

REVISITING COLONIZATION THROUGH GENDER

*Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific
Northwest and the Arctic, 1860-1945**

MYRA RUTHERDALE

MOST WOULD AGREE THAT Britain's extension of power over many distant lands was embraced with pride on the home front. The idea that Britain's superior civilization could be held up as a role model for those perceived to be less fortunate or uncivilized had massive appeal, particularly in the late nineteenth century when jingoism reflected society's *zeitgeist*. Nineteenth-century missionary zeal went hand in hand with enthusiasm for the British empire.

The rhetoric of imperialism emphasized sets of dualisms drawn on by politicians, missionaries, and others involved in the project of colonization. The British were portrayed as civilized, white, and Christian, whereas the "others" were said to be uncivilized, dark, and heathen. Commenting on what he called the "Ethics of Empire," H. F. Hyatt expressed this opposition aptly in an article in the *The Nineteenth Century*. "To us — to us, and not to others, a certain definite duty has been assigned," Hyatt boasted. "To carry light and civilization in the dark places of the world; to touch the mind of Asia and Africa with the ethical ideas of Europe; to give to the thronging millions who would otherwise never know peace or security, these first conditions of human advance. . . ." ¹ The duty of missionaries was to free the "thronging millions" from their state of ignorance and enlighten them to God's way, which was assumed to be the British way.

Anglican missionaries in northern Canada were very conscious of this duty. This paper focuses on Anglican missionary women in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic. Up until very recently, as scholars

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Historical Association, Annual Meeting, June 1994. My Thanks to Patricia Roy for her helpful comments.

¹ H. F. Hyatt, "The Ethics of Empire," *The Nineteenth Century*, XLI, April 1897, 529.

Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel argue, scholars have “consciously or unconsciously” accepted the masculine attributes of colonialism and have “simply excluded or marginalized Western women from the focus of their studies.”²

The question which arises when looking at the complex relationship between race, gender, and colonization is how to evaluate women’s roles in the growth of Britain’s purse during the age of Imperialism. Are we — as Antoinette Burton, who has just completed work on British women in India, suggests — to implicate them because “they collaborated in the ideological work of empire” and say that as Western feminists they have handed on to us a legacy of colonization and destruction.³ Or should we approach this task of balancing the historiography by realizing, as Vron Ware suggests, that its purpose is neither to create new heroines nor to “bring white women to account for past misdeeds,” but rather to determine their roles in gender and race relations in their new and unique settings.⁴ How did they articulate their mission and how did they negotiate with their male kinfolk and those they intended to missionize? Using these types of questions, what can we learn about the construction of race and gender and the transculturation of those constructions?

Data has been compiled on over 150 women who were either employed as missionaries or married to missionaries and worked in the north between 1860 and 1945. These women were sent to the north by either Britain’s Church Missionary Society or later (when the British Anglican Church stopped funding Canadian missions) by the Missionary Society for the Church of England in Canada. Most were British-born, but some were Canadian. Generally, the women shared similar educational backgrounds since they were usually trained in Anglican Deaconess Houses either in Canada or Britain. Some had trained as school teachers or nurses before embarking on further training at the Deaconess Homes.

The central argument here is that the women who came to the north, either as missionaries or missionary wives, had certain pre-conceived ideas about their superiority which were reinforced upon their arrival. This feeling of superiority was rooted in their identity as white Anglo-Saxons. It is not enough, however, just to say that these women were racist without exploring the complexities, ambiguities,

² Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3.

³ Antoinette M. Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and ‘The Indian Woman’, 1865-1915” in Chaudhuri and Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism*, 152.

⁴ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1993), 230.

and expressions of racism. Were their assertions ever appreciative of native cultures? How did their attitudes contribute to the construction of the native populations of northern Canada as the "other"? Was there a gendered component to racism? This paper will present the contours of racism beginning with a focus on appearance and behaviour, and will analyse the representations of the "other" which found their way into the the writing of northern missionary women.

In his examination of the relationship between colonized peoples and colonizers, Albert Memmi argues that while there are several stereo-typical images of the colonizer, there are even more about the colonized. A "mythical portrait of the colonized," according to Memmi, included images of native populations as excessively lazy, wretched, backward, weak and dishonest." Nothing could better justify the colonizer's privileged position than his industry," argues Memmi, "and nothing could better justify the colonized's destitution than his indolence."⁵

Memmi also observes that colonizers often found themselves in advantageous positions. Economically, socially, and politically they were potentially powerful individuals. The key to maintaining this power, Memmi states, was that the colonizer had to remain ideologically isolated from the colonized. In other words, the characteristics of the native culture were usually undervalued and the quality of the colonizer's culture and traditions upheld and glorified. Because the colonizer and the colonized could never be equal (for if they were the colonizer would no longer have a *raison d'être*), the colonizer often resorted to racism.⁶

LOOKING AT THE OTHER

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the women in my study viewed the Tsimshian of the Pacific Coast, the Dene of present day Yukon, and the Inuit of the Western Arctic with "Imperial eyes." The deeply embedded Victorian sentiment that "cleanliness is next to Godliness" was carried by these women missionaries and, according to them, relegated the natives quite far from salvation. In their eyes, the natives were often reduced to the status of animals.

Charlotte Selina Bompas arrived at Fort Simpson at the confluence of the Liard and MacKenzie Rivers in September 1874. Born to Dr.

⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

Cox and Charlotte Skey in London, England in 1830, Selina spent most of her childhood in Italy due to her father's illness. She spoke fluent Italian and loved the classics. As her niece later recalled, "even as an old lady she always carried her Dante in her pocket."⁷ Cox remained single until age 44 when she married her cousin, William, an Anglican missionary and, at that time, the Bishop of the MacKenzie River Diocese. This marriage was unpredicted since Cox had found, at least in her younger years, missionaries rather boring. As she later recalled, "My brother who was Vicar of Bishop's Tawton, Devonshire used to hold missionary meetings at the vicarage, and I remember thinking them the dullest affairs, and the clergymen who addressed us . . . I looked upon as the most dismal old slow coaches it was anyone's unhappy fate to attend to."⁸

During her first two years at Fort Simpson, Bompas acted as a school teacher, a nurse, and a mother. From the outset, she was in charge of an afternoon class. The class routine was described in her diary: "I go in and make them sing and do calisthenic exercises. Before this I preside over an ablutionary department [religious cleansing] and then send them outside with a comb by which their black shaggy manes are reduced to order."⁹ Bompas expressed grave concern over the condition of native women's hair. One woman she met in her wanderings around Fort McPherson was described as a "shrivelled and grimy" old witch whose "frizled hair" was "flying about in all directions"; so much so that Bompas said that "you can not fancy that it had ever seen a comb."¹⁰

Despite their best efforts, native women could never quite meet Bompas' standard. On one occasion she was asked to serve as a sponsor for two little boys who were being baptized. As she recorded: "The mother had done her best to make them, as well as herself, neat and presentable, but Indian faces have a perverse habit of grimness, and Indian hair is ever thick and shaggy and rough. . . ."¹¹ Many years later, while teaching school at Fort Yukon, Bompas maintained that "[i]n spite of all the difficulties the children are getting on by degrees and taming down, for a wilder and more undisciplined set of ruffians than they were at first it would be hard to find out of the zoological

⁷ S. A. Archer, ed., *Heroine of the North Pacific: Memoirs of Charlotte Selina Bompas (1830-1917)* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), xii.

⁸ Quoted in, Jean Johnston, *Wilderness Women: Canada's Forgotten History* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1973), 181.

⁹ Archer, *Heroine of the North*, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

gardens.”¹² Black and grimy, with rough manes, these native women and children were exposed to Bompas’ harsh gaze and criticism.

This obsession with appearance continues to blind imperial eyes at least until the end of my period of study. On a stopover at Alert Bay in 1894 Florence Appleyard, who had just arrived from England, recorded her first impressions of natives. “We happened to arrive just as a wedding feast was taking place,” Appleyard noted in self-revealing terms, “and the women with painted faces were sitting in rows singing and clapping hands. They looked wild and terrible and some of them were really very ugly. I can realize now more than ever before how full of love one must be in order to teach these poor creatures whose faces betray that they know not the Lord Jesus. It is very sad to see these poor Indians and know how ignorant they are and to hear the missionaries say ‘We are so short handed.’”¹³ In Appleyard’s portrayal we can detect a tone of fear and almost repulsion at her first glimpse of native culture. Her apprehensions eventually diminished, but did not entirely disappear.

Another woman missionary who worked in the Peace River Region in the Diocese of Caledonia shared a view similar to Appleyard’s. Monica Storrs, described by W. L. Morton as a “church woman through and through,” was born in London in 1888 to Rev. and Mrs. John Storrs. Storrs was educated at the Francis Holland Church of England School for Girls in London, and when her father was appointed Dean of Rochester in 1913 she began her active career in church work. Upon the death of her father in 1928 she was free to leave Rochester and take up a new type of work.¹⁴

She arrived at Fort St. John in the Peace River region in 1929. Most of her work involved establishing Sunday schools and girl guide and boy scout troops among the young settlers of the region. Storrs travelled extensively on horseback and kept a diary of her excursions. On one trip, about thirty miles north of Fort St. John, she came upon a native camp which she described as a “squalid little camp as all the natives of our district are pretty debased, more or less like Gypsies, and speak hardly any English. They don’t do any sort of work, but only hunt bear and moose and barter their meat with white men for vegetables and butter.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid., 157.

¹³ Church Missionary Society Papers, North Pacific Mission, C.2 British Columbia C.2/o orig. letters to 1900, Letter from Florence Appleyard to the C.M.S. 7 July 1893.

¹⁴ William L. Morton ed., *God’s Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979), xxv-xxvi.

¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

The analogy to gypsies' and the natives' "unemployment" clearly reflected the perspective of a newly arrived European in the north, and demonstrated a certain insensitivity toward the natives and their living mode. The idea that they lived in squalor was voiced by other missionaries, including Adelaide Butler, who began her mission work in 1932. Butler was originally from Reading, England and was serving as a school teacher at Shingle Point when she recorded a trip that she and her companion Nurse Harvey took from Shingle Point to Herschel Island. On their way they were forced by weather conditions to stop overnight at King Point about eighteen miles from Shingle Point. She claimed that

two families came out to meet us and they looked deplorable dirty and half-clad . . . Sarah the elder is very ugly and primitive, but is not nearly so fierce as she looks . . . Harvey went inside their house but the outside was enough for me it was made of sods and looked like a shelter for animals more than for human beings.¹⁶

The language used to describe these families was cast in very denigrating terms. From these descriptions, images of natives were constructed that suggest a conformity to Memmi's observations. They expressed superiority through the alleged lowly condition of native persons, persons who became objects within their mission. They were, ultimately, uncivilized; the missionary's job was to spread civilization. Had they been civilized, or Christian, or respectable, the missionaries would have been without jobs.

THE VISION DARKENS

As if the accounts of appearance and living modes were not shocking enough, often we see in missionary accounts descriptions of native culture as excessively dark and evil. In their comments on the significance of missionary's observations, Jean and John Comaroff, who have written on Christianity and colonialism in South Africa, argue that "[a]ccounts of missionary 'labour and scenes' had by the late nineteenth century become an established European literary genre, taking its place beside popular travel and exploration writings, with which it shared features of intent and style. This was a literature of the imperial frontier, a colonizing discourse that titilated the Western imagination

¹⁶ Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, (heretofore GSA) Adelaide Jane Butler Papers, M88-4 Correspondence to Mary Butler, September 1934.

with glimpses of radical otherness — over which it simultaneously extended intellectual control.”¹⁷

One theme which emerges in the correspondence and diaries of the women missionaries which provides a glimpse of “radical otherness” is that of murder. Indeed titilating and radical, murder became a measurement of the success or failure of the civilizing influence of Christianity. Often the natives were described as being murderous prior to Christian contact. This was considered as evidence of their moral debasement and greatly magnified negative images of their physical appearance and daily habits.

Elizabeth Jane Soal arrived at Metlakatla in 1901 to take up work as a teaching missionary. Originally from Lewisham, England, Soal spent two years in training at the Church Missionary Society Deaconess Houses before her departure. She worked briefly at Metlakatla and was soon transferred to Hazelton. In 1916 she wrote an article in the Anglican paper, the *North British Columbia News*, describing her experiences.

She related that the couple whom she was stationed with, Rev. and Mrs. Field, had worked at Hazelton for thirty years and had witnessed “marvelous changes.” “My knowledge of the Indian goes back for a period of ten years only,” explained Soal, “but those who have lived here for many years say that he was highly excitable, very noisy, easily angered, cruel, a gambler, dog eater, slave driver to his wife, and a firm believer in evil spirits. . . . The Potlatch of the old days, which as a rule led to poverty and frequently to murder, is forbidden by law, but the natural craving for some excitement has substituted [by] the funeral feast.”¹⁸

This view of a slightly reformed other was shared by another sister missionary, Sarah Stringer. Born in southwestern Ontario in 1869, Sarah Ann Alexander met her future husband Isaac Stringer (who was later appointed Bishop of the Yukon) at their high school in Kincardine, Ontario. Following high school she took a course in shorthand in Toronto and worked for a short time before finding another temporary position in New York. She returned to Toronto to take a nursing course at the Grace Hospital, and just prior to her marriage she took courses at the Deaconess House. She and Isaac Stringer

¹⁷ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 172.

¹⁸ See GSA, *Register of Missionaries, Clerical Lay and Female and Native Clergy From 1804-1904*, In *Two Parts Church Missionary Society*, n.d., and Caledonia Synod Archives, *North British Columbia News*, July 1916.

married in 1896 and two months later departed from Toronto to Fort McPherson. Stringer moved in 1898 to Herschel Island, where she and her husband lived for five years.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s Stringer was frequently invited to give public talks on her experience as a missionary in the north. She usually chose to speak on her years at Herschel Island. Stringer recalled at one such talk in 1927 that prior to their arrival the Inuit had been “a heathenous and superstitious people. Murder was common amongst them. Whenever an Eskimo became angry his first instinct was to kill his opponent so it was best to act in a wise and judicious way with them.” In another talk she described how they “always carried a knife in their hand or in their bootleg to be prepared. It was not pleasant to have them come to my house with a knife in their hand.”¹⁹ They probably did carry knives, but more likely for protection from potentially dangerous animals rather than from fear of each other.

Similar references appear throughout the diaries and correspondence of other missionary women in the north. Cannibalism and scalping were added to the gory image of native cultures. As Miss F. A. T. Copeland, a missionary schoolteacher, related in the mission paper, *North British Columbia News*, before the arrival of missionaries Kincolith was known as “the place where they scalp.” “But thanks to the glorious gospel,” Copeland added, “and to those who have preached it and lived it out there in the ‘Far West’ for so many years, scalping is now a thing of the past.”²⁰

According to these accounts, the missionaries and their message of Christianity had been successful and there had been some measure of improvement. Of course, none of the missionaries had actually witnessed a murder, but by retelling these types of stories they were presenting the natives as historically barbarous and themselves as saviours.

CAN THEY LOOK LIKE US?

Another feature of the portrait of the colonizer which was recognized by Memmi, and has been expanded upon by many post-colonial critics, is the idea that no matter how hard the natives tried to mimic

¹⁹ GSA, Stringer Papers, Series 2 95 2-B, Sarah Ann Stringer, Talks, Addresses, Women's Missionary Society, United Church Toronto, 9 October 1930.

²⁰ Miss F. A. T. Copeland, “Kincolith,” *North British Columbia News*, April 1911 and Archer, *Heroine of the North*, 41.

or behave like the colonizer, they always failed in the eyes of the colonizer. The objective of colonial mimicry, as Homi Bhabha discusses, "is the production of a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite."²¹ The colonized may participate in institutions and ceremonies that are part of the colonizer's cultural baggage, but because they are not white they do not quite succeed. To illustrate this we will again turn to Selina Bompas and Adelaide Butler.

Bompas' first Christmas at Fort McPherson was a memorable one. Her husband had left the Fort shortly after their arrival in the fall of 1874, and Bompas busied herself making toys for the children and preparing food. As she confided in her diary, "I had planned a Christmas dinner for twelve old Indian wives. Dear old things! They did their best to get themselves up for the occasion, and some of their leather dresses were quite smart, profusely ornamented with beads, with fringes of leather and tin tassels. I had dinner prepared in the schoolroom, the cloth spread and knives and forks etc. But these proved useless for though some of the women did try to use them to please me, their efforts were quite ineffectual and they were soon forced to lay them down and take to nature's implements."²²

The native women described here it seems at last met Bompas' expectations about cleanliness but, despite their efforts to behave in a civilized fashion, they simply failed. They were close to nature and not elevated enough to be able to use cutlery. From her perspective they tried to please her and failed.

Another more striking example of colonial mimicry is Adelaide Butler's account of what she described as a "Husky wedding" that took place at Shingle Point during Christmas of 1932.²³ The couple being married were Mabel (no last name given) and Alec Stefansson, the son of an Inuit woman and the Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Mabel was depicted as a nice girl who was "careful of herself and sports a silk dress and gold wrist watch and bracelet just like any 'tunik' [white person]." According to Butler, the wedding left much to be desired. "You would never have thought that a marriage was about to be solemnized," she wrote to her friend in England. "The Bridal

²¹ Homi Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October*, 28 (Spring 1984) 125-133.

²² Archer, *Heroine of the North*, 31.

²³ GSA, Adelaide Jane Butler Papers, M88-4, Adelaide Jane Butler to Mary Butler, 8 January 1933. Husky was the term often used to describe Inuit peoples by missionaries. They claimed that Eskimo was a derogatory term used by the Indians and so chose to call them Huskies instead of recognizing them as members of specific nations.

couple was sitting among the rest of the congregation not together and there were no bridesmaids, no confetti, no fuss, no nothing! The minister called the bride, groom and Allen, the bride's father, forward," and, Adelaide continued,

the service was in Husky, and after Allen had done his part and disposed of his daughter he left them to get on with theirs. They knelt down on the hard wooden not very clean floor, and did not go up to the altar rail. Mabel had no bridal attire, only the usual 'atikluk' (atige cover) of some inexpensive cotton material, and not very clean, no head covering. . . . After the ceremony was over the bride and bridegroom got up and went back to their previous seats until the service was over, we had a service about Holy Communion not marriage and they did not even go out of the church together.²⁴

Butler was not impressed with this wedding. She expected a more familiar experience with confetti, bridal attire and bridesmaids. She also anticipated that the bride and groom would leave the church together. The wedding was a disappointment to Butler: it was, as Bhabha would have it, not quite/not white. Unfortunately, it is impossible to discern what Mabel and Alec thought about the wedding, but from Adelaide's description, we can see that they blended both Christian and traditional rituals during the ceremony.

We might also return to Selina Bompas for a glimpse into what she described as a time of disappointment and great grief. For sixteen to eighteen months she had been training a servant named Julie. Bompas stated that

She was becoming an excellent servant and I thought very well of her in most points but she left me a week or two since without any warning or intention, and the worst of it is she took with her many of my things, in true Indian fashion. I was greatly startled and grieved when this came out as I hoped better things of my little maiden, but one has to remember that these are savages — wild Indian girls — who like their camps and wild camp life in spite of all its miseries and privations, far better than the white man's home with its comparative luxuries and restraints. The Indian infirmities too are not easily overcome and uprooted.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Archer, *Heroine of the North*, 58.

Again, a case is presented of a native woman who was almost acceptable, but ended up being, in Selina's myopic vision, just like the rest of them. She had done her utmost to remake Julie in her own image, but the young woman had resisted and departed. She could have been but was in the end not quite/not white.

While a degree of understanding had developed between Bompas and Julie, this momentary relationship, at least from Bompas' perspective, disintegrated and she was left again with a lowly opinion of natives and continued to refer to them in derogatory terms. But to assert that all missionaries in my study consistently expressed this degree of racism would be misleading. In fact, there were moments in the mission field when it seemed that racial barriers broke down.

Prior to their five-year assignment at Herschel Island, the Stringers were itinerants travelling between Peel River and Herschel Island. On their first trip they stopped at an Inuit encampment at Kittygagzyoort.²⁶ Writing back to the Women's Auxiliary in Toronto, Mrs. Stringer recounted the events of this trip.

They were greeted on shore by several members of the community then were invited to the Council House. Stringer summed up her impressions in saying that "their appearance and actions seemed odd and laughable to me while I daresay I seemed just as ridiculous to them as I was the first white woman who ever visited them therefore they scrutinized me very closely & judging by their grimaces they were much amused." Stringer had the sensitivity to admit that they were glaring at each other through a cultural prism.

Stringer described those she visited as being warm and good-natured and added that "sometimes too when leaving to go home after a visit one of the women would put her arm about my waist in an affectionate manner and walk out a short distance with me."²⁷ She found the women especially kind and recalled a tense situation when as she reported that "the Chief was intoxicated and wanted to kill some of us. They [the women] came to the door of my tent took my hand and smoothed it over and tried to assure me that everything would be all right."²⁸ There were moments when there seems to have been an unstated understanding or an equal terrain between cultures.

²⁶ GSA, Women's Auxiliary Papers, GS76-15, Series 71 Box 18, WA Corresponding Secretary, Miss L. H. Montizambert, 1897, Letter from Mrs. Sadie Stringer, 10 February 1897.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

AMBIGUITY

At another time during the Christmas of 1876 Selina Bompas, shortly after moving to Fort Chipewyan from Fort McPherson, became ill while her husband was out on his circuit (which could take as long as seven months). Bompas had met a Cree woman from Saskatchewan named Madeline. Bompas felt the Cree were different from the Chipewyan as their faces “exhibit a great deal more intelligence” and they were “better looking than the Chipewyans”; yet she claimed the Cree “of all ranks are proverbially light fingered, and many of them are incorrigible thieves.”²⁹

Bompas and Madeline developed a close relationship during a serious food shortage at the Fort. As it turned out, Madeline supplied her with food from her husband’s traps and in exchange Bompas reluctantly surrendered her treasured red shawl. When Bompas became ill, her servant abandoned her and for quite a long period of time she was alone looking after herself and her adopted baby. Finally Madeline learned of the illness and went to her.

As Bompas related, “[s]he came and stood by my bedside, and said in kind, almost remonstrating tones: ‘You are ill; why not send for me? I work for you; I do anything for you; wash clothes for you; nurse baby for you.’”³⁰ Bompas was thankful for Madeline’s assistance. She was so gratified that she was compelled to take Madeline’s “small dark-coloured hand . . . and stroke and press it while I thanked God for putting into the poor woman’s heart to come to me in my extremity.”³¹

Bompas claimed to have slept soundly the night that Madeline stayed with her, waking only once to observe a very comforting and calming scene with Madeline whistling to Jennie who was “propped upright between blanket and pillow in a manner peculiarly Indian.” She was able to go back to sleep with the confidence that as she expressed it “my little wife” had contented Jennie and provided a relaxing atmosphere.³²

This particular episode may be interpreted in several ways with due caution. It is suggested that, at least for an “unpredictable and fleeting” moment, as Denise Riley would have it, Bompas saw herself as having a wife.³³ Interestingly, she imposed one of the features of the

²⁹ Archer ed., *Heroine of the North*, 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

³³ Denise Riley, “*Am I That Name?*”: *Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 6. Riley urges that the category “woman”

category of “woman” onto Madeline. Whether she saw herself as a man being nurtured by a woman, or a woman being nurtured by a woman, or neither, is difficult to determine. Nonetheless, Madeline was her “little wife.” Bompas still viewed Madeline as a native with her “small dark-coloured” hand, but had at least consciously claimed a new space for self-perception of gender and felt an intense closeness to Madeline. Occasionally, as well, a degree of admiration for the native’s survival strategies was expressed. For example, in an advice article for prospective northern settlers, Selina Bompas suggested that white women should learn to appreciate some native traditions. She pointed out that

It should not need many hours of argument to convince you that an Indian baby in a moss bag is a far happier and warmer creature than a poor little white baby with its whole outfit of cotton and wool etc. for the little Indian’s moss is the cleanest, softest most absorbent of substances and needs only occasional change to keep the baby as tidy and sweet as the baby should be.³⁴

Bompas went on to say that despite the fact that the natives were a “phlegmatic race,” who would not be “inconvenienced by anyone, least of all by a ‘Ciciaco’ [white newcomer, many of whom were gold-seekers],” one must still treat them with patience and kindness. After all, she noted perceptively, “the white man has invaded their territory, cut down their fine forests, slaughtered or driven away their moose and cariboo, and is fast possessing himself of their hidden treasure, is it asking too much of his wife or sister to bear patiently with the Indian’s idiosyncrasies to deal gently with their failings, and above all to show towards them under all circumstances in the summer calm of golden charity.”³⁵ There is still located in this discourse signs of denegration and images of natives as passive individuals. But Bompas does at least recognize that some native traditions could be valued, and that resources which had, even in her mind, belonged to natives were being exploited by Europeans.

In one of Stringer’s public addresses she used the same tone to discuss the Inuit. She observed that the “Eskimo are a very clever people in their own way. They could quite easily do without us.” She then went on to describe how they built their boats with whale bone,

is socially constructed and can change in varying social settings. Her analysis is very useful when considering gender relations in the mission field.

³⁴ Selina Bompas, “Our Women of the North,” *Canadian Churchman*, 14 November 1907.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

ivory pegs and deer skin thongs rather than nails. She admired their artistic clothing fashioned by the “clever needle women,” and concluded by saying that they were intelligent in their own way “but it was hard for them at first to get book knowledge as they had known nothing about books up to that time.”³⁶ Stringer and Bompas both recognized that the natives had adapted well to their natural environments but, in their estimation, still had “failings” or lacked true measurements of civilization — “book knowledge” and Christianity.

These views were shared by most Anglican missionaries in the north, regardless of whether they were Canadian or British-born. Appearance and behaviour invariably drew comment; but they did so often in relation to the main priority of the mission, to spread Christianity. For the missionaries this meant that all vestiges of what they described as heathenism must disappear.

In *Tropics of Discourse* Hayden White argues that Europeans made a fetish of the native peoples “by viewing them simultaneously as monstrous forms of humanity and as quintessential objects of desire.” They were presented as exotic. At the same time that they were frightening they were also intrinsic to the project of colonization and Christianization.” But even more basic in the European consciousness of this time,” White suggests, “was the tendency to fetishize the European type of humanity as the sole possible form that humanity in general could take.”³⁷ Part of this humanity was Christianity. There was a link, however, between Christianity, behaviour and appearance. While the priority was to have natives worship Christ, the extension of that was a desired change in consciousness. Education, Western medicine, thrift, and sobriety were inextricably linked to European humanity and the remaking of the “other.”

BLINDED TO TRADITION

One of the most striking features for the missionaries was the enduring heathenism and darkness that characterized native cultures. On his first trip to the MacKenzie River Delta, Bishop Bompas described the Inuit as good craftspeople, kind and obliging but “lazy and sleepy, and addicted to lying, stealing and even stabbing.” He said that their

³⁶ GSA, Stringer Papers, Series 2, Sarah Ann Stringer, Talks, Adresses 95 2-B, Ladies of the Canadian Club in Winnipeg, November 1931.

³⁷ White defines fetish as “mistaking the form of a thing its content or the taking of a part of the thing for the whole, and the elevation either of the form or the part to the status of the content or an essence or the whole.” See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 194.

religion consisted mainly of “heathen dances, songs and conjuring. . . .” He also recognized, though, that they believed in a “tradition of Creation” and worshipped the Sun as a “good spirit” and an evil spirit called “Atti” which represented cold and death.³⁸

Just as Bompas was critical of medicine-making and Inuit religion, William Ridley, the Bishop of Caledonia, was horrified by the Potlatch tradition. In describing the unconverted of the Skeena River villages in his Diocese, Ridley presented an image similar to Bompas’.

The heathen are dirty, ragged, dispirited, and jealous of the Christians. To avoid treading in filth one must walk on the crooked trails with circumspection. The children stand at a distance huddled together. I have seen two even in the biting blast of winter wrapped in a single piece of blanket, their only covering. The houses are rotting propped up and patched. Squalid within and dismal without they truly show the moral and physical condition of their ignorant and superstitious inhabitants. These cling with a passionate resolve to the *yaok*, or potlatch. ‘That is our mountain say they our only joy dearer than life. To prison and death we will go rather than yield.’ Yet this is their ruin.³⁹

Ridley links the physical appearance of the unconverted natives to their moral or spiritual condition. As Monica Storrs and others would later conclude, their morality, or lack thereof, was somehow observable.

Opposition to the Potlatch ceremony and medicine-making was consistently expressed by missionaries. If their missions were to be successful, these traditions had to be eradicated. The language used was often cast in terms which reflected the missionary’s view that they were bringing the light to a dark and heathen land. The idea, as Memmi demonstrated, was that native traditions were seen as corrupt and debased, whereas European institutions were desirable and glorified.

Christine Carleton joined the Church Missionary Society in 1894. Prior to attending Highbury Deaconess House she had lived in Thornton Heath, where she worked as a draper’s assistant until age 24. After one year of training at the Deaconess House she departed for Alert Bay in October 1895. She spent her first month working at Alert

³⁸ Isaac O. Stringer, “The Esquimaux of the MacKenzie River Delta”, *CSA, Canadian Church Magazine and Mission News*, October 1892, 222-223.

³⁹ Bishop William Ridley, “The Indians of British Columbia,” *Canadian Church and Mission News*, December 1896, 273.

Bay; then in December she and another missionary, Miss Beeching, went to teach school and hold services at Gwayasdums, a village fifteen miles north of Alert Bay.

Writing back to the Society in February 1896, she expressed great satisfaction with her work, though she admitted that she found teaching “trying at times” because, as she said: “One cannot expect the little untrained heathen children to be as obedient and as fond of learning the ABC’s as English children.” She also noted that many of the natives who resided in the village were away. The purpose of their absence was the transaction of “their business which is the distribution of blankets and is termed ‘the potlatch’ at the same time they are practising their heathen rites, etc. which are connected with this potlatch and are most distressing.”⁴⁰

One year later, Carleton was still contented with her work but was doubtful of her impact as she claimed she would be delighted to see the people “come out of darkness” and see God’s “marvellous light.” Like her co-workers, she was concerned with the amount of darkness that still prevailed among her charges. Three years before this, Florence Appleyard had warned that missionaries must be patient for “naturally the Indians are slow, but they have so lately come out of dark heathenism. . . .”⁴¹ Unless potlatches and medicine-making could be undermined, this darkness would continue.

One goal shared by the Stringers during their time at Herschel Island was to weaken the position of medicine-makers, or “conjurers,” as they called them. In November 1897 Mrs. Stringer wrote of the sadness she felt after seeing a sick child in a snow house she had visited. She witnessed the doctor and described the practice: “When the child lies still and they think it is not breathing the doctor breathes life into it (so they say) and sings some Eskimo song. It is sad to see the hold superstition has on them.” She went back to visit this child again before it died and did not go into the house because “the doctor was there making a wild noise and all was darkness within. . . .”⁴²

Mrs. Stringer recorded several incidents where out of desperation natives came to them seeking medicine. Her diary for 13 to 20 February 1899 spoke of a young boy who had been very ill. After the parents had invited five different native doctors to attend him, with no success, they brought him to the Stringers. At first the Stringers were

⁴⁰ Church Missionary Society Papers, C. 2. British Columbia, North British Columbia Mission, Reel A123, From Miss Carleton to the Church Missionary Society, 28 February 1896.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, from Florence Appleyard to the Church Missionary Society, 7 November 1893.

⁴² GSA, Stringer Papers, Series 2, Sarah Ann Stringer, Diaries 1-17, 97 2-C, 15 November to 22 November 1897.

reluctant to have him and insisted that “no native doctor or in fact anyone else have anything else to do with the treatment of him.” Within a few months the boy recovered and, as Stringer noted, his parents “feel very grateful for our care of their son, and it certainly will have its influence.”

When they offered cures for various ailments Mrs. Stringer always conveyed her wish that their success would lead the natives to “give up their evil and superstitious ways,” and abandon the tradition of medicine making.⁴³ Missionaries in the north had no tolerance for native spirituality. They were unable to see any value in native traditions. They had no respect for the fact that the natives had their own cultural practices which had been passed on for generations. Mrs. Stringer would occasionally try to describe the medicine-making process but she failed to understand or appreciate its significance from a native perspective.

In cases where natives were seemingly more willing to accept intervention in medical matters, there was still very little satisfaction expressed by missionaries. Selina Bompas often acted as a nurse in Fort Simpson. She found this work disappointing because, in her view, the “poor Indians” were helpless. In the face of illness their response was to “watch and kiss and fondle and cry out in agony, but not stir to provide the least remedy and if you give them the chances are they will not use it.” This same frustration was expressed by Adelaide Butler who at the time of a measles epidemic at Shingle Point said that the “Eskimos are more like children” because they failed to realize the seriousness of the disease and refused to comply with her wish that they stay away from the Point if they were ill.

Like the desire to dominate medical treatment and eradicate the Potlatch, missionaries also imposed new names on those they christened. The Comaroffs noted this practice in South Africa as well and interpreted it within the context of the “colonization of language.” At Herschel Island, for example, Mrs. Stringer knew a young native boy called David Copperfield, and another missionary at Shingle Point spoke of a baptismal service where a young girl, Too-kul-u-wok, became Mary, while another little girl was baptized Margaret-Ann.⁴⁴ The assumption that Old Testament or Westernized names would remake individuals was similar to the belief that physical appearance and morality went hand-in-hand. As the Comaroffs suggest, there is a

⁴³ *Ibid.*, February 1900.

⁴⁴ GSA, Bessie Quirt Papers, Diary, 12 January 1930 and Adelaide Butler Papers, Letter from Adelaide Butler to Mary Butler, 22 April 1934.

“general tendency of imperialisms of all stripes to impose themselves by redesignating people and places. . . .”⁴⁵

Renaming, educating and attempting to eradicate native traditions and undermine spirituality were all intricate parts of the Christianizing process. Name-changing symbolically reflected a rejection of the past and the implementation of a new order.

REFASHIONING WOMANHOOD

Scholars of colonialism have recently focused on the tendency for white newcomers to the colonies to exaggerate their own significance. Mary Louise Pratt pursues this as a theme in *Imperial Eyes* when she argues that travel writers often saw the landscape that they were exploring as “empty,” yet full of potential for future use. They overlooked the presence of native populations and the meanings that the landscape held for them.” From the point of view of the inhabitants, of course,” observes Pratt “these same spaces are lived as intensely humanized, saturated with local history and meaning, where plants, creatures, and geographical formations have names, uses, symbolic functions, histories, places in indigenous knowledge formations.”⁴⁶ Unlike travel writers, missionaries were of course concerned with the native populations and endeavoured to improve and civilize them. But like the travel writers they disregarded past histories and believed that their arrival meant the advent of light, knowledge, and respectability.

This seems to be especially true for the coming of white missionary women to the north. Whether it was the first white woman to travel in an open canoe from Victoria to Kincolith or the first white woman to visit Cambridge Bay, there was always recognition of this event. A typical reference to this unique situation was made by William Collison, who served in the Diocese of Caledonia from 1873 until 1922, first as a missionary and later as Archdeacon. In recounting his wife’s experiences he noted that “[s]he was the first white woman to take up her residence among the Tsimshian at Metlakatla; afterwards the first among the then fierce Haida of Queen Charlotte Islands, where her skill in ministering to the sick, and in dressing the wounds of those injured, tended in no small degree to bring them under the influence of our teaching.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 218–219.

⁴⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 61, and John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 174.

⁴⁷ Charles Lillard ed., *William Henry Collison: In the Wake of the War Canoe* (Victoria: Sono

There seemed to be a certain pride or need to celebrate the arrival of the first white women in many of the northern mission stations. It was almost as if this event heralded a certain conquest in morality. Much evidence indicates that representations of women's role in the mission field were intricately connected to the image of Victorian womanhood. It was anticipated that white women missionaries would fulfil the function of role models for native women. Women missionaries were intended to teach native women what one male missionary described rather generally as "Christian home life."⁴⁸ This meant that under the colonialist's gaze, native women's standards of domestic sanctity had to be raised. Improvement was the ultimate object.

Selina Bompas was well aware of this goal. In November 1907 she wrote an article for the *Canadian Churchman* about the type of women who should settle in the north. She was referring, principally, to mission work, but made it clear that schoolteachers, housekeepers and dressmakers were also needed in the region. She told women who intended to settle in the north that their behaviour should set an example for native women. "Dear sister-settlers amongst the Indians," Bompas urged, "there is power given you from on high which is intended you should use among them or any other race with whom you may be placed — it is the power of *influence*; . . . In your Christian households, in your modest demeanour, in your fair dealings with all let them see what they should seek to copy more than the jewels and costly attire which in their eyes all that is needed to constitute a lady."⁴⁹ Bompas expected that white women could demonstrate to native women what it meant to be a lady, something that in her view needed vast improvement.

Expectations about the duties of missionary women were especially apparent to male missionaries and their wives during the first years of contact. When Rev. J. B. McCullagh first brought his wife to work among the Nishga of the Naas River Valley he wrote back to the Nishga Missionary Union to report how successful she had been and how she was so "capable of understanding the why and the wherefore of their racial limitations and imperfections, as well as of appreciating their good points of which they have not a few."

McCullagh listed the duties of both his daughter and wife which included the "daily cooking, washing up, brushing and dusting rooms,

Nis Press, 1981), 19 and Diocese of Caledonia Synod, *North British Columbia News*, "A Wonderful Record" January 1929, and GSA, Stringer Papers, Series 2, Sarah Ann Stringer, Talks, Addresses, 95 2-B, "A Trip to Cambridge Bay Arctic Ocean," 1927.

⁴⁸ Quoted in, Lillard ed., *In the Wake of the War Canoe*, 16.

⁴⁹ Selina Bompas "Our Women of the North" *Canadian Churchman* 14 November 1907.

washing, starching and ironing, and every other thing that has to be done in a house.” He recognized that this routine tested the missionary spirit and admired the way Mrs. McCullagh went about her work: “Looking at her amongst a crowd of Indian women, teaching them to cut and make up articles of waring apparel, my wife is a source of intense joy and astonishment to me. When one considers how difficult it is to ‘handle’ Indians, the tact patience and self-forgetting spirit it requires, to say nothing of the demand on one’s physical energy, it is a wonder to me to find her put in two solid hours of this work, and then come away as fresh as the proverbial daisy.”⁵⁰

In a similar tone, Miss F. A. T. Copeland, who arrived at the Naas River Valley in 1908, described the work of Mrs. Collison, a veteran at Kincolith of twenty-six years. She acknowledged that one must know the “character” of the Nishga to appreciate all the “patient, loving toil” the Collisons had supplied. She gave Mrs. Collison credit for raising a number of young Nishga women in her own home, resulting in several of them learning how to “clean and scrub, wash and bake, sew and knit, and last but not least, how to bring up their children to some extent in the fear of the Lord.”⁵¹

Women missionaries did more than act as role models or attempt to influence native women in matters of domesticity. One of the prevailing images of missionary women, and missionary wives in particular, was that they were helpmates sent out to the mission field to teach their disciples how to act like proper ladies, as defined within the context of British society. Implicit in this assumption was the idea that native women were somehow inferior and had to be taught womanly behaviour and domestic arts. Their standards of cleanliness, child-rearing, and family life in general came under close scrutiny and were found wanting. Power and influence could be gained by missionary women if they projected an idealized image of superior womanhood. The only way the north would prosper, suggested Selina Bompas, was if everyone followed the “refining, permeating influence of its Christian gentlewomen.”⁵²

It is necessary to approach religious missions in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic from the context of colonialism. The overlooked place of women in the colonial relationship needs to be considered.

⁵⁰ In 1905 the Nishga Missionary Union headquartered in Surrey, Britain, was formed to support work in the Naas River Valley. At this time the Church Missionary Society was beginning to curtail its endeavours in Northern British Columbia. DCSA, Rev. J. B. McCullagh, “Aiyansh” *Aiyansh Notes*, April 1908.

⁵¹ Miss F. A. T. Copeland, “Kincolith,” *North British Columbia News*, April, 1911.

⁵² Selina Bompas, “Our Women of the North,” *Canadian Churchman*, 14 November 1907.

The approach taken in this examination reveals far more about the individual missionaries than about native cultures. Their notions of superiority, their disdain toward the alien “otherness” of the native’s appearance and daily habits, their abhorrence of images of natives as murderous and savage is complicated by the ambivalence and ambiguities and their feelings and reactions to direct contact with individual natives.