Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization:
The Shuswap Encounter with Roman Catholic Missionaries, 1860–1900

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Abstract. Intensive missionary activities among the Shuswap Indians in central British Columbia led to their nominal conversion to Catholicism and a reorganization of village life according to a hierarchical administration imposed by the Catholic Church. These events are traced through the social and economic contexts of the Shuswap/missionary encounter, with specific attention to the diverse reasons that different sectors of the Shuswap community had for embracing Catholicism. Although conversion solved some immediate social and cultural problems, the long-term consequence, perhaps unforeseen by the Shuswap, was the eventual entrenchment of colonial and church hegemony.

In the 1860s the Roman Catholic Church began intensive missionary activities among the northern Shuswap Indians of the central interior of British Columbia. By the early 1870s the success of the missionary program seemed inevitable. Churches had been built in almost all the northern Shuswap villages, and many Shuswap people were attending mass and were being baptized. Under missionary guidance a strict hierarchical village organization, later known to scholars as the Durieu system, was imposed on Indian village life. The church appointed band chiefs as local representatives, giving them far-reaching powers to punish those caught drinking or engaging in the traditional ceremonial activities of feasting, singing, dancing, and gambling. Shuswap interest in the missionary program, however, did not last. By the mid-1870s the Shuswap had rejected the missionaries and were flagrantly performing their traditional ceremonies that had been forbidden by the church.

Twenty years later the Shuswap underwent yet another change in their attitude toward Catholicism. In May 1890 a group of Shuswap Indians

traveled with the local Catholic missionary to the Indian village at Sechelt to witness the dedication of a new church. This event set off a new round of religious fervor among the Shuswap. Following their return, new churches were built and dedicated, and the Durieu system was reinstated. The frequent and highly dramatic church ceremonies drew hundreds of native people and became occasions for the expression and renewal of Shuswap community identity. Although their religious fervor gradually waned, the Shuswap continued to show an interest in Catholicism and to practice this system of village social control until well into the 1900s.

This essay explores one central question: How can we understand the differential receptivity of the Shuswap to Catholicism, and to the Durieu system specifically, during the first forty years of missionary presence?

Studies of the relationship between Native North Americans and Christian missionaries have portrayed the native-missionary encounter primarily in one of two ways. The first emphasizes the themes of missionary domination, passive native acceptance of Christianity, and the subsequent destruction of the entire native cultural framework (Fisher 1992; Lemert 1954). For example, writing on the impact of Christian missionization on British Columbia Indians, Robin Fisher argues that “the demands of the missionaries could not be incorporated into existing Indian society; their teaching and their example had to be either accepted or rejected, and acceptance meant virtually a total cultural change for the proselyte” (1992: 125). Lemert, working within the context of acculturation studies, argues that his own failure to “discover any substantial incidents of functioning aboriginal ritual [among the Gulf of Georgia Salish] within the past 50 years” (1954: 25) proves the success of the Durieu system among the Coast Salish of British Columbia (cf. Gresko 1982).

More recent ethnohistorical studies, however, provide more complex and historically specific analyses that emphasize native people’s ability to control and to manipulate their relationships with Christian missionaries and that situate motives for conversion or for rejection of Christianity in indigenous cultural values, beliefs, and interests (Patterson 1982; Kan 1985; Brown 1987; Kugel 1990; Bolt 1992). Such studies propose that natives reinterpreted Christian ideas, rituals, and institutions to make them compatible with their own cultural contexts, creating an indigenized Christianity (Kan 1985) or a Christianized indigenous religion (Ridington 1987), depending on which cultural elements are perceived to be dominant. For example, Kan argues that the Alaskan Tlingit successfully used church brotherhood organizations to strengthen their position within the Russian Orthodox Church, to establish a more balanced relationship with church officials and parishioners, and to improve their standing within the
dominant society (1985: 196–97). Patterson (1982) shows that Nishga’a leaders not only invited Anglican missionaries into their communities, but, after accepting Christianity, the traditional chiefs retained their leadership positions within the Christian native village of Kincolith. Bolt claims that the Tsimshian undertook “a deliberate, conscious effort . . . to change their cultural orientation by converting to Christianity, and they willingly submitted to [the missionary Thomas] Crosby’s leadership” (1992: iii).

Both agency and constraint shaped the response of Native North Americans to Christian missionaries, and evidence can be found to support either argument. However, in itself each approach is incomplete. The studies emphasizing constraint, passive acceptance, and cultural destruction do not address how native people were interpreting Christian symbols and rituals within their own system of cultural meanings and how these new symbols could function in maintaining the older cultural system. Studies that emphasize native agency and that advocate models of religious syncretism or dualism, on the other hand, do not consider how coercion, the product of a social context of unequal relations of power between natives and colonial society, served to limit native options for responding to the missionary presence. Such studies leave unexplored the broader, long-term hegemonic consequences of using colonial symbols to reconstruct an aboriginal identity and worldview.

One alternate approach that incorporates both agency and constraint in the same analytical model has been applied by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) to the study of native-missionary relations in nineteenth-century South Africa. The authors trace how the Nonconformist missionaries gradually brought about the colonization of Tswana consciousness, situating these events not only in the historically specific political, economic, and social contexts in which Tswana-missionary interactions took place but also with reference to the diversity and internal contradictions in the social practices, cultural symbolism, and ideology of both natives and missionaries. The focus is on symbolic practice: the concrete social processes by which meanings were generated, contested, and elevated to a dominant position within Tswana society and the role played by relations of unequal power in determining the outcome of these struggles.

In this essay I apply this analytical model to the problem of the Shuswap’s differential receptivity to the Catholic missionaries during the first forty years of contact. Focusing primarily on the sociological dimension of the encounter, I explore the internal diversity within Shuswap society to determine which sectors of the society supported conversion and what their motivations may have been. I analyze the changes that had been occurring in Shuswap social organization, land tenure, and chiefly
authority prior to missionary contact. Finally, I discuss how the Shuswap involvement in Catholicism ultimately restricted their options for future action and resistance to the colonial presence.

Despite massive changes resulting from depopulation through epidemics, the loss of the chiefs’ control over traditional lands and resources, and the unraveling of the Shuswap social order owing to the impact of colonialism, Shuswap chiefs established relationships with local missionaries and supported the introduction of the Durieu system to bolster their diminishing authority. The chiefs were acutely aware of the power and moral authority that the Catholic missionaries enjoyed in colonial society. The chiefs solicited their favor not to encourage a Shuswap conversion to Christianity but to facilitate the survival of the Shuswap communities and of their own roles as authoritative leaders. In contrast, the general Shuswap population experienced conversion to Catholicism as a revitalization movement. With its many symbolic parallels with the traditional plateau prophetic movements, conversion to Catholicism and the elaborate church ceremonies that accompanied it offered the Shuswap a chance to restore social solidarity and collective identity, albeit under the symbol of Catholicism. Nominal conversion solved the immediate problems of both Shuswap chiefs and the Shuswap community. The long-term consequence, perhaps unforeseen by the Shuswap, was their eventual entanglement within the webs of colonial and church hegemony.¹

Shuswap Life in the Early 1800s

The reconstruction of the early contact culture of the Shuswap relies on James Teit’s classic ethnography (1975 [1909]), which was based on field research among the Shuswap at the turn of the century. Until the late 1800s the Shuswap were a seminomadic hunting-and-gathering people. Subsistence was based primarily on salmon, deer, and elk, supplemented by smaller game, freshwater fish, and plant foods. During the winter the Shuswap resided in permanent villages of semisubterranean houses, dispersing into smaller migratory family units during the rest of the year. The Shuswap bands in the northern extreme of Shuswap territory, who will be the focus of this essay, based their subsistence largely on the abundant runs of Fraser River salmon. The northern bands followed a more sedentary lifestyle, with families not only staying together for longer periods during the winter but also gathering together in the summer for the salmon fishery.

The Shuswap were divided into several bands, which Teit defined as “a group of families closely related among themselves, who generally
wintered within a definite locality, at or within a few miles of a larger village or center” (ibid.: 457). In the mid-1800s there were approximately thirty bands, fourteen of which, having on average two hundred members each, lived in the northern Shuswap territory. Kinship among the Shuswap was reckoned bilaterally. The basic socioeconomic unit was the extended family, which traveled together in the spring, summer, and fall months and resided in the same winter village. Some recognition of unilineal principles of descent was apparent in the use of hereditary names and in the determination of band chieftainship. There was one hereditary chief per band, determined partially by patrilineal descent but also by the individual’s ability to command respect and to demonstrate ability and leadership. The chief wielded some moderate control over resource use and the behavior of community members: “Chiefs had no special privileges, and their only duties were to look after the general welfare of the band, regulating, when necessary, the gathering of the food-supply, so that all could have an equal chance, and admonishing the lazy and quarrelsome . . . the chief was looked upon as a kind of father and leader of the people, and was expected to set a good example, and to act fairly, in all matters” (ibid.: 570). Temporary hunt chiefs, war chiefs, and dance leaders emerged as needed, and they attained their positions according to recognized abilities.

Teit reports that although each Shuswap band had its own commonly used hunting, trapping, and fishing areas, these resources, along with berry picking and root digging grounds, were considered tribal rather than band property (ibid.: 572). The only exceptions were deer fences and eagle cliffs, which were owned by individuals and were inherited by the closest kin. The use of berry patches, though open to all tribal members, was strictly controlled by the band chief.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s the development of the maritime fur trade with European trading ships on the Pacific Coast intensified social and trade relations between interior and coastal nations, the latter acting as middlemen. Spurred on also by the increased material wealth and social interaction from trade, the Northwest Coast traditions of clan organization, social rank and hierarchy, and potlatch ceremonialism began to be adopted by the interior Chilcotin, Carrier, and Shuswap nations (Goldman 1941; Jenness 1943; Steward 1960; Teit 1975 [1909]). By the early 1800s the northern Shuswap bands had begun to recognize social distinctions of ranked classes and clans. Reconstructing the actual nature of these groups is somewhat difficult, as the clan and rank systems disappeared among the Shuswap after the devastating 1862–63 smallpox epidemic. Teit’s evidence, however, suggests that clans became associated with different extended family groups within each band. Heads of families, now acting as clan
leaders, asserted ownership rights to fishing stations and trapping grounds, and clan chiefs collected rents from common people and strangers for the privilege of fishing and trapping on their grounds (Teit 1975 [1909]: 582–83). The development among northern hunting societies of family-based territorial rights in response to the European fur trade has been noted and debated elsewhere in the literature (Leacock 1954; Rogers 1963; Bishop 1970; cf. Speck 1915, 1923; Cooper 1939). For a brief period the northern Shuswap clans attempted to extend their holdings by claiming exclusive ownership to more distant hunting grounds in Shuswap territory, but the other bands of the Shuswap nation ignored the claims. For a time the northern bands attempted a compromise by allowing the other bands to hunt, but not to trap, in these regions; these efforts too were ignored, and the other Shuswap bands continued to hunt where they chose (Teit 1975 [1909]: 572).

In short, Teit’s evidence suggests that in the early 1800s there were ongoing tensions between major families and the band collective. Families struggled to control the now-valuable trapping grounds and the rich salmon fishing stations. The adoption of clan ceremonialism became a cultural means of representing the distinctions between, and marking the territories of, different families within the band.

The Mid-1880s: Establishment of the Colonial Presence

By the 1850s the northern Shuswap were adjusting their social organization, land tenure, and concepts of chiefly authority to fit their active involvement in the European fur trade. In 1812 a trading post, Fort Kamloops, had been built in southern Shuswap country, and by 1821 Fort Alexandria on the Fraser River had begun to solicit trade directly from the northern Shuswap (Moric 1978). In this same year the Hudson’s Bay Company amalgamated with its rival, the North West Company. In the following decades the Hudson’s Bay Company enjoyed a secure monopoly over the fur trade in the region, a monopoly challenged only by the pre-existing aboriginal trade networks that continued to thrive, particularly between the interior and coastal native nations.

In 1842 the first Christian missionary, Modeste Demers, arrived in northern Shuswap country. Four years earlier Demers and Francis Blanchet had arrived at Fort Vancouver in Oregon territory to establish the first Roman Catholic mission north of California and west of the Rocky Mountains (Whitehead 1981a: 13). In 1842 Demers surveyed the central interior of British Columbia to test native receptivity to the Catholic Church.
He reported that he was well received by the Shuswap and Carrier people (ibid.: 35). John Nobli, a Jesuit priest, visited the area between 1845 and 1847, staying at Fort Alexandria and paying visits to the nearby Indian villages. Nevertheless, missionary activity was sporadic until 1867, when the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a French order of the Roman Catholic Church, established a mission in the heart of northern Shuswap country. The creation of St. Joseph’s Mission, situated in the San Jose valley several kilometers south of Williams Lake, signaled the beginning of permanent missionary presence in the area.

From the outset the Oblates determined that the mission would be self-supporting, and the site was carefully chosen to include some of the most fertile agricultural lands in the district (ibid.: 55). In the following years the mission established a successful farm and ranch operation, not only providing for the needs of the resident Oblates but also turning a profit through the sale of farm produce, cattle, and horses on the local market. In the first years of operation the mission was staffed by only four Oblates: the Irishman James McGuckin, who as missionary was responsible for visiting both the native and white settlements of the region; Jean-Marie Lejacq, the resident priest at the mission who was responsible for overseeing the farm and ranch operations, and two Oblete Brothers who served as laborers (ibid.: 55–57). The Oblates were regularly circulated to different missions within British Columbia, and for the next thirty years an assortment of priests, primarily of French background, were stationed at St. Joseph’s.

Although the fur trade had brought with it some changes to Shuswap society and culture, until the late 1850s the Shuswap remained in control of their lands and communities. Two critical events drastically altered the situation. The first was the realization by whites that gold existed in Shuswap territory. Between 1859 and 1864 thousands of white and Asian miners flooded into the region in what became known as the Cariboo gold rush (Fisher 1992; Elliott 1978). The miners fanned out on the major river systems in the area that became known as the Cariboo, displacing Shuswap families from their hunting, trapping, and fishing grounds. Old Indian trails were transformed into major highways to the goldfields, and white entrepreneurs set up roadhouses and saloons, often adjacent to Indian villages, to solicit business from the miners. Some Shuswap took advantage of opportunities to work as packers and guides along the gold routes; others were drawn into the unrestrained, drunken lifestyle introduced by the miners.

On the heels of the miners came the colonial administrators. Vancouver Island had become a British colony in 1849, but it was not until 1858,
spurred by the discovery of gold in several regions, that mainland British Columbia officially had become established as a colony. In a somewhat desperate attempt to impose colonial authority amid the mad frenzy of the gold rush, the governor of British Columbia, James Douglas, dispatched government agents to regulate mining claims and land preemptions and to enforce colonial laws (Fisher 1992: 147). Although the government agents, in the hope of reducing Indian-settler conflicts, were instructed to establish small reserves to protect Indian villages, graveyards, and cultivated fields from preemption by whites, the broader issue of aboriginal land rights was not addressed. In this manner the colonial government deviated from British colonial policy and from the policy that had been implemented in other regions of Canada by failing to establish treaties with the native nations of the mainland colony (Tennant 1990).

The second key event was the smallpox epidemic of 1862–63. White-introduced diseases had spread among the northern Shuswap previously: whooping cough in 1845, measles in 1850, and smallpox in 1855, the latter being traced by traders to infected blankets that the Shuswap had acquired from the Thompson River area (Morice 1978: 257; HBCA 1845–48, 1855). The 1862–63 smallpox epidemic, which swept inland from the Pacific Coast across the Chilcotin plateau into Shuswap territory, was devastating. The epidemic completely wiped out the six Shuswap bands on the west side of the Fraser River and reduced the overall Shuswap population to a third of its former level (Teit 1975 [1909]: 463–66). Given the drastic population reduction, any exclusive control over specific fishing and trapping grounds that extended family groups previously had managed to establish now was lost. Their social networks shattered, the remaining fragments of family groups were forced to form new cooperative social units and to continue living as best they could. Of the fourteen northern Shuswap bands in existence prior to the epidemic, only seven survived: Soda Creek, Williams Lake, Alkali Lake, Dog Creek, Canoe Creek, High Bar, and Clinton (ibid.: 457–59) (Figure 1).

As the gold rush ended in the mid-1860s, many non-natives who had arrived to prospect for gold remained in the area to take up farming and ranching. Between 1865 and 1880 whites preempted virtually all the good arable land in the Cariboo region. Ranching, agriculture, mining, and transportation anchored the non-native economy in the Cariboo until well into the 1900s. As land began to be cleared and fenced, the Shuswap found it more and more difficult to continue hunting and fishing as before, and despite the periodic efforts of government agents to prevent such practices, Indian village sites, graveyards, and cultivated fields also were being encroached upon, leading to increasing conflicts between the Shuswap and
Figure 1. Cariboo region, ca. 1900.
white settlers. For the Shuswap, the expanding colonial frontier from 1860 to 1880 led to a sudden and dramatic depopulation, a shattering of their social networks, and a loss of control over their lands.

Shuswap-Missionary Relations: The Early Years

It is in this context that St. Joseph’s Mission was established. The mission’s territory was vast, initially including twenty-two bands from the northern Shuswap, Carrier, Chilcotin, and Lillooet nations, with some bands as far as three hundred kilometers away from the mission. Despite these challenges, within one year of the mission’s establishment ten churches had been constructed in the area (Whitehead 1981a: 48). The Shuswap in particular seemed to welcome the missionaries and their teachings and provided an escort for them as they traveled through the country visiting the different villages.

In the first decade of Shuswap-missionary relations both missionaries and chiefs sought to establish strategic political relationships with each other and to test their control over these relationships. In 1867 Father Jayol, en route to the Cariboo to take up missionary work with the Shuswap, reported his humiliating rejection by the Nlaka’pamux (the Thompson) and Shuswap people living in the lower Fraser-Thompson River areas (Jayol 1867a). Five hundred natives were gathering at Lytton to hear an Anglican minister. Jayol was extremely alarmed to find that a delegation of Shuswap people from the Cariboo region was traveling down to attend the meeting, apparently called by the Anglican minister who wished to meet with all the chiefs of the region.

It was not only the Oblates who felt insecure in their tentative relationship with the Shuswap. In 1867 the summer salmon run failed. At least some Shuswap interpreted this as a result of malevolent intervention by the missionaries, and they began to cool their relationship with the Oblates (Jayol 1867b).

Despite these temporary uncertainties, the Shuswap bands of Soda Creek and Williams Lake, which were closest to white population centers, soon laid the groundwork for more enduring relations with the missionaries. The Williams Lake Shuswap fully supported the building of the mission adjacent to their winter village. A year later Father Lejacq, reporting on a trip through the various villages in January 1869, recounted “since my last letter I have visited Soda Creek, where I spent four days. I have only to say that I was well received and treated” (1869). In 1870 alone almost two hundred natives were baptized, and the chiefs of Soda Creek, Williams Lake, Alkali Lake, and Dog Creek had their marriages formalized according to the rituals of the Catholic Church (OA 1866–82).
The Oblates' system for evangelizing the native populations grew not only from the order's origins and experience in early-nineteenth-century France and from later missionary work in Quebec and the Pacific Northwest but also from the influence of ideas developed by the Jesuits in their missionary work in eighteenth-century Paraguay (Gresko 1982). The Oblates' strategy initially involved the establishment of a central mission from which missionaries would make regular tours to the surrounding Indian villages. Where possible, the Oblates sought to preach in native languages, to use native catechists, and to blend elements of the Catholic faith with indigenous beliefs (ibid.: 52). At the same time, native practices that the Oblates perceived would hinder their long-term goals or that were inimical to Catholic beliefs and morality were vigorously criticized. One of the Oblates' primary goals was to establish themselves as intermediaries between natives and colonial society. From this position the missionaries sought both to protect native people from the vices—drunkenness and prostitution—believed to be an inevitable consequence of contact with non-native society and to exercise their authority and to implement their program for "civilizing" the native population without government interference.

To achieve their goals, the Oblates sought to transform Indian villages into model Christian communities by imposing a hierarchical village administration to strictly enforce adherence to Catholic morality and values. Known popularly as the Durieu system, after its most well-known proponent, the Oblate Paul Durieu, the system imposed indirect church rule through the intermediary of church-appointed chiefs and officials, with the local missionary supervising the establishment and operation of the village system. Within the village administration there existed several roles: chiefs, subchiefs, watchmen, policemen, catechists, chanteres, and sextons (or bell-ringers); however, not all native groups had the same complement of offices nor were their functions necessarily the same (Lemert 1954: 24). The missionary typically tried to appoint the hereditary chief of the band to the new position of church chief. As appointed by the missionary, the chief was considered to be the local representative of the church and was to have supreme authority for social control within the community. His duties included keeping white bootleggers out of the village and deciding upon suitable punishment for those found guilty of transgressions of the new rules (Whitehead 1981a: 18). Watchmen and policemen worked under the church chief's direction. The watchmen patrolled the village and reported to the chief any infractions of the rules. The policemen punished the offender, as directed by the chief. The system operated under the overall authority of the church, with missionaries intervening to provide direction when necessary.
Under ideal conditions, the Oblates envisioned the Durieu system operating to regulate virtually every aspect of Indian life. However, to what extent these goals were achieved depended greatly on local circumstances. A great hindrance was the vastness of the missionary’s territory and the mobile lifestyle of many native groups in British Columbia. As a result, in many regions missionaries visited the villages only infrequently, just as natives were gathered at the central villages only for restricted times during the year.

It was fully consistent with Shuswap tradition for the hereditary band chief to exercise a moderate degree of social control over community members. Changes early in the century, however, had brought new challenges to the northern Shuswap chief’s exclusive authority. Family groups had begun asserting ownership not only to fishing grounds but to trapping grounds and had begun expressing their claims to authority through the ceremonialism of the clan groups. The tensions were defused in the 1860s not only through the devastation wrought by the smallpox epidemic but through the sudden, dramatic, and unprecedented loss of Shuswap control of the land and resources to outside forces.

Their communities in crisis, Shuswap chiefs now struggled desperately to assert their authority and to restore social order to their communities. Into this context the missionaries introduced the Durieu system in the late 1860s. The chiefs used the umbrella of missionary authority to bolster their own authority and to enact harsh measures of social control. Individuals accused of drunkenness, theft, or immorality by the village watchmen were publicly whipped by the chiefs, who were acting under the explicit authority of the missionaries. On more than one occasion the punishments drew the attention of the local white settlers, who, outraged at the cruelty of these actions and of the Oblates’ complicity, petitioned government officials to prohibit such punishments (BCARS 1869; McGuckin 1873). Government officials at first were reluctant to interfere and in some instances lent the chiefs the weight of colonial authority. In 1873 McGuckin reported that “Judge Begbie gave Foster and the people of Clinton a good advice to interfere no more between the Indian Chiefs and their subjects and told the Clinton Chief to punish his people as he was accustomed to do when they misbehaved. He gave the Chief a paper authorising him to do so” (McGuckin 1873; emphasis added).

Early in his career Matthew Baillie Begbie had supported the plan to establish a separate court system to handle crimes committed by Indians. Now, as chief justice of British Columbia, Begbie instructed all justices of the peace not to interfere with “Indian chiefs exercising their customary jurisdiction over drunken and disorderly members of their own tribe and inflicting on them the salutary discipline usual in the tribe [except in cases
of] excessive severity” (cited in D. Williams 1977: 107). The plan to protect
the presumed “customary jurisdiction” of Indian chiefs had the full sup-
port not only of the Oblates but of key provincial politicians; both were
lobbying federal Indian Affairs officials to affirm the legality of Indian

Although these punishments were legitimated by government and
church officials as being consistent with Shuswap tradition, an incident
from Soda Creek suggests that such measures were a recent innovation. In
1869 the owner of a roadhouse near the Soda Creek Indian village com-
plained to the justice of the peace that the Soda Creek chief, Kramousalist,
and a missionary from St. Joseph’s, McGuckin, had carried out “acts of
cruelty” against two Soda Creek women. The two women, each married
by Shuswap tradition, had spent the night with white men at the roadhouse
adjacent to the Soda Creek village. After the women were discovered by
the village watchmen, the chief and a group of villagers the next morning
got to the roadhouse to arrest the women. They were reluctantly turned
over, the roadhouse owner warning the chief that if he whipped them, the
owner would notify government officials.

Unsure of what to do, Kramousalist traveled to Williams Lake to con-
sult with the missionary as to what punishment would be suitable. After
being reassured by McGuckin that the chief would not be arrested by the
colonial officials for whipping the women, Kramousalist then returned to
Soda Creek and gave each woman twenty lashes. The next day the chief
brought the women to the mission, where McGuckin lectured to them on
the immorality of their conduct (BCARS 1869).

A local doctor sent by the justice of the peace to investigate the matter
submitted the following report:

*The chief admits that he had never flogged any of his women be-
fore. As nearly the whole of the Indians of each tribe that I visited
were at distant lakes on fishing excursions, as usual at this period of
the year, my general information of their customs and laws, is more
meagre than I could have wished. I cannot trace any case of gross cru-
elty but find that it is customary for the Chief of each tribe to flog
his Indians, the men for theft or drunkenness, the women for immor-
ality, and all the reputable settlers in the district bear testimony to
the marked improvement in the Indian character during the last three
years, which they attribute to the teaching of the Catholic priesthood.
(ibid.; emphases added)*

McGuckin insisted that he had not instructed the Shuswap chiefs to use
whipping as a punishment but had simply supported them in choosing
whatever measures they felt necessary for maintaining social control in
their villages. McGuckin, however, had implicitly approved these acts by informing the Shuswap chiefs that it "was customary with several Chiefs in other parts of the Colony to thus punish for certain grievous crimes" and that whipping was not a sinful act, since the chief was like "a Father of a family, whose duty it was, to use his best endeavours to make his children well-conducted" (ibid.).

The Durieu system was thus part of an elaborate scheme in which the Shuswap chiefs, the local missionaries, and the colonial officials all collaborated, each party borrowing the other's symbols of authority to legitimate the program. The Shuswap chiefs borrowed the symbols of church and government authority in an attempt to reclaim their authority, albeit in a new guise, and to restore social order to their communities. For their part, both missionaries and government officials perceived the severe, authoritarian actions of the Shuswap chiefs as an effective strategy for turning the native population into honest, hardworking, and ultimately law-abiding members of the new colonial empire. Although there is no ethnographic evidence to support the idea that whipping was a traditional method of social control used by Shuswap chiefs, it is irrelevant whether or not these authoritarian acts in fact were consistent with Shuswap tradition. The important point is that these acts achieved the ends desired by the missionaries and the colonial government. The idea of Shuswap tradition, however, was a critical symbolic resource for the Oblates. They invented the notion of the Shuswap chiefs' traditional authoritarianism to protect themselves from the criticisms of the settler population and from criminal prosecution by the colonial government; paradoxically, in doing so, the Oblates also created an ideological space for native resistance.

The Next Phase: Rejection and Disinterest

The period of tentatively favorable relations between the Shuswap and the Oblates ended in 1873 with Lejacq's transfer out of the territory. His successor, Charles Marchal, "did not have the same charismatic appeal for the Indians as Father LeJacq" (Whitehead 1981a: 81), and within three years he had "visibly lost the regard of several Shuswap bands" (ibid.). It was not only Marchal's lack of charisma that led to his downfall, however. He roused the suspicions and fears of the native population by claiming in his church sermons that the government, despite its assurances, had no intention of protecting Indian land rights (BCARS 1875). Marchal broke the tacit agreement that his predecessor had established with the native chiefs of the area and began to deliver justice with his own hands. A blatant case occurred among one Lillooet community, where Marchal had
 whipped natives who had been accused of crimes, resulting in two Lil-loomet chiefs filing complaints with the federal Indian commissioner (ibid.). In short, Marchal was alienating not only the native population but local white settlers and the other Oblates at St. Joseph's as well (Whitehead 1981a: 81). Finally, Marchal lost the respect of the Shuswap when, at a weak moment, he gave William, the chief of the Williams Lake band, permission to allow some of the men in the camp to sing one of the traditional songs. This action ignited a revival of ceremonialism, and within a short time virtually all the northern Shuswap bands were again feasting, gambling, and dancing (McGuckin 1876a). The delicate balance of authority between the missionaries and the local chiefs finally had tipped, and Marchal's efforts to stop these practices were futile “mes reproches échouèrent devant l'obstination des chefs qui, blessés dans leur orgueil, poussaient les jeunes gens au mal” [in the face of the obstinacy of the chiefs who, their pride wounded, pushed their young men to bad ways] (Marchal 1891: 156).

The chiefs of Williams Lake and Soda Creek were instrumental in leading the revolt against the mission. Their actions, however, are best understood in the broader context of events occurring around them, particularly the crisis over the land.

Following the entry of British Columbia into the Canadian confederation in 1871, the province continued its strategy of dealing with the land crisis by allotting small reserves rather than signing formal treaties with the native nations. Whereas the federal government assumed the responsibility for managing Indians and Indian reserves, the province assumed ownership over all provincial lands not in fee-simple title. Constant disagreements between the province and the federal government over the amount of land to be allotted as Indian reserves—federal officials suggested eighty acres per family, whereas the province insisted that ten acres were adequate—greatly impeded the progress of reserve allotments (Cummings and Mickenberg 1972: 183). As a result, Indian-settler conflicts escalated throughout the province, leading the frustrated federal Indian Commissioner of British Columbia, L. W. Powell, to remark that “if there has not been an Indian War, it is not because there has been no injustice to the Indians, but because the Indians have not been sufficiently united” (British Columbia 1887 [1875]: 153). In 1876 a joint provincial-federal Indian reserve commission was finally established, but by 1879 the commission still had not arrived in the Cariboo.

By the 1870s land conflicts in the Cariboo region were becoming severe. White settlers continued to preempt land, blocking native access to some fishing stations and hunting grounds. The Shuswap had begun to
rely on root crops as a component of their diet as early as the 1840s, yet with the influx of settlers even these cultivated fields occasionally were being encroached upon (BCARS 1864, 1868). With the failure of the 1879 Fraser River salmon runs, the plight of the northern Shuswap bands was desperate, and, as winter approached, starvation seemed a very real threat. The situation of the northern Shuswap was eloquently expressed by Chief William in a letter dictated to a local settler and later published in the Victoria Colonist:

I am an Indian Chief and my people are threatened by starvation. The white men have taken all the land and all the fish. A vast country was ours. It is all gone. The noise of the threshing machine and the wagon has frightened the deer and the beaver. We have nothing to eat. My people are sick. My young men are angry. All the Indians from Canoe Creek to the headwaters of the Fraser say: "William is an old woman. He sleeps and starves in silence." I am old and feeble and my authority diminishes every day. I am sorely puzzled. I do not know what I say next week when the chiefs are assembled in a council. A war with the white man will end in our destruction, but death in war is not so bad as death by starvation. (William 1879)

Although these threats were disbelieved by the Indian Commissioner for British Columbia, they were corroborated by McGuckin, who warned the commissioner that "the Chief of the Alkali Lake tribe told Father Marchal that his young men were urging him to allow them to go to war with the whites. The Chilcotin and many other I know will be only too glad to join them in order to have the opportunity of avenging old wrongs" (cited in Whitehead 1981a: 90).

By this time major rifts had appeared within the Shuswap communities between those promoting conciliation with whites and those promoting violence. The authority of the Shuswap chiefs was seriously threatened by these internal divisions. The chiefs were struggling to keep their communities together, to maintain their leadership positions, and to develop a strategy for dealing with the precarious situation of their people. In the recent past this strategy had involved the borrowing of the power and authority of missionaries and government officials and providing the communities with charismatic, authoritarian leadership. Although this strategy proved effective for maintaining social control within the communities, by their incorporation of colonial symbols of power, the Shuswap chiefs implicitly had legitimated the very colonial regime that they were now trying to oppose through their land claims. By the late 1870s the Shuswap chiefs began to doubt the usefulness of the Oblates as effective advocates for deal-
ing with Shuswap land matters. The Shuswap chiefs led their communities not only to reject the missionary program but to revive ceremonialism that was at once an act of symbolic resistance and a vehicle for community revitalization.7

The period of ceremonialism and open resistance was short, however, and through the 1870s and 1880s the Shuswap continued to have mixed relations with the Oblates. Chief William, after a severe illness in 1876 that brought him close to death, had a sudden change of heart and once again embraced the church. His people immediately followed his example, and that Easter all the band participated in confession (McGuckin 1876b). However, the Soda Creek chief, Kramousalist, remained antagonistic to the missionaries, causing one missionary to complain: “Of course most of his Indians believe themselves obliged to follow his example” (ibid.). A subtle battle for symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990) ensued, through which both chief and missionary sought to gain prestige and influence through their control over symbolic resources associated with the church. At Christmas in 1876 a large group of Soda Creek Indians, including the chief, gathered at the mission. Although McGuckin attended to the people, who “complied with all my requests and each one in particular has renewed his promises of living up faithfully to the observance of their Christian duties,” he ignored the Soda Creek chief: “The Chief of Soda Creek who has shown so much obstinacy [sic] for the past year and a half made a couple of attempts at ‘talking’ according to his own idea [to] do things, but I refused to reply and at the same time insisted on each one in particular complying with my request, which they did” (McGuckin 1877). The missionary did not allow Kramousalist to speak “until nearly all the rest had spoken and promised” (ibid.). With these actions the fatal step had been taken. By engaging in these struggles on symbolic ground controlled by the Oblates, Kramousalist was submitting to the implicit preconceptions of the legitimacy of Oblate authority and belief; the hegemonic consequences of legitimating chiefly authority using colonial symbols, now that the chief and the missionary were in direct competition, were clearly visible.

Kramousalist continued to oppose the missionaries, but by 1879 his influence was waning, and the Shuswap’s attitude toward the mission moved from outright opposition to ambivalence. Occasional Shuswap opposition to the church continued until the death in 1889 of Kramousalist, who was described as the ringleader of the revolt (Marchal 1891: 158).

Through this period of struggle with the Oblates the Shuswap chiefs continued to enforce social order within their communities. In 1881 a new level of colonial authority was imposed on the Shuswap with the creation of a federal Indian Agency and the appointment of an Indian Agent in
the Williams Lake district. That year reserves were finally allotted to the Soda Creek, Williams Lake, and Alkali Lake Shuswap, which, although inadequate for their needs, nevertheless served to reduce somewhat the tensions over land. With alcohol consumption and drunkenness now becoming common in the villages, the Shuswap chiefs collaborated with the local Indian Agent and missionary to prevent bootlegging and drinking. In the early 1880s Indian constables were appointed by the Indian Agent on both the Williams Lake and Soda Creek villages (Canada 1884: 106). The constables were to report any instances of wrongdoing to the local Indian Agent, who, empowered by the Indian Act, could then launch legal proceedings against the offenders. This strategy for village control was fully supported by Chief Kramousalist of Soda Creek and Chief William of the Williams Lake band; under their influence, drinking in the villages was effectively reduced.

The [Soda Creek] chief, Camusells [Kramousalist], is one of the few remaining “old-time” chiefs—feared and obeyed by his tribe, and a mortal enemy to all drunkenness and immorality of any kind. Before he became too old, he used, sometimes, to execute his sentences with his own hand . . . this village like Williams Lake (Sugar Cane), has often been at the mercy of unprincipled whites, prowling about after night with whiskey; and the chief was eloquent in his expressions of delight at the stop put to such proceedings at the latter reserve. (ibid.)

The chiefs, once again taking advantage of the apparatus of the colonial government to bolster their authority and to restore social order in the communities, had now taken one more step toward the Shuswap’s ideological accommodation to colonial society.

The Third Phase: Conversion and Revitalization

In 1890 the Shuswap had a dramatic change in attitude toward the Catholic missionaries. In May a group of Shuswap Indians, ironically led by the same Charles Marchal who had “lacked sufficient charismatic appeal” to maintain Shuswap acceptance of the Durieu system in 1873, traveled to Sechelt to attend the opening of a new church. The Sechelt Indians had embraced wholeheartedly the Durieu system, and their village was considered a model to which other Indians (and more importantly, missionaries) could aspire. The weeklong ceremonies and festivities, in true Catholic fashion, were “elaborate and impressive” (Whitehead 1981a: 94). The church blessing itself was attended by almost two thousand natives from various nations in the Pacific Northwest. A contingency of mission-
aries and chiefs departed midway through the week from Sechelt to attend the funeral of Bishop d’Herbomez in New Westminster, which was to be a ceremony equally rich in symbolism and drama.

The witnessing of these events set off a new round of religious fervor among the Shuswap bands. On their return to the Cariboo, the Shuswap, according to Lejacq, related the wonders that they had witnessed and, in doing so, sparked among the Shuswap “une révolution dans les esprits” (Lejacq 1896: 23). Five months after the party’s return to the Cariboo, the Alkali Lake Shuswap held a ceremony, similar to that which had occurred at Sechelt, for the dedication of the village’s new church, with all other Indian bands of the district invited to attend and Bishop Durieu presiding. Not to be outdone, the Williams Lake Shuswap, under the urging of Chief William, soon began plans to build a new church in their village. This task, owing to the Shuswap’s financial poverty, would take the next five years; nevertheless, the 1895 dedication of the new church at the Williams Lake Indian village was unrivaled in its pageantry and ceremonialism (ibid.).

Durieu took advantage of the 1895 dedication to reintroduce to the Shuswap his system of village control, now remodeled in the form of a new organization, the Indian Total Abstinence Society of British Columbia. The explicit goal of the society was to reduce Indian alcohol use by encouraging a more rigorous following of Catholic values and church attendance. The society consisted of “a ‘regular association’ with a constitution, regulations, and statutes. . . . The Bishop wished to establish a branch of the society in every Indian village, and the chief—wherever possible the hereditary chief—was made the local president of his branch. As the local president, the chief was empowered ‘without being subject to arrest and prosecution to maintain order and discipline among the Indian members of the said society’” (Whitehead 1981a: 95–96). According to this system the chief was expected to carry out his mandate of social control without breaching the laws of colonial society. The chief was assisted by locally appointed watchmen, who reported instances of intemperance. Fines for such transgressions were collected by a local treasurer, and the funds went toward keeping the village church in good repair (AD ca. 1895).

In fact, the reintroduction of the Durieu system in the guise of the Total Abstinence Society was the Roman Catholic Church’s attempt to restore its control over Indian communities and to temper the actions of chiefs who were continuing to use corporal punishment as a technique of social control. In 1892 a Catholic priest, Eugène Chirouze, along with the chief of the Fountain band and four other Lilooet Indians, was arrested and convicted of assault against a young Lilooet Indian woman, whom the missionary had directed to be whipped for sexual immorality (AD 1892).
Chirouse was sentenced to a year in jail. The Catholic Church once again defended Chirouse’s involvement on the basis that the chief was implementing traditional law and blamed local Protestants for attempting to discredit the Catholic Church by drawing attention to the matter (Bunoz 1893: 129–61). After Bishop Durieu appealed to the governor-general a remission of sentence was granted (Whitehead 1981a: 97). Nevertheless, the church was greatly embarrassed by the incident.

Since the inception of the Durieu system, a delicate balance of power had existed between the chiefs, the missionaries, and the colonial governments. In the early years it had been convenient for missionaries and the Shuswap chiefs to have the responsibility for maintaining morality and order in the native villages subcontracted to the missionary-appointed church chiefs. When the missionaries had overstepped their authority and interfered too much in internal matters, they had been rejected by the native communities. On the other hand, leaving the chiefs unrestrained to carry out acts of corporal punishment left the church open to criticisms from the settler population, which was outraged both at these acts of cruelty and the church’s complicity, and vulnerable to criminal prosecution by the colonial government. The tensions had existed since the inception of the Durieu system, and they peaked with the Chirouse case.

By the 1890s colonial authority had been fully established in British Columbia. Government officials were no longer willing to allow missionaries a relatively free hand in their experiments with the social and cultural transformation of native communities or to accept the legitimacy of traditional native law. Government agents now sought to bring both natives and missionaries under state authority. Durieu responded to the crisis brought about by the Chirouse case by reformulating the Durieu system to mirror legal organizations of colonial society. Durieu’s Temperance Society would be organized according to white regulations, thus attracting the support and encouragement of white society, and also would grant chiefs the same powers as before, only now more closely supervised by the church (Whitehead 1981a: 97).

This system of social control persisted among the northern Shuswap until the 1940s (Furniss 1987). Shuswap elders at Alkali Lake, reflecting on the 1920-40 period, describe the four cardinal sins of the time to be drinking, dancing, gambling, and sexual immorality. Transgressors were called before the chief, and also the priest if he was nearby, and forced to confess to their crimes. Punishment was a fine of either cash or a valuable possession; some individuals were made to stand at the front of the church during mass, holding their hands straight above their heads until the end of the service. Shuswap elders at Alkali Lake continue to remem-
ber this system not as one of church-imposed authority but as one in which the band chief and the missionary were “partners” in a system of local village control that was both positive and effective (ibid.). Significantly, this system of social control was spatially restricted to the reserve village, where people spent only a part of the year. Although this restriction may have initially been due to the obvious problems of controlling the behavior of people when they were away from the village, by the early 1900s chiefs made little effort to control behavior outside the village limits (ibid.: 124), indicating the incompleteness of the church’s hegemonic influence.

To understand the dramatic conversion to Catholicism in 1890 and the acceptance five years later of the revamped Durieu system, a broader historical and geographic perspective must be applied. It becomes apparent that the dramatic mobilization of the northern Shuswap communities toward Catholicism was not a unique, unprecedented event. Throughout the 1800s prophets occasionally emerged among the native groups of the northwest interior, and their emergence induced an outbreak of religious fervor and community ceremonialism. Spier (1935) has linked these prophetic movements, the most discrete being the Christianized Prophet Dance (1830s), the Smohalla Cult (1860s), and the Ghost Dance (1870 and 1890), to the underlying prophet dance complex, believed to be rooted in the aboriginal shamanistic traditions of Native North Americans (Ridington 1978).

The prophet dance is known to have existed among the Shuswap through the 1800s (Teit 1975 [1909]). From time to time a prophet would appear who was believed to have died, to have traveled to the land of the dead, and to have returned to life with a message from the spirit world. World destruction was imminent; salvation could occur only through the performance of community dances, in which all were urged to participate. The emergence of a prophet typically drew large numbers of Indians from throughout the plateau area. After several days the people dispersed but continued to perform the dances in their home territory. Interest in the dancing gradually diminished with time, only to be renewed with vigor upon the appearance of a new prophet or the announcement of a new revelation.

The periodic mobilization of the native communities, in the context of the prophet dance, set a backdrop for the introduction of the elaborate pageantry and ritual of the Catholic Church. The same energy that the northern Shuswap devoted to prophet dancing was later devoted to Roman Catholic ceremonies. Certain symbolic parallels between the prophet dance and the Catholic ceremonies are evident: first, initiation of
a new round of prophet dance fervor with the gathering of bands to hear a newly emerged prophet, and the initiation of Catholic religious fervor with the gathering of Indian bands from throughout the region to witness the church dedication at Sechelt; second, the return to the home community to spread the new prophet’s, or the missionaries’, message for salvation; third, participation by the entire community in group ceremonies, circular dancing in the case of the prophet dance, and church dedications and other public ceremonies in the case of the church’s activities. Church dedications now became instrumental in revitalizing Shuswap communities.

The reasons for this transference of collective energy to Catholic ceremonialism is less obvious. Leslie Spier (1935) has argued that the Christianized version of the prophet dance that swept through the interior plateau in the 1830s served to prime at least some native groups to accept Christianity or at least to overtly accept the Christian symbols and practices as later introduced by missionaries. However, although the Christianized prophet dance caused a new religious fervor among the majority of the interior native groups, later on not all responded as well to the Christian missionaries as did the northern Shuswap. Furthermore, the northern Shuswap had first contact with a Catholic missionary in 1842, and from 1857 on the Oblates made persistent efforts to convert the native people. Yet it was not until the 1890s that they achieved any success, as defined by the overt acceptance of both the Durieu institutions and Catholic Church ceremonialism. Factors apart from the Shuswap’s preexisting familiarity with Christian symbols and rituals were involved in their dramatic conversion of 1890.

After thirty years of missionary contact, of the imposition of colonial authority, and of the loss of Shuswap control over the land, the revitalization of the Shuswap communities under the traditional cultural symbols of the prophet dance had little strength. A brief attempt had been made in the 1870s but had been short-lived. The very practices central to the prophet dance—feasting, dancing, singing—were subject to the critical attacks of the missionaries. The Shuswap chiefs’ efforts to recapture their authority by collaborating with colonial powers triggered changes that generated new symbols of power among the Shuswap. By 1890 revitalization of the Shuswap communities was occurring under the only symbols immediately available: those supplied by the Catholic Church.

The Shuswap’s conversion to Catholicism during the 1890s, as in other Native American revitalization movements, restored a sense of community solidarity in the face of destabilization and demoralization arising from contact with European colonialism (Wallace 1956; Aberle 1959, 1982; Jorgensen 1972). Unlike other revitalization movements, this one did not
overtly aim to symbolically reject white society and to return to the older traditions. At the same time, their conversion should not be seen as implying a complete abandonment of the older Shuswap traditions and the unquestioning acceptance of Catholicism. More important is the meaning that the Shuswap assigned to these symbols and what they enabled the Shuswap to accomplish; the Catholic Church ceremonies were ideal occasions for gathering together and for renewing community solidarity. Yet even as participation in Catholic ceremonies revitalized the Shuswap community, it also set the basic terms for their relationship with church and government authorities, ultimately furthering the entrenchment of colonial hegemony.

Conclusion

The observation that northern Shuswap chiefs initially collaborated with the Oblates as a means of bolstering their own authority parallels studies of indigenous-missionary relations in Oceania, where indigenous leaders converted to Christianity at strategic moments to reaffirm their positions of leadership and to advance their political interests (Sahlins 1983; Gailey 1987; White 1991). Studies of Indian-missionary relations closer to home have shown that internal political struggles within North American native communities played significant roles in determining which sectors of the native community chose to convert and at what specific time (Brown 1987; Kugel 1990). Research has also demonstrated that the adoption of Christian elements preceding direct contact with Christian missionaries was instrumental both in enabling individuals to create new offices of authority, such as the position of chief among the Skagit Indians of western Washington (Collins 1974), and in enabling chiefs to enhance their existing authority (Garth 1965). That native people used Christianity in strategic and creative ways is undeniable; yet in some accounts this agency has been tremendously exaggerated.11 Whitehead, who has made significant contributions to the study of Roman Catholic missionary history in British Columbia (1981a, 1988), nevertheless argues that conversion to Christianity was “a matter of choice” for British Columbian Indians, assuming that “the Indians showed their love of Jesus by attending church, religious exercises, catechism classes and prayer sessions” (Whitehead 1981b: 105) rather than exploring native motives as they emerged from an indigenous system of values, beliefs, and interests.

Studies of the Durieu system in British Columbia have suggested that its success was in part due to its compatibility with existing status differentials within native societies (Lemert 1954). Lemert notes how the Coast
Salish at Sechelt drove Catholic missionaries away in 1860, yet by 1871 the entire Sechelt population had apparently converted to Catholicism and had reestablished themselves in a new village, complete with church and modern houses, in which the Durieu system thrived. Lemert suggests that the Durieu system gained acceptance not only because it enabled high-status individuals to retain their positions but also because of the Coast Salish's general state of cultural crisis, their predilection for elaborate religious pageantry and ceremonialism, and the fact that the Durieu system did not require a total abandonment of all traditional practices (ibid.: 25). Yet none of these explanations can account for the timing of the Sechelt conversion, nor why the Sechelt responded with such enthusiasm to the Catholic missionaries, whereas the adjacent Homalthko, Tlahoose, and Sliammon Coast Salish continued to resist the missionary program (ibid.: 26).

Further, the Durieu system was adopted by many native groups in the south coastal and interior regions of British Columbia, including not only societies organized along formal principles of status hierarchy and rank, such as the central Carrier (Morie 1978: 337–38; Hall 1992: 86–95), but also societies in which these distinctions were much less significant, such as among the Shuswap, southern Carrier, Kutenai (Whitehead 1988: 20–24), and the Okanagan (Thomson 1985). Carstens notes similar processes of political expediency associated with conversion to Catholicism among the Okanagan. By the 1870s Okanagan chiefs in the southern interior of British Columbia were associating with Oblate missionaries in efforts to consolidate their chiefly power (Carstens 1991: 52). According to Carstens, these actions reflected a political accommodation of the Okanagan to colonial structures of authority; yet the actual social processes by which Okanagan symbols of authority became supplanted by those of the colonizers remain unexplored.

These lingering questions are best investigated through detailed, ethnohistorical analyses of the historically specific social, economic, and ideological contexts in which natives and missionaries encountered one another. Making use of the model of native-missionary relations described at the beginning of this essay does not presume that church and state domination of native peoples is a foregone conclusion nor that hegemony is ever complete or total (R. Williams 1977; Scott 1990). As is evident in the ethnohistorical literature on native responses to Christian missionization, there exists considerable variation with regard to the degree to which North American native societies maintained control over their relationships with missionaries and to the arenas in which native resistance and agency have continued to be expressed. This essay suggests the difficulty
of characterizing the native-missionary encounter in terms of either native agency or passive cultural destruction. Finally, it suggests that an analytical model highlighting cultural hegemony and symbolic practice may be applied fruitfully to the study of Indian-white relations in various contexts, both ethnohistorical and contemporary.

Notes

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1 The concept of cultural hegemony recently has been used by historians to explore the political functions of cultural symbols and the manner in which ideas serve to legitimate and to reproduce existing institutions and relations of authority within society (Lears 1985: 568). I define hegemony here as a lived process of cultural domination (R. Williams 1977). Hegemony is never complete; rather, it is an ongoing process that must be continually responsive to challenges.

It might be argued that the notion of hegemony is not that useful in situations where missionaries lack sufficient political and economic power to coerce natives. For example, Kan (1985) suggests that the ability of native peoples to successfully manipulate their relationships with Christian missionaries to achieve specific goals reflects the relative lack of power missionaries wielded over native peoples as well as the missionaries’ willingness to accept certain traditional elements of the indigenous social, cultural, and political system rather than struggling to bring about complete cultural change.

Before the hegemony model can be dismissed, two critical questions must be asked. First, what were the broader circumstances that initially led native peoples to adopt new cultural symbols? Culture, by definition, is essentially conservative; the adoption of new cultural symbols presumably is a response to the ineffectiveness of older symbols and structures of meaning to account for new circumstances or to achieve desired ends. The very fact that cultural adjustment was necessary points to the need to examine the adoption of Christianity by native peoples in the broader context of unequal power relations introduced through the colonial presence. That some native groups chose to convert to Christianity and to incorporate some aspects of the colonial political and socioeconomic system rather than to mount nativistic movements aimed at the rejection of white society may be a function of the increasingly restricted symbolic resources that these native groups had available to them to resist outside forces and to revitalize their communities.

Second, what are the long-term consequences for native people when they use colonial symbols to represent themselves to non-native audiences in various contexts of interaction? Here the concept of cultural hegemony is a particularly strong analytical device. It draws attention to the most important consequence of adopting a hegemonic cultural system: that the meanings associated with
those symbols, though controllable in a local context, become unpredictable when they move beyond the local context and are juxtaposed with other cultural symbols whose meanings are defined and controlled by the dominant society. For example, through their involvement in church brotherhood organizations the Tlingit were able to "present themselves to the Americans and the Russians as 'civilized Indians,' and thus were able to improve their standing within the larger sociopolitical system they did not control" (Kan 1985: 196). Ironically, though the Tlingit's conversion may have enabled them to achieve short-term goals, from the perspective of members of the dominant society it only affirmed the assumptions embedded in colonial ideology of the superiority of Christianity, the inherent inferiority of native culture and religion, and the natural right of colonial governments and missionaries to assert their authority over native peoples. That misunderstandings about the meaning of conversion may exist among natives and missionaries is not necessarily problematic in all settings and at all times. However, the significance of these misunderstandings, and their hegemonic implications, become clearly visible when native people begin to resist the colonial presence using a language and symbolic system that implicitly affirms the very ideas by which the colonial system has rationalized its domination of native peoples (see Wolfe 1991).

Grossman (1965) provides a somewhat different interpretation of clans among the nineteenth-century Shuswap.

An important question to be asked is whether the northern Shuswap chiefs who became supporters of the Durieu system in the 1860s and early 1870s were seeking to affirm their existing offices or were newcomers, not linked by hereditary lines, who were claiming chieftainship positions made vacant after the smallpox epidemic. Records indicate that in 1870 the chiefs of the Williams Lake, Alkali Lake, and Soda Creek bands all were hereditary chiefs; all had inherited their positions from their fathers; all were between forty and fifty years old in 1870 (OA 1866–82).

For a different interpretation of the origin of whipping as a form of social control used by Shuswap chiefs see Whitehead 1988: 16. Whitehead argues that this practice predated the arrival of the Oblates and was rooted in the Plateau whipping complex postulated by Garth (1965). In fact, Garth's analysis was specific to the southeastern Plateau groups, specifically the Nez Percé, Flathead, Cayuse, and Kalispel; further, he argues that whipping as a form of social control diffused to these groups from the eighteenth-century Spanish Franciscan missions in the American Southwest. The Shuswap, according to Teit (1975 [1909]: 586; 1900: 309–10), did have a ceremonial practice in which an elderly man, with the approval of a family, entered a winter dwelling and proceeded to enact a ritual that could involve whippings. The purpose of the ritual, however, was to encourage children to challenge the authority of the whip-bearer; in contrast, whipping as social control had a radically different goal of enforcing submission to authority. Archival evidence further suggests that whipping as a means of social control was introduced by the Oblates. Not only is this indicated in the doctor's testimony already cited, in which he states that "the [Soda Creek] chief admits that he had never flogged any of his women before" (BCARS T869), but it is clearly stated in a complaint sent to federal Indian Commissioner I. W. Powell in 1875, in which the Lilooet chief Chelecousela of the Fountain band, in the context of protesting Marchal's excessive
use of the whip to punish individuals deemed guilty of moral transgression, stated "we had no such thing as whipping before the Roman Catholic priests came among us" *(BCARS 1875)*.

5 See Rettig (1980) for a similar nativistic revival among the Tsimshian.

6 Internal conflict among the Shuswap occasionally was triggered by other issues. James Murphy (1894), a white settler in the Williams Lake area, described one incident. In 1881 the Williams Lake band finally was allotted reserve land, and in the following years families established their own garden plots, some growing substantial crops of grains and vegetables. One year (possibly between 1881 and 1890), there being a shortage of storage facilities, the chief suggested that all the grain and produce be stored in his own large building. Next, Chief William and his son-in-law initiated a plan, on behalf of his community, to sell these goods to local whites and thus to establish a market for the produce of his people. The efforts to collectivize the goods produced by the different families met with extreme resistance, and in response a faction within the band openly challenged William's authority and elected another chief, Tomahusket, who for years had been a close friend and adviser to William. According to Murphy, "The leaders of the rebellion declared William too old to fulfil [sic] his duties properly. They further stated that he was the dupe of his renegade son-in-law, that, through his neglect, the smallpox had carried off the majority of his tribe, and finally that, in consequence of his cowardice, he had allowed White men to take possession of his lands" *(ibid.: 317)*. Through some strategic politics William managed to deflect these challenges and to maintain his position. An interesting parallel occurred in the 1970s and 1980s among the Alkali Lake Shuswap. In the early 1970s the band chief and his wife initiated efforts to address the alcohol problem on the reserve, efforts that, by the late 1970s, had led to a revitalization movement in the community and a rebirth of a strong sense of community solidarity *(Furniss 1987)*. In this context the band council initiated steps to collectivize fields that were locally acknowledged to be the property of families but that for some years had not been used. These incidents, separated by almost a century, coupled with the previous discussion of the impact of the fur trade on Shuswap society, support my earlier proposition that one of the main tensions structuring Shuswap society is the dialectical opposition between the autonomy of different families and the solidarity of the band collective. Similar cyclical processes have been discussed by Fogelson (1984). He proposes that Cherokee concepts of history emphasize the contradictory tendencies of egalitarianism and hierarchy.

7 The strategy of quelling internal dissent by focusing community attention on external issues was also used by Chief William to resolve the conflict described in note 6. Just at the peak of this conflict word arrived that a group of Indians had set up camp within Shuswap territory to hunt deer. Chief William announced this news to his band, blamed the blatant trespass on the recent dissent that, he implied, had generated a public perception of the band's weakness, and then vowed to immediately launch action against the invaders. Further strategic political action followed. In the end a war was never initiated, and the crisis within the band was averted *(Murphy 1894)*.

8 "Le chef était absolument dans son droit. De temps immémorial, les lois et les coutumes des nos sauvages confèrent au chef, aidé de son conseil, le pouvoir de législateur. Elles lui accordent, par là même, le droit de sanctionner la loi par
la peine’ [The chief was absolutely within his rights. From time immemorial the laws and customs of the Indians gave to the chief, aided by his Council, the authority of the legislature and by granting to him the right of giving sanction to the law by punishment of offences] (Bunoz 1893: 133).

9 See Thomson (1985: 77–96) for a discussion of early clashes in the Okanagan between government officials and Oblates regarding the Indian court system introduced by the missionaries.

10 The positive view that Shuswap elders at Alkali Lake have of their past chief, Sxoxomic, who had played a principal role as chauffeur for Bishop Durieu during the Williams Lake church dedication in 1895 and who was chief at Alkali Lake from at least as early as 1916 to the 1940s, contrasts with Thomson’s interpretation of Okanagan attitudes toward their chiefs in a similar era. Thomson argues that the Okanagan chiefs were “co-opted” by missionaries and government officials. As a result, “To the Indian people, [the chiefs] could only have lost their moral authority and become pathetic figureheads, completely dependent on the will of the whites” (1985: 73).

11 Different emphases on Indian agency versus coercion in native-missionary relations are evident particularly in recent studies of the impact of the Indian residential school system on First Nations in Canada (Gresco 1986; Redford 1979–80; Miller 1990; Haig-Brown 1988; Furniss n.d.).

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