forge a masculine identity on a land and people unencumbered by the turmoil in contemporary Europe. To many English men confused by the recent challenges to their sex-gender system, the opportunity to establish a society in which hierarchy was natural, masculine, and unassailable was not just a privilege but an obligation.[62]

But as in all true contests, there was an opposing side. Even as the English struggled with their own understanding of gender roles on the eve of colonization, so did the natives of Virginia. When English visitors constructed the contact experience as a masculine intervention in a feminized world, the natives responded with their own gender discourse that increasingly recognized an association between masculinity and power. The contest of masculinities dominated the early interactions of the English and the Indians, exacerbating intercultural friction and leading to increased violence. At its heart, the fight over masculinity was a battle for power and control between the natives and the English

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[62] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17. Kim Hall has recently argued that "the chief sign of cultural disorder in the earlier [European exploration] texts is gender, specifically a sense of the instability of gender." (*Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995], 25). Although much of Hall's work focuses on nineteenth-century imperialism, her emphasis on the connection between gender, disorder, and later, race, also applies to the seventeenth century.

invaders.

As the English turned their attention to North America, they unknowingly encountered a society that was also experiencing dramatic changes in its sex/gender system. As Powhatan sought to consolidate power in his paramount chiefdom, he embarked on a transformation of native American gender roles. In order to solidify his power, Powhatan married native women from many of the towns in his chiefdom and then sent them back to their home districts after they had given him a child. Using this strategy, Powhatan quickly gained kinship alliances in the districts under his rule. Powhatan also replaced conquered native leaders primarily with male relatives, creating an all-male hierarchy directly answerable to the paramount chief. Although there were two female werowances in the region, Powhatan's personal policy was clear--conquered groups would have to accept Powhatan's choice of leader and the leader would be male. When the English arrived in Virginia, the heightened tension over masculinity within Powhatan society combined with the English to create a strongly gendered dialogue.[63]

Like Guiana, the environment in Virginia seemed to beg for the masculine English to help it reach its full potential. William Strachey defended Virginia from charges of infertility that plagued the colony in the early years. He argued that detractors acted "as if in the womb thereof there lay not the elemental seeds which could produce as many fair births of plenty, and increase, and better hopes, than any land under heaven." The problem was not with the land; rather, any perceived infertility in the New World was the

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[63] Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 52; Turner, "Socio-Political Organization Within the Powhatan Chiefdom," 198-99.

responsibility of the humans inhabiting the environment. Just as women could be brought to biological perfection through the intervention of men, the virgin land of Virginia needed English men to till the soil rather than the "impotent" Indians.[64]

The fact that native men were not as masculine as the English was readily apparent to the visitors. Indian men seemed to lack one of the key indicators that a boy has reached puberty: body hair. That Indian women plucked men's excess hair only made matters worse in English eyes. Even Indian men's alleged inability to restrain their sexual appetites contributed to their feminization in English accounts. While the English recognized a connection between the number of wives an Indian male had and his power in society, they claimed that polygyny was actually detrimental to the maintenance of masculine identity. Strachey claimed that for men with multiple wives, "the tired body cannot have those sensual helps . . . to hold up the immoderate desires, many women dividing the body, and the strength thereof, make it general unfit to the office of increase rather than otherwise." Not only did polygyny carry the risk of impotence, Strachey speculated, it might also shorten the Indians' lives.[65]

For the English, the risks associated with engaging in sexual activities with the natives were, in theory at least, greater than the temporary pleasure of sexual encounters. While English narrators always insisted on the chaste nature of their relations with the natives, especially in comparison with the Spanish, prohibitions against sexual liaisons had

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[64] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 291.

[65] Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 115. Gabriel Archer noted that the Indians of Virginia had "many wives, to whom as near as I can perceive they keep constant" but that "the great king [Powhatan] had most wives." (Quinn, *NAW*, 5: 276).

a new urgency when long-term residency became a distinct possibility. In a 1609 sermon

to planters about to embark to America, William Symonds argued that as representatives

of Christian plantations, the English "may not marry nor give in marriage to the heathen,

that are uncircumcised . . . The breaking of this rule, may break the neck of all good

success of this voyage." The English embraced the role of chaste conquerors in part

because they wanted to demonstrate control over their own behavior, a particularly

masculine trait.[66]

The English men involved in first contact were not quite sure what to make of

Indian women's sexuality. While the natives occasionally displayed a sense of modesty

that would be an example for English women, they also casually engaged in activities that

the English considered shocking. Some Englishmen argued that it was exceedingly

difficult to avoid situations that might result in sexual impropriety. Strachey claimed that

the Indians were "people most voluptuous" so that if a husband gave his consent, the

women "may embrace the acquaintance of any stranger for nothing, and it is accounted no

offense." As John Smith waited to meet Powhatan one day, a group of thirty "naked"

women proceeded to dance around him making "most hellish cries and shouts" for almost

an hour. After they had finished, they invited Smith into a lodging, where they "more

tormented him then ever, with crowding, and pressing, and hanging upon him, most

tediously crying, love you not me." Smith was silent about what followed, but at the very

least, he found the women's behavior to be far outside the acceptable flirtations of proper

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[66] Quoted in Smits, "'Abominable Mixture': Toward the Repudiation of Anglo-Indian Intermarriage in Seventeenth-Century Virginia." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 95:2(April, 1987), 161.

English women.[67]

The biggest problem with native women's sexuality, for the English, was that it was indicative of a society out of control. Sixteenth-century English men and women never denied women's sexuality. For Victorian women, chastity was often attributed to a naturally low level of sexual desire; for women in Renaissance England, however, sexual restraint was evidence of a conscious effort to contain their physical urges. When native women surrounded Smith and began acting--as he saw it--in a sexually provocative manner, the issue was not whether Indian women were naturally more lustful that English women but whether they could control their lust. Native men were at fault for ignoring their own masculine role as enforcers of gender norms. By establishing permanent settlements and providing proper role models, the English sought to impose their own notions of acceptable sexual behavior upon the apparently ignorant Indians.[68]

For the first English to arrive in Virginia, the problem was that the Indians seemed content to retain their own culturally constructed notions of proper sexual behavior even after the English tried to show them the error of their ways. For the Algonquians, as for the English, sexuality was deeply embedded with issues of gender and power. Upon making a tentative mutual defense compact with the English shortly after they arrived, Powhatan declared that "no man account us [Englishmen] nor Paspaheghans, but Powhatans, and that the corn, women, and country, should be to us as to his own people."

[67] Quinn, *NAW*, 5, 65; Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 162.

[68] Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy About Women in England, 1540-1640.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 59.

By grouping land, food, and women in the same category, Powhatan asserted his right to bequeath each of them to the visitors. The power to bestow sexual partners upon visitors was reserved for male leaders in the Powhatan system. Smith noted that it was customary that when a dignitary from another tribe visited the Powhatans, "at night where his lodging is appointed, they set a woman . . . to be his bed fellow." While there is no evidence that Indian women objected to such treatment, it is clear that women were often used as tokens of hospitality from one group of powerful men to another.[69]

Powhatan's grouping of women together with corn was not incidental since the two were intimately related in Algonquian society. While Indian men were primarily responsible for hunting and fishing, native women took charge of the cultivation of the important corn and other vegetable crops. Except for occasional contributions during planting and harvesting, native men considered agriculture to be women's work. While the English did not adopt many other Indian gender conventions, they seemed willing to follow native prohibitions for men to plant corn. Despite reports to the contrary, the English settlers were not simply hesitant to labor at any task--after all, they managed to build several large forts, willingly went on expeditions to the interior, and risked their lives fighting the Indians. But they did not grow corn in any amount sufficient to feed the struggling settlement. In part, the English refusal to plant corn must be interpreted as part of the contest of masculinities in Virginia. Determined not to be perceived as unmanly, the English chose to risk starvation rather than engage in behavior that in England was

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[69] Barbour, *CWJS*, 1: 67. Smith is careful to point out that this was the custom when another Indian dignitary visited the Powhatans, neatly preempting any suggestion that Englishmen partook of such customs.

considered to be the natural provenance of men, but was strictly women's work in America.[70]

The strict lines the English drew between men's and women's work were alien to Powhatan society. Smith asserted that native men "bestow their times in fishing, hunting, wars, and such manlike exercises, scorning to be seen in any woman like exercise." The image of native men frolicking through the woods while their women toiled at the hard work of farming was further evidence, to the English, of the warped gender dynamics in America. But from the Indian perspective, the most important feature of the labor division was the reciprocity of the system. Women had to work in the fields and the households, but they expected men to provide meat to cook and protection from hostile neighbors. Men had to bear the physical hardships of the hunt and warfare but could expect their women to provide a decent household and children. Gender divisions in a subsistence economy are of necessity not sharply drawn, allowing for flexibility during seasonal changes and times of particular stress. Many native American cultures also had a sense of continuity of labor--men brought home animals which women then processed for consumption--which belied any strict definition. If an Algonquian man was not a successful hunter and could not provide reasonable amounts of food for his family, his wife and children were free to find another man to take his place. Thus, Indian masculinity was closely associated with the male ability to see that his people did not go hungry.[71]

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[70] Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown," 236; *Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 48-9.

[71] Barbour, *CWJS,* 1: 162 ; Rountree, *Powhatan Indians of Virginia,* 89. English men's description of Indian women as drudges and Indian men as lazy was in part due to

The English failure to plant corn in sufficient quantities only made them seem less masculine to the Indians. Desperate to find a way to feed the hungry colony, John Smith made repeated visits to the Indians, essentially begging for corn in exchange for English goods. Recognizing that their dependence on Indian corn was a potentially emasculating experience, the English framed the search for food as a military activity and native corn as booty or tribute. The Indians refused to allow the English to do so, however, and continually scoffed at the Englishmen's behavior. When the Indians killed a group of English soldiers and stuffed their mouths with corn, the symbolic connection between dependency, violence, and feminization was complete.[72]

As the Anglo-Indian relationship became increasingly violent, both sides fashioned the other's military techniques as further evidence of their femininity. To the English, the Indians' willingness to turn and run during a battle was unmanly, as was their fondness for surprise attacks on isolated settlers. The Indians found the Englishmen's inability to withstand torture without crying out a particularly unmasculine response to physical hardship. The Indians were also offended when the English failed to comply with the Algonquian prohibition against torturing women and children. Percy described one raid during which the English soldiers attacked Paspaheghans and took the "Queen and children" prisoners. The soldiers complained that the prisoners had been spared, so "it was agreed upon to put the children to death the which was effected by throwing them

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the English resentment of the Indian ability to succeed at agriculture when the English could not. Smits, "'The Squaw Drudge': A Prime Index of Savagism," *Ethnohistory* 24(1982), 286.

[72] Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 73-74.

overboard and shooting out their brains in the water yet for all this cruelty the soldiers were not well pleased" and began to fight over how to kill the Queen. They eventually decided to use a sword rather than burning her alive as some had suggested.[73]

It was increasingly clear to the Indians and the English that despite the apparent unmanliness of their opponents, neither side was willing to accept a subordinate, feminine role in the relationship. Yet gender conventions common to both cultures still held out one possibility of resolving the crisis. In both societies, marriage could formalize political ties and kinship relations, in theory uniting two distinct groups into one with mutual concerns. When John Rolfe requested a marriage with Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, both the Indians and the English viewed the nuptials as an opportunity to harness the heretofore destructive contest of masculinities to create at least a semblance of peace.

Despite the clear political advantages of such a union, the English were worried about the image the marriage would convey back in England. Rolfe was acutely aware of the religious and social ramifications of his decision, noting that he was not "ignorant of the heavy displeasure which almighty God conceived against the sons of Levie and Israel for marrying strangewives." Concerned about the rumors that might spread, Rolfe wrote Sir Thomas Dale a letter assuring him (and other doubters) that he was

> in no way led (so far as man's weakness may permit) with the
> unbridled desire of carnal affection: but for the good of this
> plantation for the honor of our country, for the glory of God, for
> my own salvation, and for the converting to the true knowledge of
> God and Jesus Christ, an unbelieving creature, namely Pocahontas.

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[73] Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 65; Percy, True Relation," 272.

Thus, Harriot's figurative marriage of the English people with the natives of North America became real: the English man was to act out his proper role as teacher and leader of his wife, who would with all due obedience acknowledge his superiority and authority. Despite English efforts to confine the Powhatans to the subordinate role of bride, the natives stubbornly insisted on their own authority. After seeing the success of Rolfe's alliance, the English governor Thomas Dale sent an ambassador to Powhatan to negotiate for the hand of another daughter. Dale was surprised when Powhatan refused his request; the Indian leader explained that the English already had one of his daughters, "which so long as she lives shall be sufficient, when she dieth he shall have another child of mine." Once again, Powhatan was determined to assert his own masculine prerogative to bestow women as gifts or political tools. The native leader was not going to allow his people to be passive wives to the English husbands.[74]

The first Anglo-Powhatan war came to an official end in 1614 with the marriage of John Rolfe and Pocahontas, but the fundamental differences between the exhausted combatants had not been resolved. Ironically, the harbinger of peace, Rolfe, was in part responsible for the eventual return of full-scale violence as his experiments with tobacco gave the colonists renewed incentive to encroach further upon native lands. The introduction of tobacco culture would have dramatic effects on the Anglo-Indian relationship as well as the Virginia environment.[75]

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[74] Barbour, *CWJS*, 2: 249-50. Rolfe was also concerned about overstepping class boundaries by marrying an Indian princess.

[75] Potter, "Early English Effects," 158; Fausz, "England's First Indian War," 49. For the impact of tobacco on the American environment and the Anglo-Indian

The struggle for control of Virginia did not end in 1614 with the close of the first contact period but the tenor of negotiations had changed. John Smith, whose recognition of English dependency forced him to temper his own predilection towards violence, was no longer a force in Anglo-Indian relations. Hotter heads on both sides of the contact simmered until they tensions exploded again in 1622. Determined to avoid settling into a dependent status, the English and the Indians sought to enforce their supremacy with physical force. Where discursive power had failed to establish an acceptable hierarchy, a new strategy of bloodshed prevailed.

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relationship, see Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside*, 142-3; and Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), especially 30-32.

CONCLUSION

When Alexander Whitaker reflected on the short history of the English settlements in America, he acknowledged that the experience had often been difficult. Indeed, Whitaker mused, "I may fitly compare it to the growth of an infant, which hath been afflicted from his birth with some grievous sickness, that many times no hope of life hath remained, yet it liveth still." The offspring anticipated in Thomas Harriot's marriage of the English and the Indians had struggled into the world, perhaps not as easily as the English had hoped. In its infancy, the relationship between the English and the Indians had not yet lost the sense of optimism that had characterized the first meetings of the two peoples, yet it also bore the burden of the violence and cultural misunderstandings that had preceded its birth.[1]

In half a century, the English came face-to-face with a dizzying variety of peoples in Russia, West Africa, and the Americas. Although they left their home country certain of English superiority and continued to believe that they were the best people and nation on earth, the first contact experience had forced the men directly involved to come to terms with cultures that differed from their own. In doing so, the English visitors grudgingly had to accommodate native behavior and traditions that often seemed irrational at best. While the English did find much to admire in each of the lands they visited, their

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[1] Whitaker, *Good Newes from Virginia*, 22.

accommodationist strategy was more a recognition of expedience than an embryonic sense of cultural relativism. Success, measured in economic rewards or colonial permanence, was inextricably linked with the Anglo-native relationship. The fundamental factor that drove the relationship in each country was English dependence on the natives they encountered.

This fact alone, that the allegedly superior English were fundamentally dependent on the goodwill of the Russians, Africans, and native Americans, was the defining characteristic of the first contact experience. Forced to live at least temporarily in environments much different from their homeland, the English struggled to understand the world around them. It made sense that Russia would be colder than England, but the depth of the climatic differences was astounding. Likewise, the English expected West Africa to be hot, but they did not anticipate the devastating impact of diseases on European sailors. The most confusing environments may have been the Americas; scientific theory and optimistic reports suggested that the land should have been much more ideal for English colonization than it initially proved to be. Unaccustomed to these environments, the English were dependent on the natives for sustenance and strategies to survive the various conditions.

Perhaps in part as a recognition of their dependency, the Englishmen directly involved in first contact did not dwell on the racial characteristics of the natives they encountered, preferring instead to focus on cultural rather than physical attributes. While the English recognized that the natives' skin color was different in each region, during this early period it was more important to identify native cultural practices in order to find a

way to manipulate the relationship to the English advantage. Skin color did mark difference, but for the English the most important aspects of native society were religion, government, trade, and gender conventions.

English opinion of native religions in each of the countries was virtually unanimous--not only were the religions in error but they showed signs of the influence of the Devil. Paradoxically, the longest and most virulent condemnations of native religion were aimed at the most recognizable religion, Russian Orthodox Christianity. While polytheism and bizarre rituals with cannibalistic overtones were to be expected of ignorant heathens, the English were shocked to find what they considered to be outlandish beliefs among people professing to be Christians. Conversion of the natives during early encounters was out of the question. In Russia, trade-oriented English were fearful of offending their sensitive hosts, thereby risking the economic exchange at the heart of the relationship; in the other regions, conversion of the natives might be a long-term goal but was actually counter-productive during the early years. Traditional religious practices in West Africa and the Americas provided the English with an opportunity to manipulate native beliefs to wield more power in the Anglo-native relationship. By encouraging the natives to view the English as possessors of supernatural powers associated with native deities, the English hoped to position themselves as acknowledged superiors, reducing the increasingly obvious dependent status of the visitors.

While the English enjoyed limited success using this strategy, manipulating religious beliefs was not a practical way to exert power in the Anglo-native relationships. For people whose stated goal was to convert heathens to Christianity, allowing natives to

believe that the English themselves were "gods" was questionable at best. Besides, the natives in each region showed a stubborn willingness to maintain their own religious beliefs even after the English pointed out the "error" of their ways. In the end, the visitors made the decision to set aside religious differences during the first-contact period, scoffing privately at drunken Russian monks and the spiritual worlds of West Africa but rarely engaging the natives in religious debate.

A more effective way to establish control over the natives, the English believed, was to enlist the help of native leaders in each country. Just as the English monarch was supposed to embody all of the best qualities of the English nation, the English who set sail for distant lands expected native leaders to represent the people the English encountered. Believing that the natives were naturally inferior, the English supposed that native leaders would be better than their followers, though still beneath the English. Early English confrontations with Ivan seemed to confirm their suspicions; the Russian leader alternately impressed the English with displays of power and magnificence and apparently irrational rages and barbaric behavior. The English in Russia engaged in a delicate dance with the Russian monarch, forced to negotiate economic and political agreements with the violent and mercurial Muscovite..

As much as the English dreaded their meetings with the tyrannical Russian leader, the Russian government was preferable to the situation they discovered in West Africa and the Americas. While the centralized power of the Russian state opened the door for abuses of power, the decentralized systems in the other regions led to frustrating and continual negotiations for English visitors. The English struggled to understand the

governmental structures in West Africa and the Americas. By identifying the hierarchy and roles of various government leaders, the English hoped to reduce the number of natives with whom they had to negotiate. In West Africa, the English forged economic and military alliances with one group of natives only to begin the process again as they proceeded down the coast. With competition from other European powers, the English could never be sure whether they would be greeted with stockpiles of trade goods or volleys of native weaponry.

Based on this experience, the English were determined to identify and promote a good relationship with a single powerful leader in the Americas. Fortunately for the visitors, Powhatan showed the potential of becoming an Ivan but without the unpredictable behavior. Like Ivan, Powhatan was caught up in expanding his territory on the eve of English arrival and was looking for potential alliances. The English hoped that negotiating with the native leader, however difficult, would ease their way into the country. Despite their best efforts, the English in Virginia found Powhatan to be strong-willed in his insistence that he be treated with the respect due a great leader, yet in English eyes he was seemingly unable to exert the control over his own people that the English associated with powerful government officials. Although the English certainly never were themselves entirely under the control of an autocratic leader, they held the Indians to a double standard, expecting absolute uniformity in native behavior. Thus, the infamous crowning ceremony was designed not just to make Powhatan subservient to the English crown, but to make him clearly in charge of the natives of Virginia. The symbolic power of the coronation was intended to influence Indians as well as Europeans. Unfortunately

for the English, the various Indian groups scattered throughout Virginia did not simply abandon their cultural understandings of leadership and governance and continued to act independently of Powhatan. Caught between their desire to have a strong leader such as Ivan to facilitate negotiations and their need for a pushover native government that would accommodate their demands for food and land, the English found neither.

Behind all the English interactions with natives and all English assessments of native environments and cultures was the visitors' overwhelming need to trade with the local population. What initially brought the English to the freezing ward houses of Novgorod, the steaming Senegal River, and across the ocean to the largely unknown Americas was not some burgeoning imperialist impulse or statement of religious independence but a desire for riches. Even as Ivan attempted to broaden the Anglo-Russian relationship to include a military or even a marital alliance, the English continually insisted on the primacy of economic negotiations above all others. In West Africa, the English willingly joined native military disputes if economic reward was in the offing, risking their lives for gold and pepper rather than political or religious ideals. The hope for gold in Guiana outweighed the lack of hard evidence of a significant mine, perhaps distracting from the very real potential to establish profitable agricultural settlements in the region. And in Roanoke and Jamestown, discouraged settlers returned to England with reports of the economic losses they had suffered, despite the long lists of commodities contained in early reports.

The English focus on economic matters over all else during the first contact period forced them to act *within* the parameters of native cultures rather than insisting upon the

English way. Though they complained bitterly in letters home, English agents of the Russia company often waited months until Ivan beckoned them to appear before him to negotiate trade. Merchants in West Africa followed the native tradition, showing outward signs of deference to native leaders before beginning trade negotiations. In the Americas, the English learned the peculiar trade system through trial and error, eventually discovering not only what goods the Indians wanted but with whom they could conduct large-scale trade. In every region, the English found that gift-giving was a prerequisite to establishing any sort of political or economic relationship with the natives. Much to their dismay, the English discovered that failure to comply with native demands resulted in a loss of trading privileges or even in outright military revolt.

While English assessments of native religions, governments, and trade systems had immediate practical applications in directing the course of their relationship, their focus on native gender conventions had less obvious but equally important ramifications for the Anglo-native relationship in each region. The English believed that skin color was mutable, governmental systems changeable, and heathens convertible, but the differences between men and women were inviolable. English emphasis on the alleged violations of gender norms in native societies was perhaps some of the strongest evidence of the barbarity and inferiority of the natives. Through their use of gendered discourse that associated all natives with female characteristics and all English with masculine traits, the English sought to impose a "natural," immutable hierarchy in their colonial possessions. While the influence of gender discourse cannot be measured in convenient values such as pounds sterling, its importance in shaping English and native thought and behavior during

the early encounters was crucial. Political and economic negotiations which would seem to be devoid of gender issues were imbued with gendered language, as each side of the contact struggled to make sense of the behavior of the other. Since gender conventions were such strong markers of cultural values, both sides of the contact insisted on the correctness of their system and the deviance of the other.

Native insistence on English adherence to the cultural practices of Russia, West Africa, and the Americas was perhaps the most surprising and frustrating aspect of the English experience during the first-contact period. The English could write all they wanted about the superiority of their food, government, environment, and economic system, but in actual day-to-day behavior the English were forced to live in native lands with native people. The natives showed surprising resilience, maintaining their cultural values in the face of devastating diseases and the influx of Europeans. While the English saw their dependence on the natives in each region as a temporary situation that would quickly be overcome, the natives saw the English struggle for trade goods and food as a sign of the inferiority of English people and culture. Thus, any English efforts to convince the natives of the superiority of English customs or religion were largely futile until they had demonstrated the ability to carry themselves as adults rather than dependent children.

By the end of the first-contact period in the early seventeenth century, the English had decided that it was not enough to establish rhetorical control over allegedly inferior peoples but that actual control would involve a much larger commitment to the Anglo-native relationship. Since the natives seemed unwilling to simply acknowledge the superiority of the English, they would have to be forced to accept their subservient

position. In Russia, the English negotiated increasingly tough trade agreements, holding out the hope of a vital military alliance in exchange for economic benefits. In West Africa the Hawkins slaving expeditions signaled a new course in the relationship; although the English slave trade was largely dormant until the late seventeenth century, the precedent for full-scale violence and racial ideology had been set. English ambitions in Guiana fell victim to inflated expectations and the military power of other European interests, only to await future assault in the renewed imperialism of the nineteenth century. And in North America, the legacy of the unsettled first contact period resulted in the burst of violence in 1622 that caused thousands of English and Indian deaths and led to increasingly racial animosity.

Although the first-contact period should not be interpreted as a moment of racial harmony or a brief window during which the possibility for true understanding between peoples of vastly different cultural values might have forged a relationship based on mutual respect for different values, it was a time of transition. Before phrenologists sought to identify the racial characteristics associated with bumps on a skull, before gradations in skin color marked the limits of a person's future, and before the backwoods of North America resounded with the cries of Indians and colonists waging full-scale war, the outcome of the Anglo-native relationship was still in doubt. As the young relationship struggled towards adolescence, the characteristics that would mark the future of the relationship were present but not yet established as the determining features. No longer entirely dependent on the goodwill of the natives for trade, military alliances, or survival, the English began to set forth their own program for the Anglo-native relationship, one

which the natives often violently resisted. Accommodation was no longer the only

expedient course of action for the English, and the first-contact period came to a close.

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