English-Inuit hostilities at Cape Charles (Labrador) in 1767 Hostilités entre Anglais et Inuit au cap Charles (Labrador) en 1767

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Résumé de l'article

En 1767, trois pêcheurs anglais associés à l'entreprise de pêche et de traite de Nicholas Darby, au sud du Labrador, furent tués par des Inuit. En riposte, un détachement de soldats britanniques du fort York nouvellement créé se lança à la poursuite des meurtriers présumés, en tua plusieurs et fit prisonniers les autres. Parmi ces derniers se trouvaient une inuk nommée Mikak, ainsi que le futur premier converti inuk de l'Église morave, l'adolescent Karpik. Pour comprendre les hostilités de 1767, on ne peut se contenter de suivre le récit des autorités coloniales et des traiteurs. Après consultation des archives moraves, le fameux assassinat des environs du cap Charles en 1767 semble avoir eu des causes plus complexes qu'on ne l'avait pensé jusqu'ici, l'une d'elles suggérant que les Européens auraient pu être quelque peu coupables dans cet événement. Au lieu d'être le meurtre gratuit de trois Européens par des Inuit au cours d'un vol, il se pourrait qu'il se fût agi d'un acte de légitime défense des Inuit voulant empêcher les pêcheurs anglais de leur voler leurs marchandises de traite. Mais quel qu'ait été le motif à l'origine de la mort des hommes de Nicholas Darby, cet événement de l'année 1767 a pris une importance historique au Labrador, d'autant plus qu'il s'est produit durant la décennie de l'implantation de la législation et de l'administration britanniques qui ont modifié les relations des Européens avec les Inuit, parallèlement à l'établissement d'une présence morave de longue durée sur la côte nord du Labrador.

English-Inuit hostilities at Cape Charles (Labrador) in 1767

Hans J. Rollmann*

Résumé: Hostilités entre Anglais et Inuit au cap Charles (Labrador) en 1767

En 1767, trois pêcheurs anglais associés à l'entreprise de pêche et de traite de Nicholas Darby, au sud du Labrador, furent tués par des Inuit. En riposte, un détachement de soldats britanniques du fort York nouvellement créé se lança à la poursuite des meurtriers présumés, en tua plusieurs et fit prisonniers les autres. Parmi ces derniers se trouvaient une inuk nommée Mikak, ainsi que le futur premier converti inuk de l'Église morave, l'adolescent Karpik. Pour comprendre les hostilités de 1767, on ne peut se contenter de suivre le récit des autorités coloniales et des traiteurs. Après consultation des archives moraves, le fameux assassinat des environs du cap Charles en 1767 semble avoir eu des causes plus complexes qu'on ne l'avait pensé jusqu'ici, l'une d'elles suggérant que les Européens auraient pu être quelque peu coupables dans cet évènement. Au lieu d'être le meurtre gratuit de trois Européens par des Inuit au cours d'un vol, il se pourrait qu'il se fût agi d'un acte de légitime défense des Inuit voulant empêcher les pêcheurs anglais de leur voler leurs marchandises de traite. Mais quel qu'ait été le motif à l'origine de la mort des hommes de Nicholas Darby, cet évènement de l'année 1767 a pris une importance historique au Labrador, d'autant plus qu'il s'est produit durant la décennie de l'implantation de la législation et de l'administration britanniques qui ont modifié les relations des Européens avec les Inuit, parallèlement à l'établissement d'une présence morave de longue durée sur la côte nord du Labrador.

Abstract: English-Inuit hostilities at Cape Charles (Labrador) in 1767

In 1767, three English fishers associated with Nicholas Darby's fishing and trading enterprise in southern Labrador were killed by Inuit. In response to this violence, a contingent of British soldiers from newly established York Fort pursued the alleged perpetrators, killed several, and captured others. Among the captives was an Inuk woman named Mikak as well as the future first Moravian Inuk convert, the youth Karpik. The hostilities of 1767 cannot be fully explored merely by following the narrative of colonial authorities and traders. If the Moravian records are consulted, the notorious murder near Cape Charles in 1767 appears to have had a more complex causation than has hitherto been suggested, one that may include some European culpability in these events. Instead of the unprovoked murder of three Europeans by Inuit during a robbery, it may have been a violent act of self-defence to prevent the theft of Inuit trading goods by English fishers. Whatever the original motivation for the killings of Nicholas Darby's men may have been, the 1767 melee remains an important historical event in Labrador, which occurred during a decade that saw British legal and administrative changes reshape European relations with Inuit and a lasting Moravian presence on Labrador's north coast established.

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Introduction

The historical context of the capture of a woman named Mikak and a youth named Karpik—Inuit with considerable public exposure during their subsequent stay in England in 1768-1769—was defined by ongoing altercations between Inuit and Europeans in southern Labrador (Rollmann forthcoming; Stopp 2009; Taylor 1983, 1984). The narrative of the colonial authorities and English traders has so far framed the discussion so that the attack on trader Nicholas Darby's men near Cape Charles in 1767 appears to be a unilaterally hostile event perpetrated by Inuit. The hostilities of 1767, however, cannot be fully explored merely by following the narrative of colonial authorities and traders. In the following paper I will argue that if the Moravian records are consulted, the notorious murder near Cape Charles in 1767 appears to have had a more complex causation than has hitherto been suggested, one that may include some European culpability in these events.

Inuit, Moravians, and the development of the British fishery in southern Labrador

In the summer of 1765, Moravian missionaries knowledgeable in Kalaallisut (West Greenlandic), sought to explore the possibility of a mission in Labrador. At the same time, the English colonial authorities wanted to develop a ship fishery and trade in southern Labrador, free of any interference by Aborigines or other European interests. The Moravian missionaries served as mediators and interpreters between Governor Hugh Palliser of Newfoundland and the Inuit who were trading near Chateau Bay (Hill et al. 1765: 75-177; Lysaght 1971; Olsthoorn 2010; Rollmann 2013). Unfortunately the expected good relations between the Europeans and the Aborigines did not come to fruition in the wake of this 1765 encounter, a situation that made a Moravian pacifying presence among the Inuit in Labrador all the more desirable for the colonial authorities. After the departure of the missionaries and Palliser from Chateau Bay in September 1765, Inuit remained in southern Labrador. While the men had left the area, perhaps for further trade, women and older men remained in their camp. In discussing intelligence on what transpired after the missionaries left the coast, the Moravian leadership in London mentioned that "some mariners from New England went to the area of Eskimaux Bay," as Hamilton Inlet was then known, "and committed the greatest disorders among the females who had remained at home." Palliser thought that the total absence of Inuit from Chateau Bay during the following year (1766) and a murder occurred "from pure revenge" (Oeconomats-Conference 1766: 2-4).

As a protective measure for the developing fishery and hoped-for trade with Inuit, the governor had a blockhouse built in 1766 at Chateau Bay, called York Fort, staffed by a naval officer and soldiers under his command. With this protection in place, English fishers had left their fishing gear behind, hoping that they could commence fishing earlier the following spring (ibid.). A year later, relations with Inuit actually worsened when intelligence reached England that Nicholas Darby's operations near Cape Charles had been attacked by Inuit and three of his men killed (Kennedy 2015;

Whiteley 2003b). Darby was a British ship captain and merchant who had acquired his experience in the Newfoundland fishery and became from 1765 on a significant adventurer in Labrador, where he established himself at Cape Charles and maintained for a short time four different fishing locations in southern Labrador (Kennedy 2015). Although benefitting first from Governor Hugh Palliser's efforts to establish a British ship fishery in Labrador, Darby would later blame his troubles on the governor's policy of insisting on non-violence toward Inuit at any cost in the hope of fostering better relations. Darby wrote in his petition to the Privy Council, when seeking compensation for his losses, that if he "had been sufferd to fire on them as the Canadians always do, he would have maintain'd his Ground and prevent[ed] the dreadful Calamity that ensued (Darby 1769).

The 1767 hostilities in the light of governmental, mercantile, and Moravian records

What happened in 1767 is not easy to reconstruct today in light of differing contemporary sources. In particular, the Moravian records suggest an alternative to the traditional version suggested by the colonial authorities and British traders, who viewed Inuit as the sole initiators of the hostilities at Cape Charles. Governor Palliser reported back to Lord Hillsborough, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that in November of 1767 "some of the Savages from the North Coast" had come "to steal some shallops and Fishing Craft" and "when three Englishmen were killed, a detachment of men from the Blockhouse went out, attacked the Savages, killed many of them and drove the rest away, who left behind them three Women and Six Children, belonging to some of the Men who were killed" (Palliser 1768: 25-26).

Darby himself went on record about the event on at least two occasions, once in a petition to the Privy Council on 6 March 1769, when he asked to be compensated for his losses, and in an undated legal document written after 1770 (Darby 1769; n.d.). In 1769, he spoke of multiple occasions of harrassment by Inuit following the murder of his men. He wrote that while he strictly observed Palliser's policy of non-violence,

these Savages availing themselves of our Friendship and Humanity towards them most barbarously and treacherously surpriz'd Petitioner and his People[,] killed three of his men and drove the rest to the Mountains[,] burnt and destroy'd his Boats[,] Stages and Dwellings and wasted his salt whereby he was oblig'd to quit the Coast destitute of the greatest part of his Effects which Loss amounts to £ 4677 Sterling by Accompt Particulars [...]. [Then,] "some time after the Savages murder'd your Petitioner's men and destroy'd his Effects they continued to harrass him[,] in one of which attacks he took nine Women and Children whom [...] he treated with the greatest Tenderness and Humanity; two of whom are now in London (Darby 1769).

In Palliser's narrative, the deadly Inuit raid was triggered by their murderous robbery and destruction of boats and shallops. The subsequent killing of many Inuit by a detachment of soldiers from the nearby blockhouse as well as the capture of three women and six children appear to be a related series of events following the murder

and theft. Darby's account, however, separates the murder of his three men (during which his workers were expelled and boats, premises, and supplies destroyed) from subsequent "harassments." He alleges that in one of these later attacks, "he took nine women and children," whom he treated well and humanely, and of whom two were in London while he was petitioning the king for relief. In both of his depositions, Darby does not mention the British naval detachment's role in pursuing the Inuit nor the violent death of Inuit men at the soldiers' hands and the capture of the victims' women and children by the soldiers. Darby makes himself the exclusive victim and actor in this drama that is said to have featured multiple attacks, and he describes himself as the one who captured the Inuit.

A record left in the papers of Benjamin LaTrobe, the Moravian Secretary of Missions, presents an account by Jeremiah Coghlan about the incident that closely resembles Palliser's narrative. La Trobe was informed by Coghlan, a prominent trader in Labrador since 1765 (Whiteley 2003a),

that after the King's ships left the Coast that the Indians [Inuit] in their return to the North met with a boat of fishermen that were going home to Shato Bay, whom the Indians unhappily quarrel'd with & killed several off them, these fine fishermen intended to winter there but those that escape[d] went to Shato Bay & told the Soldiers & they went immediately in persuit after the Indians and killed several of them (Hutton n.d.: 4).

During the final Moravian exploration journey to Labrador in the summer of 1770, before the establishment of Nain in the following year, the missionary Jens Haven learned additional particulars about the 1767 hostilities. In September at Chateau Bay, Captain William Williams, a native of Wales and the commanding British officer on the warship Otter, had been delighted to see the missionaries. He knew of Moravian missions in America, since he had previously met and befriended the Moravian Count Reuss and his wife when taking them from New York to London. Williams ordered Captain Mugford of the Jersey Packet, the boat Haven and fellow missionary Christen Drachardt¹ were traveling on, to go to Cape Charles "to see whether the Esq[uimaux] had not caused any harm there to the English." At the same time the Captain was to deliver a commission to the newly arrived George Cartwright, who in March had joined Francis Lucas, Jeremiah Coghlan, and Thomas Perkins at Bristol in business and settled in the area to hunt and fish and to develop trade with the Inuit (Haven 1770: 367-368; Stopp 2008; Story 2003; Whiteley 2003c). In July 1770, Cartwright had taken possession for the company of the area that Darby had abandoned after the 1767 hostilities (Cartwright 1792: 1, 19-20). It was on the way to Cartwright's establishment that Haven received first-hand information about the 1767 events from an eyewitness and participant who had been with Lucas during the pursuit of the Inuit who had killed Darby's men. The information from Haven's travel diary of 1770 was first summarized in Taylor's (1983, 1984) articles on Mikak. The entry translated below in full adds to the historical record surrounding this event.

¹ Also spelled Christian Drachart.

It so happened that we had someone on board who was with Mr. Lucas when the many Esq[uimaux] were killed, and I let him tell me about it extensively since we were just in the area. And he spoke as follows. The Esq[uimaux] came to York Harbour when Governor Palliser was there and first had a respectable trade with the English of ca. 12 or 1400 £ Sterling. The governor extended freedom to all of them and anything they wanted had to be given to them, even if the governor had to pay for it himself. After the governor was gone, the officers and merchants did not wish to do this any longer. And there occurred immediately squabbling and brawling. The Esquimaux took the kindness of the governor not as a good deed but thought that the Europeans were afraid of them. And since they were no longer able to get anything worthwhile, they started to rob and steal. And what they could not take with them, they burned, and met also 3 people by themselves, and these they killed and took their things away, which was reported as a complaint to the commanding officer at York Harbour. And he then sent Mr. Lucas away in an armed shallop to retake the boats and punish the Esquimaux. And when he came to Cape Charles, he entered there into a harbour to spend the night. But he found there 13 Esq[uimaux] boats without expecting it, and the combat started right away. The Esquimaux started first to shoot on the English with their arrows, whereupon the English shot upon them with their cannons and blunderbusses as well as small guns. And he thought that 14 to 20 remained [died] there and 4 English were wounded, but recovered afterwards. It caused immediately confusion among the Esq[uimaux] and they fled into the interior bay of the harbour with their boats, which they left there and retired to the land. If Mr. Lucas had had the least courage, he would have been able to take all the boats that they had stolen this year without anyone further being killed. But he was afraid and returned again, for he knew that 2 boats came after him to assist him, with whom he wanted to unite and attack them the next day anew and exterminate them entirely. The boats did indeed come to him, but when they got there, the Esquimaux had sailed away during the night. Although they went after them, they never saw them again. On their way back, they still met 2 boats whose four men they killed and captured the remaining ones, among them was Mikak and my dear Karpik, and so ended this business (Haven 1770: 368-369, my translation).

As with Palliser's and Coghlan's information, this narrative also relates that the pivotal event, the killing of Darby's three employees, elicited the dispatch of Lucas and his soldiers in pursuit of the perpetrators. The ensuing battle resulted in the loss of up to 20 Inuit and the subsequent capture of two boatloads of those left behind, among them a woman named Mikak and the youth Karpik. What this account shares with Darby's depositions is the stress on the decided policy of non-violence advocated by Palliser, which is said to have emboldened the Inuit to exploit what they saw as a weakness of the Europeans. Haven's informant also admitted that the strict policy of non-violence was ignored by the military detachment and the merchants as soon as the governor left Labrador. If this changed attitude and behaviour toward Inuit after Palliser's departure also extended to Darby and his employees, his later assurance to the Privy Council that his misfortunes were caused by strictly following Palliser's instructions may be disingenuous.

The killing of Darby's men might not have been as unilateral and unprovoked as Palliser, Darby, and Coghlan later asserted or as Haven's 1770 informant recounted. Another contemporary observer of these events, whose testimony was preserved in papers discussed at meetings of the Moravian Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel (SFG), gave quite a different reason for the killing of the three English fishermen. A

memo, likely prepared by James Hutton for a meeting of the SFG in 1768 and preserved in the La Trobe Papers at Herrnhut, Saxony, recorded the following:

I accidentally heard by a Mate of a ship that was on the Coast at that time, that it was the fishermen that went after the Indians [Inuit] to St. Peters bay [near Cape Charles] expecting them to have a good quantity of whale bone & Oil which they wanted to plunder the poor Esquimaux of, which he thought was the very reason of the Murder, & if the Europeans could but let these poor Creatures alone they wou[l]d be quiet enough (Hutton n.d.: 4; see also edited version in Benham 1856: 450).

This English eyewitness of 1767 in the Moravian records provides a totally different context for the killing of Darby's fishermen. Instead of the unprovoked murder of three Englishmen during a robbery, we may be dealing with a violent act of self-defence by Inuit to prevent the theft of Inuit trading goods by English fishers.

In 1759 Darby himself had seized a boatload of whalebone from Inuit on their way to Newfoundland and sold it for 500 pounds (Board of Trade and Plantations [1935]1762: fo. 292). Jeremiah Coghlan remained unperturbed by any dangers from Inuit, whom he thought could be conquered by fair or unfair means. Coghlan is quoted in the same document from the La Trobe papers as saying that "if they could not make them [the Inuit] pliable by fair means they would by foul." James Hutton, or the unnamed informant, concluded after a conversation with Coghlan that "it's certainly that the Europeans will be continually in persuit after the Esquimaux to take with them for their Whale bone, which if not done with satisfaction on both Sides, one may easily emagin what bad consequence will follow, for the fishermen will be sure to be well arm'd whenever they meet the Indians [Inuit]" (Hutton n.d.).

Aggression against Inuit was of serious concern to Palliser. Haven had already witnessed tragic misunderstandings of Inuit intentions among the British and French on his first exploration journey to Newfoundland and Labrador in 1764, when he prevented a violent attack planned by the Europeans (Taylor 2009: 90-96). He prided himself on having steered Governor Palliser into a decidedly non-violent direction as far as the relations with Inuit were concerned. The result had been an even more emphatic policy of non-violence by the governor, as explicitly stated in his instructions to commanders and traders, a policy that Darby would later consider as having been responsible for the 1767 attacks on his men and premises. Haven wrote to his superiors on the continent in a postscript to the governor's original document of 1st July 1764, given to him by Magistrate Gill of St. John's, that he might have influenced Palliser during their conversations:

It [Palliser's instructions of 1st July 1764] is mainly the same as my passport. Yet it is somewhat tougher [German: "harter"], and if I did nothing else, I hope that the poor Indians [Inuit] are because of it treated in a more acceptable [or orderly] way. The description that everyone provides me of this poor nation is cruel and terrible. As far as the E[squimaux] are concerned, they are treated in a barbaric way, for I have heard much that will not fit on one page (Haven 1764: 24-25, my translation).

In 1768, the Moravian Elders on the continent feared that in light of the recent enmities between the English and the Inuit, the Moravian evangelistic outreach might prove futile unless the friendship concluded between the missionaries and Inuit in 1764 and 1765 could be re-established during a further visit (Unity Elders 1768: 3, 383). The 1767 melee, whatever the original motivation for the killings of Darby's men may have been, eventually took on a paradigmatic significance in Inuit-European relations. Inuit exhibited a renewed commitment to non-violent relations, while the British viewed it as a new beginning, intent on forgetting what had transpired in the past.

At the start of the third Moravian exploration journey, on 16 July 1770, two missionary prospects took stock of the events in a conversation with Drachardt, the Moravian interpreter on the 1765 trip. Segluinnak and Ikkianak admitted,

it is true that we have done many a bad thing, but now we no longer want to obey our sinful thoughts. We cannot deny that we are thieves and murderers, but we do not want to do it any longer. That we have killed in Schatto 3 Europeans and stole 2 boats, that we also cannot deny, and the Europeans have not committed any injustice when they came and demanded their boats back. And since we started to shoot at them with our arrows they killed many of our people with their guns and took their boats away again. (Drachardt 1770: 385-386).

In a sermon on 18 July, Drachardt (*ibid.*: 391-392) reminded the Inuit of the tragic events of 1767, as he did again during negotiations on 28 July when discussing the missionaries' future stay and need of land for a settlement (*ibid.*: 403; Haven 1770: 358).

Drachardt also came to speak of the 1767 hostilities in a lengthy conversation with Mikak on 4 August 1770. Mikak had been instrumental in furthering the Moravian cause in Labrador while in England in 1768-1769, where she was patronised by the London aristocracy and became famous. In 1770, she led the missionaries to the location where in the following year their first settlement in Labrador was to be established at Nain (Rollmann forthcoming; Stopp 2009). Now the veteran Greenland missionary reminded the celebrated Inuit woman of the 1767 events as follows: "Mikak," Drachardt said, "no doubt, you will not have forgotten what your countrymen have done 3 years ago [1767]. They entered a house near Chateau Bay and killed 3 English and stole 2 boats. Therefore, the English killed several of your people and got their 2 boats." Mikak answered: "I will not forget it." Drachardt, continuing the conversation, raised the question: "What do the Inuitter [Inuit] say about this?" Mikak and Tuglavina both replied: "The Inuit and we understand well that whoever kills a human also deserves to die." Drachardt then reminded Mikak of the 1765 conversation with Palliser, where the Inuit had been asked not to come anymore to Ikeremiklua [also spelled "Ikeremeklua"], that is, Newfoundland. He stated that they could get wood in Newfoundland but no European boats. Mikak informed Drachardt that Lucas had told her this many times and that she had made it known to the Inuit last winter [1769-1770] and was going to remind them of it once more. Drachardt also mentioned in this conversation that Governor Palliser had said "that all the European boats stolen from the English by Inuit can be kept, the English will not take them away, but if they steal

boats from that time on, then the English will come and take their boats back, and if the Inuit do not give back the boats and want to keep the boats [by defending themselves] with arrows like three years ago [1767], they will certainly die.” Mikak answered: “The Inuit are happy that they can keep the European boats and understand too well that if they do as they have done [before], they will die.” The conversation ended with Mikak reassuring Drachardt of the continued friendship of the Inuit (Drachardt 1770: 435-436, 416-417, 424).

Conclusion

The 1767 killing of Darby’s men and the stealing of boats remained in retrospect a historical marker for change in European-Inuit relations in Labrador. It occurred in a decade that saw British legal and administrative changes reshape European relations with Inuit and a lasting Moravian presence on Labrador’s north coast. In assigning culpability for these events, however, European political and mercantile interests cannot be followed alone in framing the narrative. If one uses the full range of archival records, including the Moravian missionary papers, the hostile encounter between Inuit and English fishers at Cape Charles, resulting in the death of three Englishmen and up to 20 Inuit, may very well have been a response to European provocation and an act of self-defence by the Inuit.

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