

## REINSCRIBING THE SELF AND RE-WRITING THE WORLD:

### Ojibwe and Báxoje Autoethnography in Victorian Ethnological Exhibitions

**Abstract:** In seeking to reconcile Britain with its imperial past, many historians have turned to assessing its ethnological exhibitions. The exhibition of foreign peoples during the Victorian period bolstered and reflected imperial sentiments. In proclaiming the dehumanization of performers into nothing more than objects of British fantasy and abhorrence, scholars offer both a reflection on the centrality of the imperial imaginary and a scathing critique of the violence Britain inflicted on performers. Common throughout this literature is the presentation of two binaries: the producer – product and the voyeur – voyeured. In both instances, the story centers on what Britons deliberately created and consumed. By extension, performers are relegated to simply representing the product of British visions. This narrative is a grave oversight. The literature's overwhelming focus on British identity performance and colonial victimhood threatens to reproduce the very power structures which underlie imperialism. While performers were placed in impossible positions at home as well as abroad, this does not automatically invalidate their agency.

Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*, this paper explores the power performers held in appropriating, debating, and rejecting British meanings and tools. Through an analysis of primary 1840s sources, this paper follows the accounts of two Indigenous troupes of Ojibwe and Báxoje performers. By successfully wielding British entertainment, newspapers, science, and the language of Christian charity, these performers pushed for the proper recognition of their own identities and staked a claim in characterizing the British Other. Rather than play into the retreating role imagined for them, the Ojibweg and Báxoje refused to disappear. In centering the voices and agency of Indigenous performers, this paper challenges the dominant historiography on Victorian Britain and contributes to decolonizing the literature.

In seeking to reconcile Britain with its imperial past, many historians have turned to assessing its ethnological exhibitions. The exhibition of foreign peoples during the Victorian period bolstered and reflected imperial sentiments. In proclaiming the dehumanization of performers into nothing more than objects of British fantasy and abhorrence, scholars offer both a reflection on the centrality of the imperial imaginary and a scathing critique of the violence Britain inflicted on Indigenous peoples. However, the literature's overwhelming focus on British identity performance and colonial victimhood threatens to reproduce the very power structures that underlie imperialism. While performers were placed in impossible positions at home as well as abroad, this does not automatically invalidate their agency. In exploring the accounts of two North American Indigenous troupes, I argue that these performers used the opportunities afforded to them by their exhibitions to push for the proper recognition of their own identities and stake a claim in characterizing the British Other.

Within this paper I will first provide an overview of ethnological exhibitions in Victorian Britain before critiquing the notion of the 'human zoo' prevalent within the historiography. The paper will then turn to assessing how two troupes of Ojibwe and Báxoje performers actively appropriated British modes of expression to contest the imperial imaginary and inscribe their own meanings onto their experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout Britain's history, foreigners were frequently displayed for entertainment and educational purposes. There are accounts of Inuit exhibited in Bristol as early as 1501 and of "Virginians" canoeing on the Thames in 1603.<sup>2</sup> However, the practice of exhibiting Otherness

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<sup>1</sup> The Ojibweg (singular Ojibwe) are also referred to in sources as Mississauga, Chippewa or more broadly as Anishinaabeg. Similarly, the Báxoje are commonly known as the Iowa / Ioway in settler society.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991),

reached its zenith in the Victorian period. At its peak an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 performers toured annually across imperial centres.<sup>3</sup> London stood as the world capital for these exhibitions during the mid-nineteenth century. During this time, one could behold a variety of peoples including several First Nation, Khoisan, Zulu, Australian Aboriginal, Inuit, Fiji Islander, Torres Strait Islander and Rarotongan peoples.<sup>4</sup> Performers took to the stage at world fairs, circus and freak shows and pleasure gardens as well as at private viewings for scientific communities and upper-class entertainment.<sup>5</sup> The consumers of ethnological exhibitions were incredibly diverse. Spectators consisted of men, women and children and ranged from the working class to the royal family.<sup>6</sup>

The scholarship on Victorian ethnological exhibitions has heavily focused on contextualizing their popular appeal. Historians have concluded that ethnological show business sought to display foreign peoples as subhuman. To connote the degradation of this spectacle,

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402; Robert M. Lewis, "Wild American Savages and the Civilized English: Catlin's Indian Gallery and the Shows of London," *European Journal of American studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 6.

<sup>3</sup> Pascal Blanchard et al., "Human Zoos: The Greatest Exotic Shows in the West," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, eds. Pascal Blanchard et al., trans. Teresa Bridgeman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Nadia Durbach, "London, Capital of Exotic Exhibitions from 1830 to 1860," in *Human Zoos*, 82.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, "[Communication from Dr. W. H. R. Rivers Regarding Exhibition of Human Specimens]," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900): 6–7; John Conolly, *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London*, (London: John Churchill, 1855), 10, 22; Blanchard et al., "Human Zoos: The Greatest Exotic Shows in the West," 18, 22; John MacKenzie, "The Imperial Exhibitions of Great Britain," in *Human Zoos*, 260–261.

<sup>6</sup> Blanchard et al., 12; Durbach, "London, Capital of Exotic Exhibitions from 1830 to 1860," 81, 83, 88; McKenzie, "The Imperial Exhibitions of Great Britain," 259; Bernth Lindfors, Introduction to *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) ix; Bernth Lindfors, "Charles Dickens and the Zulus," in *Africans on Stage*, 64; "The Ojibbeway Indians—Oldham Lyceum—" *Manchester Times* (Manchester, Lancashire), July 31, 1846.

some scholars have referred to them as human zoos.<sup>7</sup> During a period of social upheaval and scientific change, performances of Otherness allowed Britain to reaffirm its sense of self.<sup>8</sup> Audiences not only learned about the performer's place in the racial hierarchy but of their own position above them. The ability to host human zoos became a sign in itself of power and modernity.<sup>9</sup> Britons demonstrated their ability to scientifically order, categorize and discipline the world around them. In casting its performers as savage, the exhibitions justified imperial expansion while obscuring its violence.<sup>10</sup> The Other's primitive status gave Britons humanitarian grounds on which to interfere in their lives: it was Britain's duty to raise these people to the height of civilization. Alternatively, shows could demonstrate a performer's irremediable backwardness and thus the inevitability of their disappearance. The Anglo-Saxon organizers who displayed Otherness, the scientists who were granted 'specimens' to study, and the entertained public all benefited from the exploitation of foreign performers.<sup>11</sup>

Common throughout this literature is the presentation of two binaries: the producer – product and the voyeur – voyeured. In both instances, the story centres on what Britons

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<sup>7</sup> Warren Cariou, "The Exhibited Body: The Nineteenth-Century Human Zoo," *Victorian Review* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 25; Gilles Boëstch and Pascal Blanchard, "From Cabinets of Curiosity to the 'Hottentot Venus': A Long History of Human Zoos," in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, eds. Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 355; Sadiah Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus,'" *History of science* 42, no. 2 (2004): 237-238; Blanchard et al., 21-22; McKenzie, 260.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Boëstch and Pascal Blanchard, "From Cabinets of Curiosity to the 'Hottentot Venus,'" 264; Blanchard, 9; Durbach, 83; McKenzie, 266; Lindfors, "Charles Dickens and the Zulus," 67; Viet Erlmann, "Spectatorial Lust," in *Africans on Stage*, 117; Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978), 281.

<sup>9</sup> Blanchard et al., 8; Durbach, 84, 87; McKenzie, 259; Erlmann, "Spectatorial Lust," 109; Sarah Amato, "In the Zoo: Civilizing Animals and Displaying People," in *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*, 105-138 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 136-137.

<sup>10</sup> Cariou, "The Exhibited Body," 26; Blanchard 15; McKenzie, 267; Boëstch and Blanchard, 268.

<sup>11</sup> Boëstch and Blanchard, 268; Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman," 238, Altick, *The Shows of London*, 281.

deliberately created and consumed. By extension performers are relegated to representing the products of British visions; the projections of their fantasies. This narrative is a grave oversight. In failing to consider ethnological performers as historical actors the framing of the human zoo blatantly disregards half of the story. No matter how much the British imaginary sought to reduce performers to ethnic objects, the performers themselves never passively accepted these terms of their representation.<sup>12</sup> In fact, they often actively worked to subvert them.

While relatively rare in the historiography, such conclusions are not unique to history. As John Sutton Lutz explains, Indigenous actors “have not vanished from the historical landscape: they have *been* vanished” by scholarship that confines them to the margins.<sup>13</sup> In exclusively studying the actions and beliefs of the West, scholars reproduce the very colonial visions they seek to critique. In order to determine the realities of ethnological exhibitions, these performances must be understood as contact zones. As defined by Mary Louise Pratt, contact zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”<sup>14</sup> While there was a very real power imbalance between the Victorian imperial centre and its peripheries, these categories do not constitute unbreakable binaries. Indeed, Pratt asserts that in framing its identity against the colonial Other, the centre became “dependent on its others to know itself.”<sup>15</sup> As such, colonized peoples held power in appropriating, debating and rejecting British meanings and tools. In

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<sup>12</sup> Saloni Mathur, “Living Ethnological Exhibits: The Case of 1886,” *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 4 (November 2000): 494.

<sup>13</sup> John S. Lutz, *Makúk: a new history of Aboriginal-white relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.

exploring performer agency in Victorian Britain, this paper will now assess how the Ojibweg and Báxoje made meaning out of their experiences on exhibit.

In March 1844 performer and show organizer Maungwudaus arrived in Portsmouth with ten other Ojibweg.<sup>16</sup> They were also joined by British Canadian farmer George McKee who organized the troupe with Maungwudaus.<sup>17</sup> While in London, the group performed daily at Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly.<sup>18</sup> After briefly touring France and Belgium in 1845 they continued on to perform in regional concert halls, theatres and gardens across Britain and Ireland from 1846-1848.<sup>19</sup> Four months after the Ojibweg's initial debut, fourteen Báxoje performers arrived in England.<sup>20</sup> Accompanying the performers were organizer G.H.C. Melody and interpreter Jeffry Deroir. Melody worked as an agent for American showman P.T. Barnum.<sup>21</sup> Born into slavery, the Báxoje fought and may have even paid for Deroir's freedom. Deroir in turn acted as an

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<sup>16</sup> Donald B. Smith, *Mississauga portraits: Ojibwe voices from nineteenth-century Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), 140; George Catlin, *Adventures of the Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians in England, France, and Belgium: Being Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe with his North American Indian Collection*, 3rd ed. (London: published by the author, 1852), 2: 278-279; Maungwudaus, *An Account of the Chippewa Indians, who have been Travelling Among the Whites, in the United States, England, Ireland, Scotland and Belgium: With Very Interesting Incidents in Relation to the General Characteristics of the English, Irish, Scotch, French and Americans, with Regard to Their Hospitality, Peculiarities, etc.* (Boston: published by the author, 1848), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Mississauga portraits*, 139.

<sup>18</sup> Maungwudaus, *An Account of the Chippewa Indians*, 4; "Egyptian Hall," *Morning Post* (London), May 13, 1845.

<sup>19</sup> Maungwudaus 5-7; "Lyrical and Dramatic Record," *Morning Post* (London), September 8, 1845; "Miscellaneous News," *Leeds Times* (Leeds, Yorkshire), November 15, 1845; "Varieties," *Glasgow Citizen* (Glasgow, Lanarkshire) November 22, 1845; "The Ojibbeway Indians," *Windsor and Eton Express* (Windsor, Berkshire), November 8, 1845; "Advertisements and Notices," *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), September 28, 1846; Catlin, *Adventures of the Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians*, 2: 279-302.

<sup>20</sup> Martha Royce Blaine, *The Ioway Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 229; Catlin, 2:7,13.

<sup>21</sup> Greg Olson, "Slave, Trader, Interpreter, and World Traveler: The Remarkable Story of Jeffrey Deroir," *Missouri Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (July 2013):226-227.

advocate and translator for the Báxoje in treaty negotiations.<sup>22</sup> While in London, the Báxoje performed at Egyptian Hall, Vauxhall Gardens and Lord's Cricket ground.<sup>23</sup> Like the Ojibweg they performed across Britain and Ireland and briefly toured Paris in June 1845 before returning home later that year.<sup>24</sup>

While abroad, both the Ojibweg and Báxoje worked for a time with American artist George Catlin. Catlin had travelled to London in 1840 to promote his gallery of Indigenous portraits.<sup>25</sup> In order to cater to public interests, he quickly began 'playing Indian' around the country.<sup>26</sup> The Báxoje and Ojibwe performers partnered with Catlin in 1844 and 1845 respectively.<sup>27</sup> This arrangement added legitimacy to both Catlin and the troupes' endeavours. For Catlin, the Indigenous troupes offered a way to satisfy the public's desire for 'authentic Indians.' For the performers, Catlin conferred recognition as an established name in the business.

Catlin's *Adventures of the Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians* offers an integral source in analyzing the agency of these performers. An equally significant document is Maungwudaus' self-published *Account of the Chippewa Indians*. Drawing on these sources, scholars have afforded varying levels of agency to these troupes. Some reproduce the assumptions of the human zoo by focusing exclusively on the imperial imaginary or concluding that performers did

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<sup>22</sup> Olson, "The Remarkable Story of Jeffrey Deroine," 225.

<sup>23</sup> "Flanders Mail," *Globe* (London), August 23, 1844; "The Ioway Indians," *London Evening Standard* (London), August 27, 1844; "Public Amusements," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London), September 22, 1844; "Advertisements and Notices," *Era* (London), September 15, 1844; Catlin, 2:117.

<sup>24</sup> Catlin; 2: 155, 178, 205.

<sup>25</sup> Catlin, 1:1.

<sup>26</sup> Catlin, 1:72-78, 88-89, 94-100.

<sup>27</sup> Catlin, 2:13, 279.

not understand the role they played within this imagination.<sup>28</sup> Others acknowledge Ojibwe and Báxoje critiques of British society yet still dedicate the majority of their time to analyzing British actors.<sup>29</sup> However, some scholars actively work to transgress the colonial binaries.<sup>30</sup> It is their work that grounds the research for this paper.

As there is little information on other members of the Ojibwe troupe, this paper privileges the accounts given by and centred on Maungwudaus. An Ojibwe of the Credit River, Maungwudaus worked as a Methodist missionary and an interpreter before becoming disillusioned with the church.<sup>31</sup> In 1844 he arrived in Britain, accompanied by his wife Uhwusigeezighgokway, his three children and four Wapole Island Ojibweg: Saysaygon, Kecheusin, Mushemong and Aunimuchkwahum.<sup>32</sup> Over the following years the troupe expanded as Maungwudaus and Uhwusigeezighgokway would go on to have four more children while abroad.<sup>33</sup> Maungwudaus was well aware of how he may be perceived and treated on tour. Before leaving he heard of another First Nation troupe that had recently returned from Britain and had complained of their experiences.<sup>34</sup> His relative and prominent Methodist minister, Peter Jones,

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<sup>28</sup> Cariou, 26-27; Altick, 279.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, "Wild American Savages and the Civilized English," 11; Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 73, 77-85; Cecilia Louise Morgan, *Travellers through Empire: Indigenous Voyages from Early Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 186, 191-205.

<sup>30</sup> Blaine, *The Ioway Indians*, 229-237; Winona Stevenson, "Beggars, Chickabobbooags, and Prisons: Paxoche (Ioway) Views of English Society, 1844-45," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 17, no. 4 (1993): 1-23; Nicole Marie Kewey, "Anishinaabek Abroad: Literal and Literary Indigenous Journeys in the 19<sup>th</sup> century," (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2012), 165-193; Smith, 126-163.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, 128, 133, 136.

<sup>32</sup> Smith 139-140; Catlin, 2:279.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, 149.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 139.



condemned such exhibitions as he feared that they would “lower the Indian character in the estimation of the religious public.”<sup>35</sup> Maungwudaus, who wrote to Jones while he was abroad, would have been aware of his views.<sup>36</sup> Despite these warnings, he chose to move forward with his plan.

Maungwudaus chose to perform abroad in order to ensure the future of his family. Facing insecure employment opportunities and unhonoured treaty obligations, he decided to take matters into his own hands.<sup>37</sup> The funds raised from the exhibitions were to go towards his children’s schooling.<sup>38</sup> In particular he desired to leave his youngest son abroad so that he could gain a British education.<sup>39</sup> Providing his children with Western educations did not reflect assimilation. Rather, it was a way for Maungwudaus to ensure that his children would have the means to engage with the colonizer as they saw fit. In other words, he wanted to provide them with autoethnographic tools. Through autoethnography, individuals represent themselves in dialogue with colonizers by appropriating their means of expression.<sup>40</sup> As evident in his travels, Maungwudaus engaged in autoethnography. Rather than passively accepting Britain’s imaginary, he wielded the country’s modes of expression and entertainment against it.

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Jones to George Vardon, Port Credit, 5 Sept. 1844, Credit Mission, Entry Book, 1831–1848, 103, quoted in Smith, 140.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, 138–139.

<sup>38</sup> “Lynn,” *Cambridge Independent Press* (Cambridge, Cambridgeshire), April 25, 1846; “Public Amusements,” *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, Lancashire), August 14 1846.

<sup>39</sup> “Literary Institution — The Ojibway Indians—,” *Kentish Independent* (London), July 12, 1845; “New-World Aborigines in Bradford,” *Bradford Observer* (Bradford, Yorkshire), September 2, 1847.

<sup>40</sup> Pratt, 9.

The Ojibwe show organizer was determined to stake a greater claim in Britain's understanding of his nation. After parting from George McKee, and later from Catlin in 1846, the troupe continued to tour Britain independently for two years.<sup>41</sup> Through his *own* lectures and his *own* published account Maungwudaus subverted British assessments of the Ojibweg. While Maungwudaus titled his pamphlet *An Account of the Chippewa Indians*, this was only to appeal to a Western readership. On stage the performers properly introduced themselves as Ojibwe. They were not, as some Britons incorrectly called them, Chippewa or Mississauga.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, they belonged to the Ojibwe *Nation*.<sup>43</sup> They were not wards of Britain but sovereign in their own right. The Ojibweg were however historical allies of the British and deserved to be respected as such.<sup>44</sup> To further this point, the troupe showed off a medal given to the nation on behalf of George III 70 years prior.<sup>45</sup> Maungwudaus also rejected the trope of the vanishing Indian. In alluding to the violence of colonization he contended that settlers attempted to make them vanish.<sup>46</sup> Yet despite these efforts the Ojibweg remained resilient. Although greatly reduced, he proclaimed that they were the most numerous and powerful North American nation and lived in the "most healthy, productive and beautiful part of Canada."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Catlin, 2:299; Maungwudaus, 7; Smith, 145.

<sup>42</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847; "Local Intelligence," *Norfolk News* (Norwich, Norfolk), April 18, 1846.

<sup>43</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847; *Norfolk News*, April 18, 1846; Maungwudaus, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847; *Norfolk News*, April 18, 1846.

<sup>45</sup> *Norfolk News*, April 18, 1846.

<sup>46</sup> "The Ojibbeway Indians," *Preston Chronicle* (Preston, Lancashire), July 11, 1846.

<sup>47</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847.

In re-affirming his Ojibwe identity Maungwudaus contested Britain's understanding of itself. As the *Liverpool Standard* wrote in July of 1846, his lectures "gave roguish hits at some of our more civilised notions."<sup>48</sup> Maungwudaus recounted the extreme inequality he witnessed in Britain. In describing London, he noted that "Like musketoes in America in the summer season, so are the people in this city, in their numbers, and biting one another to get a living. Many very rich, and many very poor."<sup>49</sup> Such a metaphor holds further complexity with an understanding of the Ojibwe language. More than a biting fly, when broken down the word *zagimeh* explains the "action of attaching on and taking from the essence of another."<sup>50</sup> People were not merely annoyingly biting at each other. For such discrepancies in wealth to exist, they had to steal the essence of others to get ahead. Maungwudaus experienced the pinnacle of British excess when visiting the Queen. He wrote that, "Her house is large, quiet country inside of it. We got tired before we went through all the rooms in it." Despite such existing frivolousness, the palace "they say is too small for her, and they are building a much larger one on one side of it."<sup>51</sup> He also connected the cruelty of colonization to British rule in Ireland, writing that "people make fire of turf; many of them are very poor; the British government is over them."<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the characterization of the Ojibweg as a "wicked and cruel people," obscured the fact that the British were the foreigners who had displaced and driven the Ojibweg from their home.<sup>53</sup> Were they not

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<sup>48</sup> "The Ojibbeway Indians," *Liverpool Standard and General Commercial Advertiser* (Liverpool, Lancashire), August 18, 1846.

<sup>49</sup> Maungwudaus, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Keway, "Anishinaabek Abroad," 189.

<sup>51</sup> Maungwudaus, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Maungwudaus, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847.

justified in defending against such violence? When not having to guard against settler encroachment, they were a kind-hearted and peaceable people. As he noted in July 1846 to an audience in Preston, "there were no murders or robberies in his country, as there were weekly announced in the English newspapers."<sup>54</sup> While the laws of the Ojibweg were mild, this did not mean that they were lawless. Rather, their lack of crime did not necessitate Britain's severe rules.

Maungwudaus also confronted gender and marriage norms. He was struck by what he perceived to be the frailty of British women. Maungwudaus observed that "The English women cannot walk alone; they must always be assisted by the men."<sup>55</sup> The perplexity of their ways became more apparent to Maungwudaus when the troupe was invited to dine with British officers. In sitting for their meal, "the ladies were brought to the table like sick women."<sup>56</sup> Fellow performer Saysaygon concluded that they would be useless as wives.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Ojibwe women would detest their husbands if they made them trade their responsibilities for menial work.<sup>58</sup> Another peculiarity of British culture was its views on divorce. If a married Ojibwe couple was unhappy, they would separate, rather than stay together just to fight.<sup>59</sup> The women of their nation were appalled by this British law. It was, "cruel and unjust," to keep a couple together if they would be miserable or untrue to each other.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Preston Chronicle*, July 11, 1846.

<sup>55</sup> Maungwudaus 4.

<sup>56</sup> Maungwudaus, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Maungwudaus, 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Preston Chronicle*, July 11, 1846; *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847.

<sup>59</sup> "The Ojibbeway Indians," *Preston Chronicle* (Preston, Lancashire), July 11, 1846.

<sup>60</sup> *Bradford Observer*, September 2, 1847.

Through his lectures and writings, Maungwudaus challenged Britain's conclusions about his people and of itself. Rather than accept British hegemony over the English language and entertainment, Maungwudaus and his fellow performers appropriated these modes for their own purpose. They were not passive specimens nor spectacles. They actively observed and made their own conclusions about British society and their relation to it. Such quiet resistance was also enacted when the Báxoje troupe came to Britain.

By the 1840s, settler encroachment threatened Báxoje livelihood and culture. Game was scarce and competition among nations fierce.<sup>61</sup> Following the 1836 Iowa and Saux and Fox Treaty, the Báxoje lived on a reservation on the west bank of the Missouri River.<sup>62</sup> Life on reservation brought increased periods of hunger and starvation as well as intense colonial surveillance by the United States government and missionaries.<sup>63</sup> In response, the Báxoje carefully navigated the adoption, appropriation and rejection of settler ways. It was this careful consideration that led Mewhushekaw, a Báxoje chief, to perform abroad for the benefit of his people.<sup>64</sup> He was accompanied by his wife Rutonyewema and daughter Tapatame, the war chief Neumonya, the medicine man Senontiyah and nine others.<sup>65</sup>

Far from mere objects of study and fascination, the Báxoje became ethnographers in their own right. As recounted by Catlin, the troupe members adopted British suits and hats when they

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<sup>61</sup> Blaine, 199, 227.

<sup>62</sup> Stevenson, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Blaine, 171, 204; Stevenson, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Catlin, 2:42; Stevenson, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Catlin, 2:13.

wanted to discretely explore the cities.<sup>66</sup> While Catlin originally believed that the performers' eagerness to experience Britain and Washkamonya's particular interest in learning English indicated their desire to 'civilize,' he slowly realized this was not the case.<sup>67</sup> After seeing women and children huddled around gin palaces (or chickabobbooags) during an outing in London, the troupe decided to track how many of these establishments they would encounter from St. James's Street to Blackwall and back by way of Euston Station as they returned. They concluded that there were an estimated 450 chickabobbooags on this route.<sup>68</sup> Washkamonya was very happy with the findings of this study and decided to have Catlin's assistant write them down in his notebook.<sup>69</sup> During his tour, Washkamonya continued to take down observations he found important about British society. Adding to his study on gin palaces, he detailed alcohol consumption rates taken from *The Times*: "it is calculated that 50,000 drunkards die yearly in England and Ireland, and that one-half of the insanity, two-thirds of the pauperism, and three-fourths of the crimes of the land are the consequences of drunkenness."<sup>70</sup> Washkamonya looked forward to showing these statistics to the missionaries at home, who always characterized the Báxoje as drunkards.

Washkamonya was observant of the crime and poverty they encountered. He sought to gather rates on homicide, theft, imprisonment and transportation daily from British newspapers.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Catlin, 2:64.

<sup>67</sup> Catlin, 2:64.

<sup>68</sup> Catlin, 2:71, 99, 101.

<sup>69</sup> Catlin, 2:115.

<sup>70</sup> Catlin, 2:188.

<sup>71</sup> Catlin, 2:151-153, 193.

He was particularly concerned by how many people were criminalized for being unable to pay taxes.<sup>72</sup> The conditions of the poor struck the Báxoje. They did not understand how the working class could be subject to such precarity. A visit to a Newcastle coal pit made them worry for the number of men, women and children “imprisoned in them.”<sup>73</sup> The Báxoje were so moved by the poverty they witnessed that they frequently gave away considerable sums to people in need.<sup>74</sup> In Birmingham, the troupe encountered a mother and child outside of their lodgings. When asked why she was not taken care of by the British, the mother explained that the conditions in the workhouse were so horrid that it was preferable to beg. The Báxoje proceeded to give her money, food, and gifts for her child and promised to provide for her as long as they stayed in Birmingham.<sup>75</sup> In response to this encounter Washkamonya quickly determined to find the number of people that were homeless or in workhouses. He then made note of the Crown’s military expenditure, highlighting how its continuous desire to meddle abroad led to a failure to provide for its own people.<sup>76</sup> Perceptive that they may in the future need to rely on the solidarity of Britons or assert their character to the Americans, Washkamonya also began detailing the amount they gave in charity (for example: 370 American dollars to hospitals).<sup>77</sup> Against Catlin’s

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<sup>72</sup> Catlin, 2:151.

<sup>73</sup> Catlin, 2:161-162.

<sup>74</sup> Catlin, 2:143, 170, 174, 196.

<sup>75</sup> Catlin, 2:135-137.

<sup>76</sup> Catlin, 2:182, 187.

<sup>77</sup> Catlin, 2:144.

desire to “have kept them ignorant,” the Báxoje sought to understand ‘civilization’ on their own terms.<sup>78</sup>

In appropriating Western science, Britain's own newspapers and the language surrounding Christian charity, the Báxoje both reaffirmed their own identity and re-characterized the British Other. This was most evident in discussions held with religious officials. While the troupe had always pushed back against conversion efforts, they initially had thought that the British would all be “good and sober” people.<sup>79</sup> Yet as they traveled, they came to the conclusion that they were mistaken. As the war chief Neumonya said to two proselytizers in Dublin: “My friends—I am willing to talk with you if it can do any good to the hundreds and thousands of poor and hungry people that we see in your streets every day when we ride out.” Neumonya pointed to the hypocrisy of missionary work. Why were officials sent to the Báxoje, he reasoned, when “we have no such poor children among us; we have no such drunkards, or people who abuse the Great Spirit”?<sup>80</sup> In studying the British, the Báxoje gained damning evidence against the purported benefits of civilization and recast the very language of poverty, alcoholism, and sin so often used to represent them back onto the British Other.

In affirming these stories, this paper does not discount the precarity and oppressions faced by ethnographical performers in Britain. Catlin’s desire to create a museum for vanishing races and assertion that the troupes “will probably convert the little money they have made...into whisky and rum” — despite his purported progressive stance—demonstrate the harsh

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<sup>78</sup> Catlin, 2:137.

<sup>79</sup> Catlin, 2:176.

<sup>80</sup> Catlin, 2:176.



characterizations performers were met with.<sup>81</sup> While *Norfolk News* commended Maungwudaus' "unflinching advocacy," and several papers documented the Báxoje troupe's resolute stand against missionaries, the performers were not always appreciated nor fully understood.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the press often propagated the myth of the noble and dying savage. Writing in 1846, the *Cambridge Independent Press* described the Ojibweg as the "Most hideous looking figures" while the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* proclaimed they were "the last remnants of a race."<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in 1844 the Báxoje were described as "rude but picturesque...specimens" by the *London Evening Standard* and the *Morning Chronicle* concluded that their customs would soon become "mere chapters in the books."<sup>84</sup> Maungwudaus would later recount that they "did not thrive...The artificial mode of living, diet, clothing, sleep, etc. preyed upon their health."<sup>85</sup> Three of the Wapole Island performers died of smallpox. Maungwudaus also lost his wife to a miscarriage and three of his children to illness.<sup>86</sup> The Báxoje faced their own tragedies due to disease, as three of the performers did not make it home.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Catlin, 1:62-63, 2:310.

<sup>82</sup> *Norfolk News*, April 18, 1846; "Red Indians and Their Religious Friends," *Kendal Mercury* (Kendal, Westmorland), June 17, 1848; "The Indians and the Christians," *Darlington and Stockton Times* (Darlington, Durham), June 24, 1848; "The Ojibbeway and Ioway Indians," *Liverpool Mail* (Liverpool, Lancashire), July 15, 1848.

<sup>83</sup> *Cambridge Independent Press*, April 25, 1846; "Workshop," *Nottinghamshire Guardian* (Nottingham, Nottinghamshire), May 22, 1846.

<sup>84</sup> *London Evening Standard*, August 27, 1844; "The Ioway Indians," *Morning Chronicle* (London), August 27, 1844.

<sup>85</sup> Frank Little, "Early Recollections of Indians about Gull Prairie," read before the Kalamazoo Pioneer Society, 15 August 1895, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* 27 (1896), 336, quoted in Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> Maungwudaus 6-7; "The American Indians," *Nottingham Review and General Advertiser for the Midland Counties* (Nottingham, Nottinghamshire), December 3 1847; Catlin, 2: 296, 302.

<sup>87</sup> Catlin, 2:171, 201, 272; "Death of the Ioway Indian Child," *Bucks Herald* (Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire), March 8, 1845; "Death in Paris of One of the Female Ioway Indians," *Pilot* (Dublin), June 20, 1845.

The gravity of this devastation cannot be ignored. However, recognizing the context in which troupes performed demonstrates their resiliency, not their victimhood. In spite of these impossible circumstances, the Ojibweg and Báxoje did not passively succumb to the fate imperialism prescribed for them. While each party's choices were constrained by the ongoing impacts of colonization, they made a deliberate decision to perform in order to provide for their kin. On tour, they repurposed the language, habits and values that serviced the imperial fantasy to challenge the confining terms of their representation.

The story of ethnological exhibitions is far more nuanced than assumed by scholars of the human zoo. Deconstructing the imperial imaginary is critical to the historiography. However, such contributions are at best meaningless and at worst dangerous when not placed in dialogue with the voices of performers. More than a mechanism of separation, ethnological exhibitions allowed the Ojibwe and Báxoje troupes to engage with the British colonizer. In appropriating British modes of expression, they staked a claim in defining themselves and the British Other. Rather than play into the retreating role imagined for them, the Ojibwe and Báxoje performers refused to disappear.

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