

Chapter 19 – Conclusion

The story of our people's relationship with the early colonial authorities in the years after settlement in 1650 resemble nothing more than that of a child ignored and abandoned by a cold and unfeeling stepmother. The island's hand-over to St Kitts in 1825 did not improve our relationship with the new administering power. The resulting psychological trauma imposed on the national consciousness by this abandonment has lasted down to the present time. Anguillians have learned to be a wily and contrary people, nimble to discover our advantage and to seize it, especially when dealing with outsiders. Unique among West Indians, Anguillians have always insisted on doing things our own way. We don't take advice or direction easily especially in matters of governance. The authorities in London must occasionally realise that they have met their match in dealing with us. It is not likely that they understand some of the strange and unreasonable stands that we take, or the sometimes-perverse directions that we select for ourselves. The Anguillian way of doing things must be baffling to most outsiders.

Examples of our odd attitude to governance are everywhere. The modern-day Anguilla House of Assembly has been known to pass a law apparently for the sole purpose of quieting the debate on a public

concern. There is no intention of having the law enforced or to improve the situation being dealt with. Some of our taxes are best described as voluntary or optional taxes, no effort being made to enforce payment by imposing the penalty. Typically, an enactment is passed in the Assembly to appear to meet a crisis that has arisen. It is then allowed to fall dormant when the controversy has quieted down. It has been so from the earliest times. Two recent examples illustrate the process at work.

A few years ago, two babies were mauled to death by pit bull terriers. There was a public outcry against pit bulls. People demanded to know why such dangerous dogs were not banned. Under pressure from politicians, the Attorney-General's Chambers sprang into action. Within days a Dogs Bill was before the House of Assembly. A few days later the House of Assembly met and unanimously passed the Act.¹ It became a serious offence to keep either a pit bull or a Rottweiler without a special licence from the Dogs Inspector. All such dogs were required to be immediately neutered under penalty of a fine or imprisonment. It was a worse offence to breed them. Yet, pit bulls and Rottweilers continue to this day to be kept and to be bred unlicensed, and without a single prosecution having been brought.

¹ The Dogs Act, RSA, D036.

One must dig to find a possible explanation for the authorities overlooking the law in this way. Consider the amount of money involved in the breeding and keeping of pit bulls for dog fighting. Few of them are treated as pets or watch dogs. They are kept for the main part as fighting dogs. The dog owners are very important persons in the community. Large sums of money change hands at semi-clandestine dog pits. It can cost US\$5,000.00 to put your dog in the pit. That is before the betting starts. Many tens of thousands of dollars change hands on the outcome of the ensuing dog fight. Gambling in public and cruelty to animals are serious criminal offences. Yet, not a single person has ever been charged far less convicted in Anguilla for public gambling over a dog fight.

The Act provides that a prosecution can only be brought by the Dogs Inspector. In the absence of a Dogs Inspector, the law can never be enforced. No Dogs Inspector has ever been appointed under the law. So, we can say the law has become dormant. During the debate on the Bill, politicians took the opportunity to utter pious remarks about the sanctity of the family and the need to safeguard the little ones. Merely passing the law enabled government to show it was responsive to public pressure. Omitting to enforce the law met with no public disapproval since the omission was hardly noticed. No possibly

unpopular prosecution of any important person took place.

This treatment of animals has long been associated with psychologically adverse effects on both the participants in the fight and its witnesses. Never mind the inherent cruelty and the damage to the dogs. Dog fighting remains a popular sporting activity among a certain sector of the community, particularly young males. The average man on the street in Anguilla will assure you that he finds nothing reprehensible in attending and betting on dog fights. No person has ever been charged with the offence of animal cruelty over an organised dog fight. If deputy governors Abraham Howell, Arthur Hodge and Benjamin Gumbs came to visit the Anguilla of today, they would feel perfectly at home. For much of our population, little has changed in our culture and aesthetics from their day.

There are other examples of a law falling dormant in Anguilla. Consider the history of the Litter Abatement Act.² Some years ago, the tourism sector complained about the amount of litter visible on the sides of our public roads. Styrofoam fast-food containers, beer bottles and soda tins were routinely disposed of out of car windows. They lobbied for something to be done about the young culprits. It was agreed that one solution was to make such

² The Litter Abatement Act, RSA, L080.

littering illegal. The Litter Abatement Act sailed through the House of Assembly with unanimous support. It became an offence to throw litter out of one's car window onto the side of the road. The public uproar diminished at this demonstration by Anguilla's political elite of their social conscience.

The problem was that the Act said that it could be enforced only by Litter Wardens. By neglecting to make any provision in the budget for the appointment and payment of Litter Wardens, prosecutions under the Act were and are impossible. The administration collected the kudos for taking swift legislative action, while ensuring that there would be no political backlash from the prosecution of the young men of our society, each of whom has a vote and family members who might be upset. As one political leader remarked when questioned about this hypocrisy, "*We can't go about making criminals of innocent young Anguillians!*"

Eventually, provision was made in the budget to appoint road cleaners whose job it is periodically to walk the streets bagging the litter that has accumulated. In this way useful employment is given to persons who might otherwise be unemployable. Further kudos to government flowed. The Litter Abatement Act like the Dogs Act has been in deep hibernation since the day it was passed into law. Those two examples should suffice,

so that I do not need to go into the Sound Amplification (Restriction) Act,³ or the Roads Act,⁴ or any of the other many examples of dormant laws of Anguilla.

The Anguilla of today may fairly be described as a frontier society. The long absence of any of the institutions of government, the ingrained disrespect for law and authority, have resulted in the Anguillian of today, averse to the acceptance of all laws and regulations. A modern Planning Act has proven difficult to introduce because Anguillians take the maxim, "*A person's house is his castle*" to the extreme. We vigorously object every time an effort is made to introduce zoning or other land use regulations. A century and a half of sheltering our smugglers from the St Kitts customs and excise authorities have made modern smuggling and the non-payment of taxes endemic. A villager would die of shame before he would report criminal activity by his neighbour to any authority. This history also explains the low standard of ethics or propriety shown by those in public life. The junior civil servant caught with her hands in the cookie jar is sent away to obtain a doctorate, and returns to a high and lucrative position in the public service.

A social or cultural anthropologist knowing something of Anguilla can explain some of the reasons why the Anguillian society of today may be structured as it

³ The Sound Amplification (Restriction) Act, RSA, S050.

⁴ The Roads Act, RSA, R065.

is. Anthropologists recognise at least four categories of human society. In an ascending order of social development, there is the band, the tribe, the chiefdom, and the state. It is instructive to look at each of them and consider where Anguilla fits.

The band was the earliest and tiniest society known to humankind. The band consisted typically of less than 100 people, mostly related by birth or marriage. It lacked a permanent, single place of residence. All able-bodied persons in the band foraged for food. There were no laws, police or treaties. With all members of the band related to both of any two quarrelling individuals, any fight was soon ended by the mediation of concerned onlookers.

In time, the band evolved into the tribe. The tribe differed from the band mainly in being larger. It typically consisted of hundreds rather than mere dozens of people. Like the band, the tribe usually had no fixed place of settlement. It lacked a bureaucracy, police force, and taxes. Every able-bodied adult in the tribe, including the 'big man', participated in growing, gathering or hunting for food. Full-time craft specialists were lacking. While they were not all closely related to each other, they shared a system of beliefs, practices and loyalties.

The third stage of human political, social and cultural development is the chiefdom. Chiefdoms first

emerged in in the Middle East about 5,500 BCE. The chiefdom consisted typically of several thousand people. One person, the head-chief, exercised a monopoly on the right to use force within the community. The food surplus generated by the commoners went to feed various sub-chiefs, their families, bureaucrats and the craft specialists who made the canoes or adzes or worked as bird-catchers or tattooists. While tribes and bands relied on reciprocal exchanges of gifts, chiefdoms developed a redistributive economy. The head-chief would receive surplus food from every farmer, and then he would either throw a feast for everybody, or else give it out again gradually in the months between harvests. Most chiefdoms have now evolved into the modern state. A twisted version of the chiefdom persists where there is a dictatorship. Anguillians can sometimes be fooled by our leaders, but we would not tolerate a dictatorship.

The final stage of development, the state, began to arise about 3,700 BC in Mesopotamia. In West Africa the date was about 1,000 BCE, while in Mesoamerica it was about 300 BCE. Typically, the population of a state exceeds 50,000 persons. Initially, the paramount chief's location became the state's capital city. A city differs from a village in its monumental public works, palaces, and government buildings, accumulation of capital from tribute or taxes paid, and concentrations of people other than

food-gatherers. Economic specialization is more extreme in the state. Food is produced by specialist groups of farmers, herdsman, fishermen, and gardeners, instead of by generalists as in bands and tribes.

Even small states have more complex bureaucracies than large chiefdoms. In a state, internal conflict resolution is formalized by the establishment of laws, a judiciary, and police. With such a large population, the onlookers to a quarrel or fight are unlikely to be related to both parties. They are, therefore, unlikely to mediate to prevent violence. Binding rules of conduct, or laws, were developed to settle disputes. In a state, the laws are written down. Many early states had literate societies. In both Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica writing was developed at about the same time as the formation of states. By contrast, no chiefdom developed writing. The state is organised on political and territorial lines. Bands, tribes and simple chiefdoms are defined by kinship, not politics or territory. State bureaucrats by contrast are selected at least partly based on training and merit, not on kinship, as in a chiefdom.

Applying the above analysis, we note that in Anguilla almost everyone is related. A second-generation US- or UK-born of Anguillian ancestry is welcomed back as "*one of us*". The highest compliment that can be paid to one of us is to call us a son or daughter of the soil. An

unrelated resident, no matter how long he or she has lived in Anguilla, will always be a foreigner. Kinship, not citizenship, is the determinant for acceptance into the Anguillian community and for appointment to and promotion in the public service.

The ability to read, write and be numerate are not important achievements among the Anguillians of today. Outside of the several families that make up the social and political elite, few of our big-chiefs or even sub-chiefs complete a secondary education and qualify to be called literate. Few public servants below the level of permanent secretary can write a sentence without making mistakes of grammar, spelling and punctuation. One previous Chief Minister half-jokingly jibed about our level of literacy, *“If you want to keep something secret from an Anguillian, all you need do is write it down and place the paper in front of him. He’ll never read it.”* A Bill may be debated for days in the House of Assembly despite few of the members having read the document. Anguillians are good at talking but weak at developing the skills of reading and writing, far less of independent thinking. This is behaviour typical of a tribe, but not of a modern state.

The laws and regulations, characteristic of a modern state, are regularly ignored by us, even if strictly enforced on the foreigner living among us. Building regulations and planning rules are applied selectively, and

mainly to foreigners. If planning laws and regulations are seldom imposed on the common Anguillian, they never are on the chief. If you should see a large concrete building illegally going up less than the prescribed minimum distance from the main road in Cedar Village, it is probably owned by an official in the Planning Department. If you were to request of the Building Board a copy of the 30-year old Building Code, you would notice that it is still marked "*Draft*". It may not be enforced against a local person, but it is binding on the helpless foreigner. These are the characteristics of a tribe or band, not of a modern state claiming to be governed by the rule of law.

Hunter-gathering is characteristic of a band or a tribe. Until recently Anguillians at home depended on the remittances of bands of Anguillian relatives pursuing hunter-gathering-type activities in the modern-day version of the forests and savannahs of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and Slough, Bucks, England for a few years prior to their returning home. Hunter-gathering persists today as an important source of domestic revenue. A few years ago a foreign hotelier discovered a member of his kitchen staff stealing a ham. He immediately dismissed her. His problem was that she lived in the same village as the then Chief Minister and was one of his supporters. This Chief lost no time in visiting the hotel and explaining to

management the need for annual renewal of work-permits for the essential foreign staff needed to run a five-star hotel. The employee was soon back on the job, and, to general hilarity amongst many of us Anguillians, in receipt of a fulsome apology for the misunderstanding. We see hunter-gathering activities are carried out in the freezers and storerooms of foreign-owned restaurants and hotels.

Public procurement contracts in Anguilla offer a rich field for foraging and hunter-gathering. A building contractor explaining the secret of his success revealed he had a “*mole*” on the Tenders Board. Once he kept his mole happy, he landed the contracts he wanted.

A retired government procurement officer related the advice he received when he took up office. His outgoing senior counselled him, “*Young man, this is your time. Remember the cow must feed where she is tied.*” With that instruction to follow the previous practice of adding a personal commission to every contract for public materials or services ringing in his ears, he assumed office. Fortunately, he was cut from a different cloth than his predecessor and did not follow the advice. From these instances it is evident that Governor Benjamin Gumbs with his forged bills of lading and privateering letters of marque issued to his son in law has sunk his DNA deep into Anguillian genes.

There are other signs of the island being a chieftainship rather than a modern state. The small size of the population makes it difficult for us to aspire to be a successful state. In such a small community, the big-chief syndrome replaces the rule of law. Decisions of the Executive Council, the Courts and the Legislature are frustrated with impunity by the will of any strong chief. To obtain a licence, obeisance must be paid, and tribute laid at the feet of one or more sub-chiefs, to personally placate him and acknowledge his authority. Gifts for licences and permits ensure their swift processing.

Until recent years, the work permit for every foreign employee was personally approved by an elected Minister. Work permits were not granted based on any regulation, principle or policy, but arbitrarily, based on the Minister's favour and personal whim. Once granted, the permit must be renewed annually through a solicitation procedure that debased and degraded the less-fortunate applicant. Rules and regulations are applied not based on law or principle but on kinship and personal relationship with the relevant chief. Certificates that should be issued as of right are inexplicably held up until word comes from above, perhaps after a suitable gift has been made.

These sad tales of Anguillian contempt for the principles of public service remind us of the story of Arthur

Hodge and the powder money. Where he led, we follow. They also demonstrate the power of the kith and kin relationship characteristic of a band or tribe, as compared to the laws and regulations, code of ethics and attention to high standards of conduct required in a state.

For hundreds of years until the Anguilla Revolution of 1967 introduced self-government, Anguillians survived with none of the normal institutions of government. We banded together based on kinship and friendship to ensure we survived any attempt to impose laws and regulations on our activities. This essentially lawless nature of Anguillian society can be dated back to the abandonment of the islanders by the colonial power. The piratical blood of Abraham Howell, George Leonard, Arthur Hodge and Benjamin Gumbs runs barely diluted in the veins and arteries of the Anguillians of today. The result is that we may fairly be described as a tribal society or chiefdom rather than a modern state.

On the other hand, hundreds of years of self-reliance have ensured that the modern Anguillian is noted for his and her resilience in the face of adversity. When a hurricane strikes with catastrophic force doing immeasurable damage to private homes and public infrastructure, the shell-shocked men and women of Anguilla get up, dust themselves off, and within days begin the task of rebuilding their island. It may take time

and a great deal of money, but our economy and our homes are rebuilt long before any of our neighbouring islands that were hit by the same hurricane. The strong and healthy among us voluntarily assist the elderly neighbour to repair and rebuild with no expectation of remuneration. Abraham Howell and George Leonard did not wait for assistance from outside to fight off the marauders of their day. Nor do today's Anguillians. That self-reliance is a positive aspect of the genetic inheritance of the first generations of Anguillians passed down to the Anguillians of today.

The End