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Photographing imperial citizenship: The Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee's Lanternslide Lectures, 1900–1945

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On a warm afternoon in May 1907, in a village near Hong Kong, a primary school teacher gathers together her students for a geography lesson on the British Empire. Reading from a small textbook, the instructor announces to her audience that, "we are going to make a visit to the British Isles, the land in all the world which, after our own land…should be of the greatest interest to us, for it is the centre of the Empire to which we owe so much" (Mackinder, 1906: 6). As she reads, she loads glass slides into a magic lantern, projecting a series of photographs onto the wall that depict a journey at sea. Before departing on this virtual voyage, the teacher asks her students to imagine "cabl[ing] to our friends in London, telling them to expect us" (Mackinder, 1906: 8). Images of the deck of a steamer ship, crowded with the bodies of white, middle-class families, give way to views of the cities and towns that dot the "sea road" to the West, then to depictions of the Suez Canal and finally to the landscapes of Dover and London (Fig. 1).

Describing the steamer ship as a "great moving hotel, which goes from port to port with wonderful punctuality," the texts and photographs depict a breezy, fair weather voyage (Mackinder, 1906: 6). But conditions in the classroom are not so pleasant. The temperature in the room has risen to more than 30º C, the windows and doors closed against the afternoon sun so it is dark enough for the images to be clearly projected. Closely packed students, many of whom have already spent the morning at work in their parents' fields, begin to giggle uncontrollably, likely because the air is filling with the acetylene gas produced by the chemicals used to illuminate the lantern. Eventually, one of the younger female students loses consciousness, and the lesson is ended prematurely, with more than 300 slides left unviewed (High Commissioner of Hong Kong, 1907).

Though this sounds like a satire of colonial-era education practices, it is in fact

compiled from first-hand accounts of what it was like to witness one of the earliest

presentations of a set of geography lectures prepared, published, and circulated by the

Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee (COVIC). Founded in 1902, COVIC was a

committee of volunteers that met under the auspices of the British government to develop

and administer a program of colonial education that combined visual technologies with

geographical instruction. Described as a series of geography lessons illustrated with

lanternslides, the COVIC lectures were an exercise in colonial consolidation that used

more than 3,000 photographs to teach the empire's schoolchildren what it meant *to look*

and *to feel* like an imperial citizen at the beginning of the twentieth century. A relatively

new and non-legal category of belonging, imperial citizenship promised subjects of the

British Empire an abstract but equal form of belonging across borders, class divisions,

and ethnic backgrounds. To convey these lessons in belonging, the COVIC lanternslides

were structured as travelogues, with each lecture opening with images of a steam ship

departing from the viewers' home country and then journeyed through one of the

empire's major colonial holdings, in England, India, Canada, Australia, Africa, the West

Indies, and "the Sea Road to the East" (which included Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus, Ceylon,

Singapore, and Hong Kong).[i] While the Edwardian period saw a drastic increase in the

use of "soft" forms of imperial propaganda—marked by everyday gestures of banal

nationalism, such as the singing of the national anthem, the creation of public museums,

and the proliferation of privately funded groups like the Victoria League, the Royal

Colonial Institute, and the Daughters of Empire (Coombes, 1994: 187)— the COVIC

project was, historian John M. MacKenzie argues, the British government's only exercise

in official imperial propaganda outside of wartime (1984: 165). And, as the scene in the

classroom in Hong Kong indicates, the lectures were an unusual and impractical use of

modern education initiatives to respond to transformations in the economic and social

conditions of the empire: transformations that included the growing internationalization

of human affairs, the relative decline of Britain's finances in the world economy, and the

increasingly vocal demands for political recognition by overseas colonial subjects and,

closer to home, by women and the working class (Ó Tuathail, 1992).

As a response to these potential crises, the COVIC lectures sought to bring the

community of the empire back to a state of equilibrium by constructing a catalogue of

imperial citizenship. An invisible form of belonging that circulated in public discourse

long before the first citizenship laws were passed in the British Empire in 1947, imperial

citizenship emerged in the late–nineteenth century as "the idea of a common but equal

status across the empire" which had no legal guarantees (Banerjee 2010: 23). As Sukanya

Banerjee (2010) has shown, imperial citizenship was as a governmental strategy, a

literary vernacular and a rhetorical compromise: a way for Britain to appease the settler

colonies' demands for autonomy without losing authority over the dominions. While the

law continued to govern British subjects,[ii] the language of the imperial citizen promised

individuals equal rights in spite of the differences—of race, class, ethnicity, and gender—

between them: differences that photography had so forcefully contributed to solidifying

and visualizing in the past. COVIC borrowed this rhetoric in its aim, content, and

structure, appealing to the viewer's imaginative capacity to recognize subjects as imperial

citizens. Well before the introduction of the individual passport photograph in the United

Kingdom in 1916, COVIC made one of the first attempts at photographing citizenship.[iii]

This essay investigates the historical conditions that allowed citizenship to emerge as a photographable subject in the British Empire, tracing its representation through the making, circulation, and viewing of photographs at a moment in which it was not yet enshrined in legal code. It does so by charting the invention of the COVIC project and the political work that the lectures were imagined to do, and then analyzing the narratives of imperial belonging that were communicated to students in the first two sets of lectures, on England and India, which were tested so disastrously in classrooms in Hong Kong in 1907. In their use of photographs, emphasis on everyday life in the empire, and insistence on the affective dimensions of spectatorship, the COVIC lectures initiated a new way of "seeing" imperial citizenship. This experiment in visualizing categories that did not yet legally exist was part of the broader project of British colonial paperwork in this period, which attempted to produce epistemic distinctions about who did and did not count as a governable subject of the empire.

Recent photography scholarship, including work by Ariella Azoulay (2008; 2012), Tina M. Campt (2012), Thy Phu (2012), Leigh Raiford (2011), and Sharon Sliwinski (2011), has examined the various things that spectators *do* with photographs to make political claims for the citizens they represent. This work has been vital in asserting photography's critical potential as a tool of civic engagement and political action, insisting that images are a forceful language through which the claims to rights are articulated. Important work remains to be done, however, on how spectators learn how to identify photographs of citizenship in the first place: how they move from seeing an image, to recognizing its subjects as fellow, if distant, citizens. Such a project extends Benedict Anderson's landmark examination of the ways that newsprint culture produced

an "imagined community" of the nation across great physical distances (1991), but

examines the crucial role that visual culture—and photography in particular—played in

the formation of the modern citizen. The specificities of this process need to be

considered in studies of visual citizenship because they challenge the universal promises

offered by photography and by modern citizenship. By asking how spectators come to

understand photographs of subjects as photographs of citizens, my examination of the

COVIC project asks that viewers contend with the limits of photographic representation

in communicating identity. To confront this limit is to attend to the kinds of subjects that

are obscured from legal framings of citizenship in order for other subjects to emerge as

recognizable citizens. Such an inquiry foregrounds the ways that the circulation of

images, texts, and bodies across national borders not only shaped modern politics, but

made possible contemporary ideas of humanism, citizenship, and freedom.[iv]

The COVIC project demonstrates that viewers must be *taught* to "see" citizenship

in photographs through a lengthy and repeated pedagogical process that occurs both

inside and outside of the literal classroom. In a contemporary moment marked by

increasing restrictions on citizen rights, the creation of new categories of non-citizens

(such as refugees, illegal aliens, and stateless peoples) in places like Syria and Palestine,

and the response to these conditions through political movements such as Idle No More

and Black Lives Matter, the project of examining how spectators learn to recognize

citizens takes on a renewed political urgency for a wide range of audiences. Examining

how citizenship appeared in photographs in the past allows us to ask why certain subjects

continue to be left out of legal framings of citizenship in the present, and to consider how

and when spectators are able to recognize current claims to citizenship by immigrant

communities, people of colour, and indigenous subjects.

The COVIC project has so far received little academic attention, appearing only

in histories of British imperialism (MacKenzie 1984) and geographic education (Ryan

1997), and has yet to be formally analyzed from the perspective of visual culture. This is

perhaps because no surviving set of the lanternslides is known to exist, forcing scholars

who want to examine the COVIC images to reconstruct the lectures from the various

archives in which the committee's materials are now stored. Rather than reading the

COVIC images as illustrations of the textbooks' rhetoric, as other scholars have done, I

treat the committee's photographs as rich, generative texts of their own: aesthetic lessons

in imperial belonging and exclusion that may have communicated much more than the

lecture texts instructed viewers to see. Such a reading emphasizes the COVIC lectures as

an aesthetic, as well as didactic, method of colonial education that was convincing not

just as an ideological message, but because it offered a pleasurable and collective viewing

experience. Though citizenship was staged as a shared aesthetic experience in the COVIC

lanternslides, one premised on the affective satisfaction of recognizing others as fellow

citizens, this by no means guaranteed a uniform or compliant reading on the part of its

disparate viewers. As I go on to show, the meanings constructed by local audiences in

response to COVIC's images must have varied widely, interacting with contemporaneous

visual representations circulating in the empire. Indeed, as the lectures continued to

circulate in classrooms as late as 1945, with their visual and textual content largely

unchanged, the narratives presented by COVIC were increasingly at odds with the social

and political conditions outside of the classrooms: inconsistencies that viewers could not

help but notice, and which threatened to explode the project's intended message as world

wars, national independence, and changing immigration and voting laws restructured the

imperial community.[v]

Seeing geography, picturing empire: the first COVIC lectures on England

The COVIC lecture scheme was an ambitious project that attempted to visually

consolidate the largest empire the world had yet seen, which at the time encompassed

twelve million square miles of land and one quarter of the world's population (Ó

Tuathail, 1992: 104). As the preface to each textbook asserted (Fig. 2), "The component

parts of the British Empire are so remote and so different from one another, that it is

evident the Empire can only be held together by sympathy and understanding… imparted

to the coming generation…[and] taught in the Schools of the Empire" (Mackinder, 1910:

v). To encourage these feelings of sympathy and unity in viewers, imperial citizenship

was most often depicted as a collective effort to defend the empire, resulting in recurring

group portraits of figures such as shipbuilders (Fig. 3), military regiments (Fig. 4), and

"native policemen" (Fig. 5). Images of "native" army and police forces are a leitmotif

woven throughout the COVIC project, appearing in almost every lecture, with the

exception of England and those on the white, "settler colonies" of Canada and Australia.

And, much like the photograph of the deck of the steam ship that begins every COVIC

lecture, these groups are captured at a distance from the viewer, often with their backs

turned towards the camera. There is a sense in many of the COVIC photographs that

human subjects are interchangeable rather than unique: that their designation as imperial

citizens is measured by the physical and affective labour they offer in the defense of the

empire, and that this labour takes on added value if it seems to run counter to the

subject's "natural" affiliations based on race, religion, or class. As representations of

local populations that were not only successfully "civilized," but were now willingly

participating in the reproduction of colonial rule, these groups attested to the successes of

British imperialism in "(re)produc[ing] citizens who are capable of governing

themselves, of acting in their own interests and in solidarity with others" (Cruikshank,

1999: 3). As Barbara Cruikshank has provocatively argued, by emphasizing the

importance of agency and self-governance in defining citizenship, projects like COVIC

demonstrate that, "citizens are not born; they are made" (1999: 3).

This focus on making imperial citizens perhaps explains the COVIC lectures'

curious status as a set of geography lessons that contain almost no maps. From the outset,

it was photography, not cartography, that the committee proposed would achieve

COVIC's pedagogical goals. Michael E. Sadler, a civil servant who first proposed the

lanternslide lecture scheme to the British government's Board of Education in 1902,

stressed the importance of sight in encouraging feelings of imperial sympathy in students:

"The object in view is to give every citizen of the Empire an opportunity of *seeing* what

the different parts of the Empire are like," he wrote in his seven-page memorandum.

"Much can be learnt by the eye as well as through the ear" (1902, emphasis added). From

1905 until its official dissolution in 1924, the COVIC committee worked to meet Sadler's

goals, producing sets that included photographic slides (numbering between 350 and 400

images), twenty-five textbooks and one magic lantern seven sets of lectures (each

focused on a different colony) and sold to government houses and boards of education

around the world. COVIC intended for colonial schoolchildren to receive sets of slides

about the "Mother Country," while English schoolchildren would see slides about the

colonies.[vi] This method of organization established a double audience, each with their

own set of expectations and lived experiences of the empire (see *Colonial Office,*

Miscellaneous no. 174, 1905).

The instructive potential of photography was particularly important to Halford J.

Mackinder, a geographer and former director of the London School of Economics, who

was appointed Chair of the COVIC committee in its early years and authored many of its

textbooks. It was under his guidance that the lectures came to treat the study of

geography as an imaginative and visual endeavour, encouraging students to project

themselves into the spaces projected onto the screen (Ryan 1994: 169).[vii] His widely

publicized views on the importance of geography as "a special form of visualisation"

solidified COVIC's reliance on sight as *the* sense through which the empire should be

understood (Mackinder 1911: 80). Nowhere is the implied photographic vision of the

COVIC project clearer than in the committee's plans for the production of images for the

lectures. Unlike its contemporaries in the field of state-sponsored visual instruction (such

as the American Natural History Museum's ambitious lantern slide lending collection, an

important model for the COVIC series), the COVIC slide sets were not assembled from

existing collections of images, but were produced specifically for the project by a single

photographer. Alfred Hugh Fisher, a newspaper illustrator and fine art engraver who had

no experience with photography, was hired by the committee in 1907 and embarked on a

three-year voyage around the world, producing more than 7,600 photographs to be used

in the COVIC lectures (*Misc. No. 160*, 1907). The committee's plans for Fisher's travel

revealed the members' faith in the organization and interconnectedness of the empire, not

just as a form of rhetoric but as a practical reality. COVIC arranged for the photographer

to travel free of charge aboard the ships of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and on

the trains of several national railway corporations, plans made despite the fact that they

guaranteed that Fisher would never see Africa or the West Indies—areas he was asked to

document by collecting what he thought to be representative views of those colonies from

commercial photographers during his travels.[viii] Mackinder provided Fisher with a list of

the types of views he would need for the lectures, asking him to include "as much

suggestion of movement as possible" in his photographs through depictions of "groups

actively employed in some characteristic way" (Mackinder 1906; 1907). From the

beginning, Mackinder insisted that, for the lectures to be effective, the texts should be

written *to* the images that would be shown to students. This meant that Fisher's

photographs would not simply function as illustrations to existing lessons on the

geography of the empire: they would literally structure the content of the lectures, serving

as important visual lessons of their own.

As a non-legal, rhetorical category of belonging, imperial citizenship had until

now been invisible: promised through colonial proclamations, political petitions, and

government policies, but rarely visualized. By insisting that imperial citizenship needed

to be learned in the schools of the empire, and using photographs to do this teaching,

COVIC visualized imperial citizenship, borrowing from existing ideas about imperial

belonging circulating in policy and print culture and attempting to concretize them

through visual representations. This visualization was inconsistent, however, flickering in

and out of focus among the familiar and highly visual categories of difference that had

long sustained representations of empire. In the COVIC lectures, the problems

government officials and colonial critics had both encountered in defining imperial

citizenship became problems of the limits of visual representation. Because imperial

citizenship was an inherently abstract, and therefore blurry political category—mobilized

equally by supporters and dissidents of empire—photography was incapable of rendering

it in clear and comprehensive terms.[ix] When photographic evidence fails in the COVIC

lectures, it is supplemented with textual and verbal appeals to the imaginary, with

demands for forms of projection and identification on the part of the spectator. The

photographs of "native" military forces in India, such as those in Tanjore (Fig. 5),

required the careful supplementation of the lecture texts if they were to be understood as

representations of imperial citizenship. Although the COVIC lectures on India were

published more than fifty years after the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857, the lanternslide

images and texts were haunted by representations of the local population's insurrection,

especially as images of the Mutiny continued to circulate in newspaper accounts and

government documents that worried about the possibility of a "Second Mutiny" in British

India at the beginning of the twentieth century (a point to which I will return). To ensure

the COVIC images of groups of Indian officers were interpreted as representations of

willing imperial citizens, readily defending the empire, the lecture texts went to great

lengths to assure viewers that these were just "drills" or "practices" by subjects who

"remained loyal during the Mutiny" (Mackinder, 1910: 119).

The COVIC lectures' treatment of images of "native" military therefore

demonstrate the distinction Shawn Michelle Smith makes between photographic

evidence—what can be seen in the image—and photographic meaning—the

interpretation that viewers make from this image. For Smith, photographic meaning is

contingent, malleable and notoriously unreliable: "Photographs as *evidence* are never

enough, for photographic *meaning* is always shaped by context and circulation, and

determined by viewers. Photographic meaning results from what we *do* with

photographic evidence" (2007: 41). In the COVIC lectures, photography was insufficient

in securing the parameters of imperial citizenship and had to be supplemented through

texts that instructed viewers on how to access this meaning through their practices of

looking. These moments of uncertainty about how to represent imperial citizenship also

cast doubt onto whether the existing, supposedly stable categories of difference that

structured colonial power—especially race—were ever about vision or visibility at all

(Campt 2012).

While other scholars (MacKenzie, 1984; and Ryan, 1997) have read the COVIC

lectures' rhetoric of imperial unity against the photographs' disparate representations, and

looked for visual mistakes or insufficiencies in the project's dominant narrative, I am

interested in paying attention to the ways the COVIC project acknowledged, rather than

obscured, these discrepancies. For the committee, the tension between seeing racial

difference but recognizing imperial citizenship was inherent to the model of belonging

espoused by the project. The premise of COVIC was that students could be taught to feel

through these contradictions using photography's pedagogical potential.

The publication of the first set of COVIC lectures is a testament to Christopher

Pinney's assertion that the colonies were often the "testing grounds for new techniques of

visual control" (1997: 17). Published for the first time in 1907 as *Seven Lectures on the

United Kingdom*, they took England as their subject matter, but were addressed to Indian

students. Still considered the "jewel in the crown of the British Empire" in this period, it

is perhaps unsurprising that India figured as the ideal audience for the COVIC lectures.

What is unusual is the committee's decision to adapt these lectures for use in British

classrooms in 1909, a choice that raises interesting questions in thinking about the

relationship between photography, citizenship, and spectatorship. Rather than adapting

the language or imagery from the scripts meant for Indian students, Mackinder left the

texts on England relatively unchanged for this later edition, adding a preface explaining,

"The effort on the part of English children to imagine themselves in the position of Indian

children should tend to arouse and impress a valuable feeling of political sympathy"

(Mackinder, 1909: vi). From its earliest publications, the pedagogical aims of the COVIC

lecture scheme moved beyond simple knowledge transmission. Implicit in Mackinder's

explanation is a belief that photography permitted a special kind of spectatorial projection

and sympathy, allowing viewers to not only learn about the wider world, but to imagine

what it might be like to occupy another subject position, and to look back at

representations of themselves from this outside perspective. Projection therefore

happened in several directions in the COVIC lectures: photographs of distant imperial

citizens were projected onto the walls and screens of the classroom, bringing the empire's

far-flung corners into a virtual proximity with one another, while viewers were also asked

to imaginatively project themselves into the spaces depicted by the images *and* into the

position of other spectators of the lectures who might be located halfway around the

world. The publication of a set of eight lectures on India, meant to be seen by English

schoolchildren, the following year (1910), underscores the reciprocal model of

spectatorship that the COVIC project espoused.

This spectatorial projection was facilitated by the theatrical presentation made

possible by the magic lantern, which transformed still photographs into life-sized images

animated by the teacher's recitation of the lectures. As geography historian James R.

Ryan notes, the committee's decision to use lantern slides—3 ¼" square glass slides—

was designed to enliven the study of geography, drawing on the technology's reputation

as a "form of indoor, imaginative fieldwork, often emulating manly imperial adventure"

(1994: 169). Ryan's description of lanternslide lectures—as imaginative, as fieldwork,

and as manly—conveys the varied uses to which the magic lantern was put in the

Edwardian period. Though their popularity as middle-class entertainment peaked in the

middle of the nineteenth century, lanternslide presentations continued to be used in

classrooms, churches, and village halls well into the twentieth century to show everything

from morality plays and sermons, to soap operas, anthropological field studies, and

amateur travelogues.[x] By choosing to employ the same technology, the COVIC series

borrowed lessons about racial inferiority and imperial improvement from concurrent

religious, anthropological, and propagandistic presentations, drawing from the visual

databank they would have constructed in the minds of viewers to construct similar

hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Missionary lantern slides lectures, which relied

upon "before and after" photographic portraits of colonial subjects to demonstrate the

"benefits" of religious and imperial intervention in indigenous life, ethnographic and

anthropometric photographs used to teach anthropology to professionals and to students

in English universities, and heroic accounts of male explorers sent out on government-

sponsored expeditions to the only uncharted spaces left on the Edwardian globe (such as

Robert Peary's trip to the North Pole in 1909, or Captain Robert Falcon Scott's fatal

expedition to the Antarctic in 1910) all employed photographs to convey narratives of

colonial progress. The tone of COVIC's lanternslide presentations was considerably

subtler than that of its peers, but by using the same visual technology, and theatrical

mode of presentation, the project implicitly asked viewers to read these images of empire

as another set of lessons about the benefits of imperialism. While the subjects of these

lectures are wide-ranging, sometimes contradicting one another's messages about the

empire, what unified Edwardian lanternslide lectures was their didacticism, which

combined image and spoken text to convey a public lesson.

Despite the ambitious language the committee employed to describe the aims of

the COVIC project, the images Fisher produced for the slide lectures are, aesthetically,

quite boring. Taken during a period of relative political calm, the COVIC project had no

devastating wars to capture, nor any symbolic victories to record, forcing Fisher to

represent banal scenes as cause for a feeling of imperialist pride. Group portraits and

street scenes are the norm, emphasizing everyday life in the empire. Much of the subject

matter of the COVIC photographs was predetermined by Mackinder, who worked not

only as editor of the series' textbooks, but also operated as a director of photography

would on a film shoot. In a lengthy letter to Fisher, Mackinder gave the photographer

explicit instructions about the type of "views" to create, including a slide list that

imagined the kinds of subjects he would need as an author (Mackinder 1907). And,

though Fisher was equipped with a Sanger-Shepard model camera—a piece of cutting-

edge technology when he began taking photographs for COVIC in 1907[xi] —he was, until

his contract began with COVIC, untrained in photography, and many of his images seem

to be made with a view to what would translate into a successful engraving or print (his

usual occupation), rather than a photograph or lantern slide. Fisher mailed batches of his

negatives and prints, often developed in the bathroom sinks of his hotel rooms, as well as

his journal notes, back to England each month, where Mackinder selected the images to

be used in the lectures and wrote the texts to accompany them (Fisher, 1907).

If there is an ideological force to the lectures, then, it comes from Mackinder's

writing in the textbooks, which adopted a warm, humanist tone, addressing his school-

aged audience as "we," asking viewers to imaginatively place themselves in the spaces of

the photographs, and insisting that, as imperial citizens, they would be welcome in any

part of the empire. Early on in the lectures on England that were presented to students in

India, for instance, he provides the addresses of the Northbrook Society and the National

Indian Association, who he says will welcome and introduce "Indian students and others

who happen to have no friends in London" (Mackinder, 1909: 8). As the lectures

continue on to photographs of the country's great universities, Mackinder establishes

class distinctions between the city and country, describing the students of Eton and

Oxford, pictured at play on soccer pitches, as "the men whom we know here in India as

officers of the Army and of the Navy, as Civil Servants, and as merchants," whereas

England's small towns and countryside are said to be "the early surroundings of those

whom we know chiefly as the rank and file of the Army and as the sailors of the Navy"

(Mackinder, 1909: 59). Here, schooling is seen as an access point to international

mobility, where English students secure their ability to travel to the colonies through their

education as colonial bureaucrats at universities for the middle-class or their training in

the navy and army for the lower classes. In Fisher's photographs (Fig. 6), a group of

sailors on board the King Edward, one of the largest warships ever built in the United

Kingdom, stand in for the sailors of Mackinder's text. The image is structured by the

"rank and file" that the lectures describe, with row upon row of stern-faced young men in

uniform stretching back into the horizon line of the image. None of the men return the

gaze of the camera, looking instead to the figures at the right and left of the frame that

hand out their pay as they disembark. The militaristic tone of these photographs is

obvious, shoring up the texts' patriotic assurances that the empire is held together by the

cooperation of its citizens, working together to defend its borders. But if this image is

also meant to tell us something about what it means to feel like an imperial citizen, it is

perhaps that a kind of emotional restraint is what is expected from the modern colonial

citizen that wishes to travel within the empire, as Lily Cho has suggested (2013). These

are also photographs that fall into a category that Tina Campt describes as "images of

institutional membership whose consumption was intended to construct an affiliative

relation between the viewer and the viewed" (2012: 58). The model of affiliation and

connection that COVIC offers is not the warm and fuzzy kind located in the domestic

space of the home, however. Instead it is a calm, detached, and public form of belonging

guaranteed through institutional membership. To join this community of imperial citizens

and to access the mobility it offers is, the photograph suggests, to identify with the stern

comportment of this group of serious men over the affective structures of the family

unit.[xii]

Mackinder's appeal to the Indian viewer to conflate these images of

unindividuated white men with the real-life representatives of empire that she would

encounter outside of the classroom underscores the performative function that Fisher's

photographs were meant to play in the classroom. To interpret these subjects as imperial

citizens means to recognize them, through their rank and class positions, as already-familiar: to sympathize with them, not as strangers, but as future acquaintances who will inevitably cross the viewer's path through the circulatory systems of the "living entity" of the empire. Accompanied by Mackinder's use of biological vocabulary, describing England as "the heart and the brain of the Empire" (1909: 31) which must be nourished by the colonies, this appeal to the viewer's sympathies serves to naturalize the power relations at play in the colonial context.

Though there are few accounts from students and teachers about how they used and understood the COVIC photographs, there is evidence that viewers were aware of the double standards of imperial citizenship even from the earliest presentations of the lectures. While Mackinder's texts promised students that they could travel anywhere in the empire and find themselves at home, under the same flag and king and among fellow citizens, reports from the teachers who presented test versions of the lectures on England in 1905 point out that, for the majority of the empire's citizens, travel itself was impossible. One headmaster in the Gold Coast of Africa (now Ghana) noted that the lectures were well-received, but that the texts had to be significantly adapted in some cases to be able to explain to students who lived inland how sea travel and transportation worked, since they had never seen the ocean (Government House of the Gold Coast, 1907). Another teacher at a girls' school in Hong Kong had "nothing but praise" for the lectures' effectiveness, especially for her female students who, she noted, "have few, if any, facilities for [physically] traveling" through the empire (High Commissioner of Hong Kong, 1907). By reminding the committee that the material conditions of colonial life made the international travel depicted in the COVIC lectures a photographic fantasy,

these reports convey an implicit awareness that many of the rights guaranteed by imperial

citizenship were empty promises. In the next set of lectures on India, presented to British

students in 1910, the unevenness with which the rights of citizenship were applied across

the empire becomes even more apparent: an inconsistency that would take on added

political urgency in the face of Indian demands for independence and sovereignty as the

lectures continued to circulate in classrooms as late as 1945.

Snake charmers and other potentially mutinous subjects: fears of a "Second Mutiny" in India

The COVIC lectures on India were, along with those on England, the most popular in the

series, circulating to thousands of schools around the empire, and saw Fisher experiment

with a greater diversity of subject matter and a wider array of formal choices in his

photographs. Gone are the stiff views of well-formed groups that typified the

photographs of England; in their place, the India lectures offer the viewer a close

encounter with subjects in frontal scenes that place the camera in the middle of events

with a kind of immediacy that borders on reportage. This change in the aesthetic of the

images of India seem equally the result of Fisher's increasing competence with the

camera (they were made over the course of several years, and after his tour of England),

as well as the fantastical pull of representations of India in the colonial imaginary. Like

many Edwardians, Fisher would have had a robust visual archive of colonial

representations of "exotic" India in his mind, available to mimic in his own photographs.

In a series of photographs of a fair in Rosa, for instance (Fig. 7), Fisher positions the

camera as another spectator of the leisure activities already taking place, with one figure

in the foreground—a small boy on the left-hand side, with a small package tucked under one arm—so close to the camera that he is out of focus. Though most of the subjects return our gaze, including the passengers on the Ferris wheel who turn around to look at the camera, they do not look posed so much as briefly paused in the middle of their activities to acknowledge the camera's presence. Unlike the tours of the shipyards and factories that appeared in the lectures on England, which seemed designed to be seen by Fisher's camera alone, the photographs of India mimic the snapshot aesthetic of vernacular photography: they seem to capture everyday life as it unfolds.[xiii]

Not only are Fisher's photographs of India more visually interesting, but Mackinder's texts also take on a more evocative tone in the Indian lectures, perhaps because he was drawing on his interpretations of Fisher's photographs, and his imagination, as much as he was his geographical knowledge. As one of his biographers points out, Mackinder was fascinated with India in part because he had never traveled there (Kearns, 2009: 177); when he lists India's "common sights" or "typical scenes," he is imagining them through Fisher's photographs, just as his children viewers were asked to. As the imagined ship arrives in Tuticorin, for instance, Mackinder's text adopts the familiar tone of colonial travel writing to describe the scene:

> We land. Dark gesticulating figures surround us, scantily clad in white cotton. The morning sun casts long shadows, but there is a throng of people, for the work of India is done in the cool of the morning. The express train to Madras is waiting, but we have a short time for that first stroll, which leaves so deep an impression on the traveller setting foot in a new land. (1910: 5)

While Mackinder's text works to other these Indian subjects, in language that is a far cry from the familiar tone used to describe the English sailors, the layout of the textbooks

contributed another, often contradictory, level of narration to the images by including

reproductions of some of the slides, printed in pairs placed sporadically throughout the

books. These pairings seem to have been chosen by the book publisher for their visual

interest and formal connections rather than their original order in the lectures, often

creating compare-and-contrast relationships between images that are not reflected in the

lecture texts (Fig. 8).

Like the other lectures in the series, the images that Mackinder selected for the

India slides prioritize group portraits and street scenes over photographs of individuals.

This emphasis on the collective over the individual portrait was in keeping with the

England lectures' emphasis on group scenes, but was also emblematic of a turn in the

broader visual culture of India in this period. As Pinney notes (1997), colonial

photography projects in India shifted away from anthropometric photography—which

used the features of a single subject to try to build taxonomies of racial or ethnic

differences—and towards group portraiture as a kind of aesthetic hangover after the

Indian Mutiny of 1857. A sense of having failed to predict or prevent the Mutiny, of not

having "seen it coming," pervaded public discourse in the years after the conflict and cast

doubt on the legibility of the human body captured by photographs. Individual portraits

may have told anthropologists something about what each "race" looked like, but it did

nothing to predict the political allegiances of each religious and caste group in the lead-up

to the Mutiny. Since photographs of individual bodies were insufficient in representing

generalized social identities, post-Mutiny photography projects focused instead on the

"external traces of a collectivity" (Pinney, 1997: 70). This explains the formal tropes of

projects like *The People of India* (1868–75), an antecedent to the COVIC project that

attempted to catalogue ethnic and caste groups by bringing together 468 existing

photographs from various private and public collections into a multivolume publication.

The Mutiny forced colonial photography projects like COVIC to overthrow the "typical"

formal conventions of anthropological photography for the exigencies of the political

moment. As historian Kim A. Wagner suggests, a skepticism about the visual legibility of

the individual body was part of a wider "enduring legacy of fear" that animated much

colonial discourse and policy in India after 1857, leading to a series of non-events that

Wagner describes as "colonial information panics" (2013: 160).[xiv] Wagner traces several

moments in post-1857 British India where newspapers and colonial paperwork struggled

to make sense of trends or changes in the local population, always with the fear that

seemingly everyday practices—such as the exchange of chapattis or the dabbing of mud

onto trees—might portend a "Second Mutiny." In these expressions of anxiety about

what these visual signs *might* mean, "The colonial culture of fear found its expression at

the convergence of the colonial imagination and colonial information, effectively blurring

the lines between public opinion and government policy" (Wagner, 2013: 162). Fisher's

photographs can be interpreted as another source of this unsettled information: visual

clues about Indian subjects whose meanings had yet to be deciphered. In other words, the

committee's fantasies about building a sense of pan-imperial collectivity, by borrowing

the notion of imperial citizenship, here butts up against the fears of what collectives of

colonial subjects could do, lending the lectures on India an undertone of anxiety and

colonial paranoia.

In COVIC's section about Benares (now Varanasi), one of India's oldest cities

and a centre of spiritual education, a range of "typical scenes" is presented to the viewer,

including snake-handlers, bazaars, and carnivals (Figs. 9 and 10). I want to dwell on two

of these images, of a "fakir" lying on a bed of nails, and of snake charmers, which appear

one after the other in the slide list for the India lectures and side-by-side in the

illustrations included in the textbooks given to students (Fig. 8). They are familiar

stereotypes in the era's visual culture, so familiar that Mackinder seems to have felt it

unnecessary to describe the figures at any length. The COVIC textbooks describes them

in five economical sentences that are worth reproducing in full:

> In the narrow deep-shaded streets, and the sordid and tawdry purlieus of
> the temples may be seen many a typical scene of Eastern life. Here, for
> instance, close to Aurangzeb's Mosque, is a Fakir or religious enthusiast,
> to whom the alms or the faithful are due. He rests on this bed of spikes day
> and night. Such Fakirs get much alms, which they are supposed by the
> envious to bury underground. We have another characteristic scene here,
> two snake charmers on one of the ghats, with a fine assortment of
> reptiles—cobra, python, and other snakes, as well as scorpions. There is
> always a ready crowd for them, as for jugglers of curious skill.
> (Mackinder, 1910: 57)

Returning the gaze of the camera, the subjects of Fisher's photographs seem at ease with

his presence, welcoming the viewer as the spectator of these scenes. At first, the figures

in the backgrounds of both images seem to support what the lecture texts tell viewers to

see. The expressions of the men behind the fakir (Fig. 9) in particular convey an

emotional neutrality and casualness that suggests the banality of the fakir's performance.

Standing in an open doorway, they gaze towards us rather than at the fakir, squinting into

the bright sun overhead. Neither smiling in response to the camera—which at this

historical moment was not yet a social convention—nor exhibiting overt aggression, they

almost glare in Fisher's direction. If their expression is somewhat neutral, the fakir

himself is downright blasé, his face turned towards the camera in an expression of

disinterest, his arms resting nonchalantly in his lap. Depicting the "native" population's

suspicious or fearful reactions to the camera and the request—or injunction—to have

their photograph taken was a trope in many colonial photography projects in the late

nineteenth century, allowing colonialists to discount as irrational the indigenous

population's legitimate resistance to colonial violence, and to work through their own

fetishistic relationship to photography by displacing it onto a racialized other (Ryan,

1997: 143). Neither Fisher's photograph nor Mackinder's text traffics in this trope, but

the subjects' inactivity, as well as their ambivalent annoyance with the camera's

presence, complicates COVIC's narrative of imperial citizenship. The audience of the

COVIC lectures might hear that they are welcome travelers in any part of the empire, but

they can see there is no guarantee they will be greeted warmly upon arrival. Much like

Fisher's photograph of the sailors in England, neutrality and, in this case, indifference are

the emotional tenors of imperial citizenship.

The photograph that follows this one (Fig. 10), shows two men squatting in the

foreground, handling several different species of snake and presenting them to the

camera, but the image has been carefully framed to also include examples of "native"

architecture and several other human subjects, many carrying baskets and parcels, as they

recede into the background, up the steps toward a line of trees. Two men stand on the

steps just above the snake-handlers, one glancing at the ground as though distracted by

something just outside the frame, while the other, a cloth held to his nose and mouth, is

the only person in the image who looks at the snake handlers. Between these two

standing male figures, a younger woman, dressed in a sari, wearing bangles and carrying

a small bag, turns mid-stride to look back at the camera. The woman is striking, not just

because she is the exception as the only non-male figure in the image, but because she

seems to have been captured so candidly, as though she was going about her daily routine

when Fisher, or someone else in the scene, hailed her, prompting her to turn back and

look at the camera. Even more than her pose, it is her expression of bemusement that

makes her exceptional: unlike the fakir in the preceding image, or the men in front of her,

she exhibits a clear emotional response to the appearance of Fisher and the camera in the

landscape. Not one of surprise, but of casual and amused recognition.

I have taken liberties in reading the responses of the onlookers in these two

images (we will never know how these people felt, or even what they were looking at, in

this encounter with Fisher) not because I hope to somehow rescue the emotional lives and

biographies of these unknown colonial subjects, but because the network of gazes in

these images is significant given the project's pedagogical goals. If the COVIC lectures

were based on the assumption that children could be taught to see imperial citizenship,

then depictions of colonial subjects looking, at one another, and back at the viewer,

would offer lessons of their own: lessons about how one should "look" in the sense of

appearance—the modes of dress and emotional comportment that can be appropriately

expressed by a citizen of empire—and lessons about how one returns the look of another

imperial citizen.[xv]

The lack of descriptive attention that Mackinder pays to these two photographs is

at odds with their visual prominence in the COVIC textbooks on India.[xvi] While he goes

on at length about other, much more banal, images of factories and waterways, he passes

over these two group portraits in Benares quite quickly. Perhaps it was because the

meaning of these charged figures was so obvious—a part of the colonial common sense

about India at the time—that it did not need to be explicitly articulated.[xvii] As Wagner

explains (2013), one of the "lessons" the British took from the rebellion was that the

colonial authorities could not be seen to be interfering in local religious practices and

beliefs, leading to an official policy of non-interference after 1857. Representations of

religious leaders, and of fakirs, yogis, and snake charmers in particular, were charged

with insurgent connotations in the Edwardian period, figures suspected of "spread[ing]

sedition under the guise of devout asceticism" (Wagner, 2013: 187). An image of a fakir

leading a "Second Mutiny" even appears in a 28 November 1908 edition of London's

weekly *Penny Illustrated Paper* (Fig. 11). Published the same year Fisher was traveling

through India, the newspaper depicts a messianic figure of the revolution, sweeping a

burning torch with one hand to magically create the word "Mutiny" out of its smoke,

while the other holds a coiled snake. Below him, a group of marching male students

seemingly awaits his instructions, while on the right, eerily echoing Fisher's

compositional choices, several Indian women descend a staircase towards a river. By

condensing these signs—the fakir, the snake charmer, and the Indian insurgent—into one

figure, the drawing in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* demonstrates the currency of these

representations in British public discourse in this period, the ways that these quasi-

religious figures could operate as shorthand for both a reminder of past colonial

insurgencies and a portent of those yet to come.[xviii]

That the symbolically loaded types of the fakir and the snake charmer appear in

the section on Benares in the COVIC lectures is also significant for the specific local

meanings of that site for British colonialists. While Lucknow is usually referenced as the

main site of British casualties in the Mutiny, Benares was also an important location of

British-Indian violence because it was home to one of the country's largest mints: a place

targeted by the rebellion as a symbol of colonial rule, and also sought as a refuge by the

British civilians living there. Accounts of the Mutiny in Benares make much of the

fighting that took place at the mint, on the steps of the river, and of the subsequent public

hangings of rebels carried out by British troops and the burning of their bodies along the

banks as a deterrent to any further rebellious acts (see Dodd, 1859; and Thomas, 1858).

The lecture texts do not mark the significance of Benares in the Mutiny, except tacitly. In

the India lectures, the images of the fakir and snake charmers are preceded by a lengthy

discussion of Hindu burial practices, which the texts tell us involve burning the body of

the deceased on pyres by the riverbank, along the ghats of the Ganges. For those students

who were "seeing the world-drama as they read their morning paper," as Mackinder

hoped the lectures would help them do, contemporary newspaper speculations about the

potential for a "Second Mutiny," and reminders of the burning of insurgent bodies on

ghats in Benares, may have come to mind as they viewed Fisher's photographs.

If this connection is implicit in the COVIC lectures, the textbooks make it

explicit. Printed on the verso of the side-by-side reproductions of the fakir and the snake

charmers in Benares is another suggestive pairing: an image of a woman's body burning

on a pyre at a ghat in Benares and a photograph of a "Mutiny veteran" standing in front

of the Baillie Gate in Lucknow, a site that had become a public monument to the British

killed in the fighting of 1857 (Fig. 12). As Mackinder writes in the lecture texts about this

image, "Here is the Baillie Gate itself, the scene of the most furious attacks on the British

position. The old man whom we note with his hat off and a medal on his breast is the

guardian of the place, a veteran of the Mutiny, who as a boy took part in the defence of

Lucknow" (Mackinder, 1910: 64).[xix] This pairing of the burning body on the ghat and the

loyal veteran standing guard at the gate, as well as its placement on the flip side of the

portraits of the fakir and the snake charmers, suggests a cause-and-effect relationship

between these photographs: a study of the differences between what mutinous and loyal

subjects look like, and a reminder of the life-and-death repercussions of these imperial

allegiances.

This is, admittedly, a nuanced connection to make between Fisher's photographs.

For any of the student viewers of the COVIC lectures on India to make these interpretive

leaps would require imaginative readings of these images and a careful attention to how

the different photographs were meant to speak to one another across the lectures and in

dialogue with current events.[xx] If the COVIC lectures were intended as a form of imperial

propaganda, in this case they are certainly subtle in their messaging. But the strategy of

implying meanings through comparisons, of leaving the significance of a depicted space

unsaid, was a common solution to the unrepresentability of the Mutiny itself, as Zahid R.

Chaudhary suggests in his study (2012) of post-Mutiny photographs in India. Since

cameras were not present at the major events of the rebellion (camera technology still

being too slow to capture the moment of battle), most depictions of the Mutiny were

made retrospectively, either through drawings by witnesses, or by photographers who

sought to recreate scenes from oral accounts. These images fulfilled a memorial as well

as documentary function. Chaudhary notes that British photographers who represented

the events of the Mutiny felt the need to go back to the literal space of death to record the

scene, "yet what they record is blankness, the void, or emptiness. In these photographs

the object of the frame is absence itself, and so the images strive toward allegory in their

depiction of loss" (2012: 40). This tension between what could, or in many cases, could

not be seen in photographs "of" the Mutiny and the complicated narratives invested in

them by texts suggests for Chaudhary that colonial photography always engages in a play

of surface revelation and concealment: "What interests me is this apophatic impulse at

the heart of colonial photography that precisely cannot be explained away. Such a play of

exposure and concealment, naming and unsaying, may well lie at the heart of all

photography," he writes (2012: 69). When photographers chose to depict the blank spaces

left behind after the "atrocities" committed by insurgent Indian subjects, it was the bodies

of dead British colonists that went concealed and unrepresented, conjured in the minds of

viewers rather than explicitly pictured. For others, such as Fisher, representations of post-

Mutiny India were designed to document everyday life in the colony; both to demonstrate

that the status quo of colonial rule had been re-established and, as both Pinney (1997) and

Wagner (2013) suggest, to build a catalogue of collective allegiances that might foretell

future insurrections. In these images, it is loss itself that goes unrepresented, covered over

by images of effective colonial management and modern imperial production.

As the students' imaginary journey through India continued to Cawnpore, the

COVIC lecture returned to its message of imperial citizenship, drawing attention to the

ways that Indian subjects contribute their labour to the strength of the empire. In a series

of views of an army factory, for instance, cloth-cutters are seen crouched over an

enormous expanse of khaki, working to cut patterns for uniforms that the lectures tell us

are part of an order for 33,000 coats for the police in Hyderabad (Fig. 13). "Both the

spinning of the yarn and the weaving of kharki cloth," Mackinder's text tells the

audience, "have been accomplished by native labour and British machinery at Cawnpore"

(1910: 58). A few images later, in a tour of the boot shop of a "leather factory for making Government boots and army equipment," the lecture texts ask the viewer to note that the boots are being sewn by hand. Here, Fisher's depiction of workers squatting along the floor, making everything by hand, shows the "native characteristics" that Mackinder sought to depict in the lectures, contrasting it with the modern British forms of production that have been adapted from the "Mother Country." But Fisher's photographs of figures kneeling on the factory floor imply another kind of adaptation, this time to a position of subjugation to British rule. The textbook's reference to the destination of these goods—to be used by the police in Hyderabad and by the government army— reinforces this reading. In Cawnpore, the site of one of the bloodiest confrontations between Sepoy and British forces, the local population is seen to be quietly paying for their disloyalty fifty years later, represented here through their work to literally outfit the forces they once opposed. Images of the Mutiny and its aftermath therefore constitute the shadow archive to the COVIC photographs of India, one that haunts the geography lessons with another set of lessons about loyalty, disobedience, and retribution.

The COVIC lectures' representation of Indian figures as currently docile but potentially problematic, as ghosts of the colonial past and specters of a post-colonial future, is the first in what would become a trope: a concern with containing the latent political force of subjects by shaping them into productive and pliable citizens. Towards the end of the lectures on India, as the imagined journey moves westward into what is now Pakistan, two photographs of students in a Government High School in Peshawar are used to demonstrate the ways that schooling and the defense of the empire are intertwined. In the first, a long row of young men, most wearing turbans, stand in front of

a low, one-storey building (Fig. 14). Lined up shoulder-to-shoulder, they face the camera

and, with outstretched arms, point the viewer's gaze to another male student performing a

handstand on two balance bars in the foreground. While, in another context, this

demonstration of physical strength and fitness might have been interpreted as a potential

threat to colonial rule (one imagines a depiction of a snake charmer performing the same

gesture would have easily read as a call to insurgency), in the space of a school it is

framed as a testament to the successes of British education on the colonial periphery. As

the lecture texts explain, "Here in Peshawar, on the very border of British rule, it is

interesting to see the progress of western education. This is the Government High School.

A class is in the playground under gymnastic instruction. The boys are mostly

Musulmans, though a few Hindus may be distinguished by their caps in the place of

turbans" (Mackinder, 1910: 123). Here, on the border of India (now Pakistan) and

Afghanistan, religious differences are noted (but are so unstable that they require a mode

of dress to distinguish between the two groups), and then smoothed over by the processes

of colonial education, which transform the subjects' violent and mutinous potential

(suggested a few pages beforehand by the snake charmer in Benares) into imperial

loyalty. Fisher's photograph of the gym class in Peshawar weaves the various narrative

threads of the COVIC project together into one image: the role of state education in

producing citizens, anxieties about national efficiency brushing up against fears of a

potentially insurgent indigenous population, and the importance of training the spectator

to recognize this as a scene of imperial citizenship. Fisher's photographs could construct

a catalogue of colonial subjects, but to understand these figures as imperial citizens

required rhetorical gymnastics on the part of Mackinder's texts, and the affective work of

the viewer, who had to imagine herself to be similar to the people being projected on the

screen despite all the differences—in class, gender, religion, and especially race—that

she was also asked to see.

Flexible Citizenship[xxi]

How then were students supposed to understand the diverse subjects of the India lectures

as figures of imperial citizenship? Are they rebellious insurgents now safely contained as

citizens? Or do they constitute potential threats to imperial unity, lying in wait for the

right moment for nationalist insurrection, which even education is not guaranteed to

correct? The COVIC committee did not have clear answers to these questions: it is

evident that these uncertainties about what it meant to look and to feel like an imperial

citizen are what defined it as a category of belonging in the first place. Like

contemporary notions of universal human rights, imperial citizenship was imagined in the

abstract. When it had to be realized, concretized, and represented in specific places and

times, it was inevitably marked by contingency and contradiction. The lecture scheme's

originary moment of reception—the stuffy classroom in Hong Kong in 1907—

demonstrates that these contradictions were not only conceptual, but embodied. By

asking viewers to set aside the physical constraints of their immediate environment and

imagine themselves elsewhere and with others, the COVIC lectures staged citizenship as

a transportative, imaginary, and fundamentally visual, experience. As Banerjee argues

(2012), such a doubling or splitting of experience might characterize the practices of

citizenship more generally. Despite its promise as a universal and formal equality, she

writes, "the effects of citizenship [are] always double and partial" (Banerjee, 2012: 11).

This interplay between each subject's intersectional differences and their place

within the wider imagined community of the empire is what makes the COVIC project

such a rich area of analytic inquiry for studies of visual citizenship. Rather than

homogenizing differences between subjects, as we might expect hegemonic power

structures to do, the COVIC project highlighted them, showing the capaciousness of

imperial citizenship in accommodating (certain kinds of) agency. The flexible framework

that could safely contain these differences was a worldview of the empire as densely

interconnected, an imagined global community with a rightful place for each subject. In

many ways, the COVIC project's depiction of the empire foreshadows early–twenty-first

century discourses of the global citizen, a notion that also relies on photographs to shore

up an otherwise invisible category of belonging. But where the global citizen is created in

the supposedly immaterial spaces of digital image making and streaming video, COVIC's

imperial citizen is shaped through the viewing practices she learns in the space of the

classroom. Perhaps most importantly, the colonial subjects pictured in the COVIC

lectures had to be seen to be participating in this education in imperial citizenship of their

own accord: they had to be willing citizens, not coerced subjects. The inverse of the

imperial citizen was the colonial slave labourer, a figure who reappears throughout

Fisher's photographs, haunting the notion of the sovereign imperial citizen (Moser,

2017).

The moments of contradiction in the narrative of imperial citizenship that I have

charted in the COVIC lectures on India are not failures in the project's ability to persuade

its viewers, but constitutive of the kinds of knowledge it tried to produce. Photographic

archives such as COVIC were produced in an effort to make epistemic distinctions, to

"see" racial and imperial categories that did not yet exist. But this knowledge, as the

lecture images and texts show, was—much like imperial citizenship itself—tentative and

precarious. The COVIC project's acknowledgment of the contingencies of photographic

meaning, and the flexibility of a term like imperial citizenship—a category that

accommodates snake charmers alongside students, fakirs as well as uniform-makers—

also made it a tool of anti-colonial resistance as the lectures continued to circulate in

classrooms as late as 1945. As a researcher in the archive, my interest is in developing the

critical possibilities of these photographs further, of imagining how spectators may have

re-instrumentalized them to demand the promises of imperial citizenship be realized.

Bio
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[i] COVIC's records show that the slides were often exhibited to parents as well as to schoolchildren, and that several sets were purchased by the Department of the Interior in Canada and Australia, expanding the project's audience beyond the classroom. Copies of individual photographs were also printed and mailed to Fisher's subjects by the COVIC secretary upon request.

[ii] From 1844 to 1949, British subject law applied to all those born in the British Empire, automatically granting them British subject status. Voting rights were determined by a variety of factors, including property ownership, gender and race, well into the 1920s. The term "British citizen" was not introduced until the passing of the 1948 British Nationality Act, and effectively replaced the term "British subject," guaranteeing all of the same rights as the previous law, but allowing for greater differentiation in immigration laws in the Commonwealth in the post-war era (See Mann 2012).

[iii] The British Passport Office made photographs a standard requirement for British passports as of 1916 (See Salter 2003; Cho 2009).

[iv] This study therefore follows the methodology employed by Lisa Lowe (2015) in tracing the emergence of European concepts of freedom and equality as only thinkable within the conditions of colonialism, slavery and indentured labour.

[v] After the start of the First World War in 1914, COVIC went state of "suspended animation" while the Colonial Office's efforts were redirected towards the war. This suspended state was meant to be temporary, but it in fact marked the end of COVIC's first and most active period. Though the committee would continue to meet until 1925, after the First World War its activities were reoriented, away from the production of new lanternslide lectures (a planned lecture on Tropical Africa was never realized, for instance) and towards the maintenance, circulation and occasional revision of the existing textbooks. This means, somewhat unbelievably, that the photographs produced for the COVIC lectures in 1907 were still circulating, serving as illustrations of the British Empire, as late as 1945, with only minimal changes to the textual descriptions that tried to manage their meanings (see *Report on present position*, 1916; and *Visual Instruction Committee Sixth Annual Report*, 1925).

[vi] Here and throughout this essay, I follow the literature of the Edwardian period in using "British" to refer to all imperial subjects, in the dominions and colonies as well as in England, "colonial" to designate those subjects living away from the metropolitan centre, and "English" to designate those located in what is now the United Kingdom, even though I am wary of the hegemonic way the term "English" attempts to erase difference within the stratified and diverse population in England.

[vii] Mackinder reflected on the COVIC project's aims and successes in a paper presented at the Board of Education's Imperial Education Conference in 1911, tellingly titled "The teaching of teaching of geography from an imperial point of view, and the use which could and should be made of visual instruction."

[viii] The restrictions of the mail routes meant that Fisher could not access British South Africa or the West Indies on his voyages: an irony, given the project's plan to distribute the lanternslides and textbooks to these same areas, presumably using the same methods of transportation (see *Misc. No. 160*, 1907).

[ix] While the committee aspired to producing a pan-imperial project that would crystalize the meaning of imperial citizenship in public discourse around the empire, the reach of the COVIC lectures was in reality quite limited. There are no comprehensive accounts of the total number of slides sold (a confusion spurred

on partly by the arrangement for the publishers of the textbook, Messrs Newton & Co., to sell sets of the slides, as well as the decision to keep a set in "deposit" at the Royal Colonial Institute, which could be borrowed by schools in England. The committee's annual reports note, however, that sales of the slide sets were "disappointing," particularly in England, and there is little evidence of the scheme impacting wider public policy or anti-colonial rhetoric.

[x] Some historians, including Ryan, have argued that COVIC's decision to use the magic lantern is evidence of the project's nostalgic, anachronistic tone, especially since the genesis of the COVIC lectures directly coincides with the development of cinema in Europe between 1895 and 1906. There is no sense of incongruity in using a magic lantern rather than a film projector in the meeting minutes or in the reports from teachers and headmasters, however, and Sadler's expectation that "good lanterns would be available nearly everywhere [in the empire]" seems to have been a realistic one (Sadler, 1902).

[xi] The Sanger-Shepard camera employed a relatively new colour photography process that used a series of prisms and filters to produce three negatives on one plate of film with every exposure (see Coe, 1978; and Pénichon, 2013). As the preface to the second edition of the lectures on India note, "some of the lantern slides are photographs in black and white, some are photographs coloured by hand from Mr. Fisher's paintings, and some are colour photographs from the Sanger Shepherd process directly reproducing Mr. Fisher's work" (Mackinder, 1910: iv). I am grateful to Arpad Kovacs at the Getty Research Institute for directing me to the research into this little-known process.

[xii] Despite the COVIC project's stated aim of stirring the sympathies and sentiments of its child viewers, references to love and family are rare. When family units are depicted, they are firmly located in the white settler colonies, under the direction of a paternal figurehead and depictions of mothers are almost non-existent in the COVIC series: an erasure that has important psychic and political ramifications in the context of practices of indentured labour in the empire (See Moser, 2017).

[xiii] Although this is not the focus of the present essay, class-based distinctions and conventions would have likely also prevented Fisher from photographing his English subjects in such an intimate and direct way, in ways that the colonial setting did not. Such a reading would follow literary theorist Sara Mills's assertion (2005: 44–46) that the colonial context offered an unusual space where the legitimated subject positions of British society could be exaggerated, negotiated and sometimes rejected.

[xiv] Here, Wagner draws on Ann Laura Stoler's concept of the "non-event" (2009) in colonial archives: times when colonial bureaucrats planned for a crisis that might not ever come to pass. I am grateful to Dr. Wagner for sharing his research with me.

[xv] In its reliance on the exchange of gazes to construct self-regulating modern citizens, the COVIC project in many ways recalls museum studies scholar Tony Bennett's analysis (1995) of the similarities between the museum and the fair (and later the amusement park) in the birth of the modern museum. Fisher's images of the fair at Rosa, and the fakir and snake charmer in Benares (typical of sideshow acts in Europe and North America during this period), and the emphasis on the dutiful spectators in the background seem to bear out Bennett's claims, making COVIC's lanternslide lectures analogous to the embodied experience of visiting museums in the first decades of the twentieth century.

[xvi] It is possible that George Philip & Son, the commercial publishers who printed and distributed the COVIC textbooks, made the decisions about which of Fisher's photographs to reproduce in the books. On average, a dozen images appear in the printed textbooks, out of 350-400 lantern slides for each set of lectures.

[xvii] I owe my thinking here to Ann Laura Stoler's suggestion that important information often went unwritten in colonial archives because it was considered a part of the state's "common sense" narrative of the empire (2009: 3). To say it explicitly would have been redundant and unnecessary.

[xviii] The news item that the *Penny Illustrated Paper* illustration was meant to dramatize was the hanging of Satyendra Nath Bose, convicted of murdering an Indian insurgent-turned-British informer, Narendra Nath Gossain, while both were in the Calcutta jail hospital. Gossain, a former Indian civil servant, educated in England, who had turned against the colonial government, had been part of a plan to bomb key sites of colonial governance in Bengal. When a bombing targeting a British magistrate went wrong and killed a civilian, both Gossain and Bose were arrested, and Gossain became an "approver" (informer) for British forces. Bose was taken up as a martyr for the Indian nationalist movement after his hanging, with reports of hundreds of Calcutta residents burning effigies of his body in his honour after his execution, students marching in his memory, and British authorities refusing to release his ashes to the public out of fears of inciting violence. In its explosive bringing together of colonial education, civil service, and Indian sedition,

the Gossain case is the COVIC project's inverse: a nightmare demonstration of the limits of managing colonial subjects (see Unrest in India, 1908: 5).

[xix] Fisher's notes (1907) in the COVIC archive tell us this is not entirely accurate: the man, William Ireland, was a veteran of the Mutiny, but a Scottish surgeon posted to the East India Company who had tended to the wounded in the Siege of Delhi, not a guard who had actively defended the Lucknow Residency. Ireland returned to the United Kingdom in 1869, where he became a specialist in "imbecility and idiocy" in children, and was likely just visiting India in this period. This is not the only time the lecture texts take interpretive and narrative liberties that are contradicted by Fisher's travel journals, as I explore in the book project related to this research.

[xx] It is difficult to know exactly what the experiences of the children viewers of the COVIC lectures were like, given the scarcity of accounts of the scheme's results. There are only a handful of official reports about the implementation of the lectures in the classroom, mostly solicited from teachers and headmasters in the Eastern Colonies, where the first lectures were implemented in 1907. There are no explicit directives included in the textbooks to teachers to provide the students with instruction on how to read photographs. If any of the COVIC lectures' original viewers came to the same interpretations of this set of images, they would have had to do so on their own, filling in the "blank spaces" left between photographs and lecture text.

[xxi] Though Aihwa Ong (1999) has used the term "flexible citizenship" to describe the ways that modern citizens use the discrepancies of international citizenship laws to their advantage, often working in one country while owning property and locating their family in another, I am interested in a different conception of flexible citizenship, one in which the very parameters of what determine citizen status seem to stretch and morph through its representation in visual culture.