

# PICTURING “CIVILIZATION”:

## *Missionary Narratives and the Margins of Mimicry*<sup>1</sup>

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QUESTIONS OF REPRESENTATION have long been central to the study of colonial projects and encounters. Following Edward Said’s trenchant critique of Orientalism, scholars from a wide range of disciplines have explored the ways in which “Other” peoples and places have been constructed in the colonial imagination. It has become clear that an appreciation and an understanding of the visual is central to decoding these constructions because colonial discourse mobilized such a potent arsenal of images, visual metaphors, and symbolic icons. As Anne McClintock has argued, exploration, photography, and cartography were all imperial enterprises animated by a shared commitment to an “optics of truth,” a “science of surface appearances” that promised to contain, classify, and, ultimately, conquer the world.<sup>2</sup> The camera, in particular, was an optical invention seized upon to provide empirical proof of imperial truth. Photography shifted “the authority of universal knowledge from print language to spectacle” and, perhaps most important, produced this spectacle in a form that was easily classified, exchanged, and available for popular consumption.<sup>3</sup> Examining these discourses and dynamics in the colonial landscape of nineteenth-century British Columbia, a number of scholars have charted the ways in which its spaces and their

<sup>1</sup> I thank Jean Barman, Michael Conroy, Gillian Creese, Cole Harris, Anna Marie Repstock, Becki Ross, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this article. This piece has been developed from my MA thesis, “Teaching Civilization: Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in Two Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia Missions” (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 81-2

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; Carol Williams, “Race, Nation and Gender: 19th Century Representations of Native and White Women in the Pacific Northwest,” *Crosscurrents* 8 (1996): 35.

inhabitants were also made “continuous subjects of the colonial gaze.”<sup>4</sup> As Joan Schwartz noted in her introduction to the 1981-2 *BC Studies* Special Issue on the subject, photography “was a product, an instrument and a record of progress” that “captured the impatience and excitement of the time and place.”<sup>5</sup> Then, as now, one detects a simultaneous fascination with, yet wariness of, photographs and their ability to capture the imagination and stir our emotions. Consequently, perhaps the single most recurrent message of the scholarship, both within that *BC Studies* issue and beyond, has been the impossibility of understanding photographs outside of the contexts of power within which they were produced and consumed. As both a “technology of representation and a technology of power,” photography was firmly entrenched within what Mary Louise Pratt has called “contact zones”: the “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”<sup>6</sup> Those examining British Columbia’s contact zone have thus retained a keen eye for the interests and inequities that shaped photographic practice in the province, particularly when that practice turned its gaze on Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and communities.<sup>7</sup>

In order to disrupt notions of photography’s neutrality and objectivity, much analytical attention has focused on its practitioners – men and women, such as George Fardon, Stephen Spencer, Richard Maynard, Hannah Maynard, Charles Gentile, Frederick Dally, Benjamin Leeson, Edward Dosseter, and Edward Curtis, whose collective portfolios comprise much of the archived photographic

<sup>4</sup> Williams, “Race, Nation and Gender,” 35.

<sup>5</sup> Joan M. Schwartz, “The Past in Focus: Photography and British Columbia, 1858-1914,” *BC Studies* 52 (winter 1981-2): 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 126; Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Alan Thomas, “Photography of the Indian: Concept and Practice on the Northwest Coast,” *BC Studies* 52 (1981-2): 61-85; Margaret B. Blackman, “‘Copying People’: Northwest Coast Native Response to Early Photography,” *BC Studies* 52 (1981-2): 86-112; Margaret B. Blackman, “Studio Indians: Cartes de visite of Native People in British Columbia, 1862-1872,” *Archivaria* 21 (1985-6): 68-86; Carolyn J. Marr, “Photographers and Their Subjects on the Southern Northwest Coast: Motivations and Responses,” *Arctic Anthropology* 27, 2 (1990): 13-26; Peter Jackson, “Constructions of Culture, Representations of Race: Edward Curtis’s ‘Way of Seeing,’” in *Inventing Places: Studies in Cultural Geography*, ed. Kay Anderson and Fay Gale (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1992), 89-106; Daniel Francis, *Copying People: Photographing British Columbia’s First Nations, 1860-1940* (Saskatoon and Calgary: Fifth House, 1996); and Carol J. Williams, “Framing the West: Race, Gender and the Photographic ‘Frontier’ on the Northwest Coast, 1858-1912” (PhD. diss., Department of History, Rutgers University, 1999).

record of life on the nineteenth-century Northwest Coast. Studies have explored how logistics of the craft, frequently disguised techniques of editing and manipulation, demands of colonial markets, individual career paths, and, in some cases, personal integrity shaped the images that these photographers produced.<sup>8</sup> But while so much attention focuses on the important role of photographers and their impact on their products, we seem to have neglected the role of other colonial actors who seized upon photographs to serve agendas of their own – agendas that were often, but not necessarily, in accordance with the intentions of photographers. Frequently the published reports and accounts of missionaries, government agents, journalists, and other authors played an important role in disseminating photographs to colonial audiences, thereby adding yet another layer to the agendas and aspirations for which photographs could be made to perform. By embedding photographs taken by others within narrative contexts and discursive strategies of their own, these actors were simultaneously dependent upon and autonomous from the photographers who produced the images.

#### REFRAMING THE PHOTOGRAPH

In this article I suggest we look at colonial photography from a different angle and through a far too often taken-for-granted lens. By focusing on the use of photography in missionary narratives, and its subsequent role in the multilayered discourse of “civilization,” I argue that we gain new perspective into the ways in which different colonial actors used photographs to naturalize both their own authority and the intersecting hierarchies they laboured to uphold. Unlike those whose vested interests were served by portraying Aboriginal peoples as irredeemably “savage” and/or inevitably “vanishing,” missionaries’ very presence in the colonies depended upon a more complex construction of the province’s inhabitants. I explore the unique needs of missionary discourse, the ways in which it harnessed photographs and other visual images to the project of “civilizing the Indian,” and, ultimately, what its imaginative efforts attempted to

<sup>8</sup> Particular attention has focused on the “inaccuracies” and other clues that can be detected in the works of various photographers, revealing the staged nature of the images and/or the editing techniques used to manipulate their meaning. See, for example, Joanna Cohan Scherer, “You Can’t Believe Your Eyes: Inaccuracies in Photographs of North American Indians,” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communications* 2, 2 (1975): 65-79; Christopher Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980); Jackson, “Constructions of Culture,” 89-106; Blackman, “Studio Indians,” 68-86; and Williams, “Framing the West,” 24-33, and chap. 3., esp. 187-8.

disguise about the spectacle and success of civilization. The under-examined concept of civilization also provides us with an opportunity to examine how discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality were inextricably interwoven within colonial projects. Although frequently ruptured and blurred in colonial contexts, dichotomous constructions of race, class, gender, and sexuality were, nonetheless, rhetorically and visually indispensable as imperial indexes dividing the ruling from the ruled, the “civilized” from the “savage.” The colonial gaze was predominantly White, male, and bourgeois in its inclinations, thus it should come as no surprise that its vision tended to reinforce the hierarchies of power that privileged its perspective.

Missionaries were vanguards of Empire, in a sense, but their role and position was fraught with tensions and contradictions. It is exactly this feature that has led many to focus on their endeavours.<sup>9</sup> Their interstitial position within a shifting class structure meant that their experiences and aspirations were shot through with the contradictions of colonial political economy. They were located, as John Comaroff succinctly puts it, at the “the ideological core yet the social margins” of a vastly fissured class structure.<sup>10</sup> Located in this way, and largely

<sup>9</sup> A number of studies have examined the discourse and dynamics of missionary projects in colonial British Columbia. See, for example, Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary: John Booth Good and the Confluence of Cultures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); Michael E. Harkin, *The Heiltsuks: Dialogues of Culture and History on the Northwest Coast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); C.L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, and Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); Paige Raibmon, “‘In Loco Parentis’: G.H. Raley and a Residential School Philosophy,” *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 38, 1 (April 1996): 29-52; and Paige Raibmon, “‘A New Understanding of Things Indian’: George Raley’s Negotiation of the Residential School Experience,” *BC Studies* 110 (1996): 69-96. A number of excellent studies have also examined the complexity of missionary roles and projects in other colonial contexts. See, for example, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre, eds., *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nicholas Thomas, “Colonial Conversions: Difference, Hierarchy, and History in Early Twentieth-Century Evangelical Propaganda,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, 2 (April 1992) 366-389; and Susan Thorne, “‘The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable’: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238-62.

<sup>10</sup> John L. Comaroff, “Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 168.

dependent upon funds from often distant congregations, they proved themselves to be "especially diligent providers of stories about their own intentions, projects, and achievements," and their writing blossomed into a "literary genre unto itself."<sup>11</sup>

In conjunction with popular travel narratives, anthropological writings, and increasingly widespread photographic records, missionary reports were responsible for providing many with an image and an understanding of the unseen, "uncivilized" Other. One can argue that it was through both the construction and the consumption of missionary narratives that many Europeans and, later, Euro-Canadians developed a sense of "home" as a place and an identity defined in opposition to the colonial terrains they imagined.<sup>12</sup> Armed only with their "rhetorical potency" and "moral sanction," missionaries produced narratives of Promethean voyages into the always dark, but soon to be illuminated, mission field.<sup>13</sup> These narratives worked to transform, at least in discourse, previously poor, often minimally educated men from the margins of bourgeois society into "singularly transcendent and historically empowered figures."<sup>14</sup> Even more important, they framed and encoded their work, and images of it, as part of a much broader colonial morality tale. When we pay attention to the telling of these colonial "tales," we can identify patterns in the poetics that are metonymic of colonialism more generally. For, like the broader colonial enterprise of which it was a part, missionary discourse constantly sought to mediate its own inner ambivalence and inconsistencies – and visual images, in particular, were a major part of this effort.

As a technology based on the power of light, photography held enormous symbolic appeal for missionaries, who already conceived of their work in terms of an optical iconography. With "light" firmly

<sup>11</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness*, 35; Susan Neylan, "The Heavens Are Changing': Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missionization on the North Pacific Coast" (PhD. diss, University of British Columbia, 1999), 321.

<sup>12</sup> A cogent point can and has been raised that colonial notions of "home" and the "Other" were more complicated for Euro-Canadian settlers in particular, who, by the late nineteenth century, were actively (and aggressively) carving out a "home" for themselves in the same space occupied by the "Other." While missionary narratives would thus likely have been read differently by White audiences in Europe than by those already present in the colonies, I argue that the narratives performed a similar function for both audiences: the identification of non-White Others as inhabitants of spaces full of not only danger but also untapped potential – potential that justified, indeed seemingly invited, both colonization and settlement.

<sup>13</sup> Comaroff, "Images of Empire," 184.

<sup>14</sup> N. Thomas, "Colonial Conversions," 383.

yoked to the panoptical vision of Christianity and civilization, and “dark” associated with ignorance and depravity, photography played an essential role in missionary discourse by promising to capture and render visible the contrast between both. Indeed, the popularity of visual imagery, photographic and otherwise, in missionary narratives in general is unsurprising given the extent to which it was relied upon more to project the *desired* outcome of colonial encounters than to reflect the often awkward tensions of colonial reality. Thus the constant marshalling of photographs and other images to depict the triumph of missionary efforts that were far from ensured, and the inexorable ascendancy of European cultural values that were far from uncontested.

Perhaps the most provocative yet problematic aspect of missionaries’ use of photography lies in their failure to provide within their texts any of the source information that historians and other analysts have made such an essential component of understanding and interpreting photographic records. Many of the photographs reproduced in missionary texts were taken by the same commercial photographers whose interests and aspirations have been the focus of so much discussion. Less explored remain the ways in which these photographers’ images were purchased and reproduced by others in a variety of different formats that failed to acknowledge their source, let alone the specifics of their date, setting, or situation. It is possible to identify some of the images found in missionary publications by simply consulting the photographs analyzed by other scholars as part of various practitioners’ portfolios; the point, however, is that missionaries not only left source-related questions unanswered but that they also subtly discouraged their audience from posing them in the first place. What I want to highlight here is that, by neglecting to provide source information for the images they used, missionaries *naturalized* the authority of photography and their own appropriation of it. By eliding questions of who the photographers were; where and when the pictures were taken; and whether, in reality, the subjects photographed were even known to them, missionaries absented reminders of the human motives and manipulations (including their own) that were an inevitable part of the photographs’ construction and presentation. Their omission of this information effectively transformed the photograph into a discursive *terra nullius*, or “empty land,” onto which they could map their own desired meanings.

Having argued this, I acknowledge in advance that my examination and interpretation of photographs flies in the face of certain methodological conventions. Rather than trying to determine the documentary details that could speak to the validity and integrity of these images, I identify the exclusion of such information from missionary narratives as a starting point of central analytical significance. I'm intrigued with what we can learn by "reading" photographs just as missionaries hoped their audiences would read them – without the benefit of source information but immersed within narrative webs of meaning and morality. For, as Carol Williams reminds us, "Meaning is animated for viewers not so much by the trace – the photograph itself – as by the discursive claims made on behalf of the image."<sup>15</sup> We need, then, to consider how captions functioned as powerful framing devices, how images were placed in relation to one another, how their discursive power was directed via anecdotes and allegories, and how their very presence in a text activated assumptions about the supposed visibility of civilization and savagery. Our analytical scope must also be widened to capture the ways in which missionaries used photographs along with the drawings of artists (who, like photographers, went unacknowledged) as illustrations in their accounts. As James Ryan points out, photographs "were disciplined by the words and narrative sequence imposed upon them," but they were also "seen and read in a complex interplay with other symbolic codes," such as maps, paintings, and hand-drawn illustrations.<sup>16</sup> Understanding this interaction, or what Ryan calls the "intertextuality" of photographic discourse, is especially important in the case of missionary texts for their authors used a range of visual devices interchangeably. Photography functioned not only on its own and in conjunction with captions but also interwoven with other visual devices and portraits of "progress."

#### PICTURING THE MISSION FIELD

From 1862 to 1887 Anglican catechist William Duncan's "model" Christian village of Metlakatla stood as a paragon of missionary success for many in British Columbia and abroad who saw it as metonymic of civilization's triumph over savagery. Similarly, from the moment Thomas Crosby established his Methodist mission at Fort Simpson in 1874 to his retirement from the field twenty-three years later, his efforts to bring "salvation" and "civilization" to the Tsimshian

were emblematic of broader colonial desires and anxieties. In the analysis that follows, I draw upon narratives produced by and about both Duncan and Crosby – arguably the two most well known and influential missionaries on the late nineteenth-century Northwest Coast. While a range of historical accounts have singled out both men for equal parts celebration and condemnation, one of Duncan’s biographers makes a valuable point that applies to both of them:

William Duncan was undoubtedly an unusual man, but he was not the daring social reformer that others have described. He was not, in fact, a century ahead of his time; rather, he was essentially a typical Victorian of the lower middle classes. Victorian ideals and Victorian attitudes to Christianity and social reform shaped his thought; Victorian evangelicalism and the policies of a Victorian missionary society directed his actions.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas Crosby and William Duncan embodied and embraced the aspirations of an era and an empire. As such, reports of their progress found an enthusiastic audience with readers of missionary newsletters and periodicals back “home.” Duncan wrote regularly in his journal and sent extracts of his diary, as well as formal reports, to the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) throughout his time at Metlakatla. Jean Usher notes that his work was followed avidly by readers of the *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, the *Gleaner*, and *Mission Leaves*; that by 1870 Metlakatla was adopted by several branches of the CMS as “mission of the month”; and that “ladies’ groups and Sunday-school classes” in England were regular contributors to his far-away mission.<sup>18</sup> Reports of Thomas Crosby’s endeavours were regular features in the Methodist publications *Christian Guardian*, *Missionary Notices*, and *Missionary Outlook*, the latter of which reported that his tours brought in “record amounts of money.”<sup>19</sup> Notably, Crosby’s lengthy

<sup>15</sup> Carol Williams, “British Columbia and the Photographic ‘Frontier,’” review of *Copying People: Photographing British Columbia’s First Nations, 1860-1940*, by Daniel Francis, *BlackFlash* 15, 3-4 (1998): 29.

<sup>16</sup> James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Usher, *William Duncan of Metlakatla: A Victorian Missionary in British Columbia* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1974), 2. For more complete biographies of both missionaries and their work, see, in addition to Usher, Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan: A History of the Two Metlakatlas* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1985); and Neylan, “The Heavens are Changing.”

<sup>18</sup> Usher, *William Duncan*, 86-7.

<sup>19</sup> Editorial, *Missionary Outlook* 5 (1885): 148, cited in Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 58.

memoirs were also deemed worthy of publication – first in 1907, with *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, an account of his early travels around the province, and then in 1914, with *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship*, which focuses on the Fort (later Port) Simpson mission as well as on his work in outlying areas. William Duncan did not write his own memoirs, but a number of others at the time were inspired to write them for him; present-day readers can turn to Henry Wellcome's *The Story of Metlakahla* (1887) and John Arctander's *The Apostle of Alaska* (1909), among other works, for celebratory accounts of Duncan's efforts.

CIVILIZING THE OTHER,  
OTHERING CIVILIZATION

*Historical reality has many ways of concealing itself. A most effective way consists in displaying itself in the full view of all.*<sup>20</sup>

Reading historical accounts of Aboriginal-White relations in Canada, it is impossible not to encounter references to "civilization" and, more specifically, to the campaign to "civilize the Indian." Even actors with widely divergent interests and agendas agree that, whatever its merits or failures, civilizing the Indian was a fundamental element of Euro-Canadian colonialism, particularly as it was practised and promoted by missionaries. The popularity of these concepts is rooted in their economy and signifying power. A single word and a simple phrase convey potent stores of meaning that, most readings would suggest, were and are unanimously understood by any audience. Indeed, our understanding of civilization is so taken-for-granted and unexamined that it is easy to overlook, let alone critique, the consistent failure throughout these accounts to define and deconstruct the concept. The "common sense" complacency that so often enshrouds the notion of civilization is both a symptom and a symbol of how its myriad assumptions have been naturalized and, thus, rendered invisible within our "national" history. In this article I approach civilization as both a colonial *process* and a colonial *objective*, and I pose the following questions: (1) What did this process involve? and (2) How could one identify the end product? In the sections that follow I contend that, by looking at photographs and other visual images used in missionary texts, we can begin to answer these questions as well as to discern the unspoken limitations of the civilizing project.

<sup>20</sup> Octavio Paz, quoted in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Dialectics of Modernity*, 1.

## BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

In the histories of both missions, photographs and other visual images played a central, constitutive role in the stories of their success. The narratives are replete with references to the visible results of their civilizing and Christianizing work. Although they undoubtedly underestimated the ability of Aboriginal peoples to exercise their agency and resistance, missionaries made sweeping claims based on what they believed to be the spectacle of their success. As one Anglican missionary so succinctly put it in the pages of *The Mission Field*, “everywhere are observable the outward marks of that inward change.”<sup>21</sup> Under pressure at all times to legitimate and garner support for their endeavours, missionaries relied upon discourse and visual images to produce the proof they needed. Not surprisingly, much attention focused upon the “highly contested cultural domain” of the body.<sup>22</sup> Descriptions of Aboriginals prior (or resistant) to missionary teaching almost invariably focused upon their “unkempt,” frequently unclothed, and “unruly” appearance and its divergence from European standards of neatness, cleanliness, and order.

Unique to missionary narratives, however, was a fundamental ambivalence that ensured that their representation of “heathen” Aboriginals could never be as unrelentingly negative as some analyses of colonial discourse would seem to suggest. For, although it was clearly in their interest to provide vivid descriptions of Aboriginal savagery, it was equally true that the portraits could not be cast in such certain and irreparable terms as to render missionary work inherently futile. As Nicholas Thomas points out, “If savages are quintessentially and irreducibly savage, the project of converting them to Christianity and introducing civilization is both hopeless and worthless. The prospect of failure would be matched by the undeserving character of the barbarians...”<sup>23</sup> Missionaries thus struggled to maintain a precarious balance in their narratives – one that emphasized the “lamentable distance between savagery and civilization”<sup>24</sup> but that, at the same time, proposed and promoted the bridging of that distance, with themselves as guides, of course. They worked hard to produce what I will call “savable savages,” a category that reflected the paradoxical

<sup>21</sup> Report from Reverend J.B. Good, *Mission Field* 14 (1869): 227.

<sup>22</sup> Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 77; see also chap. 6 passim for a discussion of the central significance of bodies and their politics to colonial encounters.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, “Colonial Conversions,” 374.

<sup>24</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness*, 174.

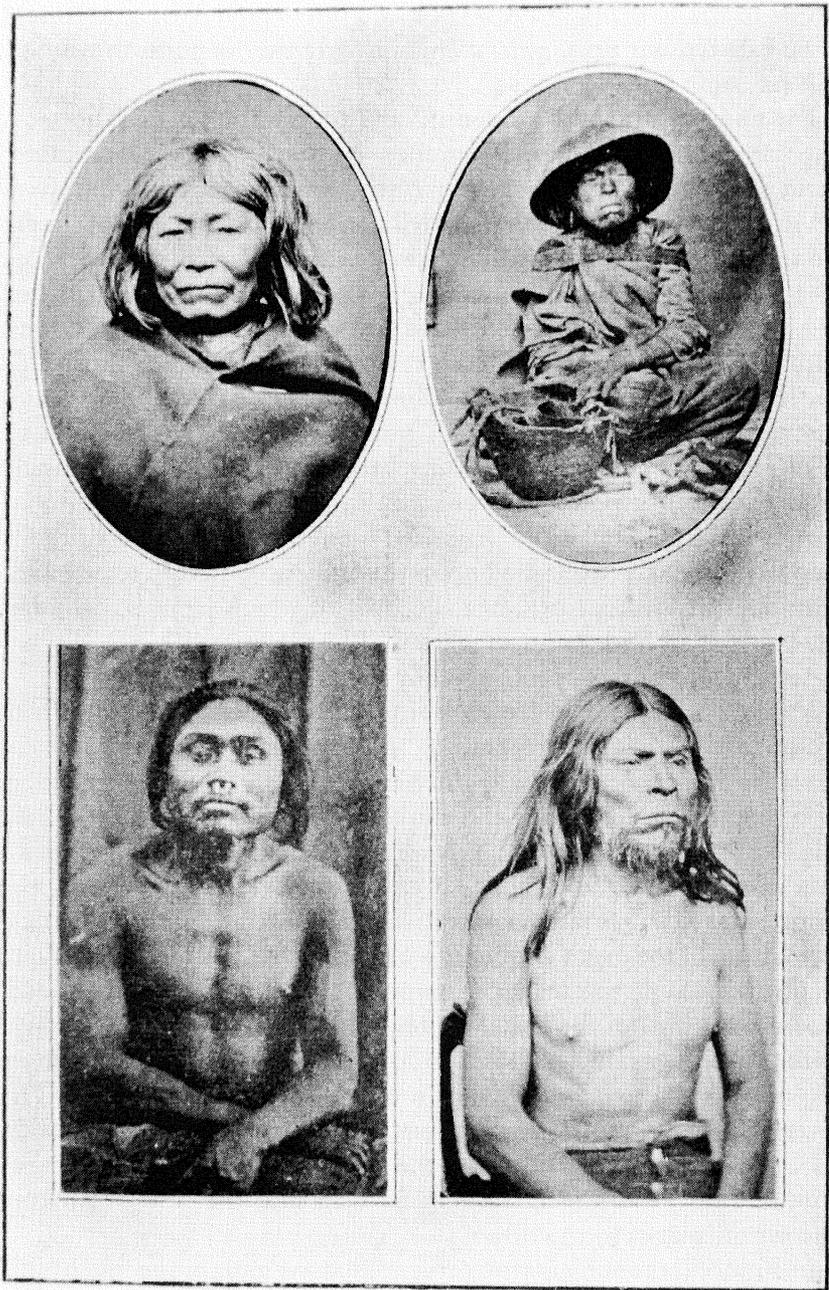
nature of the civilizing process itself and into which Aboriginals were to be ushered but *never quite allowed to outgrow* – a point to which I will return in later sections.

For now, it is helpful to identify and to examine one of the most popular strategies to emerge from these efforts: the “before-and-after” sequence. This transformation narrative was an extremely effective device that cast conversion and civilization through a scopic, linear iconography that was visually striking and ideologically compelling. The supposed success of missionary efforts over time was captured in a visual metaphor that compared one group of Aboriginal bodies with another – the more striking the contrast, the more remarkable and heroic the work of the missionary. Such dualistic images and descriptions produced what McClintock has called *panoptical time*: “The image of global history consumed – at a glance – in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility.”<sup>25</sup> With editorial motives and manipulations disguised behind the technology of “objectivity,” the narrative relied upon the audience’s failure to question a number of assumptions, not the least of which were (1) whether the subjects in both pictures were indeed the same and (2) in what order the photographs were actually taken.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 are each single-page photo sets taken from Thomas Crosby’s 1907 memoirs, *Among the An-ko-me-nums, Or Flathead Tribes of the Indians of the Pacific Coast*. Figure 1 appears in Chapter 1, “The Flatheads and the ‘Book of Heaven,’” while Figure 2 is featured in Chapter 19, “Marvels of Grace.” Although the two sets of images are not explicitly compared with one another, the before-and-after narrative is effectively implied. The almost identical formatting of the pages with four portraits each – two oval, two square – subtly reminds the reader to remember and to compare. Indeed, the very contrast of the visual contents within the broader discursive frame encourages their association so that, ironically, their differences actually bind them together in a single, cohesive narrative. The divergent locations of both photo sets on the visual scale of civilization relate them to one another, and the pages separating them become symbolic of the distance travelled in time and the “progress” from one set of images to the other.

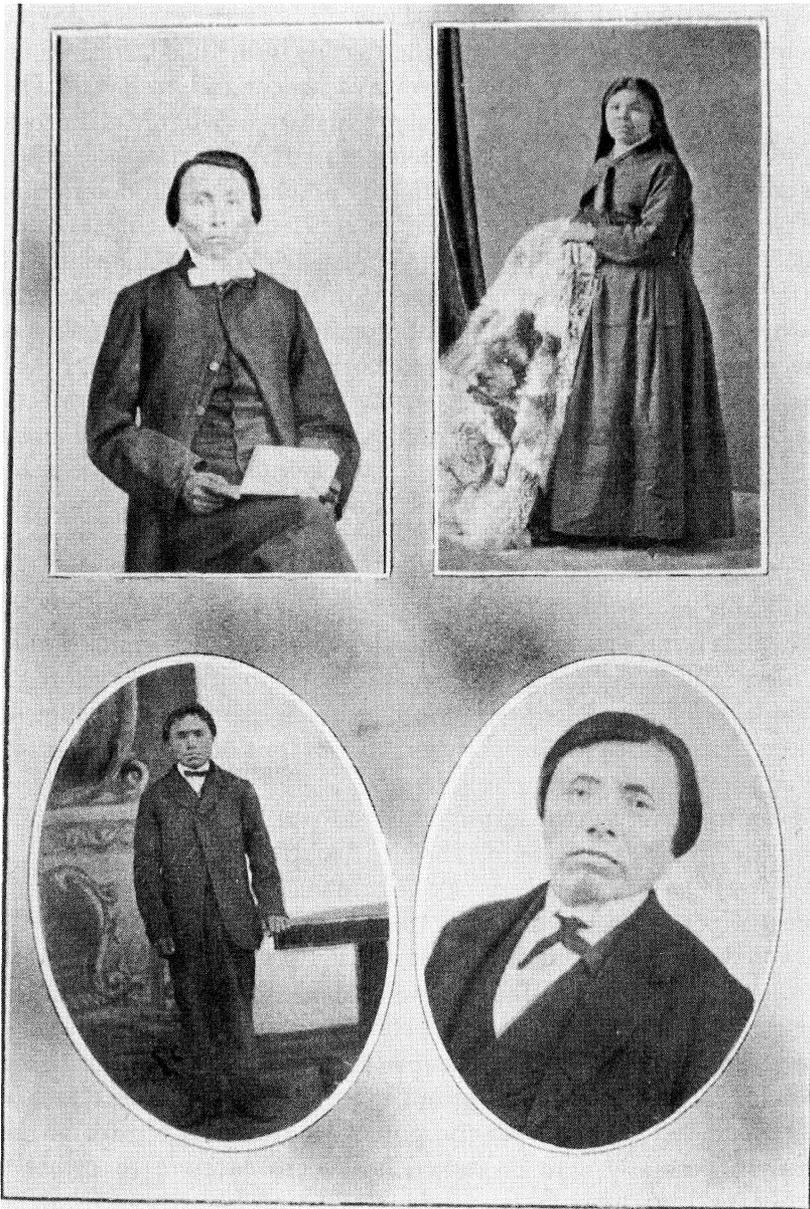
In Figure 1, the subjects are presented as exemplary specimens of a racial classification. Contextual cues, such as name, tribal membership, photographer, date, and place, are omitted in favour of the single

<sup>25</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 37.



EARLY NATIVE TYPES.

Figure 1: "Early Native Types" from Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-mums*, facing page 18.



AMOS CUSHAN.  
p. 206

SARAH SHEE-AT-STON  
p. 229

DAVID SALLOSALTAN.  
p. 209

"CAPTAIN JOHN" SU-A-LIS.  
p. 187

Figure 2: "Amos Cushan, Sarah Shee-at-ston, David Sallosaltan, 'Captain John' Su-a-lis," from Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-mums*, facing page 208.

master caption: “Early Native Types.” This discursive device disciplines the photographs by rendering any individual information, let alone the subjects’ personal narratives, absent and irrelevant. The term “early” suggests a sort of racial *pre*-history, or what McClintock has termed “anachronistic space,” relegating the subjects to an earlier, less advanced standing on an evolutionary timeline.<sup>26</sup> Their description as “types” further reinforces racial categories by reducing heterogeneous Aboriginal peoples to a supposedly homogeneous set of shared characteristics. Perhaps most significant, though, is the way in which the presentation of the photographs silences their subjects and empowers the visual with the authority to speak *for* them. In the absence of any other information, the appearance of the subjects’ faces, hair, posture, dress, and demeanour is legitimized as visual testimony to their inner identities. To the Eurocentric colonial gaze, all four figures appear dishevelled, unwashed, and inappropriately dressed. In the top right photograph the subject is shown sitting on the ground – a common technique used to signify Aboriginal peoples’ supposedly more primitive, unbounded relationship with dirt and disorder. It is important to remember that picturing indigenous bodies as “dirty” and designating their hygiene as substandard was far from a campaign of benevolent sanitation; rather, it legitimized a range of actions that invaded the intimate territory of the body and invalidated the cultural norms surrounding it.

As in the South African mission field studied by Jean and John Comaroff, campaigns to cleanse and clothe the Other on the Northwest Coast frequently revealed a barely submerged “preoccupation with the erotic.” Associated with “degeneracy and disorder, the wild and the wanton,” the “unrestrained, unclothed heathen body was, to European Protestant sensibilities, no fit abode for a vigilant Christian conscience.”<sup>27</sup> What Europeans perceived as the scanty or, worse, absent clothing of Aboriginal people, such as those shown in Figure 1, reinforced Victorian assumptions that “unclothed savages” lacked shame and self-restraint. In the potently sexualized terrain of the colonies, partially clad or naked bodies threatened to provoke Europeans’ innermost fears and desires. It thus became an imperial imperative to impose boundedness and order onto those whose unruly bodies symbolized the dangers of sexual temptation and racial transgression. But indigenous clothing was not only too sparse for

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Dialectics of Modernity*, 226, 224, 8.

European sensibilities, it was also too undifferentiated and amorphous. Another central (but so easily overlooked) dimension of these photographs involves the ways in which the figures are also gendered, or rather, *ungendered*, at least to the European eye. Neither hair length nor clothing clearly distinguishes male from female subjects, and, in at least one of the images, the gender of the subject remains ambiguous. Civilizing the Indian hinged on the installation of explicitly dichotomous, specifically hierarchical gender roles and responsibilities. The Aboriginal body was not legible to the imperial gaze, let alone manageable, unless its gender was both clearly defined and delimited. The spectacle of missionary success could hardly be inscribed on defiant bodies that resisted or blurred the boundaries of European masculinity or femininity; thus, one of the first priorities of missionary projects was the introduction of "properly" gendered attire.

Recent works by Sabine Lang, Will Roscoe, Jean Young, and others add another important dimension to our analysis of these colonial gender and sexual dynamics.<sup>28</sup> By exploring the prevalence and prestige of "berdaches," "two-spirit peoples," and "alternative genders" in North American Aboriginal cultures, these historians add much-needed depth and complexity to our cross-cultural understandings of gender and sexuality.<sup>29</sup> According to these authors, alternative genders that blurred and even reversed European norms of gender and heterosexuality were not only relatively common across North America but were also almost universally accepted by the Aboriginal cultures within which they have been documented. While their prevalence among the Tsimshian, with whom Duncan and Crosby both lived and worked, remains unclear, Roscoe reports that persons of alternative gender were "fairly common" among the Haisla and Nuxalk, the Tsimshian's southern and southeastern neighbours on the Northwest Coast. Similarly, Young charts evidence of alternative

<sup>28</sup> Sabine Lang, *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Jean C. Young, "Alternative Genders in the Coast Salish World: Paradox and Pattern" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1999). See also Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1986); and Susan Beaver, "Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations," in *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology*, ed. Makeda Silvera (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1991), 197-8.

<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, the term "alternative gender(s)" is used for both simplicity and clarity; however, the terminology in this area remains hotly contested. For a more detailed discussion about these terms and the debate surrounding them, see Roscoe, *Changing Ones*, 7-8, 16-19; and Lang, *Men as Women*, xii-xvii, 6-11.

genders among the Stö:lō, Squamish, Nooksack, Skagit, Puyallup-Nisqually, and Cowichan.<sup>30</sup>

Lang notes that missionaries rarely commented on the fact that “most women-men and men-women maintained sexual relations or even marriages with partners of the same-sex” because their Christian beliefs deemed such activities “immoral.” In the eyes of these Europeans, she argues, “the institution of gender role change was tainted from the very beginning with the stigma of sexual perversion.”<sup>31</sup> The possibility of gender variance and same-sex relations within the Aboriginal cultures that missionaries encountered suggests a provocative insight into why European conceptions of “appropriate” gender and sexuality were so fiercely promoted and patrolled in colonial encounters. It suggests that a considerable dimension of the conflict between civilization and savagery was generated by the clash of fundamentally different gender and sexual cultures.<sup>32</sup> Replacing absent or “inappropriate” clothes with European dresses, pants, suits, and skirts was perhaps one way in which missionaries hoped that Aboriginal gender and sexuality could be kept in check by the regulatory power of the closet.

In contrast to their unnamed counterparts in Figure 1, the subjects of Figure 2 (Amos Cushan, David Sallosalton, Sarah Shee-at-ston, and “Captain John” Su-a-lis) are signified as civilized through a variety of visual and discursive markers. No unclothed savages here: European clothing imposes specifically gendered order and discipline onto bodies previously assumed to be wild and unrestrained. Each figure is impeccably groomed and completely clothed, captured in a careful pose of upright self-containment. In three of the four images, the subject’s placement within the portrait is centred around contact with a material symbol of civilized life – symbols that also signified the increased wants and benefits that accompanied an evangelical economy of private property and judicious commodity consumption.<sup>33</sup> Amos Cushan holds what appears to be a book or a letter in his lap; David Sallosalton rests his hand on a table while an ornate mantelpiece seems to hover in the background; and Sarah Shee-at-

<sup>30</sup> Roscoe, *Changing Ones*, 15; Young, “Alternative Genders,” 23.

<sup>31</sup> Lang, *Men as Women*, 17–18.

<sup>32</sup> In Steven Maynard, “The Maple Leaf (Gardens) Forever: Sex, Canadian Historians and National History” (paper presented at a conference entitled “What Difference Does Nation Make?” Harvard University, 1999), the author provides a brief but extremely thought-provoking discussion of how divergent sexual cultures may have shaped Aboriginal-White encounters, particularly within the context of residential schools.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion linking colonial missions with the “sanctified commerce” of imperial markets, see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Dialectics of Modernity*, 8–9, chap. 4 passim.

ston poses next to a fur that is not draped inappropriately on her person but, rather, is carefully positioned as a decorative prop upon which she is able to lean. Their hair and clothing not only clearly distinguishes them as male and female but it also classifies them within the even more culturally complex categories of "masculine" and "feminine." Their gendered identities are also reinforced through captions that provide their "new" Christian names – names that further suggest that, once converted and civilized, the Aboriginal literally becomes a new person. As if to confirm this, the reader is provided with page numbers that refer her/him to more detailed descriptions of the subjects' personal transformations. Unlike the "Early Native Types," the subjects of Figure 2 are directly acknowledged and acclaimed as individuals in Crosby's narrative. The before-and-after sequence in this case relies not on an assumption that the exact subjects are the same but, rather, on an implicit understanding that the path between photographs charts the progression of an entire people from anachronistic anonymity to elevated individuality.

The narrative implied in Figure 2, however, is by no means a simple success story. For, when we consult the page numbers provided by Crosby, we make an extremely disturbing discovery. Each story of transformation is tragically stunted. The photographs are presented in "Marvels of Grace," a chapter in which Crosby recounts a formulaic pattern of civilization and salvation for a total of fifteen Aboriginal individuals. In ten of the fifteen cases, the "end comes all too soon" as the converts are called on to "exchange the garments of earth for the robes of heaven" as they go "triumphantly home to the skies."<sup>34</sup> Of the four whose photographs appear in Figure 2, Crosby can only "rejoice" that "Captain John" Su-a-lis is "still with us" and, even then, his narrative already muses that "when the 'roll is called up yonder,'" "Captain John" and others will answer to their new Christian names.<sup>35</sup> The death scene becomes a familiar one as stories sharing the same conclusion repeatedly appear throughout both of Crosby's memoirs; like "Marvels of Grace," the chapter entitled "Indian Characters and Triumphant Deaths" in *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast* relates countless similar "success" stories whose protagonists all "die well" and "pass sweetly away."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums, or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), 229.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship* (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1914), chap. 27 *passim*.

What are we to make of these unfortunate ends and their invariable enshrinement within the missionary narrative? I argue that these stories provide yet another glimpse of the inherent ambivalence of the missionary project. Missionaries cast Aboriginal peoples as *capable* of conversion, yet these narratives suggest that, in some cases, they could only truly conclude the process in the Kingdom of Heaven. Indeed, in his study of the Methodist-Heiltsuk encounter, Michael Harkin notes that missionaries “reported deaths in the village in the same contented terms as conversion” for in their minds “the two were morally equated.”<sup>37</sup> The very power and authority of missionaries to define Aboriginals as savable savages in the first place was premised upon, and framed within, an inherently hierarchical relationship – a relationship that, I suggest, circumscribed the projects of civilizing and Christianizing in the same moment as it cast their characters. Constructed as savable savages, Aboriginal peoples were *civilizable*, but this very status, conferred upon them by those who were *always already civilized*, denied the possibility of ever concluding the process – despite the best efforts of missionaries to portray it as possible. I argue that, given the terms in which colonial discourse was cast, even the most disciplined and devout Aboriginals would always be seen as “*almost the same but not quite*,” an ambivalent status that postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has referred to as “mimicry.” But while Bhabha’s work emphasizes mimicry’s subversive potential, its ability to unmask the “ironic compromise” at the heart of colonial discourse and thus to disrupt its authority, I highlight those moments of mimicry that, far from disrupting colonial authority, seem to defuse any potential menace to it.<sup>38</sup> I argue that the mimicry which can be discerned in these missionary portraits of “progress” marked the constant containment of the civilizing process and ensured its inevitable incompleteness. Furthermore, I suggest that, whether consciously or subconsciously, missionaries were aware of this tension and, unable to resolve the contradictions that plagued their project, made a point of celebrating their converts’ deaths as a “triumph” – a triumph that was far from assured while they were still living.

<sup>37</sup> Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> See Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 152–60.

## SHOWDOWNS WITH SAVAGERY

In yet another strategy to mediate this problem, missionaries displaced their unspoken anxieties that savagery *couldn't* be "saved" onto the bodies of their most infamous adversaries: medicine-men.<sup>39</sup> These figures embodied all that was hated and feared about Aboriginal "heathenism." They were condemned as "demon[s] among heathen peoples" who represented the "grossest features of paganism,"<sup>40</sup> and they came to symbolize that which missionaries were most loath to imagine: the abject failure and rejection of their civilizing and Christianizing efforts. The continuing power of medicine-men and shamans to define key cultural practices, particularly those surrounding the body, was viewed as a direct challenge to the missionary's own incipient authority. Missionary efforts thus concentrated on eroding the corporeal authority of these irksome competitors, and colonial discourse constructed their bodies, in particular, as spectacles of savagery. In the *Story of Metlakahla*, we find this vivid description:

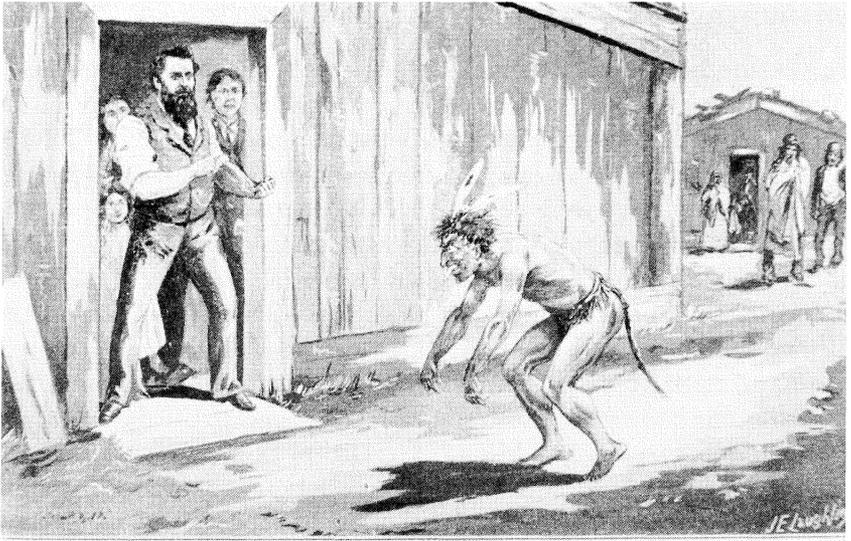
The medicine-man, claiming direct intercourse with the spirit-world, held great influence over the people. He arranged himself, in the skin of a bear or wolf, the head and muzzle of which formed a helmet, the tushes falling about his temples; and a hideously carved mask covered his face, armllets and anklets of repulsive design encircled his shrivelled limbs. To add to the ferocity of his appearance, the exposed parts of his body were daubed with red and black paint, and he was covered with pending charms ... which dangled about him as he advanced into the room with a series of postures and jerks.<sup>41</sup>

The most stunning example of the medicine-man's role in missionary discourse is found, however, in Crosby's 1914 memoirs. Susan Neylan has pointed out that narratives of "showdowns" between medicine-men and missionaries were a "classic" and compelling discursive device – second only, it would seem, to before-and-after narratives in their popularity and profusion. More significant than whether such incidents actually occurred, or how accurate were their descriptions,

<sup>39</sup> While I employ the gender-specific terms of "medicine-man/men" in this section, I recognize their limitations. Arguments raised by a growing number of scholars complicate the assumption that the gender of medicine-men and "shamans" was unambiguously male. See Note 29.

<sup>40</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nums*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Henry S. Wellcome, *The Story of Metlakahla* (New York: Trow's Printing and Book Binding, 1887), 5-6.



THE MILITANT MISSIONARY—DR. CROSBY AND THE MEDICINE MAN.

Figure 3: “The Militant Missionary – Dr. Crosby and the Medicine Man,” from Crosby, *Up and Down*, facing page 254.

Neylan argues, is what we can learn about the tensions underlying missions by examining these visual and rhetorical conventions.<sup>42</sup> In *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship*, Crosby provides a richly symbolic, strikingly illustrated (Figure 3) account of his encounter with a “hostile” medicine-man:

Another illustration of the opposition with which we had to contend, and which had a somewhat amusing side, was furnished by an incident connected with our first visit to Kitimaat [sic]. A Council had been called by the Chiefs, to which I was invited. They proposed that, if I would not pray the judgments of God upon them, they would in turn prevent any evil to me and any interruption to our services from the conjurer who was then in the mountains preparing to destroy us. I promised that if they would desist from their wicked practices on the next day, which was the Sabbath, we would not offer any prayers against them. They readily promised. I seized the opportunity to challenge them with their want of power while our service was proceeding the next night, when the conjurer with his crowd came rushing to the place, howling and destroying property in his track, and declaring that he would put a stop to the proceedings. This man, with his tongue

<sup>42</sup> Neylan, “The Heavens Are Changing,” 113-4.

protruding, was the most diabolical-looking object that one could imagine. He had a thick rope around his waist to which his followers had been clinging. His object doubtless was to let it be known in that heathen tribe and on the Coast that the conjurer had more power than the Missionary and his religious story. It was then that the Missionary felt it necessary to assume the *role* of the militant preacher; and, taking his position at the door, boldly challenged the savage to come on, at the same time suggesting what might be the consequences to him. To the surprise of those assembled, the fellow was cowed and slunk away with a scowl on his countenance, leaving us to our devotions.<sup>43</sup>

The narrative implied by both the image and Crosby's anecdote conforms almost uncannily to the formula described in Neylan's analysis:

In the missionary literature, the "medicine-men/women" or "witch-doctors" are cast as always resenting the intrusion of Christianity and perceiving the missionary as a threat to their authority and power. They frequently suffered humiliation or were discredited by the missionary, and sometimes even were converted to the "truth" of Christianity. In the heroic vein of missionary discourse, the missionaries always won the "showdown."<sup>44</sup>

The "defeat" of the medicine-man in this encounter is as inexplicable as it probably is imaginary. Whether or not the incident actually occurred, its "true" details and dynamics remain shrouded by the allegorical ambitions of Crosby's discourse. Medicine-man and missionary are vividly constructed as opposing characters in an imperial drama. As the heroic protagonist, Crosby provides the "objective," panoptical perspective of the narrator. He even shifts, at one point, into third-person narration, thereby emphasizing this as a conflict of icons rather than of individuals. The use of a hand-drawn illustration to accompany the account is particularly intriguing. The cumbersome and often lengthy process that early photography entailed would have made it an unreliable recorder of a spontaneous, action-filled event such as this one. The use of an artist's drawing as a substitute, however, was not without its benefits. While photographers had the power to disguise a range of editing techniques within their photographs, their ability to manipulate the meaning of an image still paled in comparison with the ability of those who used not the camera but

<sup>43</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 254–55, emphasis in original.

<sup>44</sup> Neylan, "The Heavens are Changing," 114.

the paintbrush and the pencil. What visual artists other than photographers sacrificed in status as objective recorders of reality, they gained in freedom to produce pictures constrained only by their own imaginations. Thus the inclusion of hand-rendered illustrations such as Figure 3 – even in the age of empiricism, at the same time that photography was being praised for its accuracy and technological superiority – testifies to the continued credibility and resilient privileging of the (White, male) European perspective *regardless of its format*. Colonial audiences would have been much more sceptical of such illustrations, one suspects, had the drawings presented perspectives antagonistic to their own or narratives that conflicted with the imperatives of Empire.

The name of the artist in this case can be seen in the bottom right-hand corner of Figure 3, but this marks the extent of the information we are given about his/her identity, let alone his/her relationship to any of the subjects depicted. We are forced to rely, once again, upon the naturalized authority of the visual image and its interaction with the narrative provided by Crosby. In the written text, Crosby's description of the unnamed medicine-man reinforces deeply racist imaginings. Using animalistic imagery, he depicts his opponent as a "diabolical-looking object" who "howls" and rushes about with his "tongue protruding." Further demonstrating his disregard for the values and materials of civilized life, this depraved creature wantonly destroys property until, finally, he is boldly confronted by the "Militant Missionary." The portrait is actualized in Figure 3, confirming that civilization and savagery can indeed be seen in the spectacle of the body. Crouched almost on all fours, the medicine-man is figured as a hybrid whose claw-like hands, horns/ears of feather, and tail of rope blur the boundaries of animal and human. His face, darkened with paint and dirt, is contorted in a terrible grimace as his eyes bulge and his tongue hangs from his head. His dishevelled hair flies in all directions, much like the ragged edges of his scanty loincloth. In stark contrast to Crosby, he stands outside in the dirt, without even shoes to separate his feet from the ground. Crosby, on the other hand, stands fully erect, completely and appropriately clothed in the symbolic space of the doorway, shielding the sacred domestic space of the interior from the dangerous threat outside. His hair and beard are carefully groomed, and the expression on his face is calm but resolute. He appears physically larger and substantially brawnier than photographs of him might otherwise suggest, and his clenched fists

reveal his readiness to protect those within.<sup>45</sup> Note also how the title "Dr. Crosby" more effectively equips him to do battle with the medicine-man by highlighting his status as a doctor of divinity and by not so subtly playing with the title's medical connotations.

While Crosby's narrative mentions nothing of a house, much less of any inhabitants within, the illustration heightens the drama by positioning Crosby at the threshold of civilized space. Intersecting hierarchies of race and gender are reinforced as the figures behind him are portrayed as passive and vulnerable, dependent upon the benevolent protection of White masculinity. At least one of the figures within, the small child, appears to be female, while the European attire, cropped hair, and posterior position of the male figure to Crosby's left suggests a faithful but feminized Aboriginal assistant. Together, text and image tell an epic tale as the White, male figure of righteous progress confronts, overpowers, and implicitly emasculates the primitive and depraved throwback of anachronistic space. The picture, in short, enacts almost every visual metaphor and symbolic strategy in the colonial arsenal. Through it, we see the embodied fears and fetishes of the imperial imagination, and the ongoing attempts to predetermine through discourse the uncertain outcome of colonial encounters.

ENGENDERING CIVILIZATION:  
"STALWART MEN AND COMELY MAIDENS"

I have visited Mr. Duncan's wonderful settlement at Metlakahtla [sic], and the interesting Methodist Mission at Fort Simpson, and have thus been enabled to realize what scenes of primitive peace, and innocence, of idyllic beauty, and material comfort, can be presented by the stalwart men, and comely maidens of an Indian community under the wise administration of a judicious and devoted Christian mission. I have seen the Indians in all phases of their existence, from the half-naked savage, perched, like a bird of prey, in a red blanket upon a rock, trying to catch his miserable dinner of

<sup>45</sup> In Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 111, it has been astutely pointed out that nineteenth-century male evangelists "came dangerously close to embracing 'feminine' qualities." Taking his cue from Davidoff and Hall, Brett Christophers (*Positioning the Missionary*, 49-50) similarly notes that missionary masculinity was "explicitly, but also anxiously," emphasized by evangelists on the Northwest Coast. Combined, these insights suggest an interesting understanding of why Crosby was depicted in such an exaggeratedly masculine manner.

fish, to the neat maiden in Mr. Duncan's school at Metlakahtla, as modest and as well dressed as any clergyman's daughter in an English parish.<sup>46</sup>

In 1876 the Earl of Dufferin, then governor general of Canada, returned from visiting the missions of Duncan and Crosby to deliver a passionate speech in Victoria's Government House about what he had witnessed. His stirring discourse and eloquent imagery did more than simply praise the virtues of mission work; they revealed integral, but often unexamined, dimensions of the civilizing project. Not only does Dufferin evoke the ever-popular spectacle of "panoptical time" with his ability to observe the various stages of Aboriginal existence during a single visit, but he also *genders* the supposed transition from savagery to civilization by exhibiting it on the imagined bodies of Aboriginal men and women. "Stalwart men" and "comely maidens" embodied the imperial ideals by which civilized Aboriginals were to be neatly categorized and contained.

### "*Stalwart Men*"

A growing number of scholars have pointed out the failure to examine masculinity as a gendered construct that has the same historical depth and complexity as do social constructions of femininity. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag note that,

Like women, men live in a world in which their sense of self, the social norms they learn to accept, their sense of appropriate social roles for themselves and others, and generally the structure of possibilities and constraints throughout their lives, are all shaped by the social construction of patriarchy and masculinity and their variation by class, race, culture, sexual orientation, and historical period.<sup>47</sup>

With these insights in mind, I want to explore some of the ways in which civilization inscribed itself differently on the bodies of Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women. Anne McClintock provides an insightful discussion of how the colonization of "virgin lands" was "libidiously eroticized" as the male ravishment of feminized people and places. She notes: "Knowledge of the unknown world was mapped as a metaphysics of gender violence ... In these fantasies,

<sup>46</sup> Speech of Lord Dufferin, cited in Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahtla*, 104-5.

<sup>47</sup> Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Taking Gender into Account in British Columbia: More Than Just Women's Studies," *BC Studies* 105/6 (1995): 12.

the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration, then reassembled and deployed in the interests of massive imperial power."<sup>48</sup> This raises an interesting question: what happens to men who are to be the *colonized* rather than the *colonizers* in this symbolically masculine endeavour? McClintock argues that colonial discourse subtly feminized non-White men by using the language of gender to mediate the hierarchies of race. Discursively (and, in some cases, literally) stripping non-White men of their masculinity defused them as threats to patriarchal colonial authority, at least in the imperial imagination. Aboriginal men in British Columbia were no exception to these processes, and one can detect efforts to emasculate them in missionary discourse and practice. In an 1887 public address in Washington, DC, William Duncan outlined his success at Metlakatla and endeavoured to prove that "Natives" *could* be civilized by insisting that, "They have all the qualities necessary to make men of themselves."<sup>49</sup> In stating this, he inadvertently belied the conflicted nature of the civilizing project and its promises for his words made equally clear the understanding that Aboriginal men *were not men yet*, and could not become so without the benefit of missionary guidance and supervision. The patronizing and paternalistic overtones of Duncan's words reflect the inherently unequal relationship in which missionaries cast themselves with their male converts. "Not men yet," Aboriginal men could strive towards an ideal that was always already embodied in the epic, masculine heroes that male missionaries imagined themselves to be. If missionary wives were also present, as was the case with Emma Crosby, then Aboriginal boys and men were further feminized when they were placed under the supervision and instruction of White women. As McClintock points out, "The rationed privileges of race all too often put White women in positions of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men."<sup>50</sup>

But it is also apparent that the feminization of Aboriginal males was complicated by the specifically gendered demands of the civilizing process, leaving Aboriginal men in a strangely ambiguous position. Stalwart masculinity remained the ideal to which they were to aspire,

<sup>48</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22–3.

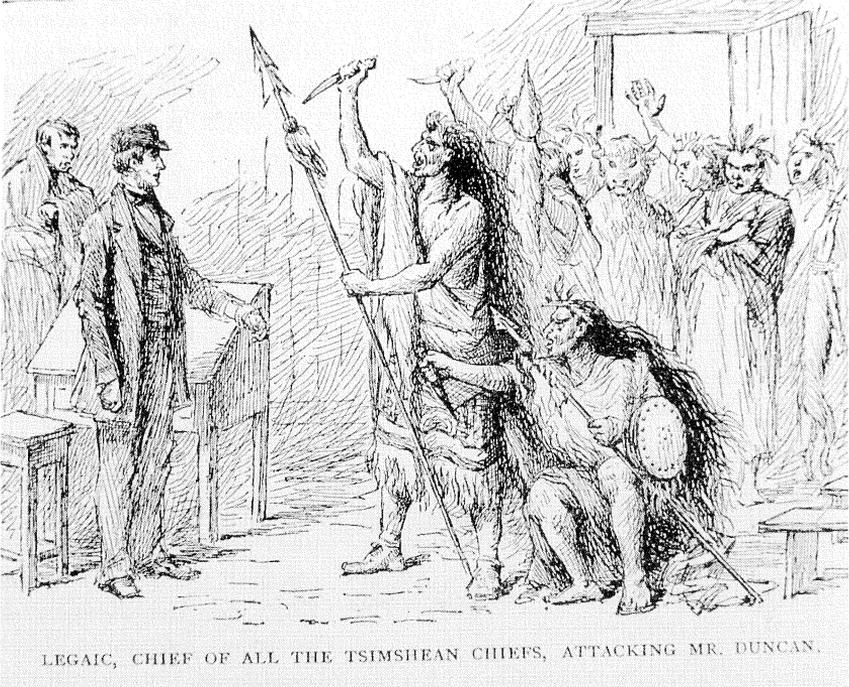
<sup>49</sup> William Duncan, "Mr. Duncan's Address before the Board of Indian Commissioners, and the Conference of the Missionary Boards, and the Indian Rights Association, Washington, D.C., Jan. 6 1887," in Wellcome, *Story of Metlakatla*, App., 391. Duncan was appealing to the American government to allow the community of Metlakatla to relocate to Alaska following his split from the Anglican Church Missionary Society. For a more in-depth discussion of this conflict, see Usher, *William Duncan*, chaps. 6 and 7.

<sup>50</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 6.

and missionary transformation narratives praised those who adopted appropriately masculine appearance and activities. While Aboriginal girls and women were civilized via domesticity, Aboriginal boys and men were civilized via properly “masculine” industry and rigorous physical recreation. Both Duncan and Crosby placed a substantial amount of emphasis on teaching “male” trades such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and farming. At his early mission in Nanaimo, one of Crosby’s first steps was to take the boys and men to the woods to extract “poles and rails and pickets,” and then to show them “how to fence and cultivate a garden.” Similarly, Duncan employed men at Metlakatla to “saw boards, split shingles, build roads and erect a protective embankment around the mission building.”<sup>51</sup> Males at both missions were also encouraged to partake in masculine endeavours such as football, a fire company, a brass band, and a rifle company. Women and girls, it seemed, did not require such outlets of energy and expression.

To complicate things even further, we must also recognize that the trades for which Aboriginal males were trained, while appropriately masculine, were also invariably *manual*, ensuring that they would be relegated to the bottom ranks of a racialized class structure. Such training marshalled the boundaries of race and class to patrol Aboriginal men’s access to the public/political arenas of White patriarchal power. Wrapped in the “common sense” discourse of “practical” education, manual training all-too-conveniently served to limit the ability of Aboriginal men to challenge colonial rule. In *The Story of Metlakatla*, Henry Wellcome provides a gendered before-and-after narrative that highlights some of the contradictions in this dual construction/destruction of Aboriginal masculinity. Figure 4 is an (uncredited) artist’s rendition of yet another “showdown,” this time pitting William Duncan against a “hostile” Tsimshian chief, Paul Legaic. According to Wellcome’s account, shortly after beginning a school among the Tsimshian, Duncan was violently threatened and confronted by Legaic and a group of medicine-men, “all hideously painted, and decked in feathers and charms.” Legaic, “fired with drink, and in a furious passion,” is described as “savagely gesticulating” before drawing his knife to attack Duncan. Like the medicine-man in Crosby’s showdown, Legaic is suddenly and, at first glance, inexplicably defeated. His arm falls, “as if smitten by paralysis,” and he is “cowed” and “slinks away.” Diverging at this point from the usual formula, Wellcome

<sup>51</sup> Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nuns*, 49; Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan*, 86.



LEGAIC, CHIEF OF ALL THE TSIMSHEAN CHIEFS, ATTACKING MR. DUNCAN.

Figure 4: "Legaic, Chief of all the Tsimshian Chiefs, Attacking Mr. Duncan," from Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahla*, facing page 12.

reveals that Clah, a "faithful" Aboriginal convert who is shown behind Duncan, had drawn a revolver and made it visible to Legaic and that "it was the sight of this defender that repulsed the would-be assassin."<sup>52</sup>

Later in the book, in Figure 5, we are presented with another picture of Legaic, this time depicting the spectacle of his transformation after conversion and civilization. Susan Neylan has analyzed both of these pictures and their ingenious blending of the showdown and before-and-after conventions. She points out some of the most significant differences between the two images, noting how Legaic's face is "contorted with anger or madness" in the first but calm and austere in the second. She points out that conversion and civilization have also stripped Legaic of status. While in Figure 4 he is depicted as a threatening, but undeniably powerful, leader, Neylan notes that in Figure 5 he is "a 'simple citizen' rather than a chief, and has an occupation readily approved by the Euro-Canadian authorities."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahla*, 11-13.

<sup>53</sup> Neylan, "The Heavens are Changing," 118.



Figure 5: "Legaic as a Simple Citizen and Carpenter of Metlakahltla," from Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahltla*, facing page 40.

and he wears a suit. According to European standards, his masculinity appears both unambiguous and rational. The masculinity of Legaic is less straightforward. Confronting Duncan, he stands aggressively with a knife raised in one hand and a spear clutched in the other. His face is contorted, his hair is long, and a blanket is wrapped around him like a skirt. Legaic is thus hyper-masculinized as violent and aggressive, but he is also feminized by other aspects of his appearance (along with his seemingly cowardly defeat). As in Crosby's confrontation with the medicine-man, the showdown narrative symbolically emasculates the Aboriginal male challenge to White male authority. Clah's part in this scene reconfirms the positioning of civilized Aboriginal males as secondary protagonists. Both the artist's placement and portrayal of Clah within the picture, and Wellcome's downplaying of his role as the faithful actions of a devoted assistant, re-centre Duncan as the epic hero around which the story revolves. Clah is literally relegated to the background shadows as a *defender*, not as a *representative*, of colonial masculinity.

When we turn to Figure 5, we find that similar strategies have contained the once formidable figure of Legaic. On the one hand, Legaic's civilization is signalled through his hair and clothes, which are now not only European in style but are also conspicuously clean

What I would like to add to Neylan's analysis is a consideration of how these images also track the simultaneous gendering and feminizing of Aboriginal men demanded by the civilizing process. Through the transformation of Legaic, we can discern the complex and contradictory ways in which Aboriginal men were both masculinized and emasculated. In Figure 4 Duncan stands calm and unafraid, his hand resting on a desk, a symbol of European knowledge and learning; his hair is short

and specifically gendered. Legaic's status as a chief may be diminished (or at least downplayed by the author), but he is now accorded membership in two male-encoded categories: "citizen" and "carpenter." As the bishop of Columbia approvingly commented: "He is industrious, and gains a good livelihood, and lives in a comfortable house of his own building."<sup>54</sup> But while the Legaic in Figure 5 conforms to many of the gendered standards of civilization, his masculinity is also compromised by the very process that civilizes him. The same process that inscribes his masculinity in his appearance and his clothing also feminizes him as docile and passive, seated submissively before the (White, male) imperial gaze – a far cry from the threatening, dynamic figure who once resisted Duncan's teachings. As Wellcome so tellingly puts it, the images show how this "brutal murderer" has been "humbled and led like a lamb."<sup>55</sup> In the colonial imagination, Aboriginal men were consigned, at best, to the mimicry of European masculinity – recognized as civilized men only once they were symbolically and literally disarmed of masculine power.

### "Comely Maidens"

Missionary discourse carved out an equally, if not even more, precarious position for Aboriginal women. As feminist theorists and historians have long argued, discursive constructions of femininity and womanhood were and are fraught with unresolved tensions and contradictions – an insight that has, to a large extent (but not unproblematically), been acknowledged and applied by researchers in a variety of disciplines. Cultural anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, for example, comment:

Women were held at once to be sensitive and delicate, yet hardy and longer-lived; passionate and quintessentially sexual; yet innocent and intuitively moral. Given the political load that the anatomy of woman had come to bear, such ambiguities were bound to fuel angry dispute; it is not surprising that her body soon became an ideological battleground.<sup>56</sup>

What has been less widely understood and analyzed, however, is the extent to which these contradictions were displaced and, to a certain degree, mediated on the inevitably racialized terrain of colonial

<sup>54</sup> Bishop of Columbia, cited in Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahla*, 71.

<sup>55</sup> Wellcome, *Story of Metlakahla*, 39-40.

<sup>56</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness*, 107.

encounters. The fracturing of femininity was negotiated in racial and class terms, which alternately compelled and constrained different women to inhabit different dimensions of this discourse. Scholars such as Rayna Green, Sarah Carter, Carol Williams, and Loraine Littlefield have argued that, for Aboriginal women in North America, this meant being classified into one of two or three categories constructed in the imperial imagination. Littlefield, for example, identifies “savage,” “squaw,” and “victim” as three images that were applied at different times to Aboriginal women along the Northwest Coast; while Green describes the “Pocahontas perplex,” which opposed Aboriginal women as either beautiful “Indian princesses” or dirty, immoral “squaws.”<sup>57</sup> There has been a tendency in many of these analyses to frame these categories according to *when* they fell in and out of use in colonial discourse. I argue, however, that by periodizing racialized images such as squaw, princess, savage, and victim, we efface their remarkable historical resilience and flexibility, and lose sight of their ability to exist simultaneously, often buttressing one another. While the specific images undoubtedly became more and less resonant under different circumstances, I question whether any of them truly relinquished their hold over the Aboriginal female body in the colonial imagination.

Within the context of the civilizing project, in particular, missionary discourse often deployed these images together. It was necessary to construct Aboriginal women as not only savages, but also as *victimized* savages who were thus capable of being saved. Missionaries see-sawed continuously in their casting of Aboriginal women as either maidens capable of exerting a civilizing influence among their people or as squaws resilient to change and prone to the ever-present danger of “backsliding.” Racialized notions of gender and sexuality converged on the Aboriginal female body as the Aboriginal girl became a “potent symbol of the task at hand. Both victim and sinner, she was the first priority of the missionary enterprise.”<sup>58</sup> Defending his decision to segregate and personally supervise the girls and young women of Metlakatla, Duncan insisted: “If we want to save the people from

<sup>57</sup> See Loraine Littlefield, “Images of Northwest Coast Native Women in the Historical Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” (paper presented at BC Studies Conference, November 1990), Special Collections, UBC Library, SPAM 21529; Rayna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in US Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15–21; Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); and Williams, “Framing the West,” 12–4 and chap. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Harkin, “Engendering Discipline: Discourse and Counterdiscourse in the Methodist-Heiltsuk Dialogue,” *Ethnohistory* 43, 4 (1996): 647.

utter ruin – bring them into a virtuous channel and socially improve them – I consider this step absolutely necessary in the present state of the Indian population," thereby identifying Aboriginal females as simultaneously essential, yet threatening, to the civilizing project.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the transformation narratives so popular in missionary reports and memoirs depended upon *all* the contradictory constructions of Aboriginal femininity for each image embodied different ambitions and anxieties underlying the civilizing mission.

The scopic spectacle of Aboriginal women's civilization, or lack thereof, lent itself easily to the photographic medium for, as Crosby argued, "It was not difficult, in visiting around among the villages, to pick out those Christian mothers who had the privilege of the '[Girls] Home' life and training."<sup>60</sup> Carol Williams has documented the ways in which Aboriginal women who adopted "White ways" were depicted as visually distinct from those who remained "resistant to assimilation,"<sup>61</sup> and we can detect many of these strategies at work in Figure 6 and Figure 7. The images are presented together on a single page in Crosby's 1914 memoirs, and, as usual, source information is omitted, thereby empowering the photographs and captions to "speak for themselves." In Figure 6 an Aboriginal woman is shown frontally, holding a stick and sitting on the ground against the outside wall of an unidentified building. Williams points out that all of these elements were common photographic practice in the portraits of older, "un-assimilated" women for they reinforced their casting as "closer to the 'natural' pagan world."<sup>62</sup> Everything about the woman's appearance transgresses the norms of civilized femininity that the missionaries were so intent on instilling. She wears a blanket rather than a dress; her hair is hidden beneath a scarf; and, while not wearing any face-paint, she displays visible facial piercings.<sup>63</sup> Notably, the blanket she wears appears to be a Hudson's Bay Company blanket, an item Williams argues was often included in such photographs to root the subject in the "deep history" of the fur trade. The description of the woman as a "grandmother of the old days" further relegates her to historical passivity, a primitive anachronism whose day has passed. The caption,

<sup>59</sup> Journal of William Duncan, cited in Usher, *William Duncan*, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Crosby, *Up and Down*, 92.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, "Race, Nation and Gender," 37; see also Williams, "Framing the West," chap. 5, esp. 315–21.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, "Race, Nation and Gender," 37.

<sup>63</sup> In addition to the piercing in her nose, the woman in the photograph also has a lip labret, which is less visible, especially as the photograph has been reproduced in Crosby's book. For a clearer version of the photograph, see Francis, *Copying People*, 34.



"THE QUEEN OF SHEBA,"  
A grandmother of the old days.



GIRLS AT THE KITAMAAT HOME.  
The result of Christian training.

Figure 6 (top): "The Queen of Sheba,' A grandmother of the old days"; and Figure 7 (bottom): "Girls at the Kitamaat Home. The results of Christian training," from Crosby, *Up and Down*, facing page 30.

"The Queen of Sheba," is particularly puzzling for it seems at first to attribute to the woman a somewhat geographically misplaced regal status. It was more likely a sardonic reference to the Biblical figure who "came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones." Describing someone as "dressed up like the Queen of Sheba" was, in fact, a popular convention of the times generally used to ridicule the person in question.<sup>64</sup> Far from bestowing a compliment, the caption was likely a wry comment on what missionaries perceived to be the dishevelled, extremely *un*-regal appearance of the unassimilated Aboriginal woman.

In Figure 7, "The Girls at the Kitimaat [sic] Home," the girls are provided as a contrast in yet another implicit before-and-after narrative. The placement of the photographs in relation to one another, combined with their captions, suggests a temporal progression embodied by the women themselves. Note how the contrast is struck between the "girls" and the "grandmother." The temporal framing of the sequence is essential because it was yet another strategy used by missionaries to mediate the tension they inadvertently invoked every time they constructed savable savages. By framing civilization as a process that was generationally staged, missionaries tried to legitimate their efforts among some Aboriginal females while still condemning the unacceptable examples and environments supposedly provided by others.<sup>65</sup> Like their counterparts at Fort Simpson and Metlakatla, the young women of Figure 7 were singled out for a specifically gendered civilizing process, in which they were initiated, coercively if necessary, into the cult of domesticity. Through domesticity, indigenous women's relation to social space and labour was recast (and subsequently devalued) as confined to the private sphere of the "home." Their civilization was reflected in their ability to regulate the boundaries of domestic spaces and bodies by imposing order and cleanliness over chaos and dirt. Nowhere was this focus more apparent than in the mission "Homes," boarding houses and schools that were established specifically to instruct Aboriginal girls and women in

<sup>64</sup> 1 Kings 10: 3; my thanks to Valerie Raoul at the Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations at UBC for alerting me to the Biblical origins of this reference. I am also indebted to both Dr. Raoul and Kelly Greenwell for pointing out the popular usage of this phrase and its implications.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Thomas further elaborates on this notion of "generational staging" in his study of early twentieth-century missionaries in the Pacific. See Thomas, "Colonial Conversions," 376-7.

the lessons of middle-class, domestic femininity. Accordingly, the residents of the Kitimaat Home symbolize the civilization of both their “race” and their gender with their clean, white, appropriately feminine dresses; their carefully groomed hairstyles; and their location in front of the home as boundary markers of domestic space. The scopical nature of the civilizing process is reinforced by the subcaption, “The Result of Christian Training,” and its implicit assertion that this result is visible, capable of being captured and consumed in a photograph. Like the “comely maidens” romanticized by Dufferin, the women in this photograph are presented to perform in a self-congratulatory missionary narrative that was infused throughout with intersecting notions of race, gender, and the spectacle of both.

If we revisit Figures 6 and 7 with mimicry in mind, however, I argue that we shall discover a complex and contradictory picture. Crosby’s attempt to present the “Girls at the Kitimaat Home” as emblems of civilized success reveals as much about the false promises of the project as it does about its imagined attainment. This is because even the most celebrated of female converts, the residents of the mission homes, were constrained within the margins of mimicry. As Emma Crosby wrote in one report, “The girls are, as a rule, quick to learn, both in school and housework, though, of course, we find some who *naturally* lack all idea of order, and can *never* be thoroughly neat and clean.”<sup>66</sup> Her comments resonate with other reports that were circulating at the time. Adele Perry notes that Aboriginal women were often targets of derision and scorn when they adopted the conventions of White femininity, from “wearing hoop skirts at court” to having the audacity to resist White men’s sexual advances.<sup>67</sup> In *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (1997), Sarah Carter relates a similarly revealing story:

Around this time, the *Macleod Gazette* was regularly mocking the appearance and behaviour of Aboriginal women in the town of Fort MacLeod, drawing distinctions between their appearance and behaviour and that of “real” ladies. In 1885 the paper published an article, intended as humorous, in which it lamented that the “broncho,” “fresh from the camp,” had disappeared from the dance floors of the town. In dance-hall language the broncho was not a

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Emma Crosby, *Missionary Outlook* (November - December 1881): 141, emphasis mine.

<sup>67</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 56.

horse, the *Gazette* explained, but a "lady of the copper colored persuasion who is being initiated for the first time into the intricacies of a 'white' ball room, and to whom the many intricacies of the quadrille and waltz are as the labyrinthe [sic] of old, a mess which, the further she gets into it, the less hope she has of ever coming out of it alive."<sup>68</sup>

Civilizing Aboriginal women meant turning "bronchos" into "ladies," a process that the *Gazette* snidely compared to a "labyrinthe" – the further one got in, the less hope there was of getting out. Through these examples, we learn that, even when Aboriginal women met all the standards of feminine domesticity and decorum, they never escaped comparison with the White women whom they could strive to emulate but never become. Recall Lord Dufferin's "neat Indian maidens" who were "as modest and as well dressed as any clergyman's daughter in an English parish." The "compliment's" efficacy depended on the taken-for-granted understanding that Aboriginal women were, without missionary intervention, the stark contrast against which delicate English femininity could be defined and identified. Indian Maidens could be "as modest *as*" and "as well dressed *as*" only because they could never fully achieve and *be* the standard by which civilized femininity was measured and judged. Campaigns to civilize non-White women were essential to reinforcing the privileged place of White femininity and domesticity in the colonies. Sarah Carter notes that, all too often, "What it meant to be a white woman was rooted in a series of negative assumptions about the malign influence of Aboriginal women. The meanings of, and different ways of being female were constantly referred to each other."<sup>69</sup> I argue that it is, in part, because the multiple constructions of Aboriginal women as savages, squaws, victims, and/or exotic princesses served as such integral imaginative resources in the construction of White femininity that Aboriginal women could never, from a colonial perspective, successfully complete the civilizing process.

Mimicry also meant that racialized hierarchies of gender and class were once again secured rather than subverted by the civilizing process. The discourse of domesticity, for example, accorded neither the same roles nor the same responsibilities to White and Aboriginal women alike. The "beasts of burden" discourse that missionaries drew

<sup>68</sup> Carter, *Capturing Women*, 175.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

upon so effectively to condemn the supposed subjugation of females within Aboriginal cultures conveniently served their own arguments that Aboriginal girls were better suited to the more strenuous, dirty, and physically demanding aspects of domestic labour than were their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Like Aboriginal males, residents of the mission homes for girls were channelled, from the start, towards a very specific rung of the racialized class structure. The system of “outing” established in the later residential school system made this racialized division of domestic labour and the mimicry of civilized femininity even more explicit. J.R. Miller notes that female students of residential schools were placed “in service” as maids, nannies, and other household servants with White families across the country, performing often extremely arduous labour in less than ideal working conditions.<sup>70</sup> Civilizing Aboriginal girls and young women thus provided White women striving for middle-class respectability with the hired help so essential to the idealized image of leisured domesticity.<sup>71</sup> But while affording non-Aboriginal households a cheap source of labour, this system also made it clear that a racialized cult of domesticity distinguished carefully between those who were White and those who were “*almost the same but not quite.*”

#### OF MIMICRY AND MISSIONARIES

If colonial discourse is critiqued as a uniformly negative enterprise, then we overlook its ability to integrate a diverse, even contradictory, inventory of strategies and images. Representations that then appear to deviate from the discursive norm are too easily marginalized as “exceptions” that we continually underestimate in terms of both their impact and complexity. It seems we must be particularly wary of this tendency when it comes to missionary narratives for much controversy surrounds their relation to, and role within, broader colonial discourses. I have argued that missionaries are important case studies because their objectives were, in many ways, unique. Having said this, however, I now want to argue the seemingly paradoxical point

<sup>70</sup> J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 253-6. See K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), chap. 4, for a forceful critique of residential schools' domestic education of American Indian girls and women.

<sup>71</sup> Anne McClintock provides a brilliant discussion of the paradoxical demands of Victorian middle-class respectability for both visible leisure and invisible domesticity. See McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 160-5.

that missionaries both *were* and *were not* exceptions to the rule. In order to construct their campaigns as both necessary and possible, missionaries depended on positive *and* negative representations of those they sought to "save" and "civilize." In doing so, their use of images disturbs a wholly negative characterization of colonial discourse, but it *also* disrupts a uniformly positive conception of missionary representations.

The undercurrents of ambivalence detectable in both their discourse and their deployment of visual images unsettles any understanding of their ambitions as singularly optimistic, one-dimensional, or, most problematically, colour-blind. Like Catherine Hall, I posit that missionary projects are fissured from within by a "profound ambivalence" that "destabilizes missionary discourse and ensures that there is never a single clear-cut utterance."<sup>72</sup> While, on the "face" of their narratives, missionaries used an adversarial interplay of positive and negative imagery to convey the successful civilizing of the Indian, their own accounts and actions often belied their anxieties about the feasibility of the project. By searching the "surface" of their narratives for submerged moments of mimicry, we discover that virtually nothing in missionary narratives was just what it seemed.

The savable savage was an inherently unstable construct that marked missionary narratives as distinct from those of other colonial actors, particularly those far less interested in civilizing Aboriginal peoples than in simply appropriating their land and resources. But while they offered what Brett Christophers has called a "distinctive discourse of empire," I remain unconvinced by arguments that missionaries were thus less invested in the same "binding racial hierarchies" that underpinned "secular discourses of empire."<sup>73</sup> Although the binaries of missionary ideology did not reduce to racial cleavages, neither were they removed from the order that such cleavages inscribed. Whether they realized it or not, theirs was an image of *mutability within immutability* – a static, unchanging vision of dynamic change. The problem was not that missionary narratives denied the possibility of change but, rather, that their images and understandings of that change never strayed from an inherently hierarchical and unavoidably racialized script. Aboriginals *could* be transformed through conversion and civilization, but the process of transformation itself could never

<sup>72</sup> Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 214.

<sup>73</sup> Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary*, 21-2

escape the unequal terrain within which it was mired. The power to bestow, administer, and recognize change always lay entirely and exclusively in the benevolent hands of the missionary. Structured by this paternalistic power dynamic, missionary projects sabotaged their own attempts to secure equality for their converts, and the supposedly “temporary break” in universal humanity never elapsed. Faced, by the mid-nineteenth century, with the rising challenge posed by “scientific,” polygenist theories of race to Biblical understandings of Creation and a common humanity, missionaries and others embraced a double-voiced discourse, which, ironically, preserved the “unity of the species” at the expense of the equality of the races. “Benevolent” intentions notwithstanding, missionaries located themselves as the “privileged narrators, those who represented others, the leaders, the guides, the parents of the universal imperial Christian family,”<sup>74</sup> simultaneously relegating those they sought to civilize and Christianize to a “protracted racial childhood” that “might be overcome but *never forgotten*.”<sup>75</sup> As Nicholas Thomas points out, “By imagining that others were part of a family, the mission was able to reconcile common humanity and hierarchy in a manner that was as natural and intelligible in the short term as it was insecure in the long term.”<sup>76</sup> The failure of the missionary project, then, cannot be located in elements and attitudes *outside* of missionary discourse itself as this would implicitly suggest that, unfettered by other, more explicitly racist colonial actors, missionary projects would have prevailed and that Aboriginal peoples would *not* have had their equality withheld. I argue that the seeds of such failure were planted at the very core of the missionary vision.

#### CIVILIZATION TODAY

The realm of colonial policy and practice was infused throughout by the concept of civilization, yet so much about this multifaceted process and objective has remained unexplored in traditional historical analyses. In order to appreciate how Aboriginal individuals and communities may have resisted the civilizing project, it can only help to understand more fully its inner workings, how the spectacle of its supposed “success” was projected in photographs and other visual images, and to what extent its ambitions and anxieties were shaped

<sup>74</sup> Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, 210.

<sup>75</sup> Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 97, 92 (emphasis mine).

<sup>76</sup> Thomas, “Colonial Conversions,” 387.

by intersecting hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Deconstructing what civilization meant, what it supposedly "looked like," and how it was to be achieved in colonial practice equips us to recognize how it continues to patrol the legitimacy of actors and arguments in present-day, supposedly *post*-colonial politics. As heated debates around a range of Aboriginal issues (such as land claims, fishing rights, residential schools, and self-governance) make clear, the concept of civilization remains a potent one, not least due to its ongoing ability to patrol the boundaries of "belonging" and "nation." A number of First Nations groups and individuals have discovered the hard way that civilization is a slippery, double-edged discourse that can be deployed just as effectively to defuse and to discredit the demands of even the most "civilized Indians."

In order to negotiate successfully with the state, while at the same time legitimating their claims in the eyes of the non-Aboriginal public, Aboriginal peoples are always expected to strike an untenable balance. They must engage in debate using only civilized methods, but they must not appear "too civilized" in their memories or motives. In short, they must either conform to what Marlee Kline describes as the "myth of static Indianness" or have the authenticity of their arguments continuously undermined. Because Aboriginal peoples have been historically defined by their assumed differences from Whites, Kline points out that their adoption of any aspect of European civilization has meant that their status and, consequently, their claims as "real Indians" have been called into question.<sup>77</sup> Aboriginal issues gain non-Aboriginal legitimacy only when they accede to the very ideologies and institutions that exclude them in the first place. Their credibility as claimants hinges on the civilized nature of their strategies and their willingness to conform to Euro-Canadian standards of evidence and entitlement.

Of particular relevance to this article is the ongoing controversy surrounding residential schools and their devastating legacy for it unsettles any complacent assumptions about the role of missionaries and their civilizing efforts. Debates surrounding the schools have also brought to the forefront questions of whose words (and images) count in the reconstruction of colonial history. Survivors of the schools have come forward with their experiences, and First Nations communities have rallied together around the schools and their impact as a powerful

<sup>77</sup> Marlee Kline, "The Colour of Law: Ideological Representations of First Nations in Legal Discourse," *Social and Legal Studies* 3 (1994): 57.

political focal point. As with any challenge to prevailing “national mythology,” however, these shifts have been met with the sort of rearguard backlash that has become depressingly familiar on the Canadian political landscape. What’s striking about this backlash is its deployment of visual and discursive strategies that are as effective today as they were over a century ago. The persuasive power and flexibility of photographs, in particular, has guaranteed their enduring popularity in narrative strategies.

Responding to the federal government’s creation of a million-dollar Healing Fund for former students of residential schools, the fiercely right-wing magazine *Western Report*, for example, gained particular notoriety when it cast the residential school legacy as “Canada’s Mythical Holocaust,” prompting the Assembly of First Nations to challenge the magazine before the Canadian Human Rights Commission – an effort that was ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>78</sup> In several of the magazine’s inflammatory articles, photographs showing Aboriginal students in classrooms (often smiling and seated attentively at desks) are inserted alongside text praising the virtues of the schools. In one piece entitled “Pay Day for Indian Boarding School Abuse,” writer Les Sillars deploys photographs to bolster his argument that residential schools have been vilified in order to finance illegitimate claims for compensation. One of the most effective images shows two young Aboriginal students, neatly groomed and dressed in gender-appropriate Euro-Canadian clothing, seated in desks beside a classroom chalkboard. One student reads with her eyes downcast, while another smiles up at the nun standing beside his desk. Sillars’ caption reads simply: “Teaching nun with students: Some schools were admirably run.”<sup>79</sup> Names, date, place, and photographer are all deemed irrelevant and unworthy of inclusion, along with any questions about how the photograph may have been staged and constructed.<sup>80</sup> Employing

<sup>78</sup> See Ken Coates, “Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 1 (March 2000): 114. I should note that, in his article, Coates refers to the magazine as *Alberta Report*. The exact name of the magazine is, in fact, unclear at times. The issues in the Koerner Library collection at UBC are entitled *Western Report*, but their inside covers list the Web site address as: <www.albertareport.com>. Furthermore, on-line periodical indexes, such as the Canadian Periodical Index, refer to the publication as *Report Newsmagazine*, with “BC Edition” or “Alberta Edition” specified in brackets.

<sup>79</sup> Les Sillars, “Pay Day for Indian Boarding School Abuse,” *Western Report* 16 (November 1998): 8.

<sup>80</sup> My point here is neither to assert that this particular photograph *was* artificially staged (although it remains an open question) nor to deny the reality that some former students (albeit a minority) have recounted positive experiences within the schools. What troubles

exactly the same strategy as the missionaries who wrote before him, Sillars distracts his audience from these issues by embedding the "natural" authority of the photograph within his own ideological agenda. The result is a chilling reminder of how timeless and effective photographs are as discursive devices – and thus how ever-pressing and valuable analyses deconstructing their historical usage can be.<sup>81</sup>

If we consider yet another aspect of this backlash, then we can also discern that the more civilizing discourse changes over time, the more its intentions and effects remain the same. As Aboriginal issues have gained greater (albeit still limited) purchase on the "national" political agenda, opponents of this change have relied less on the image of savable savages, which missionaries worked so hard to construct, and more on a newly distorted vision of Aboriginals as "ungrateful savages." This variation paints Aboriginals as opportunists who conveniently appropriate and enjoy all the benefits of civilization, while simultaneously demanding compensation for the rewards they have reaped. Images depicting the spectacle of successful civilization are now mobilized against those who were once the focus of the project's ambitions. In a 1998 article that appeared in the equally conservative *Financial Post*, columnist David Frum bemoaned the failure to appreciate that it was Europeans who "tamed and civilized this inhospitable land." To strengthen his not-so-subtle suggestion that Aboriginal peoples should be thankful for their colonization, Frum catalogs their consumption of civilized comforts in a time-proven strategy straight out of the colonial imagination:

If, by some freak of history, the European settlement of North America had never occurred, native people who are today living in heated houses, travelling by truck and skidoo, treating sickness with modern medicines (at no charge to themselves) and eating hygienic food, would instead be living in miserable frozen shanties, walking in unsoled shoes from one frozen hunting ground to another, desperately attempting to catch their dinner with stone-tipped arrows, and dying by the thousands every time the wind gusted from the north.<sup>82</sup>

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me is the way in which, once again, a single photograph is given greater authority to speak the "truth" of a colonial encounter than the actual voices of those who survived.

<sup>81</sup> For one of the few analyses to examine the specific role of photographs in residential school history, see J.R. Miller, "Reading Photographs, Reading Voices: Documenting the History of Native Residential Schools," in *Reading beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, ed. Jennifer H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996), 461–81.

<sup>82</sup> David Frum, "Express Regrets, Don't Go Overboard: No Reason to Apologize to Natives for Settling the Continent," *Financial Post*, 13 January 1998, 19.

By simply reversing the order of the before-and-after narrative, Frum contrasts the present-day pleasures of civilization with an imagined apparition of devastation and death. He compares skidoos with shanties, and heated houses with hunting grounds, suggesting that Aboriginals' adoption of these items invalidates their arguments. Like the missionaries and colonial agents who wrote before him, Frum relies upon an understanding of colonialism that weds conquest with compassion, dismissing any claims to the contrary as evidence of ingratitude. Ultimately, his efforts demonstrate the resilient enshrinement of the notion of civilization within historical mythology. When portrayed in both language and imagery as a benevolent process with an admirable outcome, civilization masks the violence and oppression of colonial contact while buttressing the fictional foundations upon which the "nation" was built.<sup>83</sup>

Imbricated and all too often rendered invisible within colonial discourse, civilization was both the imaginary foundation of the nation and a process through which, it was promised, Others could be guided in order to become members. As I have argued, missionary narratives and their use of visual images reveal that the civilizing project was premised from the very beginning on a false promise. Mimicry ensured that Aboriginals could never successfully conclude the civilizing process and attain the equality that missionaries extolled as its goal. Indeed, resilient echoes of mimicry continue to reveal the limits of this process and its promises as Aboriginals today discover that their civilized status can still be contested – or even marshalled against them. Whether they adopt "too much" or "too little" of civilization, Aboriginal peoples' membership in the hierarchical order it inscribes is still undermined by the menace of mimicry. And just

<sup>83</sup> After reading an earlier draft of this section, a colleague noted that, by focusing on articles from such "fiercely right-wing" magazines, I ran the risk of simultaneously "letting the broad middle off the hook." It was an extremely valuable comment and I continue to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of my examples even as I write this. My decision not to alter them for this article, however, was cemented while driving from Vancouver to Prince George in the summer of 2001. During a brief stop at the Dairy Queen (supplier of "imperial" treats) in Cache Creek, I discovered several issues of *Western Report* within a stack of complimentary magazines. Reading through just one of the issues forcefully reminded me that, with my head often buried in "academic" readings, I too easily lose touch with the range of ideas and opinions that continue to circulate in the "real" world – "right-wing" and otherwise. Undoubtedly, publications more representative of the broad middle can also act as carefully veiled vehicles of racist, sexist, and otherwise problematic discourses, and we need to unmask this. Yet I feel I've discovered the hard way that, if one continually overlooks and underestimates that which seems more "extreme," then a rude awakening will often be part of one's journey.

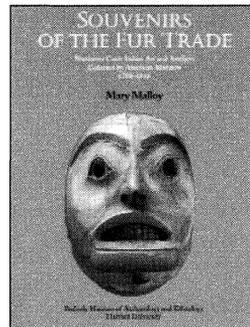
as being "civilizable" meant never *truly* being "civilized," so has it also meant never *truly* being "Canadian." Hence the insidious ability of "real" Canadians, from the nineteenth-century to today, to call into question the place of Aboriginal issues on the national agenda.

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