

# TAMING ABORIGINAL SEXUALITY:

## *Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900*<sup>1</sup>

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In July 1996 I listened in a Vancouver court room as Catholic Bishop Hubert O'Conner defended himself against charges of having raped or indecently assaulted four young Aboriginal women three decades earlier. His assertion of ignorance when asked what one of the complainants had been wearing on the grounds that, "as you know, I'm a celibate man" encapsulated his certainty that he had done nothing wrong.<sup>2</sup> He admitted to sexual relations with two of the women, but the inference was clear: they had made him do it. They had dragged him down and led him astray. The temptation exercised by their sexuality was too great for any mere man, even a priest and residential school principal, to resist.

I returned home from that day, and subsequent days in the court room, deeply troubled. I might have been reading any of hundreds of similar accounts written over the past century and more about Aboriginal women in British Columbia. This essay represents my first attempt to come to terms with Bishop O'Conner and his predecessors, made more necessary on reading the National Parole Board's decision of March 1997. The Board denied Bishop O'Conner parole, subsequent to his conviction on two of the charges, because "your recent psychological assessment indicates that you hold your victims in contempt," and "at your hearing today ... you maintain that ... you

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the BC Studies Conference in May 1997 and, thanks to Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, at the Western Historical Association in October 1997. I am grateful to everyone who has commented on the essay, especially to Robin Fisher at BCS, Elizabeth Jameson at WHA, and the two anonymous reviewers for *BC Studies*. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council generously funded the research from which the essay draws.

<sup>2</sup> This statement by Bishop O'Conner was taken up forcefully in *Reasons for Judgment*, Vancouver Registry, no. cc9 206 17, 25 July 1996.

in fact were seduced.”<sup>3</sup> If I earlier considered that my response to my days in the courtroom might have been exaggerated, I no longer did so. My interest is not in Bishop O’Conner’s guilt or innocence in a court of law, but, rather, in tracing the lineage of his attitudes in the history of British Columbia.

The more I have thought about Bishop O’Conner, the more I realize that those of us who dabble at the edges of Aboriginal history have ourselves been seduced. However much we pretend to read our sources “against the grain,” to borrow from the cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, we have become entrapped in a partial world that represents itself as the whole world. Records almost wholly male in impetus have been used by mostly male scholars to write about Aboriginal men as if they make up the entirety of Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> The assumption that men and male perspectives equate with all persons and perspectives is so accepted that it does even not have to be declared.<sup>5</sup> Thus, an American researcher wanting to find out about her Aboriginal counterparts discovered that “indigenous communities had been described and dissected by white men – explorers, traders, missionaries, and scholars – whose observations sometimes revealed more about their own cultural biases than about Native people.

<sup>3</sup> National Parole Board, Decision Registry, file 905044C, 21 March 1997.

<sup>4</sup> The three best books for understanding Aboriginal people in British Columbia are, in my view, Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1970 and 1992); Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990); and Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), each of which is driven by a male perspective as to sources, authorship, subjects, and interpretation. Much the same observation might be made about the bulk of the ethnographic literature; a recent summary of the historiography (Wayne Suttles and Aldona Jonaitis, “History of Research in Ethnology,” in Wayne Suttles, ed., *Northwest Coast*, vol. 7 of William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* [Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990], 84-86) does not even include private life or women, much less sexuality, as topics.

<sup>5</sup> This general point is made by, among other authors, Sandra Harding in *The Science Question in Feminism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Catherine Hall in *White, Male, and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1988); and Vron Ware in *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992). A handful of exceptions by Canadian scholars are principally concerned with an earlier time period, as with Karen Anderson, *Chain Her By One Foot: The Subjugation of Native Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Sylvia Van Kirk, “Many Tender Ties”: *Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); and Ron Bourgeault, “Race, Class and Gender: Colonial Domination of Indian Women,” *Socialist Studies* 5 (1989), 87-115. The two principal analyses of perceptions of Aboriginal people consider women, if at all, as extensions of their menfolk; see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1979), and Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).

Misperceptions of Indian women were rampant because they were held up to the patriarchal model.”<sup>6</sup>

So what happens when we turn the past on its head and make our reference point Aboriginal women instead of Aboriginal men? We come face to face with Aboriginal sexuality or, more accurately, with male perceptions of Aboriginal sexuality. The term ‘sexuality’ is used here in its sociological sense as “the personal and interpersonal expression of those socially constructed qualities, desires, roles and identities which have to do with sexual behaviour and activity,” the underlying contention being “the social and cultural relativity of norms surrounding sexual behaviour and the sociohistorical construction of sexual identities and roles.”<sup>7</sup> In a useful summary of recent scholarship, English sociologist Gail Hawkes tells us that the word sexuality “appeared first in the nineteenth century,” reflecting “the focus of concerns about the social consequences of sexual desire in the context of modernity.” Christian dogma defined sexual desire “as an unreasoned force differentially possessed by women, which threatened the reason of man” and the “inherent moral supremacy of men.” According to Hawkes, “the backbone of Victorian sexuality was the successful promotion of a version of women’s sexuality, an ideal of purity and sexual innocence well fitted to the separation of spheres that underpinned the patriarchal power of the new ruling class.”<sup>8</sup> Sexuality, as Hawkes contextualizes the term, helps us better to understand the critical years in British Columbia, 1850–1900, when newcomers and Aboriginal peoples came into sustained contact.

Everywhere around the world Indigenous women presented an enormous dilemma to colonizers, at the heart of which lay their sexuality.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jane Katz, ed., *Messengers of the Wind: Native American Women Tell Their Life Stories* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1995), 5.

<sup>7</sup> David Jary and Julia Jary, *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1995), 590–1. It was 1914 before the Oxford English Dictionary got to the letter ‘s.’ All of its quotes were from the nineteenth century and, while the first definition of sexuality was “the quality of being sexual or having sex,” the second and third were the “possession of sexual powers or capability of sexual feelings” and “recognition of or preoccupation with what is sexual.” See Sir James A.H. Murray, ed., *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 582. Interest in the concept of sexuality, and more generally in regulation of the body, mushroomed with the publication of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* in 1978 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, esp. vol. 1) and Peter Gay’s *The Bourgeois Experience* in 1986 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2 vols.). Particularly helpful for interpreting Foucault is Ann Laura Stoler’s *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Gail Hawkes, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), 8, 14, 42.

<sup>9</sup> This point underlies Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1990); and Margaret Strobel, *Gender, Sex,*

Initially solutions were simple and straightforward. During conquest local women were used for sexual gratification as a matter of course, just as had been (and still are) female victims of war across the centuries. If unspoken and for the most part unwritten, it was generally accepted that, so long as colonial women were absent, Indigenous women could be used to satisfy what were perceived to be natural needs.<sup>10</sup> No scruples existed over what the pioneering scholar on race Philip Mason has termed “the casual use of a social inferior for sexual pleasure.”<sup>11</sup> The growth of settler colonies changed the ‘rules of the game.’ As anthropologist and historian Ann Laura Stoler astutely observes, drawing from her research on colonial Asia, “while the colonies were marketed by colonial elites as a domain where colonizing men could indulge their sexual fantasies, these same elites were intent to mark the boundaries of a colonizing population, to prevent these men from ‘going native,’ to curb a proliferating mixed-race population that compromised their claims to superiority and thus the legitimacy of white rule.”<sup>12</sup>

In British Columbia gender, power, and race came together in a manner that made it possible for men in power to condemn Aboriginal sexuality and at the same time, if they so chose, to use for their own gratification the very women they had turned into sexual objects. While much of what occurred mirrored events elsewhere, some aspects were distinctive.<sup>13</sup> Colonizers never viewed Aboriginal

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*and Empire* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1993), which critiques Hyam’s contention that empire enhanced men’s sexual opportunities.

<sup>10</sup> Among the more perceptive recent examinations of aspects of this topic are Margaret Jolly and Martha MacIntyre, ed., *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Strobel, *Gender, Sex, and Empire*; Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995); Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; and Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Philip Mason, *Patterns of Dominance* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1970), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Cooper and Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire*, 5. Although Stoler and Cooper co-wrote this introductory essay, the insight is clearly Stoler’s, since it is her research on colonial Asia that is cited.

<sup>13</sup> As diverse examples of a similar sequence, if not necessarily interpretation, of events, see Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 169–92; and Caroline Ralston, “Changes in the Lives of Ordinary Women in Early Post-Contact Hawaii,” in Jolly and MacIntyre, ed., *Family and Gender*, 45–82. In *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), Sarah Carter links the sexualization of Aboriginal women on the Canadian prairies to their participation in the 1885 uprising (esp. 8–10, 161, 183, 187, 189).

men as sexual threats,<sup>14</sup> whereas attitudes toward women acquired a particular self-righteousness and fervor. The assumptions newcomers brought with them shaped attitudes, which then informed actions. By the mid-nineteenth century Europeans perceived all female sexual autonomy to be illicit, especially if it occurred in the public sphere, considered exclusively male. Aboriginal women in British Columbia not only dared to exercise agency but often did so publicly, convincing men in power that their sexuality was out of control. To the extent that women persisted in managing their own sexual behaviour, they were wilded into the 'savages' that many newcomers, in any case, considered all Indigenous peoples to be.<sup>15</sup> That is, until Aboriginal women acceded to men in power by having their sexuality tamed according to their precepts, they were for the taking, an equation of agency with sexuality that encourages Aboriginal women's portrayal, even today, as the keepers of tradition. As noted about American anthropological writing, "Native women are pictured as unchanging—clinging to a traditional way of life that exists outside the vicissitudes of history."<sup>16</sup> To avoid the image that men like Bishop O'Conner continue to project on them, Aboriginal women have had to be stripped of their agency past and present.

## PROSTITUTION

Indigenous sexuality struck at the very heart of the colonial project. British historian Catherine Hall has noted, in reference to Victorian England, that "sex was a necessary obligation owed to men and not

<sup>14</sup> In *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), Jenny Sharpe argues that, after rebellions in India in the 1850s, raped colonial women provided the basis for racializing Indigenous peoples as inferior.

<sup>15</sup> The concept of wildness is examined in Sharon Tiffany and Kathleen Adams, *The Myth of the Wild Woman* (Cambridge: Schenken, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Patricia C. Albers, "From Illusion to Illumination: Anthropological Studies of American Indian Women," in Sandra Morgan, ed., *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1989), 132. Carol Devens appears to accept this perspective in "Separate Confrontations: Gender as a Factor in Indian Adaptation to European Colonization in New France," *American Quarterly* 38, 3 (1986), 461-80; and in her *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). The identification of Aboriginal women's conversion to Christianity with their desire to maintain traditional values underlies much of the special *Ethnohistory* issue (43, 4, Fall 1996), "Native American Women's Responses to Christianity, edited by Michael Harkin and Sergei Kan, esp. 563-66, 574-75, 6 14, 6 29-30, 655, 675-76. Others authors sidestep issues of sexuality altogether, as with most of the essays in Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, ed., *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); and Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

one which women were permitted to talk or think about as owed to themselves.”<sup>17</sup> Sexual independence, or circumstances where that possibility existed, was the ultimate threat to the patriarchal family. Children were considered to belong to their father, who had to have the assurance that they were indeed his biological heirs. As succinctly summed up by George Stocking in his history of Victorian anthropology, “if the ideal wife and mother was ‘so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence,’ the alternate cultural image of the ‘fallen woman’ conveys a hint of an underlying preoccupation with the threat of uncontrolled female sexuality.” By the time Victoria came to the throne in 1837, “the basic structure of taboos was already defined: the renunciation of all sexual activity save the procreative intercourse of Christian marriage; the education of both sexes in chastity and continence; the secrecy and cultivated ignorance surrounding sex; the bowdlerization of literature and euphemistic degradation of language; the general suppression of bodily functions and all the ‘coarser’ aspects of life – in short, the whole repressive pattern of purity, prudery, and propriety that was to condition sexual behavior for decades to come.” Counterpoised to this stereotype were “savages,” who were by definition “unrestrained by any sense of delicacy from a copartnery in sexual enjoyments.”<sup>18</sup>

Any interpretation of events in British Columbia must adopt the language of colonialism as it was applied to Indigenous women’s sexual independence. Around the colonized world the charge of prostitution, engaging in a sexual act for remuneration, was used by those who sought to meddle in Indigenous lives. Sexuality was not to be talked about openly, but prostitution and all that it implied could be publicly condemned. In other words, sexuality had to wilded into prostitution or possibly concubinage, cohabitation outside of marriage, in order for it to be tamable. Hawkes traces the fervor over prostitution back to Christianity, which both gave it prominence and held out promise for “the redemption of the prostitute, the personification of polluting and uncontrolled women’s sexuality.” Moving to the nineteenth century, “Victorian sexual morality was focused on, and expressed through, the ‘social evil’ of prostitution. Prostitution was discussed in such diverse venues as popular journalism, serious weekly reviews, medical tracts and publications from evangelical organizations devoted to the rescue of fallen women ... prostitution

<sup>17</sup> Hall in *White, Male, and Middle-Class*, 61–62.

<sup>18</sup> George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 199–200, 202.

provided a forum within which to express, covertly, anxieties about, and fascination with, the characteristics of women's sexuality."<sup>19</sup>

No question exists but that Aboriginal people in British Columbia viewed their sexuality differently than did colonizers. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct gender relations prior to newcomers' arrival, nor is it necessary to do so in order to appreciate the enormity of contact. The scholarship is virtually unanimous in concluding that, traditionally, marriages were arranged, with goods passing to the woman's family.<sup>20</sup> Intrusions of European disease, work patterns, and economic relations unbalanced Aboriginal societies and tended to atomize gender relations. Women possessed opportunities for adaptation not available to their male counterparts.<sup>21</sup> Many of the taboos normalized and universalized by Europeans simply did not exist in Aboriginal societies. If for Europeans sexuality had to be strictly controlled in the interests of assuring paternity, the link may have been less critical for Aboriginal people in that the group, rather than the immediate biological family, was the principal social unit.

To grasp the rapidity with which Aboriginal women became sexualized as prostitutes in colonial British Columbia, it is instructive to go back in time to another bishop, George Hills, first Anglican bishop of Vancouver Island. Arriving in Victoria in January 1860, he encountered a figurative tinder box, a fur-trade village which in just twenty months had been turned upside-down by the gold rush, bringing with it thousands of newcomers from around the world, almost all of them men. Bishop Hills was almost immediately condemning "the profligate condition of the population." "The Road to Esquimalt on Sunday is lined with the poor Indian women offering to sell themselves to the white men passing by - & instances are to be seen of open bargaining."<sup>22</sup> Bishop Hills's Methodist counterpart Thomas Crosby, who arrived in the spring of 1862, was similarly struck by "the awful condition of the Indian women in the streets and lanes of Victoria."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hawkes, *Sociology of Sex*, 14-15, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Despite its male perspective, a good basic source, although limited to Coastal peoples, remains Suttles, ed., *Northwest Coast*.

<sup>21</sup> Especially useful is Carol Cooper, "Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast: An Historical Perspective, 1830-1900," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 4 (Winter 1992-93), 44-75, which points out that what newcomers labeled prostitution sometimes simply continued traditional social structures wherein some persons were deprived of their autonomy as "slaves" (58) and traces the seasonal migrations of North Coast women to Victoria with their families.

<sup>22</sup> 24 September 1860 entry, Bishop George Hills, Diary, in Anglican Church, Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia, Archives; also letter to the editor from C.T.W. in *Victoria Gazette*, 22 September 1860; and Matthew MacFie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), 471.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship* (Toronto:

What newcomers constructed as prostitution did become widespread during the gold rush, just as it had existed to some extent during the fur trade. The evidence may be largely anecdotal, but it is consistent and, for some times and places, overwhelming.<sup>24</sup> Virtually all of the descriptions come from a colonial male perspective, but they are so graphic and diverse as to leave little doubt as to the circumstances. The most visible sites were seasonal dance halls where for a price miners could while away “the long winter evenings” by interacting socially with Aboriginal women.<sup>25</sup> A New Westminster resident evoked its “Squaw Dance-House” frequented by miners “hastening to throw away their hardy earned gold.” Her description is graphic: “As soon as eight or half-past struck, the music of a fiddle or two and the tramp of many feet began. Later on the shouts of drunken men and the screams of squaws in like condition made night hideous. Each man paid fifty cents for a dance, and had to ‘stand drinks’ at the bar for himself and his dusky partner after each.”<sup>26</sup> Bishop Hills described “houses where girls of no more than 12 are taken in at night & turned out in the morning — like cattle.”<sup>27</sup> Even while acknowledging dance halls’ contribution to urban economies, the press repeatedly denounced the Aboriginal women whose presence made them possible, as in an 1861 editorial charging that “prostitution and kindred vices, in all their hideous deformity, and disease in every form, lurk there.” In their San Francisco counterparts “the females were at least civilized,” but “here we have all the savagery of the ancient Ojibbeways [sic], with all the vice of a reckless civilization.”<sup>28</sup> If the decline of the gold rush from the mid-1860s put an end to dance halls’ excesses and dampened down excitement over prostitution,<sup>29</sup> the wildness associated with Aboriginal sexuality had permeated settler consciousness.

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Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1904), 17. On the relevance of missionary accounts, see Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> This contention is supported by Chris Hanna’s extensive research on colonial Victoria, and I thank him for sharing his findings with me.

<sup>25</sup> “Can such things be?” *Victoria Daily Chronicle*, 16 November 1862.

<sup>26</sup> Francis E. Herring, *In the Pathless West With Soldiers, Pioneers, Miners, and Savages* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904), 173-75.

<sup>27</sup> 21 April 1860 entry, Hills, *Diary*; also 12 August and 24 September 1860, 31 January 1862 entries.

<sup>28</sup> “The Dance Houses,” *British Colonist*, 20 December 1861. For events in California, see Alfred Hurtado, “When Strangers Meet: Sex and Gender on Three Frontiers,” in Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, ed., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 134-7.

<sup>29</sup> In *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, a Haida Woman* (Vancouver and Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre and University of Washington Press, 1982), 44-45, Margaret Blackman

## FEMALE AGENCY

Turned on their head, contemporary portrayals of Aboriginal women during the gold rush affirm their agency. Agency is by its very nature relational and interactive. Just as occurred during the fur trade<sup>30</sup> and in traditional societies,<sup>31</sup> Aboriginal women both initiated and responded to change. They scooted around, they dared, they were uppity in ways that were completely at odds with Victorian views of gender, power, and race. Some likely soon realized that, however much they tried to mimic newcomers' ways, they would never be accepted and so might as well act as they pleased.<sup>32</sup> An Aboriginal woman "dragged" the friend of a man who had assaulted her to a nearby police station "to be locked up as a witness," only to have him seek "the protection of the police, which was granted" until she left.<sup>33</sup> The jury in a court case against a Victoria policeman accused of "having attempted to ravish the person of an Indian squaw" was told that the verdict hinged on whether "you believe the simple evidence of the three Indian women" and, "after consulting together about one moment, [the jury] returned a verdict of 'Not guilty.'"<sup>34</sup> In some cases Aboriginal women were encouraged or forced by the men in their lives. References abound to fathers selling their daughters "for a few blankets or a little gold, into a slavery which was worse than death,"<sup>35</sup> exchanges likely viewed by some as only continuing traditional marital practices. Yet even missionary accounts hint at female agency, as with Bishop Hills's comment after unsuccessfully remonstrating with "a woman making up a dress" for the dance house that night: "Poor creatures they know these things are wrong - but the temptations are too strong."<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most telling evidence of Aboriginal women's management of their sexual behaviour are the numbers who chose to live, at least

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links the decline to the smallpox epidemic of 1862-63, but newspaper coverage suggests that the principal cause was fewer lone men.

<sup>30</sup> On the maritime fur trade, see Lorraine Littlefield, "Women Traders in the Maritime Fur Trade," in Bruce Alden Cox, ed., *Native People, Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Metis* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 173-85; and on the land-based trade Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties." Devens probes "native women as autonomous, sexual active females" in seventeenth-century New France in *Countering Colonization*, 25 and passim.

<sup>31</sup> For a case study, see Jo-Anne Fiske, "Fishing is Women's Business: Changing Economic Roles of Carrier Women and Men," in Cox, ed., *Native People, Native Lands*, 186-98.

<sup>32</sup> On the concept of mimicry, see Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in Cooper and Stoler, ed., *Tensions of Empire*, 152-60.

<sup>33</sup> "A Squaw Arrests a White Man," *British Colonist*, 17 January 1862.

<sup>34</sup> "Attempted rape," *British Colonist*, 17 August 1860.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums, Or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), 62.

<sup>36</sup> 1 February 1862 entry, Hills, Diary.

for a time, with non-Aboriginal men. The nature of some decisions is suggested by Crosby's account of a twelve-year-old girl who, having "refused at first to follow a life of sin," "was visited by a great rough fellow who, with his hand full of money and with promises of fine clothes and trinkets and sweets, coaxed her and finally prevailed upon her to come and live with him."<sup>37</sup> Although referring to a later point in time, Emily Carr's observations in her fictionalized memoirs are particularly evocative, as in a conversation between two Aboriginal women whom she almost certainly knew personally. "We got a house with thlee looms, and a sink and kitchen tap. Jacob and Paul go to school with white children. Too bad you not got white man for husband, Susan."<sup>38</sup> Aboriginal women caught in the tumultuous world that was the gold rush sometimes had to make hard decisions, whether for material goods or personal safety. In such circumstances a lonely miner's entreaties could be persuasive.

Non-Aboriginal men had their own reasons for entering into relationships. During the heady years of the gold rush, at least 30,000 White men and several thousand Chinese and Blacks sought their fortunes in British Columbia. Most soon departed, for the difficulties of getting to the gold fields were horrendous, but however long they stayed, their utter loneliness in a sea of men cannot be discounted. The most fundamental characteristic of non-Aboriginal women in gold-rush British Columbia was their paucity.<sup>39</sup> A Welsh miner reported back to his local cleric how "considerable value is placed on a good woman in this country."<sup>40</sup> An Englishman who had already tried his hand in Australia lamented: "The great curse of the colony so far, as it must always be the curse of any colony in which such a want exists, is the absence of women ... there must be at least two hundred men to every woman.... I never saw diggers so desirous of marrying as those of British Columbia." "If it is one thing more than another a miner sighs for after a hard day's work, it is to see either his tent, or his log hut, brightened up by the smiles of a woman, and tidied up by a woman's hand.... The miner is not very particular — 'plain, fat, and

<sup>37</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nuns*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Emily Carr, *The Heart of a Peacock* (Toronto: Irwin, 1986), 96.

<sup>39</sup> Adele Perry admirably tackles this and related topics in "Oh I'm just sick of the faces of men': Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," *BC Studies* 105-06 (Spring/Summer 1995), 27-43.

<sup>40</sup> Letter of Morgan Lewis to Rev. D.R. Lewis, New Westminster, 29 October 1862, printed in *Seren Cymru*, 23 January 1863, quoted in Alan Conway, "Welsh Gold Miners in British Columbia During the 1860's," *Cylchgrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru: The National Library of Wales Journal* 10, 4 (Winter 1958), 383-84.

50' even would not be objected to; while good-looking girls would be the nuggets, and prized accordingly."<sup>41</sup> When a non-Aboriginal man saw an Aboriginal woman, what he may have perceived was not so much her Aboriginality as her gender and, certainly, her sexuality.

Structural factors specific to British Columbia encouraged couplings. At the level of everyday life Aboriginal people were not nearly so alien as sometimes portrayed, or as they became in the American Pacific Northwest.<sup>42</sup> Relations were generally peaceful, and many miners and settlers survived only because of local largesse. A German visiting the gold fields in 1858 reported that "many Indians lived in the neighborhood, who on the whole are on friendly footing with the Whites."<sup>43</sup> A guide to prospective settlers published a quarter of a century later asserted: "The intending settler may depend on finding the Indians peaceable, intelligent, eager to learn and industrious to a degree unknown elsewhere among the aborigines of America."<sup>44</sup> Another factor was ease of communication through common knowledge of the Chinook trading jargon. Containing about 600 words and a large variety of non-verbal additions, Chinook facilitated conversations across the races. People could talk to each other on an ongoing basis, and sometimes they did more than just talk.

Although some of the relationships spawned by the gold rush extended through the couple's lifetime, many were fairly transient, two persons cohabiting for a time until one or the other decided to move on.<sup>45</sup> In most cases it was the man who did so, and, as one Aboriginal woman recalled,

Oh, it was hard on Indian wives, I guess,  
But they always managed  
To raise their children  
Even if their husbands finished with them.<sup>46</sup>

Women might end relationships, as in the gold-rush town of Lytton in 1868 where a man "lately left by his Indian wife who had had two

<sup>41</sup> *Cariboo, the Newly Discovered Gold Fields of British Columbia* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1975), 7-8, 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> See Jean Barman, "What a Difference a Border Makes: Aboriginal Racial Intermixture in the Pacific Northwest," *Journal of the West*, forthcoming.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Friesach, *Ein Ausflug nach Britisch-Columbien in Jahre 1858* (Gratz: Philosophical Society, 1875), reprinted in *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 5 (1941), 227.

<sup>44</sup> *The West Shore*, September 1884, 275, cited in Patricia E. Roy, "The West Shore's View of British Columbia, 1884," *Journal of the West* 22, 4 (October 1984), 28.

<sup>45</sup> For a case study, see Jean Barman, "Lost Okanagan: In Search of the First Settler Families," *Okanagan History* 60 (1996), 8-20.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Augusta Tappage, "Changes," in Jeane E. Speare, *The Days of Augusta* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1973), 71.

children by him . . . confesses having sown the seed he has reaped.”<sup>47</sup> Other women simply ensured that their husbands knew that they could leave if they wished to do so. An early novel depicted a saloon keeper with a “squaw wife” named Desdemona whose independent character drew on the author’s many years in British Columbia.

All who know the habits of the squaws married to white men, especially if they lived in one of the towns, will remember the overmastering desire they occasionally developed for a return to their tribe, and a resumption of their old life for at least a time. To fish all night from a light cedar canoe, with no thoughts of the white man’s scorn, to pick berries, cut and dry fish till their garments were saturated with the odour of salmon, gather roots, herbs, and the bark of trees for baskets, the rushes also for klis-klis or mats. To extract the beautiful and durable reds and blues from certain plants and berries, and generally to revel in God’s great temple of nature.

So it was with Desdemona. “One of these calls from the wild had taken Desdemona, and when her tenase tecoup man (small white man) came in one night, the house was dark, and she and the children gone.” She had “stepped into a canoe, paddled across the wide [Fraser] river, and up the salmon stream,” and only when it suited her fancy did she return home to her husband.<sup>48</sup>

The various data from personal accounts, church records, and the manuscript censuses suggest that, in those areas of British Columbia opened up to Europeans during the gold-rush years, about one in ten Aboriginal women cohabited at some point in her life with a non-Aboriginal man.<sup>49</sup> The prevalence of such unions even caused the first session of the new provincial legislature, following entry into Confederation in 1871, to pass a bill, subsequently disallowed by the federal government, to legitimize children of unions between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men whose parents wed subsequent to their birth.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 27 May 1868 entry, Hills, Diary.

<sup>48</sup> Francis E. Herring, “Pretty Mrs. Weldon” in her *Nan And Other Pioneer Women of the West* (London: Francis Griffiths, 1913), 122, 1 24-25.

<sup>49</sup> The base used is the greatly diminished Aboriginal population of about 25-30,000 following the devastating small pox epidemic of the early 1860s. Another measure is the number of children resulting from the relationships, as indicated in the “Supplementary Report” to British Columbia, Department of Education, *First Annual Report on the Public Schools in the Province of British Columbia*, 1872, 38.

<sup>50</sup> David R. Williams, ... *The Man for a New Country: Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie* (Sidney: Gray’s Publishing, 1977), 106-07.

## TAMING ABORIGINAL SEXUALITY

By the time British Columbia became a Canadian province in 1871 Aboriginal women had been almost wholly sexualized.<sup>51</sup> The perception of widespread prostitution, and if not prostitution then concubinage, gave men in power the freedom to speak openly about matters that otherwise would have been only whispered.<sup>52</sup> Newcomers took for granted the fall as depicted in the Bible. Human nature was weak, and the biological man could easily be tempted to evil by his female counterpart, just as Bishop O'Conner considers himself to have been a century later. It was woman's place to be docile and subservient so as not to provoke man. For all those seeking to control Aboriginal peoples, women who exercised sexual autonomy had to be subdued. Conversion to Christianity held the key, for "woman was always the slave or burden-bearer until the Gospel came and lifted her into her true social position," which was essentially as man's handmaiden.<sup>53</sup> Whether missionaries, government officials, or Aboriginal men, the common perception was that the only good Aboriginal woman was the woman who stayed home within the bosom of her family. So an informal alliance developed between these three groups to refashion Aboriginal women.

This tripartite alliance, wherein men in power buttressed and comforted each other, was grounded in mutual expediency and, to some extent, in mutual male admiration. With entry into Confederation, responsibility for Aboriginal people shifted to the federal government under the terms of the British North America Act, and it did not take long for newly appointed officials to realize the enormous benefit to be had from establishing cordial relations with missionaries, who were already at work across much of the sprawling province. Officially, missionaries had no status, but unofficially they became the government's foot soldiers, and its eyes and ears. Aboriginal policy, as it developed in British Columbia, was

<sup>51</sup> The age-linked, equally essentializing counterpart was, of course, an absence of sexuality. Aboriginal woman as drudge is discussed in, among other sources, Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders' Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 127-31, 136, and 233-39.

<sup>52</sup> In referring to men in power, I do not mean to suggest that non-Aboriginal women were completely absent from the discourse but I do contend that, at least in British Columbia, their voices were muted compared to those of men; for a brief introduction to this literature, see Strobel, *Gender, Sex, and Empire*. Myra Rutherdale, "Revisiting Colonization to Gender: Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific Northwest and Arctic, 1860-1945," *BC Studies* 104 (Winter 1994-95), 3-23, discusses the priorities of female missionaries but without reference to sexuality.

<sup>53</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, 96.

to minimize official involvement in everyday affairs, which effectively meant letting missionaries have a free hand.<sup>54</sup> If disagreeing in many areas, including Aboriginal people's right to an adequate land base, government officials repeatedly commended missionaries for having "taught, above all, the female portion of the community to behave themselves in a modest and virtuous manner."<sup>55</sup> The other prong of the alliance crossed racial boundaries in the interests of gender solidarity and mutual self-interest. Members of the Indian Reserve Commission active across British Columbia in the mid-1870s left an extensive paper trail and repeatedly expressed approval of Aboriginal "manliness" and of "the industry of the men."<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in missionary accounts it is almost wholly Aboriginal men who are given individuality and personality.<sup>57</sup> Men, particularly those who emulated colonial ways, needed to have suitable spouses, and for this reason too Aboriginal women had to have their sexuality tamed.

As for Aboriginal men, they were likely motivated by a shortage of women and also, some of them, by a desire to please their colonial mentors. Reports of a shortage are sufficiently widespread to be convincing. As early as 1866 Bishop Hills observed "a scarcity of wives" among the northern Tsimshian, many of whose members camped in Victoria on a seasonal basis.<sup>58</sup> The Indian Reserve Commission's census of a decade later counted 1,919 Aboriginal persons in the area extending from Burrard Inlet north to Jervis Inlet, across to Comox, and down through the Saanich peninsula, including the Gulf Islands; of these, 979 were adult males compared with 919 adult females, and 94 male youth compared with 84 female youth.<sup>59</sup> The enumerator of the Southern Interior, extending from Lytton through the Nicola Valley, counted 884 adult males compared with 803 adult females and lamented "the absence of females both adults and youths – those who should have been the future mothers of the tribe."<sup>60</sup> Some

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, private memorandum of Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Indian Reserve Commissioner, Okanagan Lake, 27 October 1877, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3656, file 9063, c-10115.

<sup>55</sup> Remarks enclosed with George Blenkinsop, secretary and census taker to Indian Reserve Commission, to Sproat, Douglas Lake, 20 September 1878, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3667, file 10,330.

<sup>56</sup> Private memorandum of Sproat, 27 October 1877; and Alex C Anderson and Archibald McKinlay, Report of the proceedings of the Joint Commission for the settlement of the Indian Reserves in the Province of British Columbia, Victoria, 21 March 1877, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3645, file 7936, c-10113.

<sup>57</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, esp. 206-32 and passim; and Crosby, *Up and Down*, passim.

<sup>58</sup> 24 May 1866 entry, Hills, Diary.

<sup>59</sup> Census data included with Anderson and McKinlay, Report, 21 March 1877.

<sup>60</sup> Remarks enclosed with Blenkinsop to Sproat, 20 September 1878.

Aboriginal men, in effect, made deals to behave in accord with missionary aspirations for them in exchange for getting wives.<sup>61</sup> Crosby described a visit to a Queen Charlottes village in about 1885, where local men promised him: “Sir, if you will come and give us a teacher, we will stop going to Victoria. Victoria has been the place of death and destruction to our people, as you see we have no children left to us. All our young women are gone; some of our young men can’t find wives any more; and we wish that you could help them to get wives among the Tsimpshian people.”<sup>62</sup>

The tripartite campaign to tame the wild represented by Aboriginal sexuality had two principal goals. The first was to return Aboriginal women home. The second was to desexualize Aboriginal everyday life, in effect to cleanse it so that the home to which women returned would emulate its colonial counterpart.

#### RETURNING ABORIGINAL WOMEN HOME

Marriage lay at the heart of newcomers’ morality and, as anthropologist George Stocking concludes, “it is perfectly clear that ‘marriage proper’ meant proper Victorian marriage” whose “purpose was to control human (and especially female) sexuality, so that there might be ‘certainty of male parentage.’”<sup>63</sup> As summed up by historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall for England between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, “marriage was the economic and social building block for the middle class.” “Marriage became both symbol and institution of women’s containment. It was marriage which would safely domesticate the burgeoning garden flower into an indoor pot plant; the beautiful object potentially open to all men’s gaze became the possession of one man when kept within the house like a picture fixed to the wall.”<sup>64</sup>

In theory, two marital strategies could have tamed Aboriginal sexuality. One was to encourage non-Aboriginal men to wed their Aboriginal partners, the other to return Aboriginal women home to wed Aboriginal men. Either would have satisfied Victorian notions of marriage, but the alliance of interests that existed among men in

<sup>61</sup> Such a contention is not inconsistent with Devens’s view that Aboriginal men in the Great Lakes region more easily accommodated to missionaries’ aspirations for them than did women; see her *Countering Colonization*.

<sup>62</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 270–71.

<sup>63</sup> Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 202.

<sup>64</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 322, 451.

power combined with growing racism to ensure that the second option would be favoured. As early as 1873 an agitated provincial official pointed to the federal government's responsibility for "the care and protection of the native race in this Province, [and] so long as this shameful condition of things is suffered to continue unchecked, the character of that race in the social scale is practically a delusion."<sup>65</sup> Reserve commissioners reported on conversations with chiefs at Nanaimo, where "the evil of concubinage of their young women with the white men around were specially pointed out."<sup>66</sup> By 1884 an Indian agent with an Aboriginal wife and grown daughters felt able to argue, perhaps with a touch of self-interest, that "with the present state of civilization in the country and the abundance of white and educated half breed women – such a practice should be put a stop to in future."<sup>67</sup> Aboriginal women were needed at home to service their menfolk.

For men in power, gender and race neatly dovetailed. Within the mix of pseudo-scientific ideas associated with Social Darwinism, newcomers accepted, as seemingly demonstrated by the triumph of colonialism and technological advances, that mankind had evolved into a hierarchy with Whites on the top and Aboriginal people near the bottom.<sup>68</sup> Persons of mixed race ranked even lower, for, to quote a colonial visitor, "half-breeds, as a rule, inherit, I am afraid, the vices of both races."<sup>69</sup> Concerns grew over "a class of half-breed children ... who, under the bond of illegitimacy, and deprived of all incentives in every respect, will in course of time become dangerous members of the community."<sup>70</sup> During the late 1870s such fears were exacerbated by a murderous rampage by the young sons of a Hudson's Bay trader and Aboriginal woman,<sup>71</sup> and given a sexual edge by female mixed-

<sup>65</sup> Alex C. Anderson, J.P., to Sir Francis Hincks, MP for Vancouver District, Victoria, 26 August 1873, excerpted in undated memorandum of Anderson in D1A, RG 10, vol. 3658, file 9404, C-10115.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson and McKinlay, Report, 21 March 1877.

<sup>67</sup> William Laing Meason, Indian Agent of Williams Lake Agency, to I.W. Powell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Lillooet, 25 March 1884, in D1A, RG 10, vol. 3658, file 9404, C-10115.

<sup>68</sup> This topic is examined in Berkhofer, Jr., *White Man's Indian*, esp. 50–61; Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes & U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982), *passim*; Robert E. Bieder, "Scientific Attitudes Toward Indian Mixed-Bloods in Early Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 8 (1980), 17–30; and Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>69</sup> R.C. Mayne, *Four Years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island* (London: John Murray, 1862), 277.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson to John Ash, Provincial Secretary, of British Columbia, 16 April 1873, excerpted in undated memorandum of Anderson, in D1A, RG 10, vol. 3658, file 9404, C-10115.

<sup>71</sup> The fullest account of the events occurring in 1879 is by a descendent: Mel Rothenburger, *The Wild McLeans* (Victoria: Orca, 1993).

race students at a public boarding school becoming pregnant by their male counterparts.<sup>72</sup> While some encouragement was given to non-Aboriginal men to marry Aboriginal women with whom they were cohabiting, this was, for the most part, done somewhat grudgingly.<sup>73</sup> Petitions became a favoured means to compel Aboriginal women back home. The tripartite alliance developed a dynamic whereby Aboriginal men signed petitions orchestrated by missionaries who then dispatched them to government officials to justify their taking action.<sup>74</sup> Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries participated, as did Aboriginal men across much of the province and numerous officials at various levels of government.

In 1885 Oblates missionaries stage-managed two identical petitions to the Governor General that were affirmed with their marks by 962 Aboriginal men, including at least eighteen chiefs, from across the Cariboo and south through the Lower Fraser Valley. In the best English prose the petitions “beg[ed] to lay before your Excellency” that a “great evil is springing up amongst our people” whereas “on a dispute between a married couple, the wife leaves her husband and goes off the Reservation, and takes up with a bad white man, China man, or other Indian, and [they] live together in an unlawful state.” The men sought permission to “bring back the erring ones by force if necessary.”<sup>75</sup> Caught up in the rhetoric to tame Aboriginal sexuality, the Ministry of Justice drafted an even broader regulation for consideration by the chiefs, one which made it possible to “bring back to the reserve any Indian woman who has left the reserve and is living immorally with any person off the reserve.” The proposal was only derailed by the Ministry of Justice’s suggestion, made almost in passing, that the Department of Indian Affairs should “consider before it is passed whether or not the putting of it in force will lead to riots and difficulties between the Indians and the white people

<sup>72</sup> The sequence of events at Cache Creek School in 1877 was followed closely in the Victoria press.

<sup>73</sup> Drawing on Stoler, Carter suggests that, on the prairies, opposition grew out of fears of mixed-race children becoming heirs; see *Capturing Women*, xvi, 14–15, 191–92.

<sup>74</sup> The constructed nature of all Aboriginal petitions is indicated by the alacrity with which missionaries and others warned federal officials about upcoming petitions “purporting to come from the Indians,” but which were in fact being organized by an opposing religious group or others not to their liking, as with Alfred Hall, Anglican missionary, to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Alert Bay, 5 October 1889, in RG 10, vol. 38 16, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>75</sup> Petitions of the Lillooet tribe of Indians and from Lower Fraser Indians, s.d. [summer and late fall 1885], and s.d. [summer 1885] in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148. On the Oblates’ role see memo from Bishop Louis d’Herbomez, OMI, to the Governor General, s.d. [1887], in same.

and others with whom the Indian women are said to be living immorally.”<sup>76</sup> Three of the four Indian agents consulted considered that this might well happen were chiefs given such authority. One of them acknowledged female agency in his observation that, “while in some cases the Indian woman might be brought back without trouble, it would be impossible to keep her on a reserve against her will.”<sup>77</sup> The project was shelved, even though the Catholic Bishop at New Westminster intervened directly at the federal ministerial level in an attempt to bypass the bureaucrats.<sup>78</sup>

The campaign to tame Aboriginal sexuality was not to be thwarted, and the Oblates were almost certainly behind a bolder petition dispatched in 1890 to the Governor General. The chiefs of fifty-eight bands, again extending from the Cariboo through the Fraser Valley, indicated by their marks that they were “much aggrieved and annoyed at the fact that our wives, sisters and daughters are frequently decoyed away from our Reserves by ill designing persons.” No means existed to return “these erring women,” but, even were this possible, “in most cases these women are induced to return again to their seducers.” Fearing that “some of our young men who are sufferers will certainly take the law into their own hands and revenge themselves on the offending parties,” the petition sought “a law authorising the infliction of corporal punishment by the lash.”<sup>79</sup> The advisability of “legislation, making it an offence for a white man to have sexual intercourse with an Indian woman or girl without Christian marriage,” was referred to the Ministry of Justice,<sup>80</sup> which in this case pulled the plug. The Ministry considered the legislation unnecessary, since “the laws relating to the protection of females and for the punishment of persons who seduce or abduct them, apply to Indian women as well

<sup>76</sup> George N. Burbidge, Deputy Minister of Justice, to L. Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 3 February 1886, and enclosure, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

<sup>77</sup> W.H. Lomas, Indian Agent of Cowichan Agency, to Powell, Quamichan, 20 May 1886; also draft of Vankoughnet to Powell, 13 February 1886; P. McTiernan, Indian Agent at New Westminster, to Powell, New Westminster, 9 April 1886; Meason to Powell, Little Dog Creek, 25 March 1886; J.W. Mackay, Indian Agent of Kamloops-Okanagan Agency, to Powell, Sooyoos [Osoyoos], 2 May 1886; and Powell to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Victoria, 21 June 1886, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

<sup>78</sup> Memo from d’Herbomez, [1887]; and Hector Langevin, Minister of Public Works, to John Macdonald, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 25 April 1887, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

<sup>79</sup> Petition, New Westminster, 1 September 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

<sup>80</sup> Draft from Department of Indian Affairs to Deputy Minister of Justice, 17 December 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

<sup>81</sup> Draft of letter from Department of Indian Affairs to A.W. Vowell, Indian Superintendent, Ottawa, 26 December 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3842, file 71,799, C-10148.

as to white women.”<sup>81</sup> Yet the campaign persisted, and later in 1890 the Indian agent at Lillooet urged, on behalf of “the Chiefs of the numerous Bands around here,” that “a severe penalty should be imposed upon any person, not an Indian, who, harbouring an Indian woman, does not deliver her up to the Chief of the Reserve.”<sup>82</sup>

At this point the enthusiasts may have stumbled. Acting largely independently of civil authority, the Oblates had allied themselves across much of the Interior with local Aboriginal men in order to effect control over everyday life.<sup>83</sup> As one Indian agent noted in the early 1890s, although the “flogging habit has been abandoned for some years past” and fines are not so common as they once were, “considerable sums of money are annually collected by the chiefs and their watchmen for the benefit of the churches whose functionaries attend to their spiritual welfare”<sup>84</sup> In the spring of 1892 the Oblate missionary at Lillooet, the chief, and four other Aboriginal men were brought before the local magistrate, convicted, and given jail sentences for “flogging a young girl ... on the report only of a fourth party” for some unspecified sexual activity. “Without investigation he [priest] ordered 15 lashes. His plea was 1<sup>st</sup> ancient customs of the Indians & 2<sup>nd</sup> necessity for such punishment in order to suppress immorality.” The Indian agent who made the report considered both that the “ancient customs” were not as portrayed by the missionary and that the local men should not have been punished so severely, since they “believed the Priest to be their Commander in all Church matters – and that consequently they were obliged to obey him.”<sup>85</sup> The incident appears to have cooled the alliance between the Oblates and local men, who “were astonished at the extent of the jurisdiction of the Courts of law, when even the dictates of a Priest should be upset and the Priest himself held accountable.”<sup>86</sup>

The Protestants could be just as enthusiastic as the Catholics in allying themselves with local men to keep women at home and then calling on federal officials to enforce what they could not effect by their own devices. In 1889 the Indian agent at Alert Bay, acting in concert with the local Anglican missionary, stopped a group of women

<sup>82</sup> Meason to Vowell, Lillooet, 4 August 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>83</sup> For the Cariboo, see Margaret Whitehead, *The Cariboo Mission: A History of the Oblates* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1981).

<sup>84</sup> Mackay to Vowell, Kamloops, 24 May 1892, in RG 10, vol. 3875, file 90,667-2, C-10193.

<sup>85</sup> Meason to Vowell, Lillooet, 14 May 1892, in RG 10, vol. 3875, file 90,667-2, C-10193. The incident, its impetus in Oblate policy, and its aftermath are summarized in Whitehead, *Cariboo Mission*, 96-7. At the behest of Catholic authorities, the Governor General remitted the sentences.

<sup>86</sup> Mackay to Vowell, 24 May 1892.

from boarding a steamer to Victoria. His justification was that they “went with the avowed purpose of prostituting themselves” and he “had previously been requested by numbers of young men to prevent if possible their wives and sisters from going to Victoria.”<sup>87</sup> Reflecting the tripartite alliance’s perspective, the Indian agent considered that “nearly all the young women, whenever they leave their homes, whether ostensibly for working at the canneries or at the Hop Fields, do so with the ultimate idea of making more money by prostitution.”<sup>88</sup> The steamboat company vigorously protested and the provincial Indian superintendent was lukewarm to the action, atutely observing that “the Indian women and their friends come to Victoria, and other places, in their canoes,” making their restriction practically impossible.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, the Indian agent and Anglican missionary did such a successful end run to federal officials as to persuade them to propose legislation to keep at home, by force if necessary, “Indian women from the West Coast of British Columbia, who are in the habit of leaving their Villages and Reserves by steamers and by other mode of transport with the object of visiting the Cities and Towns of that Province for immoral purposes.”<sup>90</sup>

The proposed legislation hit a snag only after the federal Minister of Justice indicated “that there is not at present sufficient material on hand to permit of the drawing up of a Bill fully dealing with the question.”<sup>91</sup> The Minister requested the provincial superintendent to circularize Indian agents around the province. Even though the agents would likely have found it far easier to acquiesce to expectations than to dispute them, they were all, apart from those at Alert Bay and Babine in the Northern Interior, remarkably sanguine. On the west of Vancouver Island, “I do not know of a single instance on this Coast where a young girl has been taken to Victoria or elsewhere for the purposes of prostitution.”<sup>92</sup> His neighbour was “not aware of any Indian women belonging to the Cowichan Agency who

<sup>87</sup> R.H. Pidcock, Indian Agent of Kwawkwelth Agency, to Powell, Alert Bay, 3 April 1889, in *DIA*, RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57045, C-10193.

<sup>88</sup> Pidcock to Vowell, n.d., in *RG 10*, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>89</sup> Vowell to Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Victoria, 25 March 1890, in *RG 10*, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>90</sup> Memorandum of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs to Privy Council of Canada, Ottawa, 20 February 1890, in *DIA*, RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57045-1, C-10193.

<sup>91</sup> John S.D. Thompson, Minister of Justice, to Governor General in Council, 1890, in *RG 10*, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Guillod, Indian Agent of West Coast Agency, to Vowell, Ucluelet, 22 August 1890, in *RG 10*, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>93</sup> Lomas to Vowell, Quamichan, 22 November 1890, in *RG 10*, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

leave their Reservations for immoral purposes.”<sup>93</sup> In the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland, “there are very few immoral women.”<sup>94</sup> As for the Central Interior, “the practice of Indian women leaving their Reserves for the purpose of leading immoral lives is not common in this Agency.”<sup>95</sup> The Southern Interior agent offered a general observation: “Indians are in their nature, in consequence of their training, habits and surroundings, far less virtuous than the average whites. Their morality should not therefore be judged by the standards of the white people. The Indian woman, although, as above stated, inclined to be worse in her morals, is naturally modest.”<sup>96</sup> The North Coast agent considered that the “Indians have learned from sad experience the effects of immorality in the cities and are rapidly improving their conduct.”<sup>97</sup> Summarizing the responses, the provincial superintendent concluded that “the few Indian women who may be found living an immoral life in our towns and Cities are less in number as a rule than of their white sisters.”<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, the depiction of Aboriginal sexuality as out of control was too attractive an explanation for missionary and government failings to be abandoned. Just three years later, in 1895, a petition signed by thirty-four men from central Vancouver Island, all but one with their marks, demanded legislation to prevent “our wives and daughters and sisters” from being “carried to Victoria for illegitimate purposes.”<sup>99</sup> The British Columbia senator to whom the petition was addressed took its claims at face value and demanded that steps be taken to “prevent the deportation of Indian women,” seeing that “Indians are wards of the government under tutelage and not qualified to manage their own affairs wisely.” The senator, who simply assumed that Aboriginal women’s sole role was to service their menfolk, emphasized that an “increase, instead of a decrease, is much to be desired” in the Aboriginal population.<sup>100</sup> The federal response is interesting because, rather than quoting from the Indian agents’ reports in their files, officials emphasized the difficulties of securing legislation. In doing so, they revealed, perhaps inadvertently, that women were de

<sup>94</sup> McTiernan to Vowell, New Westminster, 23 June 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>95</sup> Meason to Vowell, Lillooet, 4 August 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>96</sup> Mackay to Vowell, Kamloops, 4 July 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>97</sup> C. Todd, Acting Indian Agent of North West Coast Agency, to Vowell, Metlakatla, 8 October 1890, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>98</sup> Vowell to Vankoughnet, Victoria, 25 February 1891, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>99</sup> Petition to Pidcock, Fort Rupert, 8 March 1895, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>100</sup> Senator W.J. Macdonald to Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, 6 May 1895, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

facto having their travel restricted by local Indian agents “when requested by the husband or brother or anyone having proper authority, to stop a woman from going away, and so the men have the prevention of that of which they complain almost entirely in their own hands.”<sup>101</sup> The sexualization of Aboriginal women had far less to do with reality than with the needs, and desires, of men in power. So long as settler society perceived a need to tame Aboriginal sexuality, men in power could reorder Aboriginal society with impunity.

#### REORDERING ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

Over time virtually every aspect of Aboriginal everyday life acquired a sexual dimension, thereby justifying its reordering. Aboriginal sexuality, or perhaps more accurately the fear of Aboriginal women’s agency, became a lens through which traditional preferences in housing, social institutions, and child care were critiqued and found wanting.

The rhetoric condemning the ‘big houses’ inhabited by Coastal peoples made explicit Victorian fears of the body and of human sexuality. It also reflected Social Darwinian notions of the hierarchy of species, at the top of which lay Western societies premised on the monogamous conjugal family. The very existence of sites where more than a single family lived together was equated with immorality. No doubt existed but that, given the opportunity, men and women would act on their impulses. Davidoff and Hall have linked the subordination of women to the private home: “Woman had been created for man, indeed for one man, and there was a necessary inference from this that *home* was ‘the proper scene of woman’s action and influence.’ ... The idea of a privatized home, separated from the world, had a powerful moral force and if women, with their special aptitude for faith, could be contained within that home, then a space would be created for true family religion.”<sup>102</sup> So also in British Columbia, the single family home came to be seen as a necessary prelude to Christian conversion.

Men in power repeatedly lauded the single-family house, as in side notes on the Reserve commission’s census of Aboriginal people. At Burrard Inlet: “The houses at this place have a pleasing appearance

<sup>101</sup> Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs to Vowell, Ottawa, 20 May 1895, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>102</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 115.

when viewed from the sea. They are mostly of the cottage style, white washed and kept cleaner in this than is usual with most Indians." In contrast, along the Fraser River: "Most of the houses of this tribe are of the primitive style. There are however several cottages kept and fitted up in a neat manner." At Cowichan on Vancouver Island: "There are a few tidy cottages – what they require is a desire and encouragement."<sup>103</sup> Missionaries like Crosby were even more fervent and repeatedly linked housing to sexuality. "The old heathen house, from its very character, was the hot-bed of vice. Fancy a great barn-like building, ... occupied by as many as a dozen families, only separated from each other by low partitions." The interior seemed made for naughty deeds. "Picture such a building, with no floor other than the ground, no entrance for light except the door, when open, and the cracks in the walls and the roof. Around the inside of such a building were ranged the beds, built up on rude platforms." "Is it any wonder that disease and vice flourished under such favorable surroundings?"<sup>104</sup> In sharp contrast stood "the Christian home." Crosby considered that "the only way to win the savage from his lazy habits, sin and misery" was to "be able and willing to show how to build a nice little home, from the foundation to the last shingle on the roof."<sup>105</sup>

Fear of Aboriginal sexuality became frenzied in the rhetoric around the institution of the potlatch. Missionaries led the campaign against this social activity practiced across most of the province, garnering support from government officials and over time from some converted Aboriginal men. Initially arguments focused on the event itself as being "demoralizing," leading to "debauchery."<sup>106</sup> Federal legislation banning the potlatch took effect at the beginning of 1885, but did not bring about wholesale conversion to Christianity. Missionaries soon sought both allies in Aboriginal men in search of wives and reasons, apart from themselves, to explain their failure to

<sup>103</sup> Census data included with Anderson and McKinlay, Report, 21 March 1877.

<sup>104</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, 49-50. On the related issue of domestic hygiene, see Michael Harkin, "Engendering Discipline: Discourse and Counterdiscourse in the Methodist-Heiltsuk Dialogue," *Ethnohistory* 43, 4 (Fall 1996), 647-48.

<sup>105</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 74.

<sup>106</sup> For example, Cornelius Bryant, Methodist missionary, to Lomas, Nanaimo, 30 January 1884; G. Donckel, Catholic missionary, to Lomas, Maple Bay, 2 February 1884; Lomas to Powell, Maple Bay, 5 February 1884; and Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, 27 February 1884, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3628, file 6244-1, C-10110.

<sup>107</sup> This point is supported by DIA to Powell, 6 June 1884, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3628, file 6244-1, C-10110; and stated explicitly in E.K. DeBeck, "The Potlatch and Section 149 of the Indian Act," Ottawa, 11 May 1921, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3628, file 6244-x, C-10110; and in C.M. Barbeau, "The Potlatch among the B.C. Indians and Section 149 of the Indian Act," 1921, in DIA, RG 10, vol. 3628, file 6244-x, C-10111.

live up to their expectations for themselves.<sup>107</sup> The ethnographer Marius Barbeau concluded in 1921, after examining federal files on the potlatch, that, “as the Church has not succeeded in making converts to any material extent ... there must be found a scapegoat, and as the potlatch already had a bad name, it was blamed.”<sup>108</sup>

The sexualization of the potlatch had a number of components, but centred on the supposed sale of Aboriginal women as wives or prostitutes to get the money to potlatch.<sup>109</sup> In 1893 a Toronto newspaper reported that a group of missionaries had witnessed “blankets for potlatch procured at the expense of the virtue of women,” an event which the local Indian agent determined was sensationalized.<sup>110</sup> By the end of the century the press was convinced that “the potlatch is the inciting cause of three-fourths of the immorality that exists among Indian women.”<sup>111</sup> Writing shortly thereafter, the Indian agent at Alert Bay asserted that the younger generation of Aboriginal men supported his attempt to persuade his superiors in Ottawa to act against potlatching: “It looks cruel to me to see a child 13 or 14 years of age put up & sold just like sheep or a nanny goat, to a bleary eyed siwash old enough to be her grand-father, for a pile of dirty blankets, which will in turn be Potlatched to the rest of the band, and all to make the proud Father, a big Injun,” rather than “let her marry a young man whom I am sure she wanted.”<sup>112</sup> The Indian agent quoted a longtime missionary to make his point that “the girls die off and the young men for the most part cannot get wives because as a rule they have no blankets or money unless they are sons of chiefs and

<sup>108</sup> Confidential memo to C.M.B., 17 February 1921, in Barbeau, “The Potlatch.”

<sup>109</sup> Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver and Seattle: Douglas & McIntyre and University of Washington Press, 1990), 75–83; and Douglas Cole, “The History of the Kwakiutl Potlatch,” in Aldona Jonaitis, ed., *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Vancouver and New York: Douglas & McIntyre and American Museum of Natural History, 1991), 150–52, discuss sexual and marriage practices of the Kwakiutl as linked to the potlatch from a perspective which, while very informative and reliable, more or less accepts at face value the critiques of men in power. In *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), Katherine Pettipas essentially equates the perspective of males with the entirety of perspectives in reference both to the potlatch (90–6) and to the sundance. With a single exception noted only in passing (62), Joseph Masco does much the same in “‘It Is a Strict Law That Bids Us Dance’: Cosmologies, Colonialism, Death, and Ritual Authority in the Kwakw’wakw Potlatch, 1849 to 1922,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 1 (January 1995), 41–75.

<sup>110</sup> *Empire* (Toronto), received 9 February 1893, and letter from Pidcock, 16 March 1893, in Barbeau, “The Potlatch.”

<sup>111</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 316.

<sup>112</sup> G.W. DeBeck, Indian Agent of Kwawkw’weth Agency, to Vowell, Alert Bay, 29 December 1902, and E.A. Bird, teacher at Gwayasdurus, to DeBeck, Alert Bay, 23 June 1902, in D1A, RG 10, vol. 6816, file 486-2-5, c-8538. The meaning of “child marriage” is explored in Harkin, “Engendering Discipline,” 646–47.

the others cannot get wives until they are able to command a certain sum which is so difficult as they have to compete with the older men who hold the property."<sup>113</sup>

The unwillingness to tolerate Aboriginal women's agency was a major factor in the determination to replace familial child care with residential schools operated by missionaries under loose government oversight. As attested by the scholarship, schools sought total control over pupils' sexuality, particularly that of girls.<sup>114</sup> The twinned concepts of Christian marriage and the Christian home depended on young women remaining sufficiently unblemished so that they could become good wives according to Victorian standards of behaviour. The attitudes and actions of Thomas Crosby and his wife Emma are instructive. Crosby considered that parents, "though kind and indulgent to their children, are not capable of teaching and controlling them properly" and "something must be done to save and protect the young girls ... from being sold into the vilest of slavery."<sup>115</sup> "On account of the prevalence of this traffic in Indian girls, many of the early missionaries were led to establish 'Girls' Homes' for the rescue and further protection of these poor victims of this awful system."<sup>116</sup> The taming that went on in the Crosbys' girls' home, as in residential schools across the province, left no doubt as to Aboriginal agency. As remembered by a Crosby school matron in the early 1880s, the girls required "a great deal of Grace, Patience and determination, they were so obstinate and disobedient."<sup>117</sup>

The wildness associated with Aboriginal sexuality explains attitudes toward a girl's transition from pupil to wife. Reflecting the assumptions of the day, the superintendent of the Children's Aid Society in Vancouver expressed relief that "the savage was so thin and washed out" of two young women of mixed race, that they were able to find happiness with their White lovers. Yet this represented "only a glimmer of light in the darkness."<sup>118</sup> According to Crosby's biographer, "girls stayed at the Home until they were married, at

<sup>113</sup>Bird to DeBeck, 23 June 1902.

<sup>114</sup>Most recently, J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>115</sup>Letter from Thomas Crosby, *Missionary Outlook* 9 (1889), 100, cited in Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 64; and Crosby, *Up and Down*, 85.

<sup>116</sup>Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nuns*, 63.

<sup>117</sup>Kate Hendry to sister Maggie, 26 December 1882, Kate Hendry Letterbook, British Columbia Archives, EC/H38.

<sup>118</sup>C.J. South, Superintendent, Children's Protection Act, to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, Vancouver, 20 September 1905, in RG 10, vol. 3816, file 57,045-1, C-10193.

<sup>119</sup>Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 64.

which time a new girl would be admitted.”<sup>119</sup> The full extent of missionaries’ distrust of their charges is evident in the musings of another Crosby matron regarding the potential marriage of a fourteen-year-old student: “It would seem sinful to allow such things to be mentioned if they were white girls, but here they are safer when married young.”<sup>120</sup>

Again, the informal alliance operated. Schools measured their success by numbers of girls who “have married Christian Indians, have helped to build up Christian homes, to civilize the people generally and to aid in developing their own neighborhood.” “Instead of a young man with his friends going with property and buying a wife, as was done formerly, many of our brightest young men tried to make the acquaintance of the girls in the Home.” Women might no longer be sold by their fathers, but they were no less commodities when it came to marriage. The Crosbys, like other missionaries, put a romantic spin around what was, in effect, a good being made available to a handful of men considered suitably Christian. “There was no doubt in our minds that real, true love again and again developed between the young people who thus became acquainted. This acquaintance finally resulted in their marriage and the happy life that followed.”<sup>121</sup>

## CONSEQUENCES

By the end of the nineteenth century settler society took for granted the interpretation that men in power put on Aboriginal women’s agency. The ongoing frenzy over the potlatch is indicative. The press became ever more determined to expose its supposed basis in Aboriginal sexuality. “Indian girl sold for 1,000 blankets” hit Vancouver streets in 1906.<sup>122</sup> The story makes clear that the supposed revelation about “the awful Indian practice of potlatch” originated with an Anglican missionary who was disgruntled because a pupil had married someone other than the man she had selected for her. Later in the year both Vancouver and Ottawa newspapers trumpeted “Five Indian Girls Sold,”<sup>123</sup> a report that, on investigation, proved to be groundless.<sup>124</sup> A Vancouver paper headlined a year later, “Squaw

<sup>120</sup> 2 October 1886 entry in Agnes Knight, *Journal*, 1885-87, British Columbia Archives, F7/W 15.

<sup>121</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 89, 92-3.

<sup>122</sup> “Indian girl sold for 1,000 blankets,” *World* (Vancouver), 2 January 1906

<sup>123</sup> “Five Little Girls Sold at Alert Bay Potlatch,” *World*, 4 April 1906; and “Five Indian Girls Sold, Vancouver, B.C., April 6,” *Journal* (Ottawa), 9 April 1906.

<sup>124</sup> Letter of Vowell, 16 April 1906, in Barbeau, “The Potlatch.”

sold for \$400.00 at Alert Bay to a grizzled Chief from Queen Charlottes.”<sup>125</sup> It turned out that, while two marriages had occurred, neither involved “a grizzled chief,” and the local Indian agent considered the article to be “very misleading.”<sup>126</sup> The press coverage prompted a host of women’s voluntary associations across the country to demand legislation to “put an end to this great blot on the Civilization and Christianity of Canada.”<sup>127</sup> Writing in 1921, a barrister who was the son of the former Indian agent at Alert Bay, and who represented Aboriginal people opposed to the potlatch ban, considered that “the strongest reason for enforcing the law against the Potlatch is the question of Indian marriages.... It is also contended that women are bought and sold, [but] this is not true.”<sup>128</sup> Had the potlatch not been so successfully sexualized, it is doubtful that opponents could have maintained its illegality into the mid-twentieth century. The taming of Aboriginal sexuality had become a means to an end, as well of course as an end in itself, but the effects were no less detrimental to Aboriginal women.

For Aboriginal women, the consequences of the ceaseless rhetoric of scorn heaped on them in the interests of men in power were enormous. Some women acquiesced and returned or remained at home,<sup>129</sup> and the Crosbys delighted “in visiting around among the villages, to pick out these Christian mothers who had the privilege of the ‘Home’ life and training.”<sup>130</sup> In a broad sense, Aboriginal societies did come to mimic their colonial counterparts, which is not unexpected given federal policies and the material advantages to be got from doing so. An Aboriginal informant explained in 1950 how “converts were sometimes termed ‘made white men’, as they used different types of houses and they dressed in white men’s clothes, while their heathen brothers ... indulged in all of the old rituals.”<sup>131</sup>

<sup>125</sup>“Squaw sold for \$400.00 at Alrt Bay to a grizzled Chief from Queen Charlottes,” *Daily News Advertiser* (Vancouver), 6 April 1907.

<sup>126</sup>Letter of William Halliday, 9 July 1907, in Barbeau, “The Potlatch.”

<sup>127</sup>The quotes are from Emily Cummings, Corresponding Secretary, National Council of Women, to Minister of Indian Affairs, Toronto, 19 February 1910, in RG 10, vol. 38 16, file 57,045-1, C-10193, which contains the many letters, often virtually identical in language, from the different associations.

<sup>128</sup>DeBeck, “The Potlatch and Section 149.”

<sup>129</sup>Margaret Whitehead emphasizes this point in “A Useful Christian Woman’: First Nations’ Women and Protestant Missionary Work in British Columbia,” *Atlantis* 18, 1-2 (1992-93), 142-66.

<sup>130</sup>Crosby, *Up and Down*, 92.

<sup>131</sup>John Tate (Salaben), Gispaxloats, informant, recorded by William Beynon in 1950, in George F. MacDonald and John J. Cove, ed., *Tsimshian Narratives*, collected by Marius Barbeau and William Beynon. Vol. 2: *Trade and Warfare* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987), 207.

Some women had the decision taken out of their hands. As more marriageable White women became available and attitudes hardened, numerous non-Aboriginal men shed their Aboriginal partners. The manuscript censuses for the late nineteenth century indicate that, while some of these women did return home and enter into new unions with Aboriginal men, others scraped along at the edges of settler society.

Other women continued to dare.<sup>132</sup> Many inter-racial unions survived the campaign to tame Aboriginal sexuality, in some cases by the partners legally marrying or retreating outward into the frontier, or by simply standing their ground.<sup>133</sup> The encouragement that missionaries and government officials gave to Aboriginal men may have caused some women to disengage from their home communities in search of more satisfying life opportunities. To the extent that traditional patterns of gender relations gave way to male mimicry of European practices, so the social distance between the sexes may have widened. Women still married out, as indicated by the 1901 manuscript census<sup>134</sup> and evoked in a Carr vignette about a woman who had “married white” and “both loved her husband and gloried in his name,” for “it was infinitely finer to be ‘Mrs Jenny Smith’ than to have her name hitched to an Indian man’s and be ‘Jenny Joe’ or ‘Jenny Tom.’”<sup>135</sup>

Most important, the campaign to tame Aboriginal sexuality so profoundly sexualized Aboriginal women that they were rarely permitted any other form of identity. Not just Aboriginal women but Aboriginal women’s agency was sexualized. In the extreme case their every act became perceived as a sexual act and, because of the unceasing portrayal of their sexuality as wild and out of control, as an act of provocation. By default, Aboriginal women were prostitutes or, at best, potential concubines. Their actions were imbued with the intent that men in power had so assiduously ascribed to them, thus vitiating any responsibility for their or other men’s actions toward them. Sexualization of Aboriginal women’s agency occurred within

<sup>132</sup>A fascinating question beyond the scope of this essay, which grows out of Foucault’s work on power, concerns the extent to which some Aboriginal women internalized the assertions being made about them and considered that, yes, they must be prostitutes simply because they had been so informed so many times.

<sup>133</sup>This topic is explored in Jean Barman, “Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia,” in R.W. Sandwell, ed., *Negotiating Rural: Essays from British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

<sup>134</sup>The 1901 manuscript census indicates persons’ “colour” and mixed-race origins, making it possible to determine the character of individual households.

<sup>135</sup>Carr, *Heart of a Peacock*, 110-1.

a context in which they were already doubly inferior by virtue of their gender and race, thus virtually ensuring that any Aboriginal woman who dared would become colonialism's plaything. Again, the stories are legion, be it the Okanagan Valley in the 1880s, Vancouver Island in the 1920s, the North Coast in the 1960s, or Bishop O'Conner. Sometimes the accounts embody a strong element of bravado, in other cases the wish fulfillment of lonely men, but in yet others a strong dose of action, as with O'Conner.

A young Englishman who arrived in the Okanagan Valley shortly after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1886 exemplified a generation of newcomers who took for granted Aboriginal women's sexualization. "Most of these girls were graceful, some even pretty; clear, light bronze skins with just a touch of color in the cheeks, even teeth and glossy jet black hair, that had almost a tinge of blue in it; their black eyes would be modestly cast down in the presence of white men. And sometimes a shy upward glance of coquetry – but not if there were any bucks in sight." He recalled a contemporary who, "fed up with batching, had disturbed the monastic peace of the community by taking unto himself a dusky mistress." The sexualization of Aboriginal women's agency removed any sense of responsibility. Even as his friends were deciding whether to be jealous, "he and his lady had a bad row, and realizing that his little romance was ended he fired her out, and as none of the rest of the old boys were gallant enough to take a chance on her, the lady returned to the bosom of her tribe, and once more there was peace on earth in the little community."<sup>136</sup>

Even persons who supported Aboriginal people, as did the lawyer representing them in the 1920s against the potlatch ban, persisted in seeing women in sexual terms, considering that "contact between Indians and loggers has always been fraught with dire results – particularly to the Indian women." This assessment was in sharp contrast to his view of Aboriginal men: "The Indian man in his own environment is a man of dignity, big and venerable."<sup>137</sup>

In a generally sympathetic account of a summer sojourn in 1966 at Telegraph Creek on the North Coast, a young American made clear that Aboriginal women's agency remained sexualized. "More than they would have in the old days, I'm sure, they make fun of the Indians to me. . . [for] their limber-limbed promiscuity." A friend "eats supper

<sup>136</sup>C.W. Holliday, *The Valley of Youth* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1948), 155, 226.

<sup>137</sup>DeBeck, "The Potlatch and Section 149."

with me, chatting about the morals of the Indian girls ('No morals at all if you scratch their stomachs a minute')." Their every action became a sexual action, thus his vignette relating how "earlier in the spring a girl appeared in the store, sent by her parents, and took up the broom and began to sweep, after the historical fashion of a squaw proposing to a white man." For this young man, the wild which was Aboriginal sexuality remained mythic. Noting that "in New York to dream of a woman is an unremarkable event" but "here it invests the whole night with sexual urgency," he repeatedly found himself tempted, as after "I've had a day hearing stories of ... Indian women being mounted and screwed." He resisted, but precisely because he did accept the equation of Aboriginal female agency with sexuality: "Of course these Indian girls are too vulnerable to fool with, so I have only the past to keep me company in bed."<sup>138</sup>

Hence we come full circle to Bishop O'Conner who at virtually the same time that this young American was fantasizing acted on his impulses. Like so many men before him, he still considers himself to have been "seduced" and, a full generation later, remains in his heart "a celibate man." I have no doubt that O'Conner feels himself to be sincere, just as I now have no doubt of the importance of newcomers' construction of Aboriginal women's sexuality for understanding events during that critical half century, 1850-1900, when your, my, and Bishop O'Conner's British Columbia came into being.

<sup>138</sup>16, 17, and 25 June and 11 and 26 July 1966 entries in Edward Hoagland, *Notes From the Century Before: A Journal from British Columbia* (New York: Ballantine, 1969), 92, 96, 101, 141, 186, 250.