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# HUMANITIES RESEARCH

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Cover illustration: Publicity photograph of Ruth  
Budd in her white union suit, circa 1916.  
Courtesy of the Allen County-Fort Wayne  
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## THE UPSIDE DOWN LADY

*As her body rolled over and over, the effect was saved from monotony only because the crowd counted the turns ... And when she returned to the ring and curtsied as prettily as a princess, the audience applauded because so little a girl had proved herself at once so dainty and so strong.'*



A female acrobat, at first glance, appears to be merely an amusing sideshow in American cultural history. But the career of Ruth Budd, an acrobat who performed in circuses, vaudeville and films, actually takes historians and cultural critics to the centre of American social and cultural life from around the turn of the century to the rise of the first wave of feminism and the cohesion of new commercial amusements into a mass culture. At the height of Ruth Budd's career (in 1920) the 'woman movement' achieved its most pressing goal in the United States: the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote.<sup>2</sup> Ruth Budd herself was known as a champion of women's suffrage; to prove that women were equal to men, she invited observers to touch her steely biceps and bragged that she could 'pick up any man twice [her] own weight and set him out on the sidewalk'.<sup>3</sup> While Ruth Budd's somersaults and swings suggested the promise (and power) of women's political activism in the early twentieth century, Budd was also a warning to

women who pursued careers, athletics or education outside domesticity. Much of the publicity surrounding Ruth Budd, for example, was a multi-layered backlash against the women's activism. The responses to two aspects of her career, in particular, cast Ruth Budd in a negative light. As Darwa—the 'female Darwin'—in a 1919 silent film, *A Scream in the Night*, she appeared to be an animal, and in her well-publicized and controversial engagement to a female impersonator, Karyl Norman in 1921, she was sexually 'deviant'.

The social status of the New Woman ('the independent, athletic, sexual and modern' woman exemplified by Ruth Budd) was closely linked with the growing business of commercial leisure around the turn of the century, including the popular institutions of vaudeville and motion pictures where Ruth Budd earned her living.<sup>4</sup> Vaudeville, a collection of disparate acts (comedians, jugglers and acrobats) marketed mainly to a family audience, emerged in the 1890s and quickly became

a national industry, with chains of theatres, controlled by a few businessmen, extending across the country.<sup>5</sup> And, in the early twentieth century, short silent films (often only a minute long) became the central attraction at movie theatres, known as nickelodeons because of the usual admission charge of a nickel. Both vaudeville and film focussed on female patrons as the key to gaining a respectable status in the early twentieth century; these industries had to transform the traditional notion that women did not belong in the public space of theatres (seen as masculine and immoral) to broaden their audiences and uplift their reputations.<sup>6</sup> As commercial amusements recruited female patrons they encouraged women's search for autonomy, public adventure and romance; young working girls sometimes defied their parents and brothers to meet their dates at vaudeville houses or movie shows, and social reformers were alarmed at the possibility of women's unchaperoned sexual activity in these public spaces.<sup>7</sup> But while these new amusements eroded patriarchal authority and Victorian notions of white women's passionlessness, they also established the sexual objectification of women as a primary pleasure of mass culture: women, as consumers and sexual spectacles to be consumed, were the currency of mass culture. In this context, a female acrobat's body and her seemingly masculine tricks are indeed a rich cultural canvas.

Historians and cultural critics have already identified the acrobat as a contentious

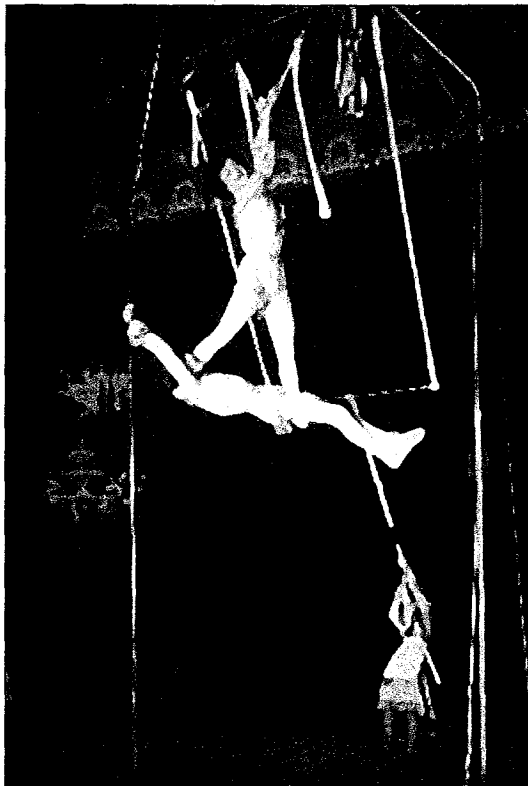
cultural symbol. As female acrobats defy—momentarily—physical limitations by flying through the air, they seem to rise above social constraints. But the female fliers return to the ground; they are drawn back into the social structures that their soaring feats seem to resist. In her analysis of the promise and perils of the New Woman, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes Djuna Barnes's fictional acrobat—Frau Mann—from her 1936 novel *Nightwood* as a symbol of the possibility of flying free of all gender codes as well as the penalty imposed on women for soaring above these codes. Frau Mann 'violates all social categories and gender restraints', while her name also suggests the label 'Mannish Lesbian', the category used to marginalize many New Women.<sup>8</sup> Ruth Budd's career reveals the tensions between freedom and restraint in mass culture, but, even more precisely, this acrobat, widely known as the 'upside down lady', embodies questions about the inversion of gender hierarchy and the social order, from notions of sexual deviancy (which were tied to gender inversions) to assertions of white women's biological duty to their race in the battles for evolutionary progress.

Ruth Budd and her brother Giles, known as the Aerial Budds, first performed in circuses and fairs around the United States in the early 1900s, and later in their career they appeared regularly in vaudeville. Their juvenile act featured Ruth Budd in the traditionally masculine position in an

aerial routine. Because Ruth Budd was several years older and many pounds heavier than her brother Giles, she undertook the tasks of carrying and manipulating her brother in the act. Giles, on the other hand, displayed his body more passively, frequently posing. While Ruth's and Giles's ages made their positions in the act 'natural', they nevertheless exploited the reversal of gender roles. A 1910 advertising pamphlet shows Giles Budd dressed as a girl, and publicity about the Aerial Budds often commented on Giles's vulnerability and Ruth's strength. One reviewer observed, "The little fellow is juggled about by the

FIGURE 1

*Ruth and Giles Budd (the Aerial Budds) circa 1910.  
Courtesy of the Allen County-Fort Wayne  
Historical Society.*



girl in a manner that makes the audience hold their breath, lest he should fall to his death.'<sup>9</sup>

In this way, Ruth and Giles Budd reversed the gender division of labour in acrobatic acts. Women were supposed to remain largely dependent on the manoeuvres of male acrobats, who were expected to be the muscular anchors of the stunts. Women usually posed while men held, twisted and swung them.<sup>10</sup> The masculine role—including stationary poses—was to undergird these moments of feminine spectacle. In his unpublished review of an acrobatic act, one vaudeville manager stated this division quite clearly: "The man in this act does some very good contortion work and some novelties in the way of acrobatic dancing ... the woman is excess baggage".<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, many performers, including Ruth Budd, often reversed this gender hierarchy with great success. A vaudeville theatre manager, for example, noted that one act was a 'hit' largely because of the novelty of the act: "[T]he woman [is] doing the work usually performed by the male partner and doing it well".<sup>12</sup>

In fact, many vaudeville acrobatic acts contained a 'sexual enigma', a tradition extending back through the history of the circus. In the late nineteenth century, as theatre historian Laurence Senelick explains, the acrobat Farini made-up one of the boys in his troupe as a woman, billing him as 'M'lle Lulu'. He sang a song in his routine that included the line, 'Wait till I'm a man!' and was celebrated as an

amazing female gymnast for seven years until a medical examination revealed the truth.<sup>13</sup> Acrobatic performances were often the occasion for gender reversals in which women undertook 'masculine' feats of muscle while men often dressed in women's clothes. Feminine apparel and display were thus central to these acts for men *and* women. Given this context, it is not surprising that Ruth Budd incorporated the reversal of gender roles in her act along with a manipulation of feminine sexual spectacle; both elements brought Ruth Budd attention, but also some disrepute.

Giles Budd's series of accidents, beginning in 1912 and ending with a broken leg in 1915, demonstrate that his vulnerability was more than inflated advertising rhetoric. Giles had four serious falls, the last forcing him out of the act. Giles Budd's 1915 injury precipitated many changes in the Budds' routine. Yet even if Giles Budd had not left the act, the Aerial Budds would have faced questions about how to make the transition from juvenile to adult performers. At the time of her brother's final accident, Ruth Budd was twenty years old, stretching the limits of a juvenile performer, and Giles Budd's maturity meant a change in the weight distribution in the act. Ruth Budd, in 1915, explained that their different weights and his leg injury made the routine increasingly difficult: 'Giles can't work very well since his leg was broken and I have to help him so much and he is quite heavy. He weighs 120 and I only weigh 106.'<sup>14</sup> Even without

Giles, however, Ruth Budd continued to structure her acrobatic act around gender inversion. Juxtaposing masculine athletics with feminine display, Ruth Budd found greater success as a single performer in vaudeville than the Aerial Budds had ever achieved, emerging as a 'feature' act in vaudeville by 1919.<sup>15</sup>

To embellish her solo performance Ruth Budd extended the song-and-dance segments and slowed down her acrobatic work; she also began to present herself in a more conventionally feminine way.

FIGURE 2

*Publicity photograph of Ruth Budd in her white union suit, circa 1916. Around this time Ruth Budd began her solo act by adding new dances and songs, such as 'The Girl with the Smile'. Courtesy of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society.*



Appearing at a dressing table and singing about make-up, Ruth Budd began her act as a pleasing young woman eager to show-off her beauty. Yet this feminine display, similar to other women's acts in vaudeville, was only temporary in her routine, for Ruth Budd discarded her vanity and dainty persona when she launched into her aerial performance. She began her act with her new trademark song, 'The Girl with the Smile', which referred to her 'little song and dance', and did not mention acrobatics at all.<sup>16</sup> When Ruth Budd was mistakenly billed as Queen of the Air' in 1916 she complained that 'It spoils my opening. My opening song is "The Girl with the Smile" and then if I am billed like an aerial artist they wonder why I am singing and dancing'.<sup>17</sup> By contrasting her song and dance opening with her acrobatic work, Ruth Budd increased the audience's awe at her athletic feats. A 1917 *Variety* review by Sime Silverman described the disjunction between Budd's femininity and her athleticism: 'The house is surprised when they see the girl go from dresses to acrobatics and that surprise is intensified when noting what a finished gymnast Miss Budd is'.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Ruth Budd had played the masculine role in contrast to her younger brother, she created the split between masculinity and femininity chronologically in her new solo act.

With her new feminine and erotic songs and dances, Ruth Budd tried to exploit the sexualization of female athletes for her own ends in vaudeville. Historians have

noted that women's athleticism early in the twentieth century was often interpreted and marketed as sexual display. Journalists and spectators in the early twentieth century often focussed more on women's clothing and appearance than their skill.<sup>19</sup> By introducing herself as 'The Girl with the Smile', Budd may have been trying to define herself as a 'lady' athlete. The 'lady' athlete and the 'mannish' athlete were two characterizations of the sportswoman that emerged from the late nineteenth century and continued into the 1920s. In the 1880s and 1890s when middle-class and elite white women, including reformer Frances Willard, became involved in the bicycle craze, they were able to claim their femininity and refinement in contrast to rough, working-class women. Later, in the 1920s, glamorous stars in acceptably 'feminine' sports such as tennis publicly espoused sport's ability to enhance women's beauty and charm, as opposed to the dangers of masculine sports and the image of the unkempt, 'mannish' female athlete. Tennis champion Suzanne Lenglen epitomized a modern feminine ideal—active, sensual, trim, and less inhibited than the older generation of women. And she promoted this ideal not only by winning tennis matches but also by offering fashion tips and make-up advice. By emphasizing her feminine appearance in the first part of her act, Budd may have been trying to appropriate the fresh sexuality of 'lady' athletes such as Lenglen. Whatever her intentions, it is clear that her masculine identity, built on

her gender inversions, overpowered the 'ladylike' dimensions of her act. She remained primarily a 'mannish' athlete associated with the taint of sexual immorality and circus animals.

Many observers felt that her disrobing and sexual innuendoes did not match vaudeville's public notion of refinement. Her pert song and dance at the start of her act may have offered a more conventional woman than the young female acrobat who twirled her brother in mid-air; but the 'new' Ruth Budd also introduced elements of sexuality that remained somewhat controversial in vaudeville, an industry which marketed itself largely as moral entertainment for women and their families. Like Ruth Budd, other female acrobats included disrobing as a salacious element of their acts; such scenes were sometimes cut because they were too controversial. Emerie and Silvern's acrobatic routine, for example, contained an innovative disrobing scene that the manager found to be provocative. The woman, Emerie, and her male assistant, Silvern, began their act in evening clothes, and after her partner pretended to drug her glass of wine on stage, she kicked off his hat and climbed up to her trapeze where she began to strip down to tights. The manager of a prominent vaudeville theatre in Philadelphia concluded that 'This part of the act is a little tart, but, on the whole, inoffensive.'<sup>20</sup> Another manager, however, found that the disrobing in this couple's routine went too far: 'We were compelled to cut out the

disrobing act of the lady member of the team', concluded the Cleveland manager.<sup>21</sup>

It is not surprising, then, to find viewers focussed on the sexual nature of Budd's disrobing: 'We waited, we saw,' wrote one critic, 'It was worth the time ... Ruth is billed as the girl with the smile. I didn't notice the smile. Her ankles are lovely.'<sup>22</sup> An audience member's letter to Budd on 13 October 1917, points to her lack of refinement because of her sexual suggestions and appearance on stage. Criticizing her trapeze work as second-class and declaring 'Just listen, Ruth! You can't sing,' this disgruntled patron was most upset by Budd's 'immoral' attempts to arouse the audience. He refers specifically to the transition to her acrobatic uniform, beginning at the end of her 'make-up' song when her maid starts to unzip her dress: '[T]hat make-up business spoilt our idea of your act and your character. What you chanted and what you did was silly enough, but the last part of the thing was disgusting (I am no wowser—but a soldier, an officer and a man). Of course the whole thing was specially devised for that smack of immorality. There was nothing wrong with your acrobatic dress', he concluded, 'but come on like that. The dirty part is the disrobing.'<sup>23</sup> The use of sexual spectacle was thus complicated for Budd. She could reveal a sexual knowingness in contrast to her previous juvenile identity and in keeping with the sexual assertiveness of the New Woman. But these additions also left her open to charges of immorality. For Budd, respectability was indeed tenuous.



As Ruth Budd earned success with her single act in vaudeville, she also gained notoriety outside of vaudeville in a film about Charles Darwin's theories of evolution, and in her engagement to a female impersonator. These events articulate two interlocking strands of anxiety about shifting gender roles and the proper boundaries of sexuality in the early twentieth century: the consternation over 'racial' suicide and the rising attention to sexual 'deviance'. While Darwin had been optimistic about natural selection in 1871, by 1899 he pessimistically looked at America and saw 'beaten men from beaten races'.<sup>24</sup> Such cynicism and xenophobia laid the foundation for the notion of 'race suicide'. Theodore Roosevelt and others believed that women of the better classes were squandering their reproductive energies on careers and politics, while women from less civilized races produced more unfit children. The birth control movement, for example, drew on these theories, as Margaret Sanger, the movement's leader, argued that birth control would bring 'more children from the fit, less from the unfit'.<sup>25</sup> This concept was so popular that comedians joked about it on the vaudeville stage; in fact, one theatre manager ordered a performer to cut his 'Roosevelt squib regarding race suicide'.<sup>26</sup> Women who entered the traditionally male realms of sports, politics and education increasingly faced the criticism that they were wasting their reproductive capacity and injuring the 'race'.

On 14 March 1919 Ruth Budd wrote from Miami, Florida: 'You will be surprised when I tell you ... I am down here working in a picture ... It is to be called the *Female of the Species* and I am Darwa'.<sup>27</sup> Eventually retitled *A Scream in the Night*, Ruth Budd's film examined women's place in Darwin's scheme: was Darwa a mother fit to advance the race? A scientist, Professor Silvio, kidnaps a small girl, Darwa, and places her in the jungle near the Amazon River for eleven years in an attempt to prove Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>28</sup> When Darwa returns to society, she is soon engaged to an aristocrat, but Professor Silvio disrupts the marriage plans by exposing Darwa as a 'crossing of the species, not a true woman'.<sup>29</sup> In Silvio's view Darwa's successful assimilation into society was proof of Darwinian theory. But still unsatisfied, Silvio again abducts Darwa and imprisons her with an ape. Her intellect triumphs over the ape as she tricks the ape into shooting himself. After Darwa points the gun at her head and 'pulls the trigger against the empty chamber', the ape imitates her with a loaded chamber. Darwa resists the crossing of the species or, as one publicist wrote, she escaped 'a thing worse than death'.<sup>30</sup> A *Variety* review recognized that the film was confusing, pointing out that Darwa's survival in the woods and in high society offers no proof of evolutionary theory: 'What [Silvio] seeks to prove by the experiment is hard to fathom'.<sup>31</sup> The filmmakers seem to have sacrificed scientific consistency for

'sensationalism'.<sup>32</sup> Promoters of the film, however, tried to clarify the confusion about the film's message by emphasizing that the film refuted Darwin's theories. The advertisements that they suggested for the film said that Darwa's intellectual superiority over the ape (her ability to think creatively as opposed to the ape's limited, imitative skills) disproved Darwin's connection between monkeys and humans: 'He did not consider the fact that mankind's mentality is a God-given gift unto itself', stated one editorial that publicists recommended printing in newspapers to create interest in the film.<sup>33</sup>

FIGURE 3.

*Ruth Budd as Darwa, the female Darwin, from her feature film, The Scream in the Night, 1919. She complained about being treated like a monkey on the set. Courtesy of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society.*



While some advertisements pointed out that Darwa distinguished herself from any ape ancestry at the film's conclusion, other accounts of Ruth Budd as well as her vaudeville and circus associations clearly positioned her as a monkey. This acrobat continued to convey the darker side of athletic women and evolutionary scenarios: she was a monkey in the hierarchy of civilization. A newspaper headline, for example, proclaimed that 'Movies Made Ruth Budd Real "Monkey"'. In the article Budd complained about the ape costume she wore, the swinging acrobatics she performed and the real monkeys on the set who threw coconuts at her. 'I had to drop twenty-five or thirty feet from the top of a banyan tree into a palm tuft and swing by my improvised tail, which threatened to come out at any moment', Budd explained in the article.<sup>34</sup> Budd's previous association with the circus also suggested her affinity with animals, for the circus was considered disreputable partly because of its reliance on animal acts and partly because of its popularity with rural ('unsophisticated') America. Some vaudeville performers, in fact, attempted to uplift their reputations by declaring that they would not appear on a vaudeville bill that included any animal acts.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in the early twentieth century several vaudeville acts featured monkeys in acrobatic work, solidifying the sense that acrobats were monkeys. In 'The Monkey Hippodrome', for example, monkeys played in an orchestra, juggled with their feet, performed feats of strength

and disrobed during their aerial act, according to a manager's review in 1913.<sup>36</sup>

The correlation of women and monkeys had been established earlier by Victorian scientists in their accounts of evolution. Although *A Scream in the Night*, released in 1919, should not be considered in a Victorian context, this film about evolution starring a woman swinging through trees in the jungle was a powerful reminder of this late nineteenth-century framework. In the evolutionary scheme, a woman often appeared as an 'arrested male', occupying a position beneath European men in the evolutionary hierarchy and seething with the race's 'base' characteristics. Victorian scientists often saw women as children and as savages; they pointed out that women, like children, were physically smaller and more delicate than men, and they argued that women's skulls, skeletons, and behaviours resembled 'savages'. Unlike men, but like primates, they were apt to 'resort to biting and scratching', according to one scientist.<sup>37</sup> The woman/monkey may have solidified the status of European men, many of whom were troubled by the implications of evolution. 'Kinship with animals', explains historian Cynthia Russett, 'raised disturbing reflections, not least the possibility that civilization was no more than a thin veneer over the savage self.'<sup>38</sup> Women like Ruth Budd, then, symbolized an evolutionary stage that white men had already surpassed, and they provided evidence of 'masculine excellence'.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, as these examples show, Budd was probably the wrong performer to disprove the human connection with a primate past. Her inversion of gender roles in the film and in vaudeville marked her, for example, as a 'less civilized' creature. As Gail Bederman has demonstrated, the stages of evolution from 'simple savagery' to 'advanced and valuable civilization' were distinguished by the extent of their 'sexual differentiation'. While 'civilized' men and women embraced divergent spheres of activity and had different identities, gender differences were not as pronounced among 'primitives'. 'Savage women', explains Bederman, 'were aggressive, carried heavy burdens, and did all sorts of 'masculine' hard labor'.<sup>40</sup>

This film's close resemblance to the popular Tarzan narratives of the early twentieth century implies that Budd was less a female Darwin than a female Tarzan. The comparison with Tarzan further exaggerated her masculine identity. *A Scream in the Night* was an adaptation of the well-known book and film, *Tarzan of the Apes*. Edgar Rice Burroughs published *Tarzan of the Apes* as a magazine serial in 1912 and as a book in 1914; the first of forty-five movie versions was produced in 1918, one year before Budd began working on *A Scream in the Night*. Orphaned by aristocratic parents in Africa, Tarzan is raised by an ape to become a great fighter in the jungle; he learns from books left behind by his parents, and successfully uses his father's hunting knife in his battles with stronger, bigger apes. As a young

adult, this human 'king of the apes' falls in love with a white woman, Jane Porter, who arrives in Africa after a mutiny. He follows Jane to America where Tarzan realizes his noble heritage. Like Tarzan, Darwa grows up in the jungle, becomes quite proficient in athletic skills of survival, and then embraces her position among 'socialites' in America. Tarzan's primitive upbringing and elite family background combine to make him a particularly powerful symbol of the masculine ideal in the early twentieth century. He was an example of how men could be revitalized by adopting some aspects of savagery. Tarzan's boyhood among the apes made him strong and aggressive because he escaped the feminizing influences of civilization that many observers believed sapped the virility of most men. Budd's association with Tarzan thus encouraged viewers to see her less as a virtuous woman (as the film's conclusion tries to convince spectators that she is) than as a masculine woman.

Much of the portrait of Darwa casts a negative light on Budd's appropriation of masculine roles on stage and screen; yet some positive discussion of Budd's athleticism show that the characterization of female athletes as masculine and savage did not stand alone. Darwinian concerns about the fitness of the Anglo-Saxon race were also the basis of the promotion of athletics for women, and of Ruth Budd's film role in particular. The producers of *A Scream in the Night* tapped into the support for women's sport as a way to

improve maternal health and thus stave off race suicide. A pioneer in women's physical education, Dudley Sargent, argued, for example, that 'good form in figure and good form in motion ... tend to inspire admiration in the opposite sex and therefore play an important part in what is termed "sexual selection"'.<sup>41</sup>

Advertisements for Budd's film bragged that the star was a 'perfect specimen of womanhood' and emphasized how acrobatics had helped Budd overcome ailments. In particular, publicity compared Ruth Budd favourably with vaudeville swimmer and diver Annette Kellerman, another woman who had benefited from the healing powers of sport.<sup>42</sup> Athletic regimes allegedly cured childhood illness for Ruth Budd as well as Kellerman, and remade them into perfect specimens of womanhood. Kellerman reportedly began to swim because of her weak legs, while Budd's father put her 'through a course of calisthenics later setting up rings and horizontal bars' to cure her slight physique.<sup>43</sup> 'I started acrobatic work when a very small child', explained Budd in 1919, 'by the doctor's orders'.<sup>44</sup> The phrase 'specimens of womanhood' signals that these women were hailed by scientists—and were presumably fit for motherhood. The athletic woman—perhaps the intimidating acrobat who can lift men twice her size—could be contained through maternal service and racial uplift. Women's expanding roles in education, sport and various professions may have inspired fears of racial suicide, but the

sporting woman's maternal 'fitness' was a soothing concept.

Sexually attractive and assertive, Ruth Budd was thus a symbol of the end of weak femininity; such a daring woman represented the strong woman that female reformers and physical-education professionals had hailed as model of emancipated womanhood since the late nineteenth century. The producers of *A Scream in the Night* recommended disseminating Ruth Budd's claim that 'women are not the weaker sex'. 'In this picture ... Miss Budd accomplishes feats requiring strength and agility that appear to be beyond a girl so winsomely feminine', asserted one article: 'Certainly no member of her sex and few of the opposite sex, can swing through forty or fifty feet of space.'<sup>45</sup>

Despite some positive interpretations of and justifications for Budd's gender inversions, her 'masculinity' brought her sexuality into question. While the film had raised questions about Budd's fitness as a mother and doubts about women's roles outside motherhood, her affair with a female impersonator suggested that women who crossed into 'male' social realms were also sexually abnormal. In one case, Budd was a primate; in the other case, she was a 'pervert'. But in both scenarios, Budd seemed to reject maternity and thus threaten the gender order and the health of civilization.

During a tour of Australia in 1917-18, Ruth Budd met George Peduzzi, a female

impersonator billed as the Creole Fashion Plate. They performed on the same bill at the Tivoli Theatre in Melbourne during the last week of August in 1917.<sup>46</sup> Three years later Budd again crossed paths with Peduzzi, who by this time had changed his stage name to the deliberately androgynous Karyl Norman. Following Norman and Ruth Budd's announcement in August 1921 that they planned to marry the following June, they often performed on the same vaudeville bills: Norman joined Budd from his seat in the

FIGURE 4

*George Peduzzi (whose stage name was Karyl Norman or The Creole Fashion Place). He probably sent this picture to her in the years after their first meeting (in 1917) when they were travelling in different parts of the United States and England. Courtesy of the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society.*



auditorium or appeared as a separate act on the bill. When Norman and Budd called off their marriage one month before the wedding, they ignited curiosity about the nature of their relationship and the cause of the break-up. Her affair stirred up gossip about Budd, as one acquaintance wrote to Budd that someone 'had said a number of catty things against you' after she and Norman split up.<sup>47</sup> Their performances together, the accompanying reviews as well as dialogues about their upcoming marriage and hostile break-up fused these two figures in the public spotlight.

The engagement of an 'unnatural' woman and an 'unnatural' man pointed not to a heterosexual union but to the gay subculture of the early twentieth century. Definitions of sexual perversion in the early twentieth century depended most on the reversal of gender roles. Historian George Chauncey has shown that early twentieth-century definitions of abnormal sexual identity were tied to the inversion of gender status, rather than a binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality based on the choice of sexual partners. Normal men, for example, were contrasted with 'fairies' who were identified not through their sexual activity with other men, but through their womanliness.<sup>48</sup>

Sexologists, in addition, linked women's 'unnatural' sexuality to women's 'masculine' traits as well as their feminist political aims. They often interpreted women's cross-dressing and athletics as signs of 'sexual inversion' and described

lesbians as being masculine in appearance and personality.<sup>49</sup> In the hands of sexologists, the label of sexual inversion became a tool for challenging and discrediting the New Woman, including women's romantic friendships and feminist goals. To counter women's expanding roles, some sexologists tied their definitions of unnatural, inverted sexuality to their eugenicist beliefs. Havelock Ellis, for example, was concerned that professional and political women were selfish for neglecting their primary roles as childbearers and childrearsers.<sup>50</sup>

Published accounts of this failed romance hinted at the abnormality of Ruth Budd and Karyl Norman's inversion of gender roles, and hence their 'perverted' sexuality. One author explained the reversals of Ruth Budd and Karyl Norman in terms of eagles and doves. 'Eagles and doves have tried to mate before without success', the author explained, 'But always the eagle was a man ... and the dove was a maid—some gentle, cooing creature who wanted nothing save a cozy love nest.'<sup>51</sup> This author tied Ruth Budd's gender inversion to the physical inversions in her acrobatic act, connecting his description of her as an eagle to her 'head-first' plunges on stage: 'Ruth Budd takes that breath-catching swoop at full speed, darting head first down the thread-like cable.'<sup>52</sup> Theatre critic Karl K. Kitchen, in addition, explained, '[I]f the Creole Fashion Plate was known to possess certain feminine characteristics, his prospective bride was

equally noted for certain masculine traits. For while Karyl Norman affected feminine furbelows on the stage, Miss Budd appeared in the most mannish "tailor-mades" in private life.<sup>53</sup> The suggestion of Budd's off-stage transvestism and her well-known athleticism clearly point to the category of the sexual invert, a label that many late nineteenth-century sexologists attached to women who attempted to 'pass' as men.

Budd alleged that the affair was actually a publicity stunt, claiming that Norman 'regarded his engagement to [Budd] merely as the means for keeping himself in the eyes of the public'.<sup>54</sup> She sued Norman for 'breach of promise', and reportedly won \$8,000.<sup>55</sup> Norman countered with an alternative explanation, that there was 'Too much mother-in-law'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, both performers' mothers worked closely with their children, helping with their acts and managing their professional engagements. Karl Kitchen noted that 'when the two performers found themselves together their two mothers were not far distant'.<sup>57</sup> Norman alleged that Ruth Budd had 'insisted on having her mother travel along with them on the honeymoon and afterward when [they] were on the road'.<sup>58</sup> While designed as an attack on Budd, this explanation actually calls attention to Norman's effeminacy. His attachment to his mother marks him as weak and feminine, while Budd, as a woman, would have seemed to be more 'naturally' in need of a chaperone. Norman's reason for the failed

engagement would also have been familiar to fans of vaudeville comedy; he relied on vaudeville's popular 'mother-in-law' jokes.<sup>59</sup>

Descriptions of the break-up also undermined the New Woman. Attacking Ruth Budd's career, Norman allegedly had tried to transform Ruth Budd into an ideal wife. Budd claimed that Norman had demanded that she give up her overprotective mother, leave the stage and travel with Norman as his dresser: 'Well, I even went so far as to agree to that,' confessed Budd, 'to give up everything ... and just travel about helping him dress himself'.<sup>60</sup> Some observers speculated, however, that she was not qualified to be Norman's dresser. The *Baltimore American* reported that Norman 'questioned whether she would be altogether successful in dressing him'.<sup>61</sup> Budd did not appear to be sufficiently feminine, caring or subservient.

Like other female impersonators, Norman was linked in a variety of ways to a gay male subculture. Female impersonator Julian Eltinge was reportedly popular with gay men in particular, although he publicly disassociated himself from disreputable female impersonators, who were more openly associated with gay men.<sup>62</sup> Eltinge proclaimed his virility in the press, using publicity photographs that showed him in athletic garb and boxing gloves jabbing at another man. Such attempts to assert his 'true' manhood contrast with Bert Savoy, a female impersonator who regularly used 'she' and 'her' to refer to himself, and also

used slang from gay subculture in his routine. One line from his act, 'dishing the dirt', was identified as 'fag parlance' in a theatrical publication.<sup>63</sup> Norman, in addition, became a performer at the Pansy Club, which opened in 1930; the club offered entertainment resembling 'drag balls', the occasions which featured the effeminate homosexual or the 'fairy' on display in glamorous women's clothes.<sup>64</sup> This club and Norman's career exemplify what historian George Chauncey has called the 'pansy craze', the period from 1920–1933, in which gay men were increasingly visible in New York city's central entertainment district—Times Square. A few comments from vaudeville theatre managers reveal that they discouraged the appearances of effeminate men on their stages. In 1910 Ned Hastings, the manager of Keith's Hippodrome in Cleveland, criticized the 'Clipper Quartette' for just that reason: 'Most of the time is taken up by a Dutchman chasing a "sissy" about the stage. They were laughed at and applauded, but the act would have a more intelligent appeal if ... much of their brand of comedy [was] eliminated.'<sup>65</sup>

Though a lesbian subculture was less established than a gay male subculture, lesbians were increasingly visible in the 1920s as sexual experimentation, particularly bisexuality but also lesbianism, was in vogue. Several male impersonators who worked in variety and vaudeville in the late nineteenth century had long-term romantic relationships with

women, but their private lives were not well-known to the theatre-going public.<sup>66</sup> By the 1920s, performers' off-stage romances were more visible. The lesbian on stage was one attraction of Harlem to those seeking adventure in the 1920s. Male impersonator Gladys Bentley, for example, wore men's clothes on stage and on the street, and was married (dressed in a tuxedo) in a civil ceremony in New Jersey to a woman. The broader cultural support for revolt also helped lesbians establish a community in Greenwich Village in the 1920s. But, as Lillian Faderman has shown, bisexuality was more accepted than lesbianism; radical men in the Greenwich Village milieu often pressured women to give up relationships with other women. Despite the support for sexual freedom in the 1920s, the lesbian was a 'pariah'. In particular, the lesbian became an obstacle to the post-World War I standard of companionate marriage, a union that was supposed to feature cooperation, friendship and sexual satisfaction for husband and wife.<sup>67</sup> In this period, then, it was quite easy to explain the failure of Budd's and Norman's romance by intimating that Budd was a mannish lesbian and Norman a 'sissy'.

Ruth Budd's fame in vaudeville faded by the late 1920s and, in contrast to the risqué publicity that had once surrounded her, she settled down to a fairly conventional life. In 1927 she married Ray Hanna, a stage hand and electrician in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who had corresponded with her for sixteen years. After her marriage she



continued to perform, but her star in vaudeville had fallen. Considering the gender novelty of her routine and the gossip surrounding her affair with Karyl Norman, perhaps it is fitting that she was replaced on one vaudeville bill in 1927 by a transvestite male acrobat, Barquette. A review of Barquette's appearance at the Palace late in his career jokingly commented that theatre management had forgotten to obtain the 'endorsements of Ruth Budd and Karyl Norman' for Barquette's act.<sup>68</sup> Her scandal thus lingered on after she had embarked on her married life in the American midwest. When she injured her wrists in a fall at a Los Angeles theatre in 1929 she sued the theatre and used the settlement to finance her retirement, although she did come back to the stage (mainly in Fort Wayne) several times in the 1930s. Along with performing intermittently, she opened a small grocery store and worked there as a clerk with her husband and her parents. She died on 11 December 1968.

Whether hanging from a tree using her make-shift monkey's tail or swinging across the vaudeville stage on her trapeze, Ruth Budd's inverted female form suggested a variety of social disruptions, from inverted sexuality to evolutionary collapse. An acrobat's bodily tricks and irreverent play with gender roles became a symbol of women's varied challenges to patriarchal hierarchy in the early twentieth century. And, as Ruth Budd's tainted reputation suggests, the changes in women's social status were uneven and, in

many ways, unwelcome. Circus monkeys, Tarzan, Darwa and Karyl Norman. All were links in a chain of deviance and disrepute for 'the upside down lady'. Her career certainly shows the freedoms for women in vaudeville to perform in 'men's' roles and to use a more sexually aggressive persona; and Budd was also lauded as an emblem of the end of Victorian constraints on women. But Ruth Budd also symbolized the dark side of the new freedoms for women: her resemblance to a monkey and the suggestion of her perverted sexuality pointed to the dangers of women outside of and unfit for maternity and marriage. Her gender inversion on stage proved to be a powerful and enduring foundation for doubts about her morality and normality. ~

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## NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Historian Wilton Eckley describing acrobat and circus star Lillian Leitzel, whose career overlapped with Ruth Budd's. See Eckley, *The American Circus* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 182.
- <sup>2</sup> Nancy Cott explains that 'feminism', a twentieth-century development which contrasted with the nineteenth-century 'woman movement', overlapped with the suffrage cause. Feminists were a minority presence in the 'woman suffrage' movement but influenced its ideology with their emphasis on rights as opposed to woman's moral influence. See Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 37.
- <sup>3</sup> 'She Can Carry Ballot to Box', 25 September 1916, clipping, box 1, vol. 7, Ruth Budd Collection (hereafter cited as RBC), Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
- <sup>4</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working women and leisure in turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 7. See also, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The New Woman as Androgyne: Social disorder and gender crisis, 1870-1936', in her *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245-96.
- <sup>5</sup> See Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- <sup>6</sup> See Kathy Peiss, 'Commercial Leisure and the "Woman Question"', in Richard Butsch (ed.), *For Fun and Profit: The transformation of leisure into consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 105-17.
- <sup>7</sup> See Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* and Lauren Rabinovitz, 'Temptations of Pleasure: Nickelodeons, amusement parks, and the sights of female sexuality', *Camera Obscura* 23 (Spring 1990), 71-88.
- <sup>8</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, 'The New Woman as Androgyne', p. 291. Film historians have turned to the anonymous female acrobat in the 1901 Edison film, *Trapeze Disrobing Act*, to describe the gendered power relations in spectatorship. This acrobat has served as an emblem of women's captivity as a sexual object in popular film in the early twentieth century for she reveals the structure of the male gaze and female spectacle. The film shows two men watching a woman's trapeze act. They become increasingly exuberant as the woman takes off her skirt, blouse and stockings and then performs a flip in her undergarments. Robert Allen concludes that the acrobat in *Trapeze Disrobing Act* was 'silenced, frozen in time and captured with the film's frame.' Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 271. See also, Judith Mayne, 'Uncovering the Female Body', in John Fell (ed.), *Before Hollywood: Turn of the century American film* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987), 63-7.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Exceeds Speed Limit: Acrobat act sixty miles an hour produced at the gaiety', April 1911, clipping, box 1, vol. 3, RBC.
- <sup>10</sup> *New York Hippodrome Winter Circus*, 11 February 1915, box 1, folder 6, RBC. First opening its doors in 1904, the Hippodrome was a huge theatre, accommodating circuses throughout the winter months.
- <sup>11</sup> Report Book 4, p. 44. Keith/Albee Collection, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa, USA (hereafter cited as KAC).
- <sup>12</sup> Report Book 1, p. 6. KAC.
- <sup>13</sup> Laurence Senelick, 'Boys and Girls Together: Subcultural origins of glamour drag and male impersonation on the nineteenth-century stage', in Lesley Ferris (ed.), *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on cross-dressing* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 83-4.

- <sup>14</sup> Ruth Budd to Ray Hanna, 13 June 1915, box 1, vol. 6, RBC.
- <sup>15</sup> A feature act was second only to the headline act out of the ten to twelve acts on a vaudeville bill.
- <sup>16</sup> Song typescript, box 1, vol. 6, RBC.
- <sup>17</sup> Ruth Budd to Ray Hanna, 24 August 1916, box 1, vol. 7, RBC.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Ruth Budd', *Variety*, 22 June 1917, clipping, box 1, vol. 7, RBC.
- <sup>19</sup> Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, sport and sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 68.
- <sup>20</sup> Report Book 6, p. 234, KAC.
- <sup>21</sup> Report Book 7, p. 11, KAC.
- <sup>22</sup> 'St. Havens Tops Bill', *Morning Oregonian*, 3 June 1918, clipping, box 2, vol. 8, RBC.
- <sup>23</sup> Anonymous fan to Ruth Budd, 30 October 1917, box 2, vol. 8, RBC, emphasis in the original.
- <sup>24</sup> Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, fitness, and sport in American society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 222.
- <sup>25</sup> Margaret Sanger, 'Why Not Birth Control in America?' *Birth Control Review*, May 1919, pp. 10–11, quoted in Linda Gordon, *Birth Control in America: Woman's body, woman's right* (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 281.
- <sup>26</sup> Report Book 6, p. 228, KAC.
- <sup>27</sup> Ruth Budd to Ray Hanna, 14 March 1919, box 2, vol. 9, RBC.
- <sup>28</sup> 'A Scream in the Night', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 8, box 2, vol. 9, RBC.
- <sup>29</sup> 'A Scream in the Night', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup> 'A Scream in the Night', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 8.
- <sup>31</sup> 'A Scream in the Night', *Variety*, 24 October 1919. Quoted in *Variety's Film Reviews, 1907–1920*, vol. 1 (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1983).
- <sup>32</sup> 'A Scream in the Night', *Variety*, 24 October, 1919, quoted in *Variety's Film Reviews*.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Man's Power of Reason', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 6.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Movies Made Ruth Budd Real "Monkey"', n.d., clipping, box 2, vol. 9, RBC.
- <sup>35</sup> Actress Annie Yeamans left vaudeville allegedly 'because she said she couldn't get on with the educated horse'. 'The Matinee Girl', *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 11 June 1904, p. 2. Furthermore, the police reportedly became involved in maintaining cultural order when they forbade blackface, acrobatic and animal acts to appear at the Actors' Fund Benefit, a charity production that included many vaudeville as well as dramatic performers. See 'Big Actors' Fund Benefit Given by White Rats', *The Player*, 6 May 1910, p. 17.
- <sup>36</sup> Report Book 15, p. 114, KAC; One trainer had a monkey perform on a swinging trapeze and the rings. Report Book 5, p. 136, KAC.
- <sup>37</sup> Carl Vogt, *Lectures on Man* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1864), p. 180, quoted in Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian construction of womanhood* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 56.
- <sup>38</sup> Russett, *Sexual Science*, p. 195.
- <sup>39</sup> Russett, *Sexual Science*, p. 205.
- <sup>40</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 25.
- <sup>41</sup> Dudley A. Sargent, 'How Can I Have a Graceful Figure?', *Ladies Home Journal* 29 (February 1912), p. 15, quoted in Susan Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth century women's sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 19–20.
- <sup>42</sup> Cahn, *Coming On Strong*, p. 257.

- <sup>43</sup> 'Ruth Budd is Perfect Specimen of Womanhood', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 8.
- <sup>44</sup> 'A Bit of Budd', *Variety*, 26 December 1919, p. 30.
- <sup>45</sup> 'Women are not the Weaker Sex, Says this Movie Star', *Exhibitors' Campaign Book*, p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Budd toured Australia and New Zealand from August 1917 to February 1918, performing on the Tivoli circuit in major cities such as Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Auckland. Looking back on her international career in 1945, she recalled, among other things, the boomerangs she had received as gifts in Australia. See Helyn Hitchcock, "'The Girl with the Smile' Acclaimed by Audiences Here, Abroad', *News-Sentinel* (Fort Wayne), 14 December 1945, clipping, box 3, vol. 20, RBC.
- <sup>47</sup> Letter to Ruth Budd, n.d., box 5, miscellaneous letter folder, RBC.
- <sup>48</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, urban culture and the making of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 55-6. See also, Ullman, "'The Twentieth Century Way": Female impersonation and sexual practice in turn-of-the-century America', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 5.4 (1995), 573-600.
- <sup>49</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A history of lesbian life in twentieth century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 46; See also, Jonathan N. Katz, 'The Invention of Heterosexuality', *Socialist Review* 90.1 (1990), 7-34. Julien Chevalier, a French sexologist, connected women's participation in 'masculine' sports and politics to female sexual inversion in his 1893 *Inversion sexuelle*.
- <sup>50</sup> For more on the famous sexologists, see Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, chapter 2.
- <sup>51</sup> 'Why the Strangest of Engagements Has Been Broken Off', clipping, 1922, box 2, vol. 12, RBC.
- <sup>52</sup> 'Why the Strangest of Engagements Has Been Broken Off'.
- <sup>53</sup> Karl Kitchen, 'Cancel of a Wedding Booking', *New York World*, 13 August 1922, box 2, vol. 12, RBC.
- <sup>54</sup> 'Ex-Fiancee Describes Wreck of "Fashion Plate's" Romance', 4 July 1922, clipping, box 2, vol. 12, RBC. This may have been a plausible explanation to the public, for by 1931 there were other cases in which male entertainers associated with femininity, female impersonation and gay subculture, also set up faux marriages. George Chauncey recounts the marriage of Gene Malin, a performer who had been a female impersonator and then became a 'pansy'. His marriage to Christine Williams and their quick divorce led reporters to contemplate whether or not he was homosexual. The *Daily News* asked, 'Is he—?' See Chauncey, *Gay New York*, pp. 314-318.
- <sup>55</sup> '\$8,000 Mends Broken Heart', *Zit's Theatrical Newspaper*, 23 May 1925, clipping, box 2, vol. 14, RBC.
- <sup>56</sup> '\$8,000 Mends Broken Heart'.
- <sup>57</sup> Kitchen, 'Cancel of a Wedding Booking'.
- <sup>58</sup> 'He'll Wed, Sure But Get Heart Balm, Try and Get It', *Daily News*, 1 July 1922, clipping, box 2, vol. 12, RBC.
- <sup>59</sup> At their most graphic, mother-in-law jokes drew the censure of managers. In 1903 Carl Lothrop, manager of Keith's Theatre in Boston, instructed Mr and Mrs Robyns to 'cut that portion of [your] opening song in which the coffin full of cheese is mistaken for the remains of a mother-in-law'. Report Book (1902-1903), p. 282, KAC.
- <sup>60</sup> 'Ex-Fiancee Describes Wreck of "Fashion Plate's" Romance'.

- <sup>61</sup> 'Ex-Fiancee Describes Wreck of "Fashion Plate's" Romance'.
- <sup>62</sup> Ullman, "'The Twentieth Century Way'", pp. 590-91.
- <sup>63</sup> Laurence Senelick, 'Lady and the Tramp: Drag differentials in the progressive era', in his *Gender in Performance: The presentation of difference in the performing arts*, (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992), pp. 37-8.
- <sup>64</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, p. 4.
- <sup>65</sup> Report Book 11, p. 22, KAC.
- <sup>66</sup> Senelick, 'Boys and Girls', pp. 90-93.
- <sup>67</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, chapter 3.
- <sup>68</sup> 'Barbette in Amazing Feats at the Palace', clipping, n.d., Barbette Clipping File, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library-Lincoln Center, New York, New York. For more on Barbette, see Francis Steegmuller, 'Onward and Upward with the Arts: An angel, a flower, a bird'. Someone wrote about Barbette's replacement of Budd in the margin of *Zits Theatrical Magazine*, 15 October, 1927, clipping, box 3, vol. 18, RBC.



CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AS STRATEGIC  
ESSENTIALISM: NEGOTIATING INDIANNESS  
IN A WESTERN CANADIAN RODEO  
FESTIVAL



*Contestants for the Indian and White Stampede Queen titles, Williams Lake,  
British Columbia, 1958*

The efforts of First Nations leaders in Canada to remodel their relationship with the Canadian state through court challenges, amendments to the Indian Act, and an overhaul of the Indian Affairs bureaucracy recently have drawn much media and public attention. Yet the politics of colonialism are not limited to national

corridors of power, nor are they limited to challenges to the institutional, legal and political/economic structures constraining aboriginal lives. Rather, they are also part of the very fabric of everyday social relations in small cities and towns across rural Canada. This is particularly true in British Columbia, where, after over

a hundred years of denying the existence of aboriginal title, the provincial and federal governments are now negotiating treaty settlements with First Nations. In many of the rural forestry communities there is a growing concern with the potential social and economic impacts of aboriginal treaties, and the issues of aboriginal rights, self-government, and the future of aboriginal/non-aboriginal relations are widely—and often heatedly—debated in coffee-shops, in public meetings and in community newspapers. In this context, First Nations leaders are striving to gain public support for aboriginal rights and treaties by challenging some of the fundamental assumptions of the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. They are questioning the widespread understandings of history and identity that have underpinned, and legitimated, the colonial process: the frontier histories that erase aboriginal people while celebrating the settlers' 'discovery' and 'conquest' of the empty wilderness; the demeaning stereotypes of aboriginality that deny people their individuality and moral integrity, and that encourage some to argue that aboriginal people simply 'don't deserve' treaty settlements.<sup>1</sup>

This paper addresses one of the multitude of strategies that First Nations leaders in one rural British Columbia community are employing to negotiate issues of identity and history with local Euro-Canadian residents.<sup>2</sup> This is the strategy of cultural performance: the staged public displays of

aboriginal cultural identity. Cultural performances, to be sure, have become central to the language of aboriginal politics. From testimony presented to the Canadian courts during aboriginal title cases to the actions of aboriginal protesters at sit-ins and roadblocks, the symbolic language of political protest all makes use of what has been called 'ethnodrama':<sup>3</sup> the dramatization of cultural symbols of Indianness for political gain. The particular performance I examine here, though, occurs not on ground controlled by aboriginal peoples, but in the overarching context of an annual summer festival that commemorates the history of one rural city in the province's interior region. Furthermore, this annual festival not only is controlled by a Euro-Canadian organizing committee, but it dramatically celebrates the colonial process itself: the festival pays tribute to the region's ranching and rodeo heritage, the 'taming' of the Wild West and the conquest of the British Columbia frontier, all processes that required the dispossession of aboriginal territories and the subjugation of the region's aboriginal peoples.

The Williams Lake Stampede is the most important tourist event of the year. During the four-day event the city transforms itself into an imagined Wild West settlement. Businesses and stores remodel their interiors into make-believe Western saloons, hotels and stables, while images of cowboys, Indians, horses and hay bales adorn store windows. There is a specific

slot assigned to aboriginal people: they are encouraged to participate as culturally exotic 'Indians', to enter the parade on horseback in traditional regalia, to put up arts and crafts booths and tipi villages on the rodeo grounds, and to stage displays of drumming and powwow dancing. The incorporation of aboriginal people into this Western frontier myth provides a mirror image through which the identity of the city is refracted and celebrated. Indian participation symbolically completes the script of colonial history being commemorated through the festival's events.

In the following pages I explore two issues. First, I trace the history of aboriginal participation in the Williams Lake Stampede and the ways in which aboriginal people have adopted the dramatic roles assigned to them in this festival of frontier history. I want to examine what Rayna Green sees as the apparent (and somewhat paradoxical) willingness of aboriginal people in North America to 'play Indian' in colonial dramatizations of history.<sup>4</sup> A historical perspective on this festival reveals a core ritual complex that has persisted for seven decades. This ritual complex imposes limits on the symbolic resources available to aboriginal people, who—within the context of this festival—are seeking to negotiate issues of identity with non-aboriginal people.

Second, I discuss the dilemma that area First Nations leaders face today in contemplating whether or not to become

involved in the Stampede festivities. I shift from a theoretical model approaching cultural performance as text to one highlighting performance as social action, and examine how various groups involved in the festival's events are engaging in struggles over the constitution of public identities and over the meaning of performances. I ask: how do area First Nations leaders interpret the benefits and pitfalls of performing Indianness in the overarching context of a Euro-Canadian-controlled and operated festival? Why are they choosing to adopt what appear to be colonial stereotypes of Indianness in order to present themselves to non-aboriginal audiences? My goal is not to deny the hegemonic power of colonial symbols, or as recent critics of resistance studies have put it, to romanticize resistance to the point where power, domination and the ambiguities of aboriginal responses to colonialism are rendered invisible.<sup>5</sup> Instead, my intent is simply to create an ethnographic space for understanding the strategic logic of First Nations leaders who, far from naïve about the hegemony of colonial stereotypes, are attempting nevertheless to transform cultural performances into vehicles of political power.

#### OVERVIEW: FIRST NATIONS AND WILLIAMS LAKE

Williams Lake lies some five hundred kilometers north of Vancouver in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of the British Columbia interior. The forest industry



forms the base of the regional economy, although ranching, mining, and government employment are also important. The city has a population of about ten thousand, but serves as the main commercial and administrative center for a much wider regional population of sixty thousand. Rural families regularly travel to the city to buy groceries, clothing, hardware and livestock supplies, and to obtain medical and government services. Included in the regional population are fifteen Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in and Carrier First Nation reserve communities, totalling about six thousand registered band members. Aboriginal people therefore comprise at least 10 to 15 per cent of the regional population.

The non-aboriginal population of Williams Lake has prospered greatly since the expansion of the forest industry in the 1950s. Many people are employed directly by the local mills as mill workers, truckers or contract loggers, or are employed indirectly through businesses such as machine repair shops and heavy equipment suppliers that provide the mills with goods and services. In contrast, aboriginal people in the Cariboo-Chilcotin over the last four decades have been largely excluded from employment as the forest industry and infrastructure of businesses, services and government agencies have grown and prospered. Their marginalization has been exacerbated by dependency on welfare and the extensive restrictions imposed by the Indian Act, the Indian reserve system and the coercive

policies of the federal Department of Indian Affairs. With the provincial and federal governments now engaged in treaty negotiations with a number of First Nations, the economic marginalization of aboriginal people is now beginning to shift. Many First Nations are beginning to establish relationships with government ministries, forest companies and local businesses, all of whom are anticipating a future in which First Nations will be in control of significant resources and will be important players in the regional economy.

At an everyday level, though, aboriginal relations with Euro-Canadian townspeople remain fraught with tension. While there is a public awareness of the importance of the values of multiculturalism and tolerance, racial prejudice and discrimination against aboriginal people are still evident both in the subtle gestures and the openly demeaning insults and behaviours that aboriginal people may be subjected to in the school yards, stores and pubs around town. Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people may occupy the same public spaces—the fast-food outlets, the grocery stores, the bingo halls, the recreational sports venues. But an implicit convention of mutual avoidance tends to reduce social interaction between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. They occupy relatively separate social worlds.

This social isolation is enhanced by the geographic isolation of reserve communities of the region. While

aboriginal people move freely between their reserves and the city, a similar movement among non-aboriginal people does not occur. Few non-aboriginal people, it seems, have visited reserve communities, and many seem to be unaware even of the names or locations of the different reserves. Indian reserves are invisible to non-aboriginal people except in the abstract: they are imagined as dangerous, foreign and violent places where non-aboriginal people are not welcome. The cultural life of reserve communities, and the cultural differences among the Secwepemc, Carrier and Tsilhqot'in people, also remain largely invisible.

In this context, one of the major tasks facing area First Nations leaders in attempting to advance claims to aboriginal title and rights and to develop more positive, respectful relations with non-aboriginal people, is that of initiating a meaningful dialogue. How might this dialogue begin? How can First Nations begin to challenge the negative identities they are often ascribed—the stereotypes of the 'drunken Indian', the 'Indian criminal', the 'lazy Indian living off government handouts'? How can First Nations leaders create a more positive climate for the education of their children in the local schools, for the treatment of aboriginal people within the justice system, or merely for the way aboriginal people are viewed in the public spaces in Williams Lake? Area First Nations leaders are employing a variety of strategies.

Cultural performance, and particularly the very public, positive expression of Indianness within the Stampede festival, is one strategy they are contemplating.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE STAMPEDE

The Williams Lake Stampede originated in 1919, the year the settlement of Williams Lake was officially born. By the 1920s the Stampede had become a popular annual event attended not only by village residents but by tourists, area ranchers, and Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in and Carrier people. The Stampede included several events now commonly associated with rodeo: roping competitions, bull and bronc riding events, and horse races. The Stampede, though, was not a purely local invention. It consisted of a ritual complex adopted from the Wild West exhibitions that originated in the United States in the 1880s and that, through the entrepreneurial skills of Buffalo Bill Cody, evolved into major entertainment spectacles shown to enthusiastic audiences throughout North America and Europe.<sup>6</sup> This ritual genre very quickly spread to small town festivals and fairs across North America, from the well-known Calgary Stampede and Cheyenne Frontier Days to the smaller agricultural fairs and exhibitions across the Canadian and American plains.<sup>7</sup>

The core events of Buffalo Bill's Wild West exhibitions were the demonstrations of cowboy skills of roping and trick riding, demonstrations that eventually evolved into contemporary rodeo. But it was their

dramatic reenactments of scenarios from the history of the Western frontier that captured the audience's attention and imagination. These reenactments included displays of a presumably static, 'pre-contact' Indian life—tipi villages, Indian dancing—as well as reenactments of Indian–white conflict on the frontier: Indian attacks on stagecoaches and settlers' cabins. Together, they presented narratives of the frontier myth of history, telling the story of the heroic encounter of whites and Indians on the frontier, the ultimate triumph of white settlement and conquest, and the regrettable but inevitable disappearance of Native people in the wake of progress and civilization.<sup>8</sup>

In Williams Lake, this ritual genre laid the foundation for the early Stampedes. Rodeo contests remained the central events. But in the 1920s a series of dramatic performances and contests were included that highlighted the frontier themes and Indian–white contrasts. Some novelty races were for Indians only. The 'Indian Race' of 1924 required participants to wear 'war bonnets'. In 1926, the Stampede program promised that spectators would be treated to displays of 'Indians dancing in their old-time costumes'. At the same time, the ritual complex was adapted to the regional setting. The famous Wild West scene of the Indian attack on a stagecoach was Canadianized: the 1924 program promised audiences would witness an Indian attack on a Hudson's Bay fort.

Over the next three decades the Stampede remained the most popular annual gathering for townspeople, area ranchers and aboriginal people alike. Over time, some events were modified and new ones added. By the 1950s, the local economy was booming and the population surging. There was efflorescence of popular cultural representations of the 'noble savage' in Hollywood westerns and television programs. At the same time, there was a new awareness of the dangers of racism, brought to international attention through the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. In this context, the Stampedes of the 1950s enacted new rituals of community identity through which Indians and whites were represented as existing in a balanced, harmonious relationship. While the dramatic performances of frontier conflict were dropped, the displays of Indian culture, Indian people and the Indian–white dichotomy remained central. In 1950, the colonial categories of Indian and white were elevated to new heights of reification with the modification of the Stampede queen contest to include both an Indian and a white queen. At the coronation ceremonies the Indian and white queens sat on matched thrones, the Indian queen in decorated buckskin and feathered headband, the white queen in a white satin gown and tiara. This image of a balanced, harmonious relationship contrasted sharply with the realities of ongoing racial discrimination and the conventional banning of aboriginal people from the hotels and restaurants around town.

In the 1960s climate of civil rights protests and increased movements towards racial integration, organizers of the Stampede decided to amalgamate the Indian and white queen contests into one. But the duality of the Indian/white archetype was preserved in other aspects. Aboriginal people, dressed in buckskin and regalia, continued to enter the Stampede parade. Secwepemc, Carrier and Tsilhqot'in families from across the Cariboo-Chilcotin travelled to the Stampede in horse-drawn wagons, setting up their canvas tents on the Stampede grounds where they remained for the week, visiting with friends and relatives and celebrating an intertribal community that largely excluded Euro-Canadian townspeople. Nevertheless, the 'Indian Camp', as it was known to non-aboriginal people, became a spectacle of tourist interest and curiosity, preserved in tourist snapshots, artists' paintings and souvenir postcards.

By the 1970s and 1980s the increased politicization of the regional aboriginal communities, and their struggles to address the many dimensions of political, economic and bureaucratic domination they experienced, led inevitably to public debates about the role of aboriginal people in the Williams Lake Stampede.

Aboriginal people were voicing resentment at being assigned roles of noble savages and being economically exploited as tourist attractions. Yet, at the same time, area aboriginal people were also undergoing a cultural revitalization that involved not only a revival of

Secwepemc, Carrier and Tsilhqot'in traditions, but also an incorporation of significant components of Pan Indian cultural practices of powwows, drumming, dancing and sweatlodge ceremonies. These cultural traditions increasingly served as a currency for aboriginal people to communicate to themselves, and to non-aboriginal audiences, the distinctiveness of aboriginal cultural and political identities. The symbols of culture that had long been part of the ritual complex of the Stampede—that could be read as reaffirming the colonial project—were revitalized as symbols of political power for the advancement of aboriginal interests and agendas. The political contest ultimately was not over the symbols themselves—feathered headbands, decorated buckskin, and powwow dances—but over their significance and meaning, and over how these symbols of cultural identity were to be read and comprehended by the general public.

In short, for almost eight decades the Stampede has served as the major occasion for the ritual performance of Williams Lake's collective identity as a frontier town, an identity performed not only for local residents but for tourists and visiting dignitaries alike. Throughout its history there has been a consistent ritual core. What began as historical reenactments of the imagined confrontation of Indians and settlers on the frontier evolved into symbolic displays

of the Indian-white dichotomy. The Indian-white juxtaposition became an archetype in the construction of the town's public identity and history, and this archetype, and the frontier history in which it is embedded, continue to provide the major symbols of public identification in the city today.

But why have Secwepemc, Carrier and Tsilhqot'in people willingly participated in the Stampede for over seven decades? Many anthropological studies of cultural performances—of rodeo,<sup>9</sup> parades,<sup>10</sup> and small town festivals<sup>11</sup>—take a 'textualist' analytical approach. The observer reads these performances for their inherent meaning, arguing that cultural performances convey deep cultural themes, play with inherent contradictions in the social order, and project images of community solidarity that mask social conflict, domination and inequality. In this context, the Stampede, like all small town festivals, can be read as a narrative performance of the town's myths of history and public ideology. 'Textualist' approaches often make assertions about the function of cultural performances, arguing that the participation of subordinate groups only reinforces their perhaps unwitting compliance with the systems of inequality that have rendered them powerless.

Yet this theoretical perspective cannot account for the willingness of subordinate groups to participate in rituals of the dominant.<sup>12</sup> Instead, cultural performances can also be approached as forms of social

action, where participants themselves have various understandings of the meanings of ritual events, and where these events become the occasion for contesting dominant ideologies and creating new, politicized identities of the subordinate.<sup>13</sup> What may appear to be a submission to colonial stereotypes, and what may appear to be instances of aboriginal people 'playing Indian', emerge from a lack of appreciation for the multiple meanings at play in ritual contexts, and the way in which aboriginal people have long been engaging in cultural performance not only to express aboriginal meanings and identities, but also to subvert and challenge dominant stereotypes of Indianness.

The remaining question, then, is: how do various First Nations people of the region view the advantages and disadvantages of performing culture in the context of the Stampede festival?

#### THE STAMPEDE TODAY

The Williams Lake Stampede is held every summer over the 1 July weekend. The centrepiece of the festival is the professional rodeo, but there are many other events to entertain children, their families and visitors to the city. Pancake breakfasts and steak dinners are held in the grocery-store parking lots. A midway, with rides and games of chance, is set up outside the rodeo grounds. The annual parade draws huge crowds to the downtown streets. There are sidewalk sales, children's amusements, and musical

groups playing in the city's parks. The Stampede provides a major source of revenue to city businesses. One retailer referred to the Stampede period as a 'Cowboy Christmas', the second most important time of the year for retail sales. The Chamber of Commerce unofficially estimates that the Stampede brings in almost one million dollars to the city's economy.

The festival itself is run by a non-profit society, the Stampede Association, which is comprised of rodeo enthusiasts, area ranchers and downtown business owners. None of the 1994 board members or the over ninety volunteers who worked on the 1994 Stampede were aboriginal. Nevertheless, representatives have frequently stated that they would encourage aboriginal involvement. They see Indian participation—the erection of mock Indian villages, the performances of powwow dancing on the rodeo grounds—as part of the 'rodeo tradition'. Organizers also realize that aboriginal involvement would be a great tourist attraction, and would economically benefit the Stampede organization and the city as a whole. While recognizing that relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people today are 'touchy', they nevertheless feel that area First Nations are 'missing out on an opportunity to market their culture' by failing to get involved in the Stampede festivities. Aboriginal people, however, do participate in the festivities: as rodeo riders, as spectators, as entrants to the parade. Occasionally an aboriginal woman

will enter the Stampede Queen contest. But it is the organized displays of Indian culture on the rodeo grounds that the Stampede organizers hope to solicit, and it is these forms of organized display and performance that are now the issues of contention.

Since the 1970s aboriginal people in the region have been using a variety of symbols and ritual practices to express and convey their aboriginal identities: Plains Indian-style tipis, feathered head-dresses, buckskin regalia, sweatlodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, powwow dancing, and most recently, the Indian princess contests that accompany invitational powwows. In different ways these symbols and rituals of identity are being mobilized as forms of political power for advancing the interests, status and rights of regional First Nations. But these symbols are also subject to variable interpretation. Many of these symbols resonate with the noble savage images of Indianness purveyed through popular cultural representations ranging from Hollywood movies and popular fiction to Boy Scout traditions. Not only may these symbols be interpreted differently by aboriginal and non-aboriginal audiences, there is also significant debate within the various aboriginal communities regarding the legitimacy and meaning of these symbols of identity. I will limit my discussion to the various Secwepemc opinions on this matter, as most of my ethnographic work in the region has been with Secwepemc groups, where I have carried out

ethnographic and applied research for a number of years since 1985 on topics including community revitalization and Pan-Indianism.<sup>14</sup> My understanding of Secwepemc perspectives on cultural representation and ceremonialism comes both from my long-term involvement and from interviews conducted with various members of the regional Secwepemc community in the 1994–1995 period.

Academic debates regarding the nature of culture—whether we can speak of ‘authentic’ culture as opposed to ‘invented’ culture—find their parallel in the ways in which Secwepemc people debate the legitimacy and authenticity of cultural symbols and rituals. Not all Secwepemc people attend powwows or sweatlodge ceremonies. Some individuals dismiss sweatlodge ceremonies, as well as other recently-popular spiritual practices such as the Plains Indian pipe ceremonies and Sun Dances, as ‘imported culture’. They argue that these practices are not traditional to the Secwepemc. They see these ceremonies as carrying no meaning, and they worry that those who engage in them are being misled by spiritual leaders of dubious integrity.

Other Secwepemc people find meaning in powwow dances and sweatlodge ceremonies, but they do not personally support the idea of performing such rituals for non-aboriginal audiences. Their concern is not with the legitimacy of cultural symbols of identity, but with the meanings that may be conveyed, and the stereotypes that may be affirmed. Some

argue that dressing in Indian regalia and ‘parading for whites’ is a degrading spectacle. Others argue that conveying identity through these essentialist images ultimately limits the audience’s ability to appreciate the full individuality, diversity and humanity of aboriginal people. They voice resentment at the power of the Euro-Canadian festival organizers to control the terms—and the symbols—for their participation in the event.

Remarking on the manner in which Euro-Canadians have assigned aboriginal people a status of virtual invisibility in the regional social landscape, one leader remarked in frustration, ‘There’s room for us as tourist attractions, but when we want to be human, the door is shut’. Ultimately, these individuals are drawing attention to the fact that the meaning of cultural performance is derived from the broader context of power relations in which non-aboriginal residents still hold privileged control over when aboriginal people will be acknowledged, and on whose terms. At the everyday level of informal social interaction, these terms of recognition often are limited to a restricted range of identities: the ‘drunken Indian’, the ‘Indian criminal’, the ‘noble savage’.

Mediating these positions are a few First Nations individuals who are willing to act as ‘cultural bridges’, and who on occasion do coordinate aboriginal cultural performances and displays for non-aboriginal audiences. Among these are elected First Nations chiefs and past chiefs, as well as individuals employed in the

public service. All, by virtue of their position, have taken on roles of advocacy for aboriginal people in their dealings with non-aboriginal society. In the last few years, for example, these leaders have organized cross-cultural training workshops to introduce the regional police, court workers, judges, social services workers and school teachers to aboriginal cultural beliefs, values and spiritual practices, such as pipe ceremonies and sweatlodge ceremonies. They believe in the potential for such cultural performances to bridge the gap in understanding between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations, and to improve the tenor of social relations in the city.

Yet these First Nations leaders also have ambivalent attitudes towards participating in the Stampede festivities as adjunct sideshows to the larger ritual and where they lack full control over the terms of their participation. They share a strong conviction that Stampede organization, and the Williams Lake community generally, take the aboriginal presence for granted, misinterpret cultural performances, and benefit economically from displays of aboriginal heritage while returning little to the reserve communities. One individual commented:

What I want to know is: what is Williams Lake willing to put in? Let's talk money! The Stampede has been commercialized now. It's a money-making thing. We want to benefit too ... The town of Williams Lake doesn't do nothing for [our] Band. We spend between

\$100,000 and \$120,000 every month in town, in the local businesses ... and the town doesn't do nothing for us!

These leaders are concerned with being spatially marginalized during the Stampede festivities: of being sequestered into a small space and being forced into secondary roles that diminish the importance of aboriginal culture. One individual saw these issues in a deeper historical context, arguing that the history of aboriginal involvement in the Stampede is a history in which Euro-Canadians have controlled the terms of aboriginal participation, including and excluding them when convenient. The most controversial event, and one still resented today by those area aboriginal people who remember the earlier Stampedes, was the Stampede Association's decision in the 1970s to charge aboriginal people for camping on the grounds. In earlier times, the fact that aboriginal people camped on the grounds and were allowed into the rodeo for free was taken as a sign of Euro-Canadian recognition that the Stampede grounds were located on aboriginal traditional territory. With the policy shifts of the 1970s, aboriginal people were 'pushed out' of the Stampede and their traditional rights were denied. Given this historical context, First Nations leaders see the current tensions with the Stampede organizers as rooted in issues of control:

I don't think they want to see First Nations people empowering themselves. They want to keep control ... Our people have always



responded to them when they tell our people what to do. But now our people are becoming empowered, so [aboriginal people] don't [respond] ... We do speak up. I think people are very uncomfortable about that.

Despite these concerns, most of these First Nations leaders did express an interest in participating in the Stampede under certain conditions. They were willing to represent cultural identity through a variety of symbols of Indianness: through putting up tipis, setting up booths selling bannock, jarred fruit and crafts, and staging lahal games, powwows and drumming performances. These individuals are not unconcerned with the potential for general audiences to misconstrue the meaning of cultural performances. Their willingness to use these symbols of cultural identity to communicate with non-aboriginal audiences must be understood in the terms of the broader constraints that bear down on their overall ability to negotiate identity in the Cariboo-Chilcotin, and given these limitations, their pragmatic political intentions and their strategic considerations of the dual audiences to whom they are directing their displays and performances.

The hegemony of colonial stereotypes lies not in the symbols themselves, but in the epistemological power exercised by dominant groups to control the meaning of these symbols. As Patrick Wolfe has argued with regard to Australian Aborigines' entanglement within the concepts and language introduced by

colonialism, 'to acquire a hegemonic language is to submit to a framework in which local meanings can take on unpredictable significance in relation to oppositions or associations whose determination is independent of local factors'.<sup>15</sup> When aboriginal people in the Cariboo-Chilcotin engage in powwow drumming, dancing and sweatlodge ceremonies, how individuals experience and imbue these events with meaning is contained within local fields of understanding (although, as I have indicated, these local fields also are heterogeneous). For a number of people, these practices have become the means for expressing deeply rooted feelings of identity, spirituality and belonging. But to non-aboriginal audiences reared on Hollywood movies and pulp Western novels, these practices may take on quite different signification, resonating instead with the stereotypical images of the noble savage that are embedded in popular Canadian culture. At the very least, the manner in which audiences understand and interpret these performances becomes unpredictable when these practices are transported beyond contexts controlled by aboriginal people. The use of such symbols and practices, so easily absorbed into hegemonic constructs of exotic Otherness, does not necessarily contribute to the subjugation and powerlessness of the aboriginal population. What it does mean is that public performances of aboriginality are sites defined by the confrontation of

multiple epistemologies variously privileged by social fields of power.

Aboriginal people of the Cariboo-Chilcotin are acutely sensitive to the epistemological power of the dominant society: the ability of non-aboriginal people to misconstrue aboriginal behaviours and utterances as evidence for the 'drunken Indian' or the 'Indian criminal' stereotypes; the ability of non-aboriginal politicians and lawyers to misconstrue the history of British Columbia so as to deflect and deny aboriginal rights and title. They are also sensitive to the hegemonic potential of noble savage imagery. Non-aboriginal people, one Tsilhqot'in leader pointed out, frequently overlook the way in which powwows, dancing and drumming embody the most central values of aboriginal societies, treating these performances like a show, an entertainment spectacle, 'like the Shrine Circus'. He continued:

They don't see the importance of our spiritual and cultural values that are exercised through powwows and drumming. The drummers are into their own spirituality for the drum, eh, and the dancers are also into their own spirituality for honouring the great spirit and mother earth. It's not just a cultural show, but there is spirituality involved.

The risk is not only that non-aboriginal audiences will misinterpret these performances. There is also the risk that these performances will be dismissed as

inauthentic by some aboriginal people themselves. These leaders, thus, must also negotiate their way through the plural interpretations of cultural performances that may exist among both the regional non-aboriginal and aboriginal populations.

Nevertheless, those I spoke with were not overly concerned with defending the authenticity of these practices. Instead, they responded by adopting a model of culture remarkably similar to those now advocated by contemporary anthropologists, through which notions of a static, bounded, traditional culture have been deconstructed and replaced by a model that highlights the dynamic, creative and fluid nature of cultural systems. This very fluidity, one Secwepemc leader claimed, constitutes aboriginal tradition:

All people from the past have learned to borrow. There has been a lot of borrowing. It's a continuation of that trend from the past. What it does is build on the model, the model style ... If you look at some of our elders, when they dance—that's a borrowed thing. That's been going on for years. See, the other thing too is that we lost a lot of our cultural traditions. It's not what it is today. Yet that's part of ... our people ... searching for identity. And that's what we're taking back from the earth. That's who we're becoming. We're slowly becoming this style. We use whatever it is. We're still following our traditions.

A similar understanding of tradition was voiced by another Secwepemc leader:

What else can we do? We've lost everything. We don't have any memory of what we did before ... I think sometimes you get fooled into thinking the only way we can be a true Indian is to live how people did one hundred years ago ... Tradition evolves. It's ongoing every day. It's not something that happened one hundred years ago. People start traditions today, and people do, everyday ... And if it doesn't work it disappears. If it does, it gets lodged as tradition ... and that's what we're doing now, saying that some of the things we did then aren't good for us now ... we don't have to keep going as they did.

When engaging in cultural performances, First Nations leaders are aware that they are entering into fields of competing definitions of the very nature of aboriginal culture and tradition.

Despite these endemic risks, most of the leaders I spoke with were willing to consider organizing cultural displays and performances in the overarching context of Stampede festivities. Their motivations had to do with their own pragmatic political concerns, and their assessment of their potential audiences. Further, they were willing to become involved only if they could exercise total control over the terms, conditions and processes through which these performances would be held.

When directed to general audiences, these leaders felt that cultural performances could only raise the positive public profile of aboriginal people of the region. These individuals are explicitly attempting to counter not only the negative stereotypes

of Indianness but the widespread invisibility of aboriginal people to the regional society. Thus, one individual felt that to not participate would be only to further their invisibility to Euro-Canadians. '[Aboriginal culture] gets most misunderstood when you don't see anything', he commented. Another leader felt that participating in the Stampede would counteract Euro-Canadian tendencies to only 'see' aboriginal people who conform to their preconceived stereotypes of the 'drunken Indian'.

Aboriginal cultural displays 'would be an eye opener for the people of Williams Lake', as people would realize that 'the [aboriginal people] they see on the streets aren't the only ones around'. While these strategies may reflect the degree to which the dominant culture has restricted aboriginal modes of resistance—that aboriginal people have to submit to images of cultural exoticism to capture 'positive' non-aboriginal attention—aboriginal agency has nevertheless survived. Stereotypes of Indianness are being mobilized with an eye to their practical implications: positive images may afford some temporary relief to the continual denial of worth to which aboriginal people are subjected through many forms of everyday racism.

Furthermore, such performances may create a context for people to create and renew positive cultural identities amongst themselves.<sup>16</sup> First Nations leaders felt strongly that these positive, public

assertions of Indianness within the context of the Stampede festivities would also be of great benefit to area aboriginal people in boosting their own cultural pride and self-esteem. As one individual remarked:

I think, all of these types of activities [tipis, lahal, fish barbecues, arts and crafts booths] will ... make our young people, and even our older people, be proud of who we are. We need to be very visible. In a positive way.

The fact that these performances would be enacted in the risky setting of a Euro-Canadian festival only enhances their political significance. Rather than undermining aboriginal meanings, the public Euro-Canadian festival context transforms these performances into defiant assertions of moral worth and integrity that contrast sharply with the racism that pervades other dimensions of the regional non-aboriginal society. When directed at aboriginal audiences, the question of non-aboriginal audience response becomes irrelevant to these leaders. It is the very juxtaposition of dominant and subordinate constructions of the meaning of aboriginal culture that would empower these performances as modes of resistance to the dominant Euro-Canadian culture.

In conclusion, in order to negotiate issues of identity and history with non-aboriginal audiences, First Nations leaders of the Cariboo-Chilcotin must first of all develop a means to command public attention. They must develop a means of

counteracting the invisibility they are typically ascribed in many other dimensions of their relationships with non-aboriginal people. In other arenas of political action, First Nations leaders are mobilizing their political (and imminent economic) strength in current provincial treaty policies, and their moral power as victims of racism, in order to challenge various aspects of their relationship with non-aboriginal society. In the ritual context of the Williams Lake Stampede, First Nations individuals are contemplating manipulating the power inherent in the public's fascination with Indian culture, and the centrality of Indians in the Stampede's ritual script, in order to draw attention to issues of cultural pride, power and racism in local social relations. They are making use of the unwitting power they can draw from the 'colonial gaze' in order to begin this process of renegotiating the meaning of aboriginality.

As James Carrier points out, there are dangers inherent in 'ethno-Orientalisms', essentialist representations of aboriginality by aboriginal people themselves. These constructions can 'mislead and have unfortunate consequences if they are applied unreflectively in novel situations'.<sup>17</sup> The danger of these homogeneous representations of Otherness, however, lies not in the representations themselves, but in how these representations are used and their social, political and economic

consequences. Further, the individuals I interviewed here are not unreflective or naïve, but are experienced players in the contemporary politics of identity. As various scholars of colonialism have argued, strategic essentialisms may be extremely powerful representational strategies for both mobilizing indigenous peoples into collective political action and for advancing their collective political interests in particular historical and political contexts.<sup>18</sup>

But First Nations leaders in the Cariboo-Chilcotin are not rhetorically committed to these essentialisms. In many other contexts aboriginal people are deconstructing essentialist stereotypes and/or are making claims to equality and similarity with other non-aboriginal Canadians through a rhetoric based on drawing 'strategic equivalences' with their non-aboriginal audiences.<sup>19</sup> In the ritual context, however, by virtue of the power engendered in the colonial category of the Indian, engaging in cultural displays and performances of Indianness is a powerful counter-hegemonic strategy.

First Nations leaders, like anthropologists, at times *are* concerned with the issues of tradition, authenticity and the hegemony of colonial symbols. In private settings, powwow songs, dancing, sweatlodge ceremonies and other events are providing the means for expressing and experiencing unique identities. Increasingly, these practices and performances are being used as a language

to express identity to non-aboriginal audiences. These individuals are concerned with the difficulties of cross-cultural translation, and the potential for general audiences to misinterpret cultural performances. The risks of miscommunication, though, are outweighed by the pragmatic political potential that these performances may bring to the enhancement of aboriginal self-pride and the improvement in the state of local social relations. While neither First Nations leaders nor anthropologists can predict with certainty the outcomes of their representations,<sup>20</sup> it is the intentionality of those agents, and the considerations and forces that guide and constrain their choices of action, that are critical to trace for understanding the continuing, determined efforts of aboriginal people to use 'old' symbols to negotiate new identities and relationships with non-aboriginal audiences. ~

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#### NOTES

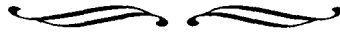
- <sup>1</sup>This article is a revised version of a chapter of *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the frontier myth in a rural Canadian community* (University of British Columbia Press, in press, 1999) in which I trace more broadly the contemporary cultural politics of aboriginal/non-aboriginal relations in a rural community in British Columbia. The research and writing of this article were

- supported by doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and by the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, where I am currently based.
- <sup>2</sup> In formal discourse aboriginal people in British Columbia use the terms First Nations and aboriginal to refer to themselves, and I have followed that usage here. In more informal contexts, people in the Williams Lake region frequently refer to themselves as Native. The terms Indian and white, however, are also commonly used in informal settings. These terms are not self-referential but are used to designate others, but not necessarily with a derogatory connotation. I use the term Indian only rarely, when I am referring to non-aboriginal perspectives on aboriginal people. In this sense, I speak of negotiating Indianness as a public negotiation of the manner in which Euro-Canadian townspeople are to view aboriginal people. Finally, the majority of townspeople in Williams Lake are of European ancestry, and I have used the term Euro-Canadian to designate this group. This term is considered appropriate in formal, academic discourse although it is rarely used in informal discourse in rural towns.
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- <sup>4</sup> Rayna Green, 'The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe', *Folklore*, 99.1 (1988), 30-55.
- <sup>5</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women', *American Ethnologist*, 17.1 (1990), 41-55; Sherry B. Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37.1 (1995), 173-93; Michael F. Brown, 'On Resisting Resistance', *American Anthropologist*, 98.4 (1996), 729-49.
- <sup>6</sup> Don Russell, *The Wild West: A history of the wild west shows* (N.p.: Forthworth, Texas).
- <sup>7</sup> James Gray, *A Brand of its Own: The 100 year history of the Calgary exhibition and stampede*, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1970); Mary Lou LeCompte, 'Wild West Frontier Days, Roundups and Stampedes: Rodeo before there was Rodeo', *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, 16.2 (1985), 54-67; Jon Whyte, *Indians in the Rockies*, (Banff: Altitude Publishing, 1985); Keith Regular, 'On Public Display', *Alberta History*, 34.1 (1986), 1-10; Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government repression of indigenous religious ceremonies on the prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994).
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The myth of the frontier in twentieth-century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 63-87.
- <sup>9</sup> Beverly Stoeltje, 'Cowboys and Clowns: Rodeo specialists and the ideology of work and play', in Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams (eds), *And Other Neighboring Names', Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 123-51; Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An anthropologist looks at the wild and the tame* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Frederick Errington, 'The Rock Creek Rodeo: Excess and constraint in men's lives', *American Ethnologist*, 17.4 (1990), 628-45.
- <sup>10</sup> Carole Farber, 'High, Healthy and Happy:

- Ontario Mythology on Parade', in Frank Manning (ed.), *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on contemporary cultural performance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983), 33–50; Denise L. Lawrence, 'Rules of Misuse: Notes on the Doo Dah Parade in Pasadena', in Alessandro Falassi (ed.), *Time out of Time: Essays on the festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 123–36.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert H. Lavenda, 'Family and Corporation: Celebration in central Minnesota', in Frank Manning (ed.), *The Celebration of Society*; Frederick Errington, 'Reflexivity Deflected: The festival of nations as an American cultural performance', *American Ethnologist*, 14.4 (1987), 654–67.
- <sup>12</sup> See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- <sup>13</sup> Ronald Grimes, *Symbol and Conquest: Public ritual and drama in Santa Fe, New Mexico* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); Fred R. Myers, 'Culture-Making: Performing aboriginality at the Asia society gallery', *American Ethnologist*, 21.4 (1994), 679–99; Dorothy C. Holland and Debra G. Skinner, 'Contested Ritual, Contested Femininities: (Re)Forming self and society in a Nepali women's festival', *American Ethnologist*, 22.2 (1995), 279–305; Julie Cruikshank, 'Negotiating with Narrative: Establishing cultural identity at the Yukon international storytelling festival', *American Anthropologist*, 99.1 (1997), 56–69.
- <sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Furniss, 'A Sobriety Movement Among the Shuswap Indians of Alkali Lake, MA Thesis (University of British Columbia, 1987).
- <sup>15</sup> Patrick Wolfe, 'On Being Woken Up: The dreamtime in anthropology and in Australian settler culture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33.2 (1991), p. 198.
- <sup>16</sup> See Holland and Skinner, 'Contested Ritual', for a discussion of this point.
- <sup>17</sup> James Carrier, 'Occidentalism: The world turned upside-down', *American Ethnologist*, 19.2 (1992), p. 198.
- <sup>18</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, strategies and dialogues*, Sara Harasym (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1990); Annie Coombes, 'The Recalcitrant Object: Culture contact and the question of hybridity', in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 89–114; Benita Parry, 'Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism', in Barker, Hulme and Iversen (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, 172–96; Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, travel and government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- <sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Furniss, 'In the Spirit of the Pioneers', pp. 174–85, 216–28.
- <sup>20</sup> And in keeping with my theoretical argument, these outcomes cannot be determined by an observer's 'reading' of a ritual—they must be ethnographically demonstrated through tracing the application and consequences of cultural representations in a social context.



## HULA AND HAKA: PERFORMANCE, METONYMY AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN COLONIAL HAWAII AND NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>



Each April in Hawaii, local attention is focussed on the Merrie Monarch Festival on Big Island. Every year, the foremost hula troupes of the various islands compete for prizes in a variety of disciplines, traditional and modern. The festival is a cultural event of considerable magnitude. For several evenings in succession local television provides live broadcasts of the performances lasting many hours. Two months earlier the Kapa Haka Festival in New Zealand enjoys similar attention from public and media alike as the country's Kapa Haka groups compete against each other. In both cases the indigenous culture of each country attains nation-wide media attention thanks to a performance form: the hula in Hawaii and the haka in New Zealand. While both forms had always enjoyed a certain popularity—the hula being almost synonymous with the image of Hawaii as a tourist paradise, and the haka representing not just the Maori people but also on occasions bi-cultural New Zealand as a prelude to All Black rugby games—the new prominence attained is certainly one manifestation of the so-called 'cultural renaissance' among Hawaiians and Maori alike.

In this paper I wish to explore what could perhaps be termed the roots of this new performance phenomenon as parallel developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The aim is to explore a particular nexus between colonial contact and identity formation.<sup>2</sup> Although this general question has been much researched in recent years, the field of performance is one area that has received little systematic attention, even though Polynesian performance forms belong to those cultural aspects that are, for outsiders at least, almost synonymous with these cultures. The focus is twofold: firstly, to demonstrate how two particular performance forms—the hula and the haka—became subject to a European strategy of folklorization and theatricalization. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to indicate the way Hawaiians and Maori themselves adapted their cultural performances to meet an ever increasing ensemble of new functions ranging from the traditional to the tourist, from the religious to the political.

Whatever these new functions may be, where an indigenous people is required to perform for the colonial gaze, the



performance enacted tend to have in most cases the metonymic gesture of standing in for the whole of the respective culture. The interrelationship between performance and metonymy, or perhaps more precisely *performance as metonymy of culture*, needs to be prefaced by a few remarks on the concept of metonymy. As a figure of speech, metonymy is closely related to notions of inauthenticity and incompleteness. The dictionary definition—'the substitute of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant'<sup>3</sup>—points to this disjuncture between a metonymic trope and the actual thing or the thing in its entirety. Viewed in this context, metonymy as a trope of cultural discourse carries with it more than just the signature of abbreviation typical of most figures of speech. It has inscribed in it already a discursive strategy symptomatic of colonial discourse: the penchant to circumscribe and contain. When Hawaiians or Maori perform for the (usually colonial) other, they are rendering themselves observable and definable. The whole tradition of folkloristic performance, which begins in the nineteenth century in Europe and is then exported to the colonies for adaptation by the indigenous peoples, is framed within the metonymic notion that performance(s) can stand in for the culture as a whole.

The link between metonymy and the very broad and often ill-defined concept of performance can be usefully focussed if we link it to the notion of theatricality as defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.

Said defines orientalism as a mode of representation and 'learned field', and notes that a field 'is often an enclosed space'. He continues:

The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The discourse of orientalism, according to Said, 'theatricalizes' the East in the sense that it reduces and defines it, rendering it observable; it is as though the East or Orient were a stage on which a set of dramatic figures of the Orient make their exits and entrances for the delectation and edification of the Western beholder. Said's concept of theatricality is both metaphoric and metonymic. It is metaphoric in the sense that he invokes the old *theatrum mundi* simile. It is metonymic to the extent that the process he terms theatrical or theatricalization embraces more than the old trope. It designates a particularly Western style of thought which ultimately was brought to bear on most of the colonized world. Taking Said's use of the term one step further, we can postulate that theatricalization and colonialism are related phenomena.

Theatricalization carries with it a number of interrelated processes involving fixture and closure necessary for, or inherent in, any kind of *mise en scène*. The *mise en*

*scène* of a culture, country or ethnic group implies that this group can be represented by a finite set of mostly recurrent props, costumes and corporeal signs. Whereas theatricalization is primarily a spatial and visual limitation of culture, in the colonial context it is invariably accompanied by the temporal closure of *folklorization*. The discourse of folklorization, whether in a European or a colonial context, seeks to 'fossilize' cultural artefacts somewhere on an ill-defined but usually pre-modern, pre-technological time line. As we shall see, theatricalization and folklorization work hand in hand as concomitant processes in colonial and indigenous discourses which reevaluated and recoded performance forms for an altered cultural and political context.<sup>5</sup>

Dance is perhaps the form of expression the West most often used and adapted for the purpose of theatricalizing other cultures. In the context of Hawaii, the performance form of hula became synonymous with its dance component, which in turn came to stand for the indigenous people of the country. In the case of Maori, it was mainly the 'wardance', the haka, which from a variety of performance forms attained the metonymic force of representation. The process of colonization was concomitant with the theatricalization of the objects of colonization. The strategies of representation that Said terms orientalist are thus metonymic and theatrical with a few selected figures having to stand in for the larger whole of the Orient. In the

examples examined here—Hawaiian and Maori cultures—I will explore how the 'theatrical stage' of indigenous culture, while not 'affixed to Europe' in Said's terms, is nevertheless subjected to analogous processes of synecdochical limitation.

#### REINVENTING THE HULA

The history of hula in Hawaii runs in many ways parallel to the fortunes of the indigenous culture. In pre-contact times it was an integral part of the religious and cultural fabric of Hawaiian society. From 1820 onwards it was severely attacked by missionaries of different persuasions until it all but died out except in more remote areas.<sup>6</sup> Under King Kalakaua, who ruled from 1874 to 1891, hula flourished again, yet within a fundamentally altered cultural context. When the 'Merrie Monarch', assumed the Hawaiian throne in 1874 he called *kumu hula* (hula teachers) to his court and revived the tradition of hula performers as part of the court retinue, as had been the case in pre-contact times. With Kalakaua begins what might be called a conscious reinvention of tradition for the purpose of cementing Hawaiian national identity and reinforcing indigenous political aspirations which were coming under pressure from the white settlers.<sup>7</sup> Although the reintroduction of ancient hula as a form of court entertainment was initially conceived as a demonstration of indigenous traditionalism, it led ironically (or perhaps logically) to major innovations in the performance form itself; it 'became a

breeding place for change', as dance ethnologist Adrienne Kaeppler notes.<sup>8</sup> These changes received dynamic public demonstration during the 1880s when Kalakaua staged large hula festivals. These celebrations were extensively photographed, and a large number of these photographic documents have survived. Analysing a selection of these iconographical documents I am particularly concerned to read the semiotics of hula costume as an indicator of the multiple cultural functions that the performance form was coming to assume.

Figure 1 dates from 1858 and is the earliest extant photograph of hula. By this time missionary influence had completely changed the costuming, which in pre-

FIGURE 1

*Hula dancers, circa 1858. (Ambrotype, photographer unknown). Reproduced by permission of the Bishop Museum.*



contact times had consisted of a skirt made of tapa cloth, necklace and head-wreaths, bracelets and anklets for both male and female dancers. There was, however, considerable variation in the costume depending on status, sex and type of dance. Early evidence, which is exclusively reliant on pictures and descriptions by European explorers and travellers, suggests that women danced bare-breasted, which was certainly one of the causes of missionary opposition.<sup>9</sup> This earliest photograph of hula, an ambrotype, already prefigures the tradition of studio-produced studies for the tourist market. The floor has probably been retouched to give the appearance of sand. The costumes depicted here are also characteristic of one image of hula that was to persist throughout the nineteenth century. The wide cloth skirts, tightly buttoned blouses and fibre anklets represent the exact opposite of the scantily clad South Seas maiden of the popular imagination. This photograph was taken one year before the passage of legislation regulating public performances of hula. The dance was permitted provided it was 'not of an immoral character, to which admission is obtainable by the payment of money.'<sup>10</sup> Against this background the picture seems to be conveying a double message. On the one hand an image of tightly buttoned respectability, where anything less likely to arouse immoral passions is scarcely imaginable. This certainly holds true for the photographic image and it is only this particular function we can study. On the

other hand, the dancers' kinaesthetic appeal, it would seem, is deliberately effaced in this static pose. The other implicit message is a commercial one. Here we have to take cognizance of the context and purpose of representation. Already hula was being manoeuvred into a context of commercial exploitation as the tourist industry in Hawaii began to grow in the second half of the nineteenth century. Further legislation was passed in 1865 and 1870 to remove most restrictions, opening the way for wide participation in hula performances throughout the islands.

Within this context photography had already begun to establish itself as a purveyor of commercial interests, particularly in the realm of theatre and performance.

The various guises under which hula was demonstrated and promoted can be illustrated by reference to its appearance in King Kalakaua's court, who, as mentioned, was chiefly responsible for revitalizing hula. Figure 2 shows hula master Ioane Ukeke with four of his troupe. Ukeke was responsible for staging

FIGURE 2

*Ioane Ukeke and court dancers, circa 1885 (photographer unknown). Reproduced by permission of the Bishop Museum.*



Kalakaua's festivals and earned the name 'Honolulu Dandy'. The dancers are clad in what has become regarded as 'traditional' attire. The costume closely resembles that of figure 1, with the calf-length dresses, long-sleeved voluminous blouses and head-wreaths. This set the fashion standard for 'traditional' hula, and it has persisted with slight variation until today. Ukeke presents himself in an intriguing mixture of top-hat, jacket, lei and cigar. The backdrop is a painted view of Waikiki beach and Diamond Head, Honolulu's

most famous landmark—quintessential touristland, even in the late nineteenth century. Thus we have a conflation of a courtly dance troupe, dedicated to the preservation and practice of hula, with a standardized, even stereotypical, vista and a somewhat hybridized Hawaiian male presence.

Figure 3 also depicts hula dancers against a stereotypical South Seas backdrop. The central figure is also a court dancer for Kalakaua, yet the costume could not be more different from that used in court

FIGURE 3

*Court dancers for Kalakaua, late 1880s (photograph unknown). Reproduced by permission of the Bishop Museum.*



performances. The grass-skirts and lei, commonly associated with Hawaiian hula, were introduced about this time. The origin of the grass-skirt is uncertain. It may have been introduced by visiting Tahitian troupes, from whom the Hawaiians certainly learned the famous hip-rotating dance, which has come to be known as synonymous with hula, but was in fact entirely unknown to ancient hula. Some scholars identify Gilbert Islanders, present in Hawaii as labourers, as the source of inspiration for what was to become one of the most famous dance costumes of all time.<sup>11</sup> The ukulele also became synonymous with hula, incorporated into the performance tradition by Kalakaua's court dancers at the time, along with hymn singing and band music. European music was refashioned and syncretized during these years to produce a distinctively Hawaiian music and dance tradition, which found acceptance by both Hawaiians and Europeans alike. They were introduced in one spectacular performance as Kaeppler notes:

In Kalakaua's court all these influences converged and at his jubilee celebration in 1886 a famous Hawaiian dancer appeared in a hula accompanied by ukulele and steel guitar. The new music was sanctioned by the King, teachers, and performers, and loved by the audience. Soon most new compositions were in this style ... This new idiom is now known as 'Hawaiian music.' In truth it has little indigenous Hawaiian music in it, but is uniquely Hawaiian in that it was developed in Hawai'i by Hawaiians out of a combination of

Western music ideas available to them in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Both process and performance document a moment of cultural and performative self-fashioning as a response to heavy acculturative influences. The picture of the girls in grass-skirts with the ukulele reveals, however, the ambivalence of this process. Seen together, these photographs suggest that a multiplicity of images and performative identities had begun to evolve around the 'traditional' performance form. Under the putative strategy of reviving ancient hula, the court dancers created a modern form, incorporating new movements (Tahitian hip-gyrations), new musical instruments and idiom. Out of an initially folkloric impetus arose a highly inventive syncretic performance genre.

But what did this mean for the ethnographer or ethnomusicologist in search of genuine ancient hula? Where could it be found at the end of the nineteenth century? Their searches may have led them to the scene in figure 4, dating from 1899. In a grove of trees, two bare-breasted hula dancers (or are they dancers?) pose. They are accompanied by a woman in a sleeveless dress with a guitar and an elderly man in a loincloth playing a nose flute. In a single image, this photograph contains the multiple identities of hula at the end of the century, encapsulating a range of projections. The forest setting corresponds with the ethnographer's intuition that genuine 'old

hula' might best be found in a remote area, far from the madding crowd.<sup>13</sup> The bare-breasted women correspond to the eroticized image of hula—an image, however, which had more to do with European, especially missionary projections, than with the actual costume codes of the form, whether ancient or modern. The guitar suggests that for Hawaiians, or for the European photographer staging the photograph, the instrument that was introduced by the Portugese in the mid-nineteenth century, had become synonymous with hula, to the point perhaps that it was inconceivable

without it. The old man playing the noseflute is a marker of the pre-contact period, indicated in both his dress and the musical instrument he is playing. However, in the context of this photograph, it is the guitar-playing woman who is at odds with its staged primitivism. The image is written over with the whole genealogy of European projections regarding hula: the contradictions and impositions. It is a composite image trying to cater for all these desires. It is perhaps the image that would have met with the ethnographer's approval, if he could have been convinced it was authentic.

FIGURE 4

*Hula dancers, ca. 1899 (photographer unknown). Reproduced by permission of the Bishop Museum.*



My final hula image (figure 5) dates also from the late 1890s. It is a snapshot (as far as snapshots were technically possible at the time) of hula being performed in a backyard, probably somewhere in Honolulu. Although this performance would certainly not have met with ethnographic approval—the urban setting alone would have been a great disappointment—it is 'authentic' to the extent that it appears to be an indigenous performance context. With the exception perhaps of the photographer, there are no European spectators. The dancers are clad in simple dresses without decorative wreaths (lei) or anklets. They are accompanied by two men playing calabash drums, a sign of *hula kahiko*, dances performed in a broadly traditional way.

The photographer has caught the characteristic but subtle sway and hand movements of ancient hula, as performed today. Of primary interest here, however, is less the question ancient or modern: we see that hula is part of a living tradition within the fabric of Hawaiian society. It is a formal occasion judging by the attire of the spectators—a birthday or wedding perhaps—and hula dancers have evidently been employed or invited for that special celebration. The dance is performed neither for the tourist gaze nor for courtly delectation and political self-representation. Here it appears to occupy a third space, somewhere between the private and the public, continuing some of its traditional functions, although in new clothes.

FIGURE 5

*Backyard hula dancers, Honolulu circa 1890s (photographer unknown). Reproduced by permission of the Bishop Museum.*





## TAMING THE HAKA: ROTORUA 1901

Turning to a second example, I wish to extend some of the issues raised so far. If the hula is metonymic of Hawaiian culture, then the same function is assumed by the haka, the wardance of the Maori. This dance represented more than any other cultural manifestation of the Maori its dominant image in the mind of Europeans—both at home and abroad: the Maori as a fearsome warrior.<sup>14</sup> That the Maori had almost defeated the mighty British army in the wars of the 1860s was still very much in public consciousness. It was thus only logical that for the 1897

Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London, New Zealand chose to send along with its pakeha troops a contingent of Maori soldiers clad in modern army uniforms. Those same soldiers then performed the haka in traditional attire at the Holborn Restaurant in London, watched on by the New Zealand premier Richard Seddon, the former New Zealand Minister of Labour and ardent imperialist William Pember Reeves and assorted British guests (figure 6). It is hard to imagine a more 'fitting' image of the construction of performance under the imperial gaze. The artist has individualized the guests of honour—

FIGURE 6

*Maori warriors performing the haka at the Holborn Restaurant, London, July 1897 (J. Begg, London Illustrated News, 17 July 1897). Private Collection.*



Seddon is recognizable (to New Zealanders at least) even without the legend—whereas the haka party vies for iconographic attention with candlebra and bowls of fruit. Nevertheless, their presence here is remarkable. The foes of yore were now providing delectation in an upmarket London restaurant on the eve of a large-scale colonial conference, where Seddon promoted, among other things, New Zealand's claim to annex various Pacific territories.<sup>15</sup>

The success of this performance may have perhaps planted the seeds for what four years later was to become the largest ever demonstration of Maori performance for Maori and European alike. In 1901, New Zealand and other British dominions were blessed with a royal tour by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, the duke being the grandson of recently deceased Queen Victoria, Empress of India and sovereign of many far-flung dominions. The tour was clearly designed to reinforce the symbolic claim to imperial sovereignty by the royal family after the death of its most important figurehead. While the royal party's reception by the white settlers was presumably never in doubt—'a thousand miles of loyalty' in the words of the official historian of the tour<sup>16</sup>—the same could not necessarily be said for his Majesty's Maori subjects.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps not surprising then that Maori participation was focussed almost entirely in one place: a three day 'carnival' of Maori performance culture in Rotorua from 13 to 15 June 1901. This *hui* (the Maori term for a

ceremonial gathering) brought together representatives from all the major tribes in Aotearoa, providing the royal party and each other with an unprecedented display of indigenous performance. The choice of Rotorua was not surprising. Rotorua could already boast an established touristic infrastructure dedicated to presenting Maori culture to European visitors.<sup>18</sup> The local people, the Arawa, were also famous, or infamous, for having deliberately sided with the settlers in the Maori-European wars in the 1860s. The planning of the *hui* was in the hands of a Maori committee under the chairmanship of the Minister of Native Affairs, James Carroll, himself half Maori. The result was a gathering on an unprecedented scale with over six thousand Maori from all over the country in attendance.

The resulting meeting provided ample evidence of the *dialectics of spectacle*: that is the mutual desire to see and be seen in an aesthetically controlled environment. While Maori were certainly on display to the Europeans, the latter, especially the royal party, were equally on display to Maori and the Maori tribes were on display to each other. The uniqueness of this event was apparent to the participants, and subsequent historians of Maori culture have drawn attention to its importance in terms of scale and organization.<sup>19</sup> The large Maori contingent camped together for about ten days prior to the actual ceremony. The camp was divided along tribal lines and the time was used for extensive rehearsals.

Our most comprehensive document of this event is the extraordinarily detailed account in the official history written by Robert Loughnan, a 'descriptive narrative', as he terms his lavishly illustrated book. His narrative is, not surprisingly, not only a descriptive account but also an ideological one. That the book is a paean in praise not just of the monarchy but also the whole colonial enterprise goes almost without saying at this time in the country's history. Within this unadulterated tribute to colonial discourse the account of the Rotorua *hui* is somewhat anomalous. Not only is it the most detailed section of the whole book, amounting to almost one hundred pages of densely written descriptions and commentary, but the usually clear monotone of the narrative voice is varied or perhaps fractured by the presence of other voices. As Loughnan admits in the preface, substantial sections of the chapter are from the pen of Sir Apirana Ngata of the Ngatiporou. With the exception of an interpolated poem by him, however, his voice is never made explicit. Rather we have the impression that Loughnan reworked extensive comments by Ngata into his own text. This is particularly evident in the detailed accounts of Maori performance culture, which stand beside racist views of the people themselves, sentiments which Apirana Ngata himself would scarcely have uttered.

In the following examination of what is an extremely multi-textured and complex

performative event I wish to restrict my comments to the question of how these extensive performances may have functioned as indicators of cultural redefinition for Europeans and Maori alike. This 'gathering of the clans', as Loughnan terms the coming together of the various tribal groups,<sup>20</sup> was certainly unprecedented in scale and form of interaction. As well as oratory, the main mode of communication was by means of haka and *waiata*, costume and *poi*. Perhaps the dominant chord in the plethora of information provided is the tension between the past and the present.

Loughnan's account stresses the occasion as an opportunity for Maori to rejoice in the glories of their ancient, pre-contact culture. Using a theatrical metaphor, Loughnan describes the preparations as a welcome chance to revive past grandeur:

Old scarred warriors waxed wrathful in heated debate over ancient war-dances to be used in mimic warfare at Rotorua, the almost obsolete *peruperu* that were wont to awake echoes in the New Zealand forests in the fighting-days of the past. Once more the Maori lived in the past. For a brief space the edge of the heavy curtain that screened it was raised, old memories revived, old chords were touched anew, and hearts thrilled and vibrated to the weird music of the dead ages.<sup>21</sup>

The Maori past is troped here as a stage on which a historical drama thematizing the 'dead ages' is to be produced. It is not the 'debased' Maori present that is to be unfolded before the royal visitors (and the

New Zealand politicians accompanying them), but an idealized version of an heroic and 'homeric' past.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, theatrical performances only allow themselves to be stage-managed to a certain degree. Theatre, like culture, is always subject to the vicissitudes of time and change. This was nowhere more obvious than in the costuming for the event. Like the hula in Hawaii, the Maori performances were subject to precise control and conceptualization. The Rotorua performances saw a similar process of conscious and unconscious adaptation to the special requirements of the unusual event. Traditional clothing became increasingly refashioned as theatrical or folkloristic costume: at once a signifier of the 'dead past' and the cultural changes of the present. During the preparations for the arrival of the royal party, Loughnan describes the appearance of Maori in the informal situation of the camp:

There was a curious mingling of the old and new. Deeply tattooed warriors, some of whom had witnessed a cannibal feast, rubbed noses with young men who rode bicycles and pounded the big drum in the brass band. In the dresses an effective compromise was effected. Over a creaseless frock coat fresh from the hands of the pakeha tailor a Maori mat was thrown, and a belltopper surmounted the combination. A high-born lady decked in silk of bright hues yet wore a *piupiu* round her waist and a *heitiki* round her neck. It was one huge fancy ball, full of

fantastic anachronisms characteristic of a time of transition. The past was revived, and mingled with stately dignity in the whirl of the present, seeking to grasp the bewildering changes that a century of contact with civilization had effected.<sup>22</sup>

While the quotidian, informal dress codes reflected indeed the cultural syncretism characteristic of most 'times of transition', the formal performances revealed much tighter control and conscious fashioning. Not only did each tribe adopt a special dominant colour, but most tried to emulate within the bounds of Christian propriety the traditional past that was eagerly sought by European and Maori alike.

The extent of this 'conscious fashioning' can be illustrated by comparing two photographs. Figure 7 shows the performance of a haka by members of the Ngati Kahungunu tribe of the East Coast region, welcoming guests at a wedding. The photograph is contemporaneous with the Rotorua festivities. Like the backyard hula, this is an indigenous performance context: Maori performing for Maori. With the exception of the figure right, all are dressed in formal, everyday European-style clothes. If we compare this image with a photograph taken of the Wanganui haka party at the Rotorua *hui*<sup>23</sup> (figure 8), all performers are now clad in traditional *piupiu*. The dominant impression is a move from clothes to costume. Although both occasions can be considered *hui*—ceremonial encounters in the Maori use of

FIGURE 7

*Members of the Ngati Kahungunu tribe perform a haka, welcoming visitors to the wedding of Maude, daughter of George and Airini Donnelly, at Taradale, East Coast of the North Island. Early 1900s (photographer unknown). Auckland Star Collection. Reproduced by permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. F-68581-1/2.*



FIGURE 8

*Haka party from Wanganui at Rotorua during Royal visit, June 1901. Auckland Star Collection. Reproduced by permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. G-3142-1/1.*



the word—the Rotorua gatherings are evidence of a new configuration of performative and cultural codes catering to the European gaze.

This conscious staging of anachronism by means of costuming was matched by careful attention to the type of weapons on display: 'They were admired by all who saw them—they and their good humour, and their vigour, and their weapons. No weapon was there, however, of European origin; no gun of any period from the time of Hingis [*sic*] wars ... no pouch, no belt, no tomahawk or axe of the whole fire-and-steel period of their wars.'<sup>24</sup> Already here we see a feature typical of folklorization of colonized cultures in general: the effacement of all signs of post-contact culture. All material signifiers of culture—costume and properties (in this case weapons)—were placed in the temporal frame of pre-contact times, the generic time of folklorized performance forms. At Rotorua we can speak too of a theatricalization of Maori people and their performance forms as they were adjusted to the new receptive code of a European desire for performed primitivism. The ineluctable logic of this discursive construction explains why Loughnan himself resorts to an extended theatrical metaphor at the 'climax' of his account:

The carnival had not lasted more than an hour. But for the spectators who saw it for the first time how many impressions had been crowded into that brief space! It was something to dream of. In no theatre in the

world could a sight comparable to it be seen. The broad glare of the sun played on stage and players; the stage might have been the whole world, and the players children of Nature, untutored, yet endowed with instinctive grace and the marvellous art of suiting word to action and action to word.<sup>25</sup>

The theatrical performance being played out is, in Loughnan's interpretation, a kind of historical drama resurrecting 'the buried treasures' of the Maori past and celebrating 'the remnants of a proud race'.<sup>26</sup> The metaphor also carries a metonymic force for colonial peoples as a whole. When he claims that 'the stage might have been the whole world' on which 'children of Nature' perform for their colonial rulers, no sophistry is required to interpret this vision as one pertaining to all colonized peoples. In this sense the Rotorua performance is both highly specific and symptomatic of wider issues and processes pertaining to performance in cross-cultural colonial situations.

#### SUMMARY

Two cultures under heavy assimilative pressure—both threatened with cultural, if not physical extinction—resorted to a revitalization and redefinition of their performance traditions. In Hawaii, the hula revival dating from the late 1870s, and in New Zealand the new idea of cultural performance festivals after the turn of the century, resulted in a significant recoding of performance forms. The need to

perform one's culture to a cultural Other arose as a response to an altered cultural and political situation: the addressees are, on the one hand, the colonizing majority and, on the other hand, members of the same culture, with whom in pre-contact times intercourse would have been unlikely or problematic. Thus the sharing of performance traditions becomes a first step toward reorganizing cultural boundaries and creating new identity formations. In New Zealand, tribal groups gathered to share traditions in a new communicative situation. What today is deemed 'traditional' Hawaiian or Maori performance (the hula and haka) can in fact be located at a particular point in time, a moment of historical crisis, where the remedial strategies were performative as much as political, or indeed where the two merge.

These revisions include the strategic folklorization of King Kalakāua's court dancers who revived a putative traditional hula but paved the way for the commercialized touristic forms. The touristic manifestation of hula in turn reveals itself to be a curious composite, requiring the form be deliberately primitivized in a way in which it had never existed. Maori performance, particularly the haka, had by the end of the nineteenth century become subject to similar processes of revaluation. In Rotorua in particular, these performances had been discovered and refashioned for the tourist gaze. At the same time they continued to

fulfil important functions in their indigenous context. With the arrival of the royal party in 1901, Maori were called upon to present themselves to European guests in a theatrical mode. Dancing and singing and brandishing weapons of pre-European origin, they were induced to present a staged version of an earlier period of ancient vigour untainted by European influence.

Both hula and haka are quintessential cultural signs, acting as focal points for the cultural identity formation of their respective cultures. Of equal importance, however, are their functions as theatrical forms, acts of performance combining music, symbolic and mimetic movement, and, in the case of hula, narrative and lyrical poetry. The changing dress codes during these periods of change demonstrate that a clear binary of 'traditional' performance on the one hand and an 'inauthentic' touristic version on the other is extremely problematic. In terms of physical presentation hula and haka were subject to a complex dynamic of cultural borrowings and redefinitions that incorporated historical exigencies, aesthetic innovation and cultural identity formation. Performances always represent a particular manner of staging the body for a particular audience at a particular time and place. As such they are replete with cultural and aesthetic meanings that are invariably read differently by different spectators. This multivalency suggests, as I have argued, that performance is a

particularly productive place to study the complex cross-cultural exchanges characteristic of colonialism. ∞

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on a paper given at the conference 'Adventures in Identity: Constructing the Multicultural Subject' held at the Goethe Institut, Sydney, 30 July–2 August 1998. It is part of an on-going research project funded by the German Research Council (DFG), within the framework of its interdisciplinary focus, 'Theatralität'. My thanks to John Döcker for encouraging me to rework the paper into the present form.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. particularly Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (eds), *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.747.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p.63.

<sup>5</sup> For the notion of folklorization as 'fossilization' in the European context, cf. Marianne Mesnil, 'The masked festival: disguise or affirmation?', *Cultures* 3:2 (1976), 11–29. For a discussion of time in the anthropological context, cf. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> The history of hula, particularly its ill-fortune under the missionaries, has been extensively documented and need not be repeated here.

For different perspectives see (in chronological order) Nathaniel Emerson, *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii: The sacred songs of the hula* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909); Dorothy Barrère, Mary Kawena Pukui and Marion Kelly, *Hula: Historical perspectives* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1980); Roger G. Rose, *Hawaii: The royal isles*, exhibition catalogue (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1980); Adrienne Kaeppler, *Polynesian Dance* (Honolulu: Alpha, Delta Kappa, 1983); and, most recently, Elisabeth Buck, *Paradise Remade: Politics of culture and history in Hawai'i* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), esp. p.12ff.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'reinvention of tradition' is used here in the sense defined by Hobsbawm and Ranger, although I am aware that it is a very contested term among Pacific scholars. As Hobsbawm and Ranger propose in their now classic definition, an 'invented tradition' is 'a set of practices ... of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition [and] ... attempt to establish continuity with ... a suitable historical past.' Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.1. As the contributors to the volume show, this process is most effective in forms of ceremony and performance. For a discussion of the term in the Pacific context, cf. Jocelyn Linnekin, 'Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity', *American Anthropologist* 93:2 (1991), 446–49.

<sup>8</sup> Kaeppler, *Polynesian Dance*, p.23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Caroline K. Klarr, *Hawaiian Hula and Body Ornamentation, 1778–1858* (Los Osos, Cal.: Bearsville Press and Cloud Mountain Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Barrère et al., *Hula*, p.41.

<sup>11</sup> For the origin of the grass-skirt, see Barrère et al., *Hula*, p.72.



- <sup>12</sup> Kaeppler, *Polynesian Dance*, p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> For an extensive discussion of the place of hula in European discursive and iconographical constructions at the end of the nineteenth century, see Balme, 'Dressing the Hula: Iconography, performance and cultural identity formation in late nineteenth century Hawaii', *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 45 (forthcoming, 1999).
- <sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the image of Maori as a warrior people as an invention catering to a European discursive construction, cf. the article by Toon van Meijl, 'The Maori as Warrior: Ideological implications of a historical image' in Toon van Meijl and Paul van der Grijp (eds), *European Imagery and Colonial History in the Pacific* (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Breitenbach, 1994), 49–63.
- <sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Seddon's imperial ambitions, especially in the South Pacific, cf. Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 217–21.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert A. Loughnan, *Royalty in New Zealand: The visit of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, 10–27 June 1901. A Descriptive Narrative*, (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printing Office, 1902), p.v.
- <sup>17</sup> The relationship of the Maori to the British Crown has been and still is a vexed one, and cannot be easily summarized. In the nineteenth century, a number of Maori leaders still viewed the British sovereign as an impartial place of appeal for their conflicts with the white settler government.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, 'The Sociocultural Impact of Tourism on the Te Arawa people of Rotorua'. PhD Thesis (University of Waikato, 1981).
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Jennifer Shennan, who points out the importance of *hui* for the exchange of performance ideas. 'Such gatherings may have sharpened an appreciation for the contrast between area styles and conventions within the dance forms, but there may also have been incentive for encouraging uniformity in some features'. *The Maori Action Song* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1984), p. 23.
- <sup>20</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 63.
- <sup>21</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 63.
- <sup>22</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 74.
- <sup>23</sup> The leader of the group is Mrs Kemp, wife of a Wanganui chief who fought with the New Zealand militia during the land wars of the 1860s.
- <sup>24</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 76.
- <sup>25</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 99.
- <sup>26</sup> *Royalty in New Zealand*, p. 99.

