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# CATEGORIES AND TERRAINS OF EXCLUSION CONSTRUCTING THE “INDIAN WOMAN” IN THE EARLY SETTLEMENT ERA IN WESTERN CANADA

SARAH CARTER

In 1884 Mary E. Inderwick wrote to her Ontario family from the ranch near Pincher Creek, Alberta, where she had lived with her new husband for six months.<sup>1</sup> The letter provides a perspective on the stratifications of race, gender, and class that were forming as the Euro-Canadian enclave grew in the district of Alberta. Mary Inderwick lamented that it was a lonely life, as she was twenty-two miles from any other women, and she even offered to help some of the men near them to “get their shacks done up if only they will go east and marry some really nice girls.” She did not consider the companionship of women such as “the squaw

who is the nominal wife of a white man near us,” and she had dismissed her maid, who had become discontented with her position as a servant. Inderwick had disapproved of a ball at the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) barracks at Fort Macleod, despite the fact that it was “the first Ball to which the squaws were not allowed to go, but there were several half breeds.” Commenting on the Aboriginal population that still greatly outnumbered the new arrivals, Inderwick wrote that they should have been “isolated in the mountains,” rather than settled on nearby reserves, and that the sooner they became extinct the better for themselves and the country.

At the time of Mary Inderwick’s arrival in the West the consolidation of Canada’s rule was not yet secure. The Metis resistance of 1885 fed fears of a larger uprising, and an uncertain economic climate threatened the promise of a prosperous West. There was a sharpening of racial boundaries and categories in the 1880s and an intensification of discrimination in the Canadian West. The arrival of women immigrants like Mary Inderwick after the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed through Alberta in 1883 coincided with other developments such

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as the railway itself, the treaties, and the development of ranching and farming that were to stabilize the new order and allow the recreation of Euro-Canadian institutions and society. The women did not introduce notions of spatial and social segregation, but their presence helped to justify policies already in motion that segregated the new community from indigenous contacts.<sup>2</sup> The Canadian state adopted increasingly segregationist policies toward the Aboriginal people of the West, and central to these policies were images of Aboriginal women as dissolute, dangerous, and sinister.

From the earliest years that people were settled on reserves in western Canada, Canadian government administrators and statesmen, as well as the national press, promoted a cluster of negative images of Aboriginal women. Those in power used these images to explain conditions of poverty and ill-health on reserves. The failure of agriculture on reserves was attributed to the incapacity of Aboriginal men to become other than hunters, warriors, and nomads.<sup>3</sup> Responsibility for a host of other problems, including the deplorable state of housing on reserves, the lack of clothing and footwear, and the high mortality rate, was placed upon the supposed cultural traits and temperament of Aboriginal women. The depiction of these women as lewd and licentious, particularly after 1885, was used to deflect criticism from the behavior of government officials and the NWMP and to legitimize the constraints placed on the activities and movements of Aboriginal women in the world off the reserve. These negative images became deeply embedded in the consciousness of the most powerful socio-economic groups on the Prairies and have resisted revision.

The images were neither new nor unique to the Canadian West. In "The Pocahontas Perplex" Rayna Green explored the complex, many-faceted dimensions of the image of the Indian woman in American folklore and literature. The beautiful "Indian Princess" who saved or aided white men while remaining aloof and virtuous in a woodland paradise was the positive side of the image. Her opposite, the squalid

and immoral "Squaw," lived in a shack at the edge of town, and her "physical removal or destruction can be understood as necessary to the progress of civilization."<sup>4</sup> The "Squaw" was pressed into service and her image predominated in the Canadian West in the late nineteenth century, as boundaries were clarified and social and geographic space marked out. The either/or binary left newcomers little room to consider the diversity of the Aboriginal people of the West or the complex identities and roles of Aboriginal women. Not all Euro-Canadians shared in these sentiments and perceptions. Methodist missionary John McDougall, for example, in 1895 chastised a fellow missionary author for his use of the term "squaw": "In the name of decency and civilization and Christianity, why call one person a woman and another a squaw?"<sup>5</sup> While it would be a mistake to assume a unified mentality among all Euro-Canadians, or, for example, among all members of the NWMP, it is nonetheless clear that the negative stereotype not only prevailed but was deliberately propagated by officials of the state.

#### EURO-CANADIAN SETTLEMENT OF THE WEST

Following the transfer of the Hudson's Bay Company territories to the Dominion of Canada in 1870, the policy of the federal government was to clear the land of the Aboriginal inhabitants and open the West to Euro-Canadian agricultural settlement. To regulate settlement the North-West Mounted Police (later Royal North-West and then Royal Canadian Mounted Police) was created and three hundred of them were dispatched west in 1874. A "free" homestead system was modeled on the American example, and a transcontinental railway was completed in 1885. To open up the West to "actual settlers," seven treaties with the Aboriginal people were negotiated from 1871 to 1877, and through these the government of Canada acquired legal control of most of the land of the West. In exchange the people received land reserves, annuities, and, as a

result of hard bargaining by Aboriginal spokesmen, commitments to assist them to take up agriculture as their buffalo-based economy collapsed. A Department of Indian Affairs with headquarters in Ottawa was established in 1880, and in the field an ever-expanding team of Indian agents, farm instructors, and inspectors were assigned to implement the reserve system and to enforce the Indian Act of 1876. The people who had entered into treaties were wards of the government who did not have the privileges of full citizenship and were subject to a wide variety of controls and regulations that governed many aspects of life.

Much to the disappointment of the federal government, the West did not begin rapid development until the later 1890s. There were small pockets of Euro-Canadian settlement, but in 1885 in the district of Alberta, for example, the Aboriginal and Metis population was more than 9500 while the recent arrivals numbered only 4900.<sup>6</sup> All seemed hopeless, especially by the mid-1880s when immigration was at a near standstill. Years of drought and frost and problems finding suitable techniques for farming the northern Plains account in part for the reluctance of settlers, and the 1885 resistance of the Metis in present-day Saskatchewan did little to enhance the image the government wished to project of the West as a suitable and safe home.

#### RESISTANCE TO SETTLEMENT

The Metis were people of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry who regarded the Red River settlement (Winnipeg) as the heartland of their nation. It was here in 1869-70, under the leadership of Louis Riel, that the Metis first resisted Canadian imperialism, effectively blocking Ottawa's takeover of the West until they had been guaranteed their land rights, their French language, and their Roman Catholic religion. But the victory negotiated into the Manitoba Act of 1870 soon proved hollow as the Canadian government adopted a variety of strategies to ensure that the Metis did not receive the lands promised them, and many

moved further West.<sup>7</sup> In their new territories the Metis again demanded land guarantees but when the Canadian government largely ignored their requests, they asked Louis Riel to lead another protest in 1884. The Canadian government dispatched troops west and defeated the Metis at Batoche in May 1885. Riel was found guilty of treason and was hanged, as were eight Aboriginal men convicted of murder.

Despite desperate economic circumstances and deep resentment over government mistreatment, few of the treaty people of the West joined the Metis resistance, although at a settlement called Frog Lake, in present-day Alberta, some young Cree men killed an Indian agent, a farm instructor, and seven others, and in the Battleford district two farm instructors were killed. This limited participation became a rationale for the increasingly authoritarian regime that governed the lives of the treaty people. Anxious to see western development succeed in the face of all of the setbacks of the 1880s, the Canadian government restricted the Aboriginal population in order to protect and enrich recent and prospective immigrants.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF STEREOTYPES

Particularly irksome to many of the recently-arrived "actual settlers" was Aboriginal competition they faced in the hay, grain, and vegetable markets. Despite obstacles, many Aboriginal farmers had produced a surplus for sale. Settlers' particularly vocal and strident complaints led the government to curtail farming on reserves. To explain why underused reserves had become pockets of rural poverty, Indian Affairs officials claimed that Aboriginal culture and temperament rendered the men unwilling and unable to farm.

Plains women were also responsible: according to government pronouncements they were idle and gossipy, preferring tents to proper housing because tents required less work to maintain and could be clustered in groups that allowed visiting and gossip. Reports of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs claimed that Indians raised dust with their dancing and

the women's failure to clean it up spread diseases such as tuberculosis. Administrators blamed the high infant mortality rate upon the indifferent care of the mothers. The neglected children of these mothers grew up "rebellious, sullen, disobedient and unthankful."<sup>8</sup> While men were blamed for the failure of agriculture, women were portrayed as resisting, resenting, and preventing any progress toward modernization. As an inspector of Indian agencies lamented in 1908, "The women, here, as on nearly every reserve, are a hindrance to the advancement of the men. No sooner do the men earn some money than the women want to go and visit their relations on some other reserve, or else give a feast or dance to their friends. . . . The majority of [the women] are discontented, dirty, lazy and slovenly."<sup>9</sup>

The unofficial and unpublished reports of reserve life show that officials recognized that problems with reserve housing and health had little to do with the preferences, temperament, or poor housekeeping abilities of women. Because of their poverty the people were confined in large numbers in winter to what were little better than one-room and one-story huts or shacks that were poorly ventilated and impossible to keep clean, as they had dirt floors and were plastered with mud and hay. Tents and tipis might well have been more sanitary and more comfortable. One inspector of agencies noted in 1891 that women had neither soap, towels, wash basins, nor wash pails, and no means with which to acquire these.<sup>10</sup> Officials frequently noted that women were short of basic clothing but had no textiles or yarn to work with. Yet in official public statements, the tendency was to ascribe blame to the women rather than to draw attention to conditions that would injure the reputation of government administrators.

#### "LICENTIOUSNESS" AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Officials propagated an image of Aboriginal women as dissolute, as the bearers of sinister influences, to deflect criticism from govern-

ment agents and policies. This image was evoked with particular strength in the wake of an 1886 controversy that focused upon the alleged "brutal, heartless and ostentatious licentiousness" of government officials resident in Western Canada.<sup>11</sup> The remarks of Samuel Trivett, a Church of England missionary on the Blood reserve in present-day southern Alberta, became the focus of the controversy. To a special correspondent for *The Mail of Toronto*, Trivett said that Indian women were being bought and sold by white men who lived with them without legally marrying them and then abandoned the offspring to life on the reserve.<sup>12</sup>

Trivett strongly hinted that some government agents were involved in licentious behavior, an accusation seized upon by critics of the administration of Indian affairs in western Canada. In the aftermath of the Metis resistance of 1885, opponents of John A. Macdonald's Conservatives amassed evidence of neglect, injustice, and incompetence and were delighted to add immorality to this list. In the House of Commons in April of 1886, Malcolm Cameron, Liberal Member of Parliament, delivered a lengthy indictment of Indian affairs in the West, focusing upon the unprincipled and unscrupulous behavior of officials of the Indian department. Cameron quoted Trivett and further charged that agents of the government, sent to elevate and educate, had instead acted to "humiliate, to lower, to degrade and debase the virgin daughters of the wards of the nation." He knew of one young Indian agent from England, unfit to do anything there, who was living on a reserve in "open adultery with two young squaws . . . revelling in the sensual enjoyments of a western harem, plentifully supplied with select cullings from the western prairie flowers."<sup>13</sup>

Cameron implicated members of the NWMP in this behavior, wondering why it was that over 45 percent of them were reported to have been under medical treatment for venereal disease. Cameron was not the first to raise the matter of police propriety in the House. Concern about possible improper relations between

the police and Aboriginal women long predated the Trivett scandal and was one aspect of a larger debate in the press and in the House in the late 1870s over charges of inefficiency, lack of discipline, high desertion rates, and low morale in the force. Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories David Laird alerted NWMP Commissioner James Macleod in 1878 that reports about immoral conduct were in circulation: "I fear from what reports are brought me, that some of your officers at Fort Walsh are making rather free with the women around there. It is to be hoped that the good name of the Force will not be hurt through too open indulgence of that kind. And I sincerely hope that Indian women will not be treated in a way that hereafter may give trouble."<sup>14</sup>

Although Macleod and Assistant Commissioner A.G. Irvine denied that there was "anything like 'a regular brothel'" about the police posts, such reports persisted. In the House of Commons in 1880 Joseph Royal, a Manitoba Member of Parliament, claimed that the NWMP was accused of "disgraceful immorality" all over the West. Royal had evidence that at one of the police posts that winter there had been "an open quarrel between an officer and one of the constables for the possession of a squaw . . ." and that one officer slapped another "in the face on account of a squaw." Royal had been informed that "many members of the force were living in concubinage with Indian women, whom they had purchased from their parents and friends."<sup>15</sup> In 1886 public attention was once again drawn to police behavior. *The Mail* informed its readers that between 1874 and 1881 the police had "lived openly with Indian girls purchased from their parents" and only the arrival of settlers had compelled them to abandon or at least be "more discreet in the pursuit of their profligacy."<sup>16</sup>

There is little doubt that Trivett and other critics based their accusations of both the police and government officials on some foundation, but remaining evidence is scanty and scattered. Missionaries depended to a large extent on the goodwill of government and were rarely as outspoken as Trivett or John McLean, a

Methodist missionary on the Blood reserve near Fort Macleod, who in 1885 characterized many reserve employees as utterly incompetent and urged the government to employ only married men, "of sterling Christian character."<sup>17</sup> But missionaries were instructed in 1886 by Edgar Dewdney, lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories, not to voice their accusations to the newspapers "even if allegations against public officials were true," as this would do more harm than good, would affect mission work, and could be used to stir up political strife.<sup>18</sup> Government officials generally investigated reports of government misconduct themselves and this functioned to cover up or to mitigate such allegations. Similarly members of the NWMP themselves looked into any complaints about the force's behavior.

#### MARRIAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND NWMP MEMBERS

There were members of the NWMP, especially among the earliest recruits of the 1870s and early 1880s, who formed relationships with Aboriginal and Metis women, as did a great many other male immigrants of these years. Some of these were marriages of long-standing, sanctioned by Christian ceremony or customary law. Lakota author/historian John O'Kutesica noted that six "Red Coats" of the Wood Mountain Detachment in the early 1880s married Lakota women from Sitting Bull's band, and most of the couples, such as Mary Blackmoon and Thomas Aspdin, lived together to old age and death. One couple, Archie LeCaine and Emma Loves War, separated because she did not wish to move to Eastern Canada.<sup>19</sup>

Other relationships were of a more temporary nature. Of course there were children. Cecil Denny for example, while a sub-inspector at Fort Macleod, had a daughter with Victoria McKay, a part-Piegian woman who was the wife of another policeman, constable Percy Robinson.<sup>20</sup> Denny was forced to resign from the force in 1881 as a result of his involvement in a series of court cases that Robinson brought against him for "having induced his wife to



Fig. 1. *Tahmoncoach*, believed to be a niece of *Sitting Bull*, was the Lakota wife of *George Pembridge*, NWMP, *Fort Walsh*, c. 1878. Courtesy of the *Glenbow Archives*.

desert him and also having criminal connections with her."<sup>21</sup> The child was raised by her mother on the American Blackfoot reservation. Assistant Surgeon Henry Dodd of the NWMP had a daughter who lived on one of the Crooked Lake reserves in the Qu'Appelle Valley. There is a record of this in the police files only because Dodd was granted leave to attend to her when she was very ill in 1889.<sup>22</sup>

D. J. Grier, who served three years with the NWMP beginning in 1877 at Fort Macleod, married Molly Tailfeathers, a Piegan woman, and together they had three children.<sup>23</sup> By 1887, however, Grier had remarried a white woman. For a short time the children from his first marriage lived with their mother on the Piegan reserve, but the two eldest were taken from her

and placed in the care of Grier's parents, who had also settled in Fort Macleod. Grier was one of the most prominent men of the West. Renowned as the first commercial wheat grower in Alberta, he also served as mayor of Macleod for twelve years from 1901 to 1913.

#### ABUSE OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

John O'Kute-sica wrote at length about one unsuccessful Wood Mountain customary marriage, that of his aunt Iteskawin and Superintendent William D. Jarvis, an Englishman with the original contingent who was dismissed from the force in 1881. According to O'Kute-sica his aunt consented to marry Jarvis because he promised that her brothers and sisters would have something to eat twice a day, and all of her people were in want and suffering. After only a few weeks of marriage Jarvis, in a jealous rage, publicly assaulted Iteskawin at a Lakota "Night Dance," an incident that strained relations between the two communities, and she immediately left him.<sup>24</sup> On most of the few occasions that Aboriginal women laid charges against policemen for assault or rape, their claims were hastily dismissed as defamation or blackmail.<sup>25</sup>

Some government employees resident on reserves clearly abused their positions of authority. In 1882, for example, Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot and his wife complained that the farm instructor on their reserve demanded sexual favors from a young girl in return for rations, and when an investigation proved this to be the case the man was dismissed.<sup>26</sup> Both the documentary and oral records suggest that several of the government employees that the Crees killed at Frog Lake and Battleford in the spring of 1885 were resented intensely because of their callous and at times brutal treatment of Aboriginal women. The farm instructor on the Mosquito reserve near Battleford, James Payne, was known for his violent temper—he once beat a young woman and threw her out of his house when he found her visiting his young Aboriginal wife. The terrified and shaken woman, who was found by her father, died soon

after, and her grieving father blamed Payne, whom he killed in 1885.<sup>27</sup> Farm instructor John Delaney, who was killed at Frog Lake in 1885, laid charges against a man by the name of Sand Fly in 1881 so he could cohabit with Sand Fly's wife. Delaney first claimed that Sand Fly had struck him with a whip, and when this charge did not result in the desired jail sentence, Delaney claimed that the man had beaten his wife. The farm instructor then lived with Sand Fly's wife, and the general feeling in the district, shared by the local NWMP, was that "Mr. Delaney had the man arrested in order to accomplish his designs."<sup>28</sup> As a Touchwood Hills farm instructor told a visiting newspaper correspondent in 1885, the charges of immorality among farm instructors on reserves were in many instances too true, as "the greatest facilities are afforded the Indian instructor for the seduction of Indian girls. The instructor holds the grub. The agent gives him the supplies and he issues them to the Indians. Now you have a good idea of what semi-starvation is . . ."<sup>29</sup>

#### BLAMING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The most vocal response to the accusations of Trivett and other critics was not to deny that there had been "immorality" in the West but to exonerate the men and blame the Aboriginal women, who were claimed to have behaved in an abandoned and wanton manner and were supposedly accustomed to being treated with contempt, to being bought and sold as commodities, within their own society. In defending the NWMP in 1880, the *Toronto Globe* emphasized that Aboriginal women had "loose morals" that were "notorious the world over" and that "no men in the world are so good as to teach them better, or to try to reform them in this respect." These sentiments were echoed again and again in the wake of the 1886 controversy. The editor of the *Fort Macleod Gazette*, a former NWMP, argued that whatever immorality there might have been came from the women themselves and from the customs of their society. They were prostitutes before they went to

live with white men, who did not encourage this behavior but were simply "taking advantage of an Indian's offer." *The Mail* told readers that Aboriginal males had sold their wives and children in the thousands to soldiers and settlers since the time of the French fur trade in exchange for alcohol, and that with the arrival of the police a great deal had been done to end this situation.<sup>30</sup>

The *Gazette* stressed, incorrectly, that there was no marriage in plains societies, simply a little lively bartering with the father and a woman could be purchased for a horse or two. The argument that Aboriginal women were virtual slaves, first to their fathers, and then to their husbands, was called upon by all who wished to deflect criticism from government officials and the NWMP. In the House of Commons in April 1886 Sir Hector Langevin defended the record of the government against Cameron's charges of immorality. Langevin claimed that to Indians marriage was simply a bargain and a sale and that immorality among them long predated the arrival of government agents in the North-West.<sup>31</sup>

The government published its official response to the criticisms of Indian affairs in the North-West in an 1886 pamphlet entitled "The Facts Respecting Indian Administration in the North-West." A government official had again inquired into accusations about the misconduct of employees of the Indian department and, predictably, had found no evidence. The investigator, Hayter Reed, assistant commissioner of Indian affairs, was one of those unmarried officials who had been accused of having Aboriginal "mistresses" as well as a child from one of these relationships.<sup>32</sup> The pamphlet boldly asserted that Trivett was unable to come up with a shred of actual evidence, although the missionary vehemently denied this.<sup>33</sup> The pamphlet writer admitted that some men had acquired their wives by purchase, but claimed that this was the Indian custom, and that "no father ever dreams of letting his daughter leave his wigwam till he has received a valuable consideration for her." If the government stopped



this custom, there would be loud protests, over and above the Indians' "chronic habit of grumbling." "The Facts" insisted that it was not fair to criticize the behavior of the dead, such as Delaney and Payne, who had "passed from the bar of human judgment."<sup>34</sup>

#### ENDANGERED WHITE WOMEN

The real danger was not to Indian women but to white women, who might again be dragged into horrible captivity if critics encouraged Indians in their exaggerated, misled notions. Two white women, Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, had been taken hostage by Big Bear's band following the events at Frog Lake. There were a great number of Metis and Aboriginal women (and men) hostages as well, but outrage and indignation did not focus upon them. Although Delaney and Gowanlock were fed and housed as well as their captors, and released unharmed, the government publication played up the perils, hazards, and threat to the safety of these women and others who might move west. The women's account of their two months of captivity stressed the "savagery" of their captors, and the ever-present danger of "the fate worse than death."<sup>35</sup>

Following the period of heightened tensions within the Euro-Canadian community after the events of 1885 there was an increased emphasis upon the supposed vulnerability of white women in the West. Rumors circulated through the press that one of Big Bear's wives was a white woman being held against her will.<sup>36</sup> After a girl of about nine with fair hair and blue eyes was spotted on the Blackfoot reserve by an English artist accompanying Canada's governor general on a tour across the continent, in 1889, the story of a "captive" white child attracted international attention and calls for a rescue mission. Indignant outrage was expressed, especially in the Fort Macleod newspaper, which called for prompt action to rescue the girl from "the horrible fate that is surely in store for her." The NWMP and Indian affairs officials assigned to look into the case knew all

along that the child was not a captive at all but resided with her mother on the reserve. The captivity story functioned, however, to reaffirm the vulnerability of white women in the West and to provide a rationale for those who wished to secure greater control over the Aboriginal population.<sup>37</sup>

#### THE IMAGE OF THE "SQUAW MAN"

The use of the term "squaw man" to denote men of the lowest social class became increasingly frequent during the later 1880s. There was disdain for those within the community who did not conform to the new demands to clarify boundaries. Police reports blamed "squaw men" for many crimes such as liquor offenses or the killing of cattle. S.B. Steele of the NWMP wrote from the Fort Macleod district in 1890 that the wives of these men "readily act as agents, and speaking the language, and being closely connected with the various tribes, their houses soon become a rendezvous for idle and dissolute Indians and half breeds, and being themselves in that debatable land between savagery and civilization possibly do not realize the heinousness and danger to the community . . ." <sup>38</sup> The *Moosomin Courier* of March 1890 blamed the "squaw-men" for stirring up trouble with the Indians in 1885 and prejudicing them against policies that were for their own good.<sup>39</sup>

#### LIVES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The overwhelming image that emerged from the 1886 "immorality" controversy was that of dissolute Aboriginal women. They, and the traditions of the society from which they came, were identified as the cause of vice and corruption in the new settlements of the prairie West. This was not an image shared or accepted by all Euro-Canadians in the West at all times, nor did the image bear resemblance to the lives of the vast majority of Aboriginal women. Women were not commodities that were bought, sold, or exchanged at will by men. Plains marriage

practices entailed mutual obligations between the families of the couple and an on-going exchange of marriage-validating gifts.

Aboriginal oral and documentary sources suggest that in the early reserve years, particularly in the aftermath of the events of 1885, women provided essential security and stability in communities that had experienced great upheaval. In these years of low resources and shattered morale, the work of women in their own new settlements was vital, materially as well as spiritually. Cree author Joe Dion wrote that when spirits and resources were low on his reserve in the late 1880s "much of the inspiration for the Crees came from the old ladies, for they set to work with a will that impressed everybody."<sup>40</sup> Aboriginal women also provided considerable assistance to new immigrants, particularly women. They were important as midwives to some early immigrants and they helped instruct newcomers in the use of edible prairie plants and other native materials.<sup>41</sup> Aboriginal women formed what was described as a "protective society" around the women and children hostages in Big Bear's camp in 1885, keeping them out of harm's way, but this aspect of the drama was absent from the headlines of the day.<sup>42</sup>

#### CONSTRAINTS ON ABORIGINAL WOMEN

It was the image of Aboriginal women as immoral and corrupting influences that predominated in the non-Aboriginal society that was taking shape. Authorities used this characterization to define and treat Aboriginal women, increasingly narrowing their options and opportunities. Both informal and formal constraints served to keep Aboriginal people from the towns and settled areas of the prairies and their presence there became more and more marginal. While they may not have wished to live in the towns, their land-use patterns for a time intersected with the new order and they might have taken advantage of markets and other economic opportunities, but townspeople believed that Aboriginal people did not belong within the new settlements that were replacing

and expelling "savagery."<sup>43</sup> Their presence was seen as incongruous, corrupting, and demoralizing. Classified as prostitutes, Aboriginal women were seen as particular threats to morality and health. An 1886 pamphlet of advice for emigrants entitled "What Women Say of the Canadian Northwest" was quick to reassure newcomers that Aboriginal people were seldom seen. The 320 women who responded to the question "Do you experience any dread of the Indians?" overwhelmingly replied that they rarely saw any. Mrs. S. Lumsden, for example, thought they were "hundreds of miles away with sufficient force to keep them quiet."<sup>44</sup>

Following the events of 1885, government officials as well as the NWMP made strenuous efforts to keep people on their reserves. A pass system required all who wished to leave to acquire a pass from the farm instructor or agent declaring the length of and reason for absence. A central rationale for the pass system was to keep away from the towns and villages Aboriginal women "of abandoned character who were there for the worst purposes."<sup>45</sup> There is evidence that some Aboriginal women did work as prostitutes.<sup>46</sup> Cree chiefs of the Edmonton district complained to the prime minister in 1883 that their young women were reduced by starvation to prostitution, something unheard of among their people before.<sup>47</sup> Officials attributed prostitution not to economic conditions but to what they insisted was the personal disposition or inherent immorality of Aboriginal women.<sup>48</sup> Classified as prostitutes, Aboriginal women could be restricted by a new disciplinary regime. Separate legislation under the Indian Act, and, after 1892, under the Criminal Code governed Aboriginal prostitution, making it easier to convict Aboriginal women than other women. As legal historian Constance Backhouse has observed, this separate criminal legislation, "with its attendant emphasis on the activities of Indians rather than whites, revealed that racial discrimination ran deep through the veins of nineteenth century Canadian society."<sup>49</sup>

The pass system was also used to bar Aboriginal women from the towns for what were

invariably seen as "immoral purposes." Women who were found by the NWMP to be without passes and without means of support were arrested and ordered back to their reserves.<sup>50</sup> In March of 1886 the Battleford police dealt with one woman who refused to leave the town by taking her to the barracks and cutting off locks of her hair. Two years later the Battleford paper reported that

during the early part of the week the Mounted Police ordered out of town a number of squaws who had come in from time to time and settled here. The promise to take them to the barracks and cut off their hair had a wonderful effect in hastening their movements.<sup>51</sup>

Accustomed to a high degree of mobility about the landscape, Aboriginal women found that the pass system not only restricted their traditional subsistence strategies but also hampered their pursuit of new jobs and resources. Government officials further limited the women's employment and marketing opportunities by advice such as that given by one Indian agent, who urged the citizens of Calgary in 1885 not to purchase anything from or hire Aboriginal people, so as to keep them out of the town.<sup>52</sup> The periodic sale of produce, art, and craftwork in urban or tourist areas could have provided income to women and their families, as did such sales for Aboriginal women in eastern Canada. Studies of rural women in western Canada suggest that in the prairie boom and bust cycle the numerous strategies of women, including the marketing of country provisions and farm products, provided the buffer against farm failure.<sup>53</sup> Aboriginal women were not allowed the same opportunities to market these resources.

The mechanisms and attitudes that excluded Aboriginal women from the new settlements also hampered their access to some of the services these offered. Jane Livingston, the Metis wife of one of the earliest farmers in the Calgary district, found that whenever there was a new policeman in Calgary, he would ask her and her

children for passes and make trouble because of their appearance. On one occasion when a child was sick and she needed medicines from downtown Calgary, she rubbed flour into her face and "hoped I looked like a white Calgary housewife" so that the new police constable would not bother her about a pass.<sup>54</sup>

#### MURDERS OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Community reactions to the poisoning of one Aboriginal woman and the brutal murder of another in the late 1880s in southern Alberta reflect the racial prejudices of many of the recent immigrants. In 1888 Constable Alfred Symonds of the NWMP detachment of Stand Off was accused of feloniously killing and slaying a Blood woman by the name of Mrs. Only Kill by giving her a fatal dose of iodine. The woman had swallowed the contents of a bottle given to her by Symonds that apparently held iodine and had died the next morning. The same day she had also eaten a quantity of beans that had turned sour in the heat. Although Only Kill died on Wednesday morning, the matter was not reported to the coroner until late on Friday night. The coroner claimed that by this time the body was too decomposed for post mortem examination, and the coroner's jury decided that the deceased had come to her death either from eating sour beans or from drinking the fluid given to her by Symonds, who was committed to trial and charged with having administered the poison.<sup>55</sup> Constable Symonds was a popular and jocular cricketer and boxer, the son of a professor from Galt, Ontario.<sup>56</sup> In his report on the case, Superintendent P. R. Neale of the NWMP wrote to his superior, "I do not think any Western jury will convict him." Symonds appeared before Judge James F. Macleod, former commissioner of the NWMP, in August of 1888 but the crown prosecutor made application for "Nolle Prosequi," which was granted, and the prisoner was released.<sup>57</sup>

During the 1889 trials of the murderer of a Cree woman identified only as "Rosalie," who had been working as a prostitute, it became

clear that there were many in Calgary who felt "Rosalie was only a squaw and that her death did not matter much."<sup>58</sup> Instead the murderer gained the sympathy and support of much of the town. The murder was a particularly brutal one, and the accused, William "Jumbo" Fisk, had confessed and given himself up to authorities, yet there were problems finding any citizens willing to serve on a jury that might convict a white man for such a crime. The crown prosecutor stated that he regretted having to conduct the case, as he had known the accused for several years as a "genial accommodating and upright young man."<sup>59</sup> Fisk was a popular veteran of 1885, and he was from a well-established eastern Canadian family. At the end of the first of the Rosalie trials the jury astoundingly found the accused "Not Guilty." Judge Charles Rouleau refused to accept this verdict and he ordered a re-trial at the end of which Rouleau told the jury to "forget the woman's race and to consider only the evidence at hand," that "it made no difference whether Rosalie was white or black, an Indian or a negro. In the eyes of the law, every British subject is equal."<sup>60</sup> It was only after the second trial that Fisk was convicted of manslaughter and sent to prison for fourteen years at hard labor. The judge intended to sentence him for life, but letters written by members of parliament and other influential persons who had made representations to the court as to his good character, combined with a petition from the most respectable people of Calgary, persuaded him to impose the lesser sentence.

The people of Calgary tried to show that they were not callous and indifferent toward Rosalie by giving her "as respectable a burial as if she had been a white woman," although several months later the town council squabbled with the Indian Department over the costs incurred, as the department did not think it necessary to go beyond the costs of a pauper's funeral. As a final indignity Rosalie was not allowed burial by the priests in the mission graveyard, although she had been baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, be-

cause they regarded her as a prostitute who had died in sin. The lesson to be learned from the tragedy, according to a Calgary newspaper, was "keep the Indians out of town."<sup>61</sup>

#### ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND ANGLO-SAXON MORAL REFORMERS

There was an intensification of racial discrimination and a stiffening of boundaries between Aboriginal and newcomer in the late 1880s in western Canada. In part this may have been because the immigrants exemplified the increasingly racist ideas and assumptions of the British toward "primitive" peoples.<sup>62</sup> Like the Jamaica Revolt and the India Mutiny, the events of 1885 in western Canada sanctioned perceptions of Aboriginal people as dangerous and ungrateful and justified increased control and segregation.<sup>63</sup> Aboriginal women presented particular perils and hazards. The Metis of the Canadian West had fomented two "rebellions" in western Canada, so authorities wanted to discourage such miscegenation, which could potentially produce great numbers of "malcontents" who might demand that their rights and interests be recognized.<sup>64</sup>

A fervor for moral reform in Protestant English Canada also began to take shape in the later 1880s. Sexual immorality was a main target and racial purity a goal of the reformers.<sup>65</sup> There were fears that Anglo-Saxons might well be overrun by more fertile, darker, and lower people who were believed not to be in control of their sexual desires. Attitudes of the moral reformers toward the inhabitants of the cities' slums were similar to categorizations of "savages" as improvident, filthy, impure, and morally depraved. The 1886 accusations of Malcolm Cameron about the extent of venereal disease among the NWMP had led to an internal investigation of the matter, and although this proved that Cameron's claims were exaggerated, they were not entirely incorrect.<sup>66</sup> The concerns of the moral reformers, however, justified policies segregating Aboriginal and newcomer communities.

## THE INVALIDATION OF MIXED MARRIAGES

Also at issue in the West at this time was the question of who was to control property and capital, who was to have privilege and respectability, and who was not. The possibility that the progeny of interracial marriages might be recognized as legitimate heirs to the sometimes considerable wealth of their fathers posed problems and acted as a powerful incentive for the immigrants to view Aboriginal women as immoral and accustomed to a great number of partners. With the arrival of Euro-Canadian women, Aboriginal wives became fewer, and there is evidence, just as Trivett had suggested, that in the 1880s husbands and fathers were leaving their Aboriginal wives and children for non-Aboriginal wives. D. W. Davis, for example, began his career in Alberta as a whiskey trader at the infamous Fort Whoop-Up, but by 1887 was elected as the first Member of Parliament for the Alberta district. He had a family of four children with a Blood woman by the name of Revenge Walker, but in 1887 he married an Ontario woman, Lillie Grier (sister of D. J. Grier), with whom he had a second family. Although Davis, like Grier, acknowledged the children of the earlier marriage and provided for their education, they were excluded from the economic and social elite in the non-Aboriginal community.<sup>67</sup>

While the validity of mixed marriages according to "the custom of the country" had been upheld in Canadian courts earlier in the nineteenth century, this changed with the influential 1886 ruling in *Jones v. Fraser*. The judge ruled that the court would not accept that "the cohabitation of a civilized man and a savage woman, even for a long period of time, gives rise to the presumption that they consented to be married in our sense of marriage."<sup>68</sup> In 1899 the Supreme Court for the North-West Territories decided that the two sons of Mary Brown, a Piegan woman, and Nicholas Sheran, a founder of a lucrative coal mine near Lethbridge, were not entitled, as next of kin, to a share of their father's estate, as the judge found that Sheran could have but did not le-

gally marry Brown while they lived together from 1878 until Sheran's death in 1882.<sup>69</sup>

## HAUNTED BY AN IMAGE

Negative images of Aboriginal women proved extraordinarily persistent. Their morality was questioned in a number of sections of the Indian Act. If a woman was not of "good moral character" for example, she lost her one-third interest in her husband's estate, and a male government official was the sole and final judge of moral character. As late as 1921 the House of Commons debated a Criminal Code amendment that would have made it an offense for any white man to have "illicit connection" with an Indian woman. Part of the rationale advanced was that "the Indian women are, perhaps, not as alive as women of other races in the country to the importance of maintaining their chastity." The amendment was not passed, as it was argued that this could make unsuspecting white men the "victims" of Indian women who would blackmail them.<sup>70</sup> By contrast, any critical reflections upon the behavior of early government officials and the police in western Canada did not survive beyond the controversy of the 1880s. Ideological constraints, combined with more formal mechanisms of control such as the pass system, succeeded in marginalizing Aboriginal women and in limiting the alternatives and opportunities available to them.

Local histories of the prairies suggest that by the turn of the century many of the settlements of the West had their "local Indian" who was tolerated on the margins or fringes of society and whose behavior and appearance was the subject of local anecdotes. "Old Dewdney" for example, an ancient, often flamboyantly dressed man, was a familiar sight in Fort Macleod. Local people exchanged stories about the exotic past of the old man and of their generosity and kindness toward him.<sup>71</sup> "Nikamoos" or the Singer camped each summer by herself on the trail to the Onion Lake reserve agency in Saskatchewan. Among the white community it was reputed that as a girl Nikamoos had run away with a policeman but that he had been

compelled to leave her. The child she bore died and Nikamoos went insane.<sup>72</sup>

A solitary Indian woman known only as Liza camped on the outskirts of Virden, Manitoba, for many years until her disappearance sometime in the 1940s. By then Liza was thought to have been well over one hundred years old. She lived winter and summer in an unheated tent by the railroad tracks although she spent the long winter days huddled in the livery stable and also at times crept into the Nu-Art Beauty Parlour, where she sat on the floor in front of the window, warming herself in the sun. Liza smoked a corn cob pipe as she shuffled about the streets and lanes of Virden, rummaging in garbage tins. She bathed under the overflow pipe at the water tower, sometimes clothed and sometimes not, and dried off by standing over the huge heat register in Scales and Rothnie's General Store. To an extent she was tolerated and even assisted; town employees shoveled out a path for her when she was buried under snow, and it was thought that the town fathers supplied her with food from time to time. Children were half fascinated and half frightened by this ancient woman. Old-timers believed that Liza was there well before the first settlers, that she was among the Sioux who had escaped the pursuing American army in 1876, that she received regular checks from the United States, and that she was capable of fine handwriting, where learned, no one knew.<sup>73</sup>

The presence of Liza, and the stories told about her, served to sharpen the boundaries of community membership and to articulate what was and what was not considered acceptable and respectable.<sup>74</sup> Liza was the object of both fascination and repugnance as she violated norms of conventional behavior, dress, and cleanliness, representing the antithesis of "civilized" prairie society. Although economically and socially marginal, Liza was symbolically important. Her role attests to the recurrent pattern through which the new society of the West gained in strength and identity and sought to legitimate its own authority by defining itself against the people who were there before them. Liza was a real person, but what she

represented was a Euro-Canadian artifact, created by the settlement. The narratives circulated about Liza were not those she might have told herself—of the disasters that had stripped her of family and community, or perhaps of her strategies in adopting the character role—and this folklore reflected less about Liza than about the community itself. Her solitary life was unique and in contrast to the lives of Aboriginal women; Liza was not representative of a Lakota woman within Lakota society. Yet her presence on the margins of the settlement was tolerated and encouraged in the way these women were not, as she appeared to fit into the well-established category of the "squaw" that still served to confirm the Euro-Canadian newcomers in their belief that their cultural and moral superiority entitled them to the land that had become their home.

#### NOTES

The author thanks Hugh Dempsey for sharing his research with her and for his valuable suggestions as to other sources.

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