The Semantics of *Nadowa*

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THE VARIOUS ALGONQUIAN TRIBES of an earlier day used *Nadowa* – a debatable name that may connote "enemy," or may connote "foreigner" – to designate not only Iroquoians, but also Eskimos, Dakotas, Iowas, Tetons, the Nottoways of Virginia, and most every other non-Algonquian tribe. The multiplicity of the tribes to which the word refers has led to misuse and to misunderstanding. Moreover, since the ambiguity of the name gave the French a veil behind which to malign the Iroquois, there are cases where the use of the term is less the result of misunderstanding than of deliberate political double-talk. Certainly *Nadowa* presents an engaging problem in semasiology. It is the intention of the present article (1) to illustrate the errors and misuse of the name; (2) to explain how the French sometimes artfully introduced it for political reasons, and (3) to deduce, from certain aspects of the name's application, just what *Nadowa* really connotes.

1. Misuse and Misunderstanding

In 1677, when the body of Father Jacques Marquette was exhumed from the eastern shore of Lake Michigan and taken for permanent burial to the St. Ignace Mission at Michilimackinac, the Hurons, not the Iroquois, were present along with the Algonquians who attended the funeral. Yet, we have Father Dablon speaking, either from ignorance or naïveté, of "... the goodly number of *Iroquois* who United with our algonquin savages to lend more honor to the ceremonial."[1] Dablon's mistake is typical of a semantic confusion that existed among Jesuit chroniclers of the day, a confusion clearly owing to the fact that the Algonquians referred to both Hurons and Iroquoians as *Nadowas*.

[1] Reuben G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, 1896–1901), LIX, 201–203.

In the late nineteenth century, because of a report in 1641 by Jesuits Raymbault and Jogues that the persecution of certain hostile Indian nations had led the Potawatomi to take refuge near Sault Ste. Marie, the historians Shea and Neill fell prey to *nadowa's* ambiguity.[2] Shea expanded the 1641 report into a statement that at that time the Potawatomi were at Sault Ste. Marie fleeing from the Sioux;[3] Neill, concerning the same event, stated that the Potawatomi were at Sault Ste. Marie fleeing from the Iroquois.[4] How could these historians be so wrong as to confuse with each other two tribes so different geographically and linguistically as the Sioux and the Iroquois? Evidently Shea and Neill had misunderstood the Algonquian term *Nadowa*, the name by which the Potawatomi, an Algonquian tribe, would naturally refer to the Sioux, the Iroquois, and to most any other non-Algonquian people.

Henry R. Schoolcraft's tale, "The Magician of Lake Huron" (v. his *Algic Researches*), affords a third example. The Ottawas were supposedly chased from Manitoulin by the Iroquois. In the opening paragraphs of his story Schoolcraft repeatedly uses the term "Iroquois." Yet, in the last part of the story he uses only "Nadowa." What most likely happened is that Schoolcraft heard a tale of the *Nadowa* at Manitoulin. Deluded by the age-old confusion, he assumed that Nadowa referred to the Iroquois, whereas it probably referred to some other non-Algonquian group, such as the Hurons, Neutrals, or the Tobacco Nation.[5]

Finally, there exists in *Iroquois Point* (20 miles northwest of Sault Ste. Marie) a place name example of the faulty interpretation of *nadowa*. The Algonquians probably ambushed an enemy war party here in the mid-1660's, and most writers abide by Gagnieur's explanation that Iroquois Point stems from *Nadoway-Wiganing*,

[2] The Raymbault-Jogues account is in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, XXIII, 223–27.

[3] John G. Shea, "The Indian Tribes of Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, III (1857), 136.

[4] Edward D. Neill, in a footnote in William Warren, *History of the Ojibway Nation* (Minneapolis, 1957), 32.

[5] This tale also appears in Mentor L. Williams (ed.), *Schoolcraft's Indian Legends* (East Lansing, 1956), pp. 282–85. Beneath the title appears this line: "Related by Nabunwa in the Indian Tongue, to Mr. George Johnston." Evidently, either Johnston or Schoolcraft substituted *Iroquois* for *Nadowa*.

"place of Iroquois bones."[6] However, regardless of what *Wiganing* means (cf. Ojibwa *wijigan*, "skull"; *nin biwigan* "I have small bones") and of whether there was ever a battle here, the ambiguity of *nadowa* is such that the ambushed war party could quite as easily have been the Sioux or the Assiniboine as the Iroquois. Nicolas Perrot, the usual source, reported the battle many years after it supposedly occurred;[7] Father Lalemant specifies the Iroquois, but has the clash occurring on the shores of Lake Huron, not Lake Superior.[8] William Warren also claims that the adversaries were the Iroquois, but his source was the Ojibwa chief, Great Buffalo – and Great Buffalo used the term *Naud-o-ways*.[9] Thus we have Warren mistaking *Naud-o-way* for "Iroquois," despite the fact that Ojibwas used the name to mean the Hurons, the Neutrals, the Sioux, and many other non-Algonquian tribes. This mistaken interpretation of *Nadoway-Wiganing* unfairly maligns the Iroquois, since one finds Osborn claiming that during the battle the 1,000 Iroquois who were there were slaughtered by 300 Ojibwas.[10]

II. Anti-Iroquoian Double-talk

The Iroquois have been reported historically as a warlike, treacherous, domineering people. Much of their unfortunate reputation is traceable to the misunderstanding and misuse, often intentional, of the term *nadowa*. There is reason to believe that the

[6] William F. Gagnieur, "Indian Place Names in the Upper Peninsula," *Michigan History*, II (December, 1918), 537.

[7] In Emma H. Blair (ed.), *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes* (Cleveland, 1912), I, 178–80, 280–81.

[8] Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, XLVIII, 75–77.

[9] William Warren, *op. cit.*, 147–48. It is indeed strange that Warren would translate *Naud-o-ways* as "Iroquois." Warren himself was a half-breed Chippewa from Minnesota. These Chippewas had a lengthy history of conflict with the Sioux. In fact, the word *Sioux* is probably from the ending (*-ssi*) of Algonquian (Ojibwa) *Nadowessi* "Sioux Indian." See Thwaites, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, XVI (1902), 193, n; also, Baraga, *Dictionary of the Otchipwe* (Montreal, 1878), 231.

[10] Chase and Stellanova Osborn, *Schoolcraft — Longfellow — Hiawatha* (Lancaster, Pa., 1942), pp. 65–67. The Rev. John Pitezel, Methodist missionary among the Lake Superior Ojibwas in the 1840's, was one of the few observers who saw through this puzzling term. Pitezel mentioned the tradition of a battle between the Ojibwas and the *Nad-o-wag*. He suggested that the *Nad-o-wag* were the Sioux; he did not mention the Iroquois. See his *Lights and Shades of Missionary Life* (Cincinnati, 1859), 193.

French, for a variety of political and military motives, often used this name confusion to their advantage. It is no secret that the Jesuit superiors, in an effort to discredit the Iroquois, often tampered with the *Relations* and other reports they sent to Paris by supplanting *nadowa* with *Iroquois*, whereas it could just as well have been the Neutrals, Sioux, Huron, or any other non-Algonquian group. Part of the memoir of Baron Davaugour explains the anti-Iroquois propaganda campaign waged by the French: "... I noted that it was politic to exaggerate more than ever the cruelties of the Iroquois, in order better to conceal the designs that might be adopted by this country [New France]..."[11]

An example of how the ambiguity of *nadowa* could serve a hidden political purpose occurs in connection with the decision, in 1684, of Le Febvre de La Barre, governor-general of New France, to attack the Iroquois in their own country, i.e., up-state New York. Although de La Barre let it be known that this was a defensive move, it was common knowledge that the motive for the invasion was to capture the Iroquoian fur trade, which had been going to the English.[12] The French diplomatic maneuvers were undoubtedly made easier because of the equivocal term *nadowa* – for if some Nadowas were guilty of pillage, rape, ambush, and so forth, the French could plausibly state that the offenders were Iroquoians.

III. The Connotation of *Nadowa*

The conventional connotation of *nadowa* (Cuoq *natowe*, Baraga *nadowe*, " a kind of big serpent") is "enemy."[13] Hewitt concluded

[11] This memoir, a report on the status of the colonies in New France, appears in *New York Colonial Documents*, IX (1855), 13–15.

[12] R. La Roque de Roquebrune, "Joseph-Antoine Le Febvre de La Barre," in George Brown (ed.), *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1966), 442–46.

[13] References for the "enemy" connotation are Warren, *History of the Ojibway Nation*, 72; Arthur T. Adams (ed.), *Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson* (Minneapolis, 1961), 94; Edwin James (ed.), *Thirty Years Indian Captivity of John Tanner* (Minneapolis, 1956), 316, n. Although *nadowa* was widely used by Algonquians to mean "foreigner," each Algonquian group had an additional specific word for "foreigner." The Cree term was *pitusisiw* (Lacombe). The Ojibwa was *maiâginini* (Frederick Baraga, *A Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language*, Montreal, 1878, 206). One of the eastern Algonquian terms was *penoowohteau* (J. H. Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*, [Washington, 1903] 328).

this in 1910;[14] Erminie W. Voegelin, in her ethnological observations on the Walam Olum (1954) maintains the opinion, "...'snake' seems to be an Algonquian metaphor for any people regarded as enemies."[15] However, the present writer regards these routine conclusions as oversimplifications. It cannot be shown that the term *nadowa* was restricted to "enemies." And it is his conviction, considering certain aspects of the name's use, that the term clearly connotes "foreigner." Perhaps the confusion arose because the Ojibwa, from whose language the word seems to have come, were often at odds with the Sioux and the Iroquois. To the Ojibwa, the Sioux and the Iroquois were sometimes enemies, but always foreigners.

There are many examples to support the "foreigner" connotation of Nadowa. The Eskimos near James Bay speak a language far different from their Algonquian Cree neighbors. They are foreigners, and hence, from the Algonquian, there is a Nahdoway River flowing into James Bay.[16] By similar logic, Nottoway River, Virginia, named by the Algonquian Powhatans owing to the early presence of the Iroquois, suggests a nation quite foreign linguistically.[17]. For a further instance, *Nadoessi Mascouteins* ("Sioux of the prairies"), the Algonquian name for the Iowa, a Siouan plains tribe, seems to emphasize distance and difference, and thus to connote "foreigners."[18]

However, it is in the Huron-Algonquian zones of contact that one can most clearly see the connotation "foreigner." The Hurons, of Iroquoian stock, usually were on very good terms with their Algonquian neighbors, especially the Ottawas and Nipissings. Thus in southwestern Ontario, *Nottawa*saga, a bay, river, and township, commemorates the "foreigner" Hurons, not the "enemy" Iroquois.[19] In Michigan the Huron River was formerly called *Nottawa Seppee*.[20] Leonard Bloomfield (v. his *Eastern Ojibwa*) defines Ojibwa

[14] In Frederick Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians* (Washington, 1907), I, 617.

[15] Cf. Voegelin, *et al.*; *Walam Olum, or Red Score* (Indianapolis, 1954), 62.

[16] Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, XXIII, 326, n.

[17] Hodge, II, 87.

[18] Thwaites, LX, 321, n.

[19] These place names are on the northern edge of ancient Huronia, i.e., around modern Georgian Bay, Lake Huron.

[20] "Appendix," *Michigan Pioneer Collections*, X (1886), 674.

na·tuwe·ssi as "Iroquois, Huron."[21] Peter Jones, nineteenth century Ojibwa clergyman, wrote that the term for Hurons is Nahdooways. But, he explained, this term also applies to the Six Nations Indians [the Iroquois].[22] To designate the Iroquois and the Hurons by the same name is logical if one means "foreigner," but not if one means "enemy." For the Hurons were usually antagonistic towards their linguistic cousins, the Iroquois, and friendly to the Algonquians.

It must be emphasized that no Algonquians were referred to as *nadowa* by other Algonquians, except for a single instance of a Potawatomi band in southern Michigan.[23] As mentioned previously, an early name for Michigan's Huron River was *Nottawa Seppee*. The Potawatomis are relative newcomers to the southern part of Michigan. Several groups settled on Nottawa Seppee; gradually the whites and other Indians came to refer to these Potawatomis as "Nottawa Indians." Neither "foreigner" nor "enemy" figures in this instance; it was merely a case of a previously-established place name being applied to people who later moved there.

A final argument against the "enemy" meaning for *nadowa* is that there were many cases of inter-tribal conflict among the Algonquians. The Sauk and Fox in particular have a lengthy record of hostility against their linguistic cousins, the Ojibwa, Menominee, and Ottawa. Yet in these, and in other inter-Algonquian disputes, the term *nadowa* is not used. The reason is obvious; they were inter-family fights, not disputes with "foreigners."

Kinietz clarified some of the *nadowa* confusion, and bolstered the case for the connotation, "foreigner," when he wrote, concerning an alleged Iroquois attack upon the Algonquians,

> It is most likely that it was not the true Iroquois that drove them out, but the Neutrals. The Huron, Neutrals, and Tionontati were known to Algonquian peoples by the same name as the Iroquois, and for a time the French called the Huron tribes 'the good Iroquois.'[24]

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[21] Leonard Bloomfield, *Eastern Ojibwa* (Ann Arbor, 1956), 251.

[22] Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians* (London, 1861), 32.

[23] S. C. Coffinberry, "Incidents Connected with the First Settlement of Nottawa-Sippi Prairie in St. Joseph County," *Michigan Pioneer Collections*, II (1877), 489–501; W. H. Cross, "Recollections of Early Occurrences about Nottawa Sepe," *Michigan Pioneer Collections*, VI (1883), 423–25.

[24] W. Vernon Kinietz, *Indians of the Western Great Lakes, 1615–1760* (Ann Arbor, 1965), 309.

It is ludicrous to suppose that the French intended this phrase to mean "the good enemies." This and the foregoing instances and arguments all indicate that, though *nadowa* may have begun with the pejorative connotation "enemy," it did not remain restricted to this sense, but broadened and softened, until it took on the meliorative connotation "foreigner."

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