

**Missionaries, modernity and the moving image:
re-presenting the Melanesian Other
to Christian communities in the West
between the World Wars**

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A thesis submitted to
Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Victoria University of Wellington

February 2015

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Abstract

This thesis considers conflicting representational strategies used by Christian missionaries in displaying Melanesian people to white audiences in the West with particular reference to films made during the period of colonial modernity between 1917 and 1935. Most scholarly work on Christian mission in the Pacific has focussed on the nineteenth century and on the effect of Christianisation on indigenous populations, rather than on the effect of mission propaganda on Western communities. This thesis repositions mission propaganda as an important alternative source of visual imagery of the Melanesian ‘Other’ available to white popular audiences.

Within a broader commercial market that commodified Western notions of Melanesian ‘savagery’ via illustrated travelogue magazines and commercial multi-media shows, missionaries trod an uneasy knife-edge in how they transmitted indigenous imagery and mediated cultural difference for white consumers. Five case-studies consider missionary propaganda from four Christian denominations in disparate parts of Melanesia. They reveal a temporal trajectory in the conflicted but symbiotic relationship between, on one hand, missionary organisations interested in propagandising their work and, on the other, travelogue-adventurers operating with commercial motives. This trajectory follows missionaries as they move from facilitation of travelogue-adventurers, through passive commissioning of their services, then active collaboration, and finally to autonomous film-making in their own right.

I consider how white missionaries played a pivotal role in *both* enabling *and* subverting the dominance of the prevailing commercial paradigm of the period: that Melanesians are by nature and definition ‘savages’ and ‘head-hunters’ residing in a thrilling, timeless, virtual place called ‘Cannibal-Land.’ These contradictory impulses, I contend, destabilised both Christian and ‘Cannibal-land’ stereotypes. This destabilising effect was not restricted to film, but I suggest that it was *amplified* by the use of the quintessentially modern medium of moving images. I argue that film – particularly film made by missionaries – posed an implicit challenge to the essentially literary trope of ‘Cannibal-land’. Moving images offered a more unruly medium within and around which indigenous Melanesians of the colonial era could sometimes display what I term a *radical visibility* that escaped and transcended both types of Western stereotype.

List of abbreviations

ABM	Australian Board of Missions
AHC	Seventh-Day Adventist Heritage Centre, Cooranbong, NSW.
AR	<i>Australasian Record</i> , Seventh-Day Adventist newsletter.
JD38	Jonathan Dennis File #38, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision
MAW	Marist Archives, Wellington
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, Australia
NZFA	New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington (now Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision)

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For my father

Acknowledgements

Second only to bearing and raising a child, writing this dissertation has been the most demanding and fulfilling task of my life. It would have been impossible without the support of innumerable people.

It has its roots in my involvement with the multi-authored landmark publication *Art in Oceania* (Thames & Hudson, 2012). From 2009 to 2012 I had the privilege of working for this Marsden-funded project as image researcher and editorial assistant to a team of top scholars in the arts, cultures and histories of the Pacific: Peter Brunt, Nicholas Thomas, Lissant Bolton, Sean Mallon, Deidre Brown, Damien Skinner and Suzanne Kúchler. I gained a sweeping education and an enduring fascination with the complexities of indigenous representations in and of the Pacific. Nevertheless, without Dr Peter Brunt's encouragement and faith in my ability, I would not have embarked on my own research journey.

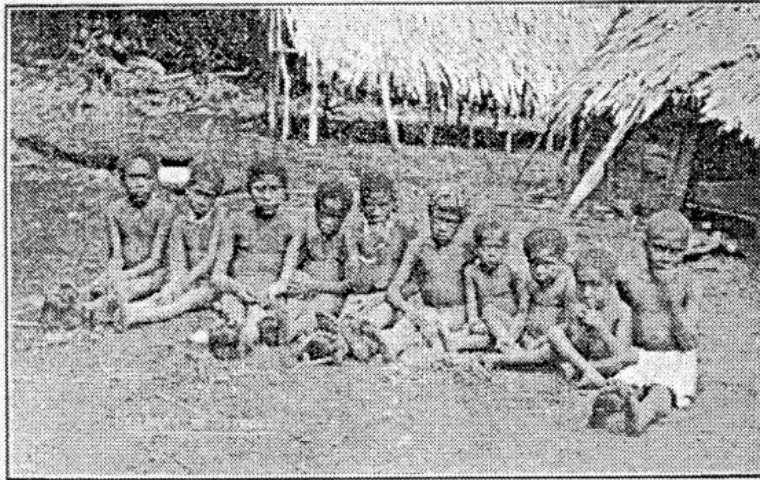
My supervisors, Professor Geoffrey Batchen and Dr Minette Hillyer, did me the honour of careful reading and insightful engagement. They have challenged me to think both more broadly and more rigorously. Thanks to my colleagues in Art History for providing a companionable environment, especially to Pippa Wisheart, Phyllis Mossman and Kirsty Baker. Annie Mercer has provided unstinting moral and emotional support as well as practical guidance through the administrative forest. I am grateful to her, and to my other good friends on campus made over these years of study – Belinda Ricketts and Vivienne Morrell – for coffee and conversations that have helped assuage the loneliness of the long-distance writer.

I have benefitted from a Victoria Doctoral Scholarship, without which this thesis would not have been undertaken, and two Faculty Research Committee grants that enabled overseas research. Thanks also to the dedicated staff of several institutions: Chief Senimau of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council and Ambong Thompson, Director of the National Film, Sound and Photo Archives, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Port Vila; Kathryn McLeod and Jack Dunstan of the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; Jo Smith, Archivist for the Methodist Church of New Zealand; Rose Power, Curator and Archivist of the Seventh-Day Adventist Heritage Centre, Cooranbong, NSW; Ken Scadden, Brother Gerard Hogg S.M. and Elizabeth Charlton of the Marist Archives

Wellington; and Kiri Griffin, research librarian of Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision (formerly New Zealand Film Archive) in Wellington. I am also grateful to Dr Allan K. Davidson of the College of St John the Evangelist for sharing his work with me. I owe special posthumous thanks to film historian Jonathan Dennis, who compiled much of the documentation on which Chapter Two is based. He had, I believe, planned to write an article on this topic. I am indebted to Jonathan for doing the groundwork, and to Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision for making his research available to me.

Finally, my love and gratitude to Chris Thorn, who has, throughout, kept me warm, sane and well-fed.

The METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY of AUSTRALASIA



Something NEW Something THRILLING
and Something TRUE

The TRANSFORMED ISLE

A Marvellous Motion Picture
featuring life among the fierce
and bloodthirsty Headhunters
of the Pacific

This enthralling film gives vivid pictures of the old
cannibal days, and portrays the old head-hunting
expeditions; it then gives a graphic representation of
the change brought about by Christianity

DO NOT MISS THIS !

BURWOOD CINEMA No. 2

Burwood Road, Burwood

Monday, 17th August, 1925, at 8 p.m.

Admission—Adults, 1/6 & 1/-—Proceeds for Methodist
Children, Half-price Foreign Mission Funds

EPWORTH PRESS, 218 CASTLEREAGH ST., SYDNEY

Fig 0.1: Advertisement, Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, 1925. Methodist Archives, Auckland.

Prologue

Something NEW, Something THRILLING, and Something TRUE.

Film advertisement, Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, 1925

The missionary enterprise of the early twentieth century faced a dilemma in representing Otherness to popular audiences in the West. As transmitters of indigenous imagery within a broader commercial market that commodified Western notions of Melanesian ‘savagery’, missionaries trod an uneasy knife-edge. An advertising flyer published in 1925 by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australia illustrates the problem [Fig 0.1].

It promotes a missionary propaganda film, *The Transformed Isle*, nominally set on the island of Vella Lavella in the western Solomon Islands of Melanesia. Like many other forms of promotional material, it combines text with a photographic image. The photograph shows a line of ten children of various ages seated on the ground in front of a couple of thatched huts. The photographer, and hence we too, stand at adult height looking down on them. The unlikely line-up and the static, uniform postures suggest a photographer in a socially dominant role, able to command this tidy, posed shot. The children look plausibly Melanesian, but whether they are indeed Solomon Islanders is moot, as this photograph is not in fact a still from the film being advertised.¹ In any case the poster is notably vague as regards geography – we only know the advertised motion picture ‘featur[es] life among the fierce and bloodthirsty Headhunters of the Pacific’ – the epithet significant enough to warrant being in title case and underlined. The poster’s text is true to the ‘before and after’ conversion narrative: the word ‘old’ is used (‘old cannibal days’; ‘old head-hunting expeditions’) to emphasise the ‘change’ that has been ‘brought about by Christianity’. Presumably the docile, decidedly non-bloodthirsty looking youngsters are representative of their still-infant Christian society, and this therefore justifies their juxtaposition to that prominent phrase ‘fierce and bloodthirsty Headhunters’. Nevertheless the juxtaposition creates a jarring discontinuity between image and text. Does ‘something thrilling’ refer to witnessing a Christian ‘transformation’ or is it seeing ‘vivid pictures of the old cannibal days’? The poster can’t seem to decide. Perhaps the phrase merely taps into the narrative convention of the popular adventure genre of the period, whereby an audience being ‘thrilled’ – for whatever reason – is *de rigueur*? It is this representational ambivalence, whereby mission

¹ The film in question – itself geographically slippery – is discussed in Chapter Three.

promotion finds itself simultaneously resisting and participating in populist tropes, that is the focus of this thesis.

Introduction

My research considers the interplay between missionary imagery and populist travelogues between 1917 and 1935, with particular reference to moving-image representations of Melanesian people intended for popular audiences in Australia, New Zealand, North America and Britain. The particular historical confluence that brought missionaries and movies together over representations of Melanesia in conditions of colonial modernity provides an illuminating nexus for cultural studies.

Against the background of other forms of populist visuality, such as illustrated travelogue magazines and commercial multi-media shows, what part did missionary imagery play in mediating cultural difference for white consumers? While acknowledging that multicultural modernity could not properly take root till indigenous people were finally able to make their own voices heard on the world stage in the 1970s, this thesis considers an earlier moment. It asks whether and to what extent indigenous representations deployed by Christian missions in the period between the World Wars subverted or supported the dominance of the prevailing commercial paradigm: that Melanesians are by nature and definition ‘savages’ and ‘head-hunters’ residing in a thrilling, timeless, virtual place, popularly called ‘Cannibal-Land.’

While considerable research has been done on how Christian missions interacted with indigenous populations during the colonial era, less attention has been paid to the impact of Christian mission on the largely white Western populations who supported it from a safe distance. This thesis examines this effect via the deployment of representations of Melanesia and Melanesian people, on the basis that such representations were not just a supplement to colonialism but centrally constitutive of it.

Missionary historian Ryan Dunch argues that:

The missionary movement must be seen as one element in a globalizing modernity that has altered Western societies as well as non-Western ones in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²

Dunch’s research focuses on Christian mission in China, but his argument remains relevant to the Pacific case. His work is a contribution to a discursive shift that has occurred over the last few decades of postcolonial scholarship. Whereas an outdated

² Ryan Dunch, ‘Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity’, *History and Theory*, 41: 3, 2002, 301-325, 301.

scholarship branded missionaries as the religious wing of systematic imperial oppression of passive native peoples, since the 1980s scholars such as Dunch, James Clifford, Donald Tuzin, Margaret Jolly and Bronwen Douglas have tackled the topic of the Christianisation of Oceania with more nuanced approaches.³ They posit Pacific Christianity as both a vector of modernity for colonised peoples and a means of managing and modulating colonial relations. But, as Dunch maintains, modernity caused ‘profound and inescapable’ changes throughout the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which ‘colonized the consciousness’ of the West as well as its Others.⁴ So, taking his argument a little further, can one argue that white missionaries were *also* instrumental in transmitting a new sense of cosmopolitan modernity in the opposite direction, back to their ‘home’ constituencies?

This was a period of widespread popular traffic in imagery of Melanesian people, a traffic in which missionary involvement was deeply entangled with that of commercially motivated travelogue-adventurers, despite their conflicting agendas. By exploring in detail the nature and evolution of that entanglement, I examine how twentieth-century missionary imagery of Melanesian peoples, aimed at congregational and public audiences in the West, both partakes of and resists stereotypes prevalent in secular commercial outputs aimed at a similar popular market. Adventure-travelogue imagery – itself facilitated by missionary expertise in the field – not only circulated alongside mission propaganda but also often overlapped and hybridised with it during the colonial period. If, as I suggest, these overlapping frames of reference were pulling in different directions, then it necessarily strained the representational fabric that packaged Melanesian bodies for the Western gaze.

The presumption of natural and inevitable white supremacy that had been used to justify the imperial adventures of the Victorian age persisted into the colonial period and far beyond. Hence almost every representation of people from tribal cultures intended for the

³ See for instance: James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982); Donald Tuzin, *The Cassowary's Revenge: The Life and Death of Masculinity in a New Guinea Society*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997); Bronwen Douglas, ‘Christian Citizens: Women and Negotiations of Modernity in Vanuatu’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 14:1, 2002, 1-38; Margaret Jolly and Martha McIntyre (eds), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴ Dunch, 2002, op.cit., 317, 301. The phrase ‘colonization of consciousness’ was coined in relation to the missionisation of the Tswana people of South Africa by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

visual consumption of white audiences was steeped in a sordid imbalance of power that must be borne in mind even (perhaps especially) when addressing indigenous agency in self-representation and the benign paternalism of many genuinely devoted white missionaries. If I argue that missionaries were instrumental in offering to popular Western audiences a different, less glamorous but also less alienating view of ‘real’ Melanesian people than was available via exploitative commercial imagery, this is not to say that they were themselves free of racist assumptions. Nor were they able to free themselves from the marketing requirement to forever label every male Melanesian as a ‘cannibal’ or ‘head-hunter,’ albeit, in the missionary case, with the addition of the word ‘former.’ Nevertheless, I suggest that merely by making available an alternative view they cracked the rigid representational frame that confined Melanesian people to such a narrow interpretation.

Scope and focus: Melanesia, Colonial Modernity, Visuality and Film

‘... the whole framed world is “brought to life”.’

David Summers, *Real Spaces*

This thesis will focus on texts and images that represented Melanesia to Western audiences between 1917 and 1935.⁵ Melanesia in the Jazz Age was a place that occupied an unusual position in the Western imaginary. Whereas Polynesia had long since been comprehensively Christianised, and had in any case always tended to have been associated with a ‘softer’, more languorous and feminine form of exoticism, the popular conception of ‘Melanesia’ (Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji) retained its association in white Western minds with notions of a

⁵ The terms ‘Western’, ‘the West’ and ‘white’ are used throughout this thesis as a broad brush approximation and shorthand for people of European ethnicity living in North America, Northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Conditions of relative affluence and urban modernity in these places enabled popular access to imagery of Melanesia and Melanesian people, regardless of whether this imagery was commercial or religious in intent, consumed in movie theatres, church halls, travel magazines or in mission newsletters. These shorthand terms occlude the complex tapestry of national variations within these areas, let alone differences of class, gender and profession. The limited parameters of this study are unable to accommodate a more nuanced approach. However one general division within the ragbag signifier ‘the West’ is significant for this thesis: the difference in attitude taken by the white settler societies of Australia and New Zealand - Pacific regional neighbours to Melanesia - from that of distant North America and Europe. This difference will emerge in the course of the case studies and will be returned to in the Conclusion.

‘hard’, masculine, ‘primitive savagery’ well into the twentieth century.⁶ As one of the last places on earth to be colonised and evangelised, it offered – or appeared to offer – a unique combination and strongest contrast of ‘primitive’ peoples co-existent with colonial modernity.

I owe the term ‘colonial modernity’ to Robert Dixon, who coined it to express the trans-national network of commerce, travel, entertainment and communication that emerged in the early twentieth century.⁷ By the 1910s and ’20s colonial modernity was in full swing across the Pacific. It was ‘colonial’ because Britain, France, the Netherlands and the United States, together with Britain’s white settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand, had over the course of the previous century taken imperial possession of the Pacific and were (or imagined themselves to be) politically, economically and militarily in patchwork control of the region (as Germany had also been until after the First World War). It was ‘modern’ because by then this administrative management was run from bustling settlements (Port Moresby, Rabaul, Port Vila, Nouméa, Suva) with paved streets, busy wharves, motor cars, hotels, cinemas and Burns Philp shipping offices.

Meanwhile Western societies were also swept up by the ‘delirious embrace’ of new technologies and mass media entertainments. There was an explosion in curiosity about the wider world mediated through ‘lantern-slide lectures, postcards, photographic exhibitions, documentary and feature films, advertising, newspaper and magazine articles, radio broadcasts, travel writing and illustrated books.’⁸ As Elizabeth Hartrick discusses in her work on lantern slide infotainments, the middling classes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were avid for the notion of self-improvement through ‘rational recreation’, within which ‘vision and visuality [were] understood as a primary means of apprehending the truth of the observable world’.⁹ ‘Learning by seeing’ was a kind of surrogate for knowing; it was easier and more entertaining to achieve.

⁶ Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and related ideas in antiquity*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 10ff.

⁷ Robert Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity: Frank Hurley’s Synchronized Lecture Entertainments*, (London & New York: Anthem Press, 2012)

⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁹ Elizabeth Hartrick, *Consuming Illusions: the magic lantern in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand 1850-1910*, unpublished PhD dissertation, 32-33 and passim. See also Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001).

While most of the mass media phenomena listed above were rooted in strong nineteenth-century antecedents, film and radio only came into their own in the early decades of the twentieth. Thus the period under review coincides with the heyday of cinema, the ubiquitous popular medium whose potential for both entertainment and education posed tensions for proponents and detractors alike. Cinematic footage was now habitually incorporated into the established tradition of the quasi-ethnographic travelogue lecture tours that offered to paying customers a multi-media combination of lantern slides, moving images and sometimes phonograph recordings to illustrate lively talks given by charismatic traveller-adventurers. In the United States Burton Holmes (1870-1958) had developed the form into a polished money-making enterprise, while Australia's most accomplished proponent was Captain Frank Hurley (1885-1962).¹⁰

At this time too, church-going, Sunday School attendance, missionary fund-raising appeals and the reading of illustrated missionary publications were norms for a great many people. Nicholas Thomas asserts, albeit in passing, that missionary imagery of all kinds was a significant contributor to the formation of white Christian views on the Pacific 'Other' during the twentieth century:

... many of my grandparents' and parents' generation in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and elsewhere learnt about the South Seas through presentations of slides or films at churches, in the lectures by missionaries on furlough, popular magazines, children's books, and missionary memoirs that presented detailed information of an ethnographic type, horror stories of pagan customs, heroic tales of missionary martyrdom, and accounts of the elevation of indigenous peoples once converted. The importance of these constructions of the other thus arises partly because they constituted not merely a private archive but a set of published images and texts which conveyed ideas about a place and a social process – namely the story of conversion – to a mass audience.¹¹

That these images and texts reached a 'mass audience' indicates their significance for colonial studies and justifies a closer reading in their own right. But my contention is that missionary imagery did not operate in a pious vacuum. Sunday churchgoers were (with puritan exceptions) largely the same people as weekday pleasure-seekers caught up in the 'delirious embrace' of spectacular entertainments.

¹⁰ Alison Griffiths discusses Burton Holmes in *Wondrous Difference*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 204ff; Robert Dixon, 2012, op.cit. spotlights Hurley.

¹¹ Nicholas Thomas, 'Colonial Conversions: Difference, Hierarchy, and History in Early Twentieth-Century Evangelical Propaganda', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34: 2, 1992, 366-389, 371.

Moving images were so distinctive a feature of colonial modernity that I have placed them at the centre of my arguments about representations of Otherness in this period. In his exhaustive analysis of the spatial characteristics of world art, David Summers identifies film as inherently *modern* due in part to its dependence on incandescent artificial light to re-animate for an audience, not just the figure directly in front of the lens, but the ‘whole framed world’ within the camera’s viewfinder:

And, much as the registration of image on film is uniformly effected by light, the transparent film is reanimated by artificial light, incandescent light, ultimately by electricity. Seen in these terms, it is not simply images that are reanimated – the horse or the man – rather the whole framed world is ‘brought to life’. This ‘life’, with the authority of the indexical and ‘real’, always ahead of our perception of it, becomes the material for constructions in which light from the centres of modern energy and power shines from behind the viewer as if in imitation of *phantasia*, the mind’s generation of images in its own light. ... This mechanical and electrical fantasy ... is as constitutively dependent on modern energy as it is collective (for an indefinite audience) rather than individual ...¹²

This touches on some of the technological and phenomenological aspects that have given cinema a scopic and cultural power that is uniquely and intricately entwined with the twentieth century. Tom Gunning puts it more succinctly: ‘Film embodied the energies of modernity’. He goes on:

... film’s nature as a product of mechanical reproduction allowed it to become the first truly mass art, its popularity and portability not only attracting an audience of working-class patrons unable to afford other forms of commercial entertainment, but allowing it to spill across borders and create a new international audience.¹³

Gunning is here referring to Hollywood as providing a kind of ‘universal’ language which nevertheless, he emphasises, involved culturally diverse receptions: ‘not simply passive consumption, but a process of making sense and reworking’¹⁴ In other words, it was a process identical to the complex translations described by Dunch with regard to the transmission of Christianity.¹⁵ Gunning is as emphatic about the centrality of motion

¹² David Summers, *Real spaces: world art history and the rise of Western modernism*, (London: Phaidon, 2003), 620-621. Summers was discussing Eadweard Muybridge’s visual experiments in the previous paragraph, hence the reference to ‘not simply ... the horse or the man ...’.

¹³ Tom Gunning, ‘Film Studies’, in John Frow and Tony Bennett, *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, vols. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008). 200.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵ Dunch, *op.cit.*, 322.

pictures to globalised modernity as Dunch is about missionaries, stating that '[f]ilm's de facto universality must be explored as intrinsic to the making of a modern world'.¹⁶ This paralleling of cinema and Christian mission as vectors of modernity is a theme that recurs in this thesis. Again, while these scholars are thinking in terms of the modernising effect of Christianity and cinema, respectively, on *non-Western* societies, it is equally true that the 'whole framed world' – in Summers' phrase – was taken back to white audiences in the West. But that 'frame' – as I argued above – was not rigid. It could twist and splinter under the stress of conflicting forces.

While this thesis pays particular attention to footage of Melanesian people shot for both commercial and religious reasons, this did not operate in a cultural void. I have therefore also included consideration of the books, travel magazines, photographs, lantern slides, advertisements, newspaper reviews and missionary newsletters that provided a rich intertextual fabric for white spectators curious about Melanesia. And curious they were.

Religion and Film

'... these films will be more effective than any sermons we have ever preached ...'

The Bishop of London, c. 1925

Film historian Francis Gooding has pointed out that 'the history and extent of missionary film-making during the twentieth century is almost completely overlooked in histories of film'.¹⁷ Slides and moving footage of a religious, moral or temperance nature were often combined in multi-media lecture-hall formats, and these have been considered by scholars such as Tom Gunning and Elizabeth Hartrick.¹⁸ But specifically *missionary* film, made in the field with intention to inform Western audiences about distant peoples, has received little attention.¹⁹ Yet, as this thesis will show, missionary film, alongside other mission

¹⁶ Gunning, 'Film Studies', op.cit., 201.

¹⁷ Francis Gooding, 'Missionary Societies', <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/missionary-societies>.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Hartrick, 'Consuming illusions', op.cit., Chapters Six and Seven; Tom Gunning et al. (eds.), *Une Invention Du Diable? Cinéma Des Premiers Temps Et Religion*, (Québec: Domitor Association, 1992).

¹⁹ Exceptions are anthropologist Nicholas Thomas and historian Allan Davidson, who have both written about one particular missionary film, though not from the point of view of its entanglement with commercial interests. Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), Chapter Four; Allan Davidson, 'New Zealand Methodists and "Missionary Propaganda" in the 1920s', *Wesley Historical Society Journal*, 2006, supplement. For my own take on this particular film, see Chapter Three.

promotions, played a significant role in popular life between the wars as a vehicle for displaying images of Melanesian people.

In the 1920s and '30s the use of moving pictures for religious propaganda was still a distinctly modern venture. Many within the church had misgivings, feeling cinema to be intrinsically tainted by populist worldliness.²⁰ Others, like the Methodist missionary Reginald Nicholson, were enthusiastic advocates for film's educational potential, urging that, 'the Church cannot afford to hold herself aloof any longer.'²¹

In fact, the Christian Church's interest in the early film industry was anything but aloof. Its concern was multi-faceted: castigating perceived immorality; promoting spiritually uplifting storylines; encouraging explicitly religious and biblical themes; propagandising evangelism and the missionary enterprise. In the United States, prominent churchmen of all denominations were closely involved in the development of movie censorship regimes. Brought to a head by the Arbuckle scandal of 1921, the call for containment of perceived Hollywood wantonness was raised in the United States in 1922 via an influential pamphlet entitled *The Motion Picture Problem* by Charles Lathrop. Representing the Federal Council of Churches, an ecumenical but broadly Protestant and Evangelical organisation founded in 1908, Lathrop's call was for an enforceable federal censorship law (as opposed to the often arbitrary and time-consuming state-by-state censor board decisions). Keen to improve its standing with the public and to avoid federal censorship, the industry responded to this pressure by offering to informally self-regulate, appointing former Republican politician William Hays as its internal arbiter of good taste. Perhaps surprisingly, Roman Catholicism rallied to the side of industry self-regulation rather than external federal control, and it was in fact two prominent Catholics, a Jesuit priest and a lay journalist, who later formalised and extended Hays' earnest list of 'Don'ts' and 'Be Carefuls' into the catechism popularly known, somewhat inaccurately, as the Hays Code. A covert Protestant-Catholic split was thus concealed in the interstices of this aspect of the censorship debate.²² While the 1930 Motion Picture Code is well known for its dour stance on sex, it also strikes a surprisingly tolerant note on religious and ethnic difference,

²⁰ See for example the Methodist diatribe by R.G. Burnett and E.D. Martell, *The Devil's camera: menace of a film-ridden world*, (London : Epworth Press, 1932).

²¹ Reginald Nicholson, 'Motion Pictures and the Church. Their Influence on the Young', *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 19 July 1924, 14.

²² Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

stating: 'No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith' and 'The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.' Hays' own, earlier list made a more inclusive point in simpler terms: included under his 'Don'ts' was '[causing] wilful offense to any nation, race or creed'. Needless to say, these clauses were no more adhered to than the more familiar puritanical ones. However their inclusion at all reminds us of the current of liberal humanism, even if only on paper, that ripples through Christian morality.

In Britain, J. Arthur Rank's Religious Films Society was a typically pragmatic Methodist response to morally unedifying storylines. Cecil B. DeMille's blockbuster biblical epics – *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and *King of Kings* (1927) – proved the Bible itself could be a useful plot resource and were met with rapturous ecclesiastical praise. As regards the promotion of the overseas missionary enterprise, the Methodist Episcopal Centenary held in Columbus, Ohio in 1919 – a spectacular public event that was essentially a 'Methodist World's Fair' – featured a huge, specially built motion-picture screen used to show 'recent Hollywood and New York silent films, as well as amateur missionary pictures and thousands of glass lantern slides.'²³ In Britain, an independent film-maker, adventurer and big-game hunter – one M.A. Wetherell – in 1923 raised sufficient funds from numerous worthies of the British establishment to make an ambitious film in Africa which literally followed in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century Scottish missionary David Livingstone. So enthusiastically was this received by the church in the UK that an organisation called the Missionary Film Society was formed to promote it and encourage others like it. One clergyman gushed that he 'could conceive of nothing more likely to generate Missionary enthusiasm than this film,'²⁴ while the Bishop of London added his own endorsement to the press book released with the film, stating 'I thoroughly believe that these films will be more effective than any sermons we have ever preached in our lives'.²⁵ It is clear from comments like these and from other evidence in church archives that cinema was seen not just as an alternative to still photographs and lantern slides, but as a powerful new medium in its own right in the fight for hearts and minds.

²³ "Centenary Exhibition of American Methodist Missions", *Ohio History Central*, July 1, 2005, <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1388>

²⁴ Dean Rapp and Charles Weber, 'British Film. Empire and Society in the Twenties: the "Livingstone" film, 1923-1925', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 9:1 (1989), 3-17, 4.

²⁵ Excerpt from *Livingstone* press book, c. 1925, quoted in <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1844>

Colonialism and Cannibalism

‘... modernity enters the world’s stage attached to its cannibal shadow’

Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*

Propaganda cinema may have been a novel and powerful tool for the church, but modern missionaries were also operating within a popular commercial environment. The commodification of the exotic via stereotypes has been the stock-in-trade of travellers’ tales since the fifteenth century. Armchair tourists expected and responded to well-worn visual signifiers of ‘savagery’ that saturated travel journals, engravings, costume books, encyclopaedias, photographs, postcards, popular books, lantern slide lectures and, eventually, motion picture footage of red-, black- and brown-skinned peoples of the Americas, Africa and Oceania. The repetition of stereotypical motifs – despite the lack of specificity or accuracy – acted as a guarantee of supposed authenticity, and a way of rendering the exotic familiar.²⁶

These signifiers – nakedness or near-nakedness, shields and spears, feathers and face-paint, dancing and drumming, tattoos and flamboyant bodily adornment – served as a visual shorthand that operated metonymically to justify belief in unseen behaviours – cannibalism and headhunting – assumed to be prevalent in groups displaying these visual characteristics. Jack London provides a nice example of this in his description of Solomon Islanders from Malaita. ‘To look at, they were certainly true head-hunting cannibals. Their perforated nostrils were thrust through with bone and wooden bodkins the size of lead-pencils.’²⁷ The logic is circular and self-perpetuating, functioning with happy disregard for evidence. My argument is not that ritualised tribal violence was illusory. There is ample evidence for head-hunting in the Solomon Islands and for cannibalism in some parts of the New Hebrides, Papua New Guinea and Fiji.²⁸ But my point is that its actual presence or absence was irrelevant to the thrill evoked in Western

²⁶ See Peter Mason, *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Olive Patricia Dickason, *Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997); Vivienne Morrell, ‘“To Know the World from Home You Need Not Stray”: Exotic Depictions of Oceanic Peoples in Popular Illustrated Books, c.1775-1810’, *Alexander Turnbull Record*, 44 (2012).

²⁷ Jack London, *The Cruise of the Snark, Illustrated* (London: Mills & Boon, 1913 [1911]), 264.

²⁸ See below, Chapter Three, 125 fn 15 and 134-135 for Solomon Islands head-hunting. Ritual anthropophagy by its nature has been less visible and hence heavily reliant on hearsay rather than eye-witness accounts. But it undoubtedly occurred in some Melanesian societies in some circumstances. See for example Felix Speiser, ‘Cannibalism’ in *Ethnology of Vanuatu: An Early Twentieth Century Study* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1996 [1923]), 215 ff.

audiences by the terms and their associated visual stimuli. It is untenable that complex human beings operating in historically embedded, dynamic, multi-faceted cultures (as we all are) can be reductively labelled according to a single defining ritual behaviour. Yet the essentialist epithets ‘cannibal’ and ‘head-hunter’ have enjoyed powerful and continuing currency in the Western imaginary, mediated less by ethnographic evidence than by a long literary history.

So powerfully entrenched is the ‘cannibal/headhunter’ figure in the Western imagination that the fascination must be more deeply rooted than mere bogeyman thrills deployed for commercial gain. Whatever the *actual* occurrence of ritual violence in some Melanesian societies²⁹ – the *mythic* figure of the savage cannibal has loomed in white fantasies of black Otherness. Cultural anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, leaning on colonial historian Peter Hulme, has helpfully disentangled the notions of, on the one hand, ritual anthropophagy as a real phenomenon and, on the other, ‘cannibalism’ as it exists in popular Western discourse on Otherness.³⁰ Obeyesekere terms the latter ‘cannibal talk’. This, he says, ‘becomes the most powerful component of the metaphysics of savagism’.³¹ ‘Savagism’ itself is a useful coinage by Roy Harvey Pearce referring to the nexus of attributes that ‘civilised’ man cites to define himself in opposition to, and which, like Said’s Orientalism, ‘exerts power at the service of colonial domination’.³² Hence the ‘cannibal’ is not a signifier of atavistic violence but an intrinsically colonial construct: ‘...modernity,’ writes Hulme, ‘enters the world’s stage attached to its cannibal shadow.’³³ To mission propagandists he embodies the benighted state from which heathens were to be delivered by Christian modernity; to travelogue-adventurers he embodies the tough, masculine, warrior ethos lost to flabby urban white men.

²⁹ For the cannibalism debate see Marshall Sahlins, ‘Culture as Protein and Profit’, *New York Review of Books*, 23 November 1978; William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1980); Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: the discovery and representation of the cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Laurence Goldman, *The Anthropology of Cannibalism*, (Westport: Praeger, 1999); Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁰ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Routledge, 1987), 86, cited in Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 14.

³¹ Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 152-153.

³² Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) cited in Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 10, 153.

³³ Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 6.

The literary entanglement of colonialism and cannibalism has been explicit since the term was coined in the late fifteenth century in response to a written report from Columbus's second voyage about the Carib people of the West Indies that included 'evidence' (even from the beginning, hearsay not eye-witness) of human flesh-eating.³⁴ Cannibalism is, by definition, a horror encountered *elsewhere* by an invading member of a 'civilized' imperialist power. More precisely, it is a spoken or written or pictured *narrative* of a horror allegedly encountered elsewhere. In 1580, Montaigne immediately grasped this storybook status when he used idealised Tupinamba cannibals as a literary platform from which to interrogate his own culture.³⁵ Montaigne's influence on Shakespeare is well established.³⁶ *The Tempest* (c. 1610) has long been analysed in terms of its anagrammatic colonial relations: Caliban, the disinherited canibal (archaic spelling), thunders his ultimately impotent curses at Prospero, the colonising oppressor. The cannibals who haunt *Robinson Crusoe*'s island were written into existence by Daniel Defoe in 1719, while the various journals of James Burney, Charles Clerke and James Cook from Cook's second voyage in the mid-1770s consolidated the link between 'savagery' and man-eating in many European minds.³⁷ In Cook's footsteps and thereafter throughout the nineteenth century, cannibal savages follow European writers to new sites of imperial expansion in the Pacific and Africa. Melville's *Typee* (1846) and Ballantyne's *Coral Island* (1857) are set in the South Seas; Verne's *Among the Cannibals* (1868) includes a New Zealand cannibal feast peopled with 'hot blood bespattered' Māori; Conrad's Marlow encounters Kurtz's *Heart of Darkness* in the Belgian Congo (1899); Jack London imagined himself and companions on *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911) as threatened by Solomon Island head-hunters.³⁸ Among London's companions on the Snark was the young Martin Johnson, whose own literary and filmic adventures inaugurate the twentieth-century case studies of this thesis (Chapter One). Hulme argues that the violence inherent to these

³⁴ Peter Hulme, 'Introduction: the cannibal scene' in Barker et al. (eds.), *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, 1-38, 16-17.

³⁵ Michel de Montaigne, 'Des Cannibales', in *Essais* (Bordeaux: Simon Millanges, 1580)

³⁶ John Florio's English translation of Montaigne's *Essays* was first published in 1603. Alice Harmon, 'How Great Was Shakespeare's Debt to Montaigne?', *PMLA* 57.4 (1942): 988-1008.

³⁷ See Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas*, (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2005), for an analysis of these narratives. Obeyesekere argues that indigenous people were so obsessively questioned about putative cannibalism that some mimetically obliged as an impudent self-fulfilling prophecy to conspicuously demonstrate the expected ferocity. Thus even 'actual' cannibalism has the 'entangled' status of a thing emerging from the vexed 'contact zone' of cultural encounter.

³⁸ London, *The Cruise of the Snark*, 287-291.

storied sites of colonial encounter and imperial invasion – and their plethora of generic offspring – emerges as an inversion in which ‘denial of colonial violence’ is ‘one of the roots of the projection of cannibalism onto the victims of that violence.’³⁹

Thus a keynote of my thesis is the essentially *literary* rather than *visual* nature of Western cannibal discourse. Even when manifested in print imagery, the trope thrives on obsessive repetition, text and image reproduction, the projection and recycling of preconceived expectations. ‘Cannibal talk,’ writes Obeyesekere, ‘giv[es] the settler, the missionary, and the traveller the license to lie and the license to take hearsay as truth.’⁴⁰ But what happens when the attempt is made to transpose a static and imaginary literary trope into a dynamic, ‘real-life’ visual mode? If a literary heritage formed the imaginary map on which ‘Cannibal-land’ was to be found, then for travelogue-adventurers trying to construct its filmic simulacrum for commercial gain, it had to be patched together, as best they could, from footage of obliging twentieth-century Melanesian people gleaned from brief visits to villages. The ‘adventure-travelogue’ film genre – and the inherent problems its cinematographers faced – therefore needs to be understood within the context of that literary heritage. Moreover, this commercial conundrum is the background against which the mission enterprise constructed its own versions of Melanesian imagery.

Missionary Martyrdoms

In the case of white missionaries in Melanesia, the situation was further complicated by instances of actual violent attack and murder during the nineteenth century. While rare – surprisingly so, given the minefields of cultural misunderstanding and colonial oppression over which missionaries trod – these unfortunate deaths dominated the public imagination. Alongside more triumphalist depictions of white Christian superiority, popular representations of the final moments of white missionary martyrs of Melanesia circulated enduringly in prints and book illustrations.⁴¹ [Fig. 0.2] In them, the indigenous perpetrators of the bloody deeds were depicted as frenzied and mindless caricatures, acting out of arbitrary instability, rather than responding to a perceived threat or exacting retribution for a previous wrong. Such images have a dramatic – even cinematic –

³⁹ Hulme, *op.cit.*, 14.

⁴⁰ Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 154.

⁴¹ Polynesian and indigenous missionary martyrs, who fared far worse, received far less publicity.

bloodcurdling verve well-suited to a white popular audience raised on ‘Cannibal-Land’ adventure stories. They fed neatly into the expectation – based on the long history of ignoble ‘savagism’ – that black Others look and behave thus.



Fig 0.2: George Baxter, *Massacre of Reverend Williams at Erromanga*, colour print, 1839

But if nineteenth-century missions tended to depict indigenous people as benighted, another entwined strand of Western attitude to Pacific Islanders romanticised the flip side, Rousseau’s intrinsically virtuous ‘natural man’ who should have been left in peace. Anxiety that European contact would contaminate the purity and supposed static timelessness of an idealised ‘ethnographic present’ has been pervasive since the first European voyages of discovery.⁴² Of Tahiti, George Forster wrote in 1778, that if ‘knowledge ... can only be acquired at such a price as the happiness of nations, it were better for the discoverers and the discovered that the South Seas had remained unknown to Europe and its restless inhabitants.’⁴³

⁴² See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 80-86, for an analysis of the ‘ethnographic present’ and how it excludes the Other from participation in anthropological discourse.

⁴³ George Forster, *A voyage round the world*, eds. Nicholas Thomas and Oliver Berghof, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000).

Likewise, recalling a pristine Thursday Island, the Reverend William Gill wrote sadly to A.C. Haddon in 1888:

... as 'civilisation' advances much that is of deepest interest to you and me disappears forever.
You do well to pick up the crumbs that remain.⁴⁴

The loss of this presumed authenticity in the face of the inevitability of modernity was a source of lament for both serious ethnographers and their more populist cousins, the traveller-adventurers whose livings were made by re-presenting 'Otherness' to European consumers with an eager appetite for exoticism. Ironically, those who feverishly strove to visually replicate dubious notions of pre-contact cultural 'purity' did so despite the fact that the very existence of such imagery demonstrated their 'contamination' by modernity. The term 'ethnographic salvage' was adopted in the 1970s to describe this desperate scramble, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to record, collect, describe and represent tribal worlds assumed to be doomed to extinction.⁴⁵

The conflicted Reverend Gill notwithstanding, missionaries on the whole had an entirely different attitude and agenda. While they were themselves both significant producers of images and facilitators of image-production by others, their relationship to the indigenous people thus depicted is radically different to that of travelogue-adventurers.⁴⁶ Unlike them, missionaries by definition have a distinct relationship to the indigenous cultures they encounter in their unabashed commitment to changing them. Though undoubtedly paternalistic, their attitude to their host communities was often both protective and forward-looking. Travelogue-adventurers and salvage ethnographers were there to record (or reconstruct) what they could of the imagined past 'before it was too late' (after which

⁴⁴ Quoted in A.H. Quiggin, *Haddon, the Head Hunter: A Short Sketch of the Life of A.C. Haddon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Archive, 1942), 90. Reverend Gill must have felt terribly conflicted, since his book *Life in the Southern Isles* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1876) celebrates the transformations of modernity.

⁴⁵ Jacob Gruber, 'Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 72, 1970, 1297- 1298.

⁴⁶ However it's also important to note that most Western missionaries to Melanesia necessarily took an interest in the culture of their protégés; many were keen collectors; some were significant anthropologists in their own right. The Anglican priest R.H. Codrington wrote a seminal ethnography of Melanesia (*The Melanesians; studies in their anthropology and folk-lore*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891); the itinerant and polyglot Methodist minister George Brown published a thoughtful contribution to scholarship on the so-called Polynesia-Melanesia dichotomy (*Melanesians and Polynesians Their Life-histories Described and Compared*, London: MacMillan, 1910); Maurice Leenhardt, a French Protestant pastor, spent a lifetime immersed in the languages and life-worlds of New Caledonia. See, for example, *Gens de la Grande Terre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1937; *Do Kamo. La personne et le mythe dans le monde mélanésien*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

the contaminated people were expected to have expired from Western disease or, at best, have lost their pristine cachet and be of little further interest). Missionaries, on the contrary, were in for the long haul. They had no intention of letting their charges die off or fade into the past: their attention and concerns were with survival into the future. Thus time and transformation are key elements of the missionary enterprise which contrast emphatically with the fly-in-amber ethnographic present. Missionaries embraced modernity as part and parcel of the spread of Christianity in the Islands; whereas ethnographic salvage was intrinsically anti-modern as regards its objects. I suggested above that mission promotion also transmitted a sort of modern global sensibility to white congregations. Hence, the mission enterprise operated in both directions, linking brown and white across the Pacific, fuelled by the traffic in Melanesian representations.

Propaganda and Money

‘We must then win these people to Christ that they may resist the oncoming and the incoming of the white man who will assuredly - apart from Christ - be their destruction.’

Southern Cross Log, magazine of the Anglican Melanesian Mission, December 1908

‘This work of missions is the biggest, the most far-reaching, most divine task that confronts the twentieth-century man.’

The Open Door, Methodist magazine, September 1927

Like the travelogue-adventurers and salvage ethnographers, a sense of urgency pervades mission publications of the early twentieth century. But it stems from an entirely different source. Missionaries were out to save people, body and soul, rather than salvage cultural ‘crumbs’. They were often wholeheartedly nativist, a self-appointed shield – as the Anglican quote above shows – against the colonial oppression then in full swing across Melanesia. This in itself marks the enterprise as qualitatively different to most colonial agencies. Christianity trumps white suprematism: brown prospective Christians are far preferable to godless white men who – oncoming and incoming – are cast as an inexorable tsunami. Although often regarded as working hand-in-glove with colonial bureaucracies, in fact missionary societies such as the Methodist Foreign Mission and the Anglican Melanesian Mission enjoyed no government support and often actively opposed colonial initiatives such as land appropriation for white settlement.

But while missionaries themselves might be clear about why they were there, financial support from home congregations was essential to the enterprise; so it was they who must be convinced of its urgent necessity. Finance came from the congregational donations of patron countries and from self-funding industrial endeavours such as, in the Western Solomon Islands, church-owned copra plantations. The correspondence and minutes of church organisations during the 1920s, such as the annual Methodist Conference of New Zealand, are full of fretful calculations, anxious financial projections and strident fund-raising appeals. There was never enough.

Some mission support could be demanded in the abstract, through stern Biblical reference to the duty to evangelise.⁴⁷ But to engage the level of committed enthusiasm that would translate not only to a reliable income but also to volunteers for service in the field, imaginative empathy must be fired and the romance of the heroic invoked. How were missionary organisations to go about this, given their audience's limited access to real information about these foreign fields, and against a background of commercial popular representation that emphasised simplistic exotic otherness rather than complex common humanity? Mission organisations had to keep up with the commercial competition while simultaneously pushing a somewhat different agenda.

Methodology: A Trajectory

In practice, it seems to have taken some time for mission organisations to recognise that their relationship with the travelogue-adventure genre was problematic. This thesis employs case-studies to reveal a temporal trajectory in the twentieth-century relationship between missionary organisations interested in propagandising their work and travelogue-adventurers operating with commercial motives. This trajectory follows missionaries as they move from facilitation, through passive commissioning, to active collaboration, and finally to autonomous film-making in their own right.

Part One of this thesis considers the first three situations – those in which missionary organisations directly or indirectly engaged with ‘professional’ travelogue-adventurers – and the unforeseen results this sometimes produced. When missionaries assisted or employed film-makers in return for propaganda imagery, an uneasy relationship akin to a

⁴⁷ Matthew 28:19-20

three-legged race ensued, caused by the tacit cross-purposes of their respective core businesses, leading to splintered and hybrid outcomes.

Chapter One considers a case from 1917-1919 where circumstantial evidence strongly suggests an unacknowledged debt owed by American travelogue-adventurers Martin and Osa Johnson to the Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries who facilitated and mediated their access to a Big Nambas community on Malakula and which produced a popular book – *Cannibal-land: adventures with a camera in the New Hebrides* (1922) – and movie footage that Johnson mined extensively thereafter. A subsidiary case-study from Malakula looks at a similarly unacknowledged debt from a later moment.

Chapter Two examines two separate attempts by Anglican Missionary boards in Australasia to commission a propaganda film from professional film-makers during the early 1920s. The first is a lost film called *The Heart of New Guinea* (1923) made by Captain Frank Hurley but later considered ‘absolutely useless’ as mission propaganda. The other Anglican case follows the contractual and marketing difficulties that beset two ill-matched Hurley wannabes and which left New Zealand’s Melanesian Mission Board embarrassed and out of pocket. This film was *10,000 Miles in the S.Y. Southern Cross* (1921), with footage shot on a tour of the archipelagos of the Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz and Vanuatu. It survives only as a twenty minute segment in the New Zealand Film Archive.

Chapter Three analyses a collaboration on Vella Lavella in the Solomon Islands, in which Reginald Nicholson, an Australian Methodist missionary, and Edward Salisbury, an American travelogue-adventurer, produced between them two very different films from essentially the same footage. Reginald Nicholson’s film was *The Transformed Isle* (1924). This survives as approximately 60 minutes held in the New Zealand Film Archive (now Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision). Nicholson also wrote a popular book – *Son of a Savage: the story of Daniel Bula* (1924) – which enjoyed wide circulation in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. This will be considered alongside the film as an integral part of the missionary propaganda package.

Part Two of this thesis goes on to tell the story of missionaries extricating themselves from their unholy alliance with adventurers, acquiring their own equipment and making films independently. We considered earlier the way in which the missionary agenda differed from that of commercial travelogue-adventurers. A further important logistical

consideration is the long-term proximity, relative companionship and linguistic connection between white missionaries and their indigenous subjects. This was necessarily lacking in visiting commercial film-makers making short-term trips. Whether and to what extent this familiarity allowed room for the recording of everyday activities that humanised and acknowledged the agency of Melanesians captured on screen will be considered, against the tendency of adventurers to impose a 'Cannibal-land' framework onto their representations.

Chapter Four scrutinises footage recorded by an Australian Seventh-Day Adventist missionary, Pastor Andrew Stewart, in 1929 and 1931, held in Canberra's National Film and Sound Archive. Despite considerable overlap of fragmentary footage, two or three relatively cohesive missionary trips from Sydney to the Solomon Islands, New Guinea and New Hebrides, are discernible. Most popular in terms of press promotion was *Cannibals and Christians of the South Seas* (c. 1929) filmed by Pastor Stewart on the Solomon Islands, Bougainville, New Ireland and New Britain. It survives as approximately 25 minutes of footage split and duplicated over several entries in the NFSA. *In Primitive Papua* (c. 1930), filmed in south-east New Guinea, survives as roughly 14 minutes of footage, and *In Cannibal Isles* (c. 1931), filmed on Malakula, New Hebrides, survives as approximately 12 minutes.

Chapter Five investigates a complex propaganda package that evolved in the early 1930s promoting the Roman Catholic mission on Bougainville. It consisted of three separate elements – a slideshow, a film and a book of collected letters – which by 1935 coalesced around the tragically absent figure of Emmett McHardy, a young priest from New Zealand who gave his life for his faith. The film – *Saints and Savages* (1935) – and the lantern slides are held by the Marist Archive, Wellington.

This thesis is structured around a trajectory in the interdependence of two separate image-making impulses – that of the commercial travelogue-adventurer and the mission propagandist. But I also interrogate the differences in approach between the two groups. My hypothesis is that their conflict of agenda raises fundamental tensions around how and why Melanesian people were put on display to white audiences of the colonial period. I test that hypothesis by considering not only the filmic text but also the extra-filmic detritus of publicity ephemera, newsletters, newspaper and magazine articles and reviews that forms the multi-faceted textual complex within which films and photographs

circulated.⁴⁸ Are any such tensions apparent in the contemporary promotional material surrounding these images? If so, are any such perceptions discernible in the newspaper reports or other contemporary publications that mark the films' reception? Is there any evidence to support my contention that a stereotype collision acts to destabilise stereotype itself? How do stereotype change or disintegrate?

Beyond these historically specific questions, this thesis addresses the problematic politics of representation, which lies at the heart of cross-cultural colonial exploitation.

Methodologically I am influenced by anthropologist Clifford Geertz's view of culture as 'an assemblage of texts' that can be mined for 'thick description'.⁴⁹ 'Thick description' advocates 'working through the web or tissues of conceptual structures, social institutions, local conventions and individual motives that make the isolated sign meaningful.'⁵⁰ Clearly this methodology is applicable to history as well as anthropology. Hence, to quote historians Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, 'in grappling with the contested status of representation' I feel justified in:

... close, detailed engagement with a multiplicity of historically embedded cultural performances: specific instances, images, and texts that offered some resistance to interpretation.⁵¹

My art history background enables me to bring visual critique to material circulating in wider social and historical contexts. That is, I engage with photographs, films and texts not merely as illustration but as embedded cultural artefacts in their own right.

My focus on film is challenging for several reasons. Firstly, there is the paucity of surviving material, which often exists in only fragmentary form, if at all. But in the spirit of Walter Benjamin, I would argue that fragments can offer insights and authenticity based on honest incoherence which a more polished and cohesive narrative lacks. The fragmentary nature of surviving footage often also reflects its use, not as a self-contained, self-explanatory whole, but as just one component in an evening's multi-media educational entertainment which is otherwise lost to us.

⁴⁸ Peter Limbrick emphasises the importance of extra-filmic material in his *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁴⁹ Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Towards an interpretive Theory of Cultures' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

⁵⁰ John Hawley, *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), 203-204.

⁵¹ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4.

Secondly, as mentioned above, collaborations between missionaries and travelogue-adventurers, or the commissioning of the latter by the former, led to several instances of the same footage re-emerging in different films and contexts, or the ghosts of one film haunting an entirely different one. Promiscuous re-use of footage was a common practice of the time (as was also the case for ‘ethnographic’ photographs), but the question of *how* it was re-used is salient to my analysis.

Lastly, this is a study of strategies of indigenous representation deployed by white colonial agents acting on Melanesian people in circumstances that reek of power disparity. As a Pākehā with no anthropological qualifications and no personal experience of any of the Melanesian places or people mentioned in this thesis, I am acutely aware that I am open to similar accusations of exploitation and objectification. My counter-argument is that a major thread of this study lies in attentiveness to and respect for the indigenous agency that is and was always present, whether in the frame or operating outside its margins. By re-presenting images of Melanesians captured for exploitative or propagandist reasons to a new audience in a post-colonial academic context, I hope to draw attention to individuals and communities whose voices might otherwise be lost.

PART ONE

Strange Bedfellows: Missionaries and Travelogue-Adventurers



Fig. 1.1: Martin Johnson, *Nagapate*, photograph, c.1917

Chapter One: Facilitation: Missionaries Behind the Scenes

Introducing Nihapat

‘We had come in contact with many wild peoples, but none of them were quite wild enough.’

Martin Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*

One of Martin Johnson’s most widely reproduced photographs depicts ‘Nagapate’, a Big Nambas chief of the Tenmaru community from the upland interior of north-west Malakula. [Fig. 1.1] It is a head-and-shoulder frontal portrait of a ni-Vanuatu man in his middle years. His steady, serious glare assesses the camera equipment. . His hair and beard are full and grizzled, though his top lip is neatly clean-shaven; a deep frown incises his forehead, but his shoulders are relaxed and it is apparent from their position that his arms are akimbo, a confident stance. The only adornments visible in the frame are a white rod piercing his septum, and a single-strand fibre necklet.

This chapter marks the start point of the trajectory – outlined in the Introduction – that considers the conflicted relationship between travelogue-adventurers and missionaries. It illustrates how travelogue-adventurers depended on missionaries to facilitate their access to the glamorous Other for the purpose of collection and disseminating Melanesian imagery while deliberately downplaying this reliance and outwardly deploring the erosion of perceived indigenous ‘authenticity’ due to Christian incursion.

The primary case study analyses American travelogue-adventurer Martin Johnson’s literary and filmic output relating to Vanuatu, and, in particular, to a Big Nambas community on Malakula. This provides an opportunity to consider in more detail the traits of the adventure-travelogue genre – and, more specifically, the problems this genre creates for a film-maker and photographer constructing and collecting images in the field for a white audience. This is an important theme in this thesis, because it forms the background against which imagery deployed by missionaries takes its stand in public forums. Subsidiary case studies consider later ventures on the same island and likewise illustrate significant aspects of the interactions between commercially-motivated film-makers and indigenous communities. Again, these obsessively circulate around images and the effort of image-making. Although this chapter does not include a missionary film

as such, missionary representations of indigenous people are richly present in the form of text media transmitted ‘home’, and in photographs that reveal how missionaries played unacknowledged key roles in mediating the relationship between adventurers and ni-Vanuatu. Moreover, these case studies illustrate how indigenous people exercised their agency in varied ways in their dealings with colonial modernity.

In the introduction to his book, *Cannibal-Land: Adventures with a Camera in the New Hebrides* (1922), Johnson described his exasperated, restless disappointment at his failure, prior to encountering the Big Nambas people, to find his notion of unsullied authenticity:

We had come in contact with many wild peoples, but none of them were quite wild enough. I had made motion-pictures of cannibals in the Solomons. They were *bona-fide* cannibals, fierce and naked. But somehow, I never quite felt that they were the real thing : they so obviously respected the English Government officers and native police boys who accompanied and protected us. I wanted to get among savages who were unspoiled — to make photographs showing them in their own villages, engaged in their ordinary pursuits. I felt sure, from what I had seen and heard and read, that the pictures I wanted were waiting to be taken in the New Hebrides and nowhere else. Savagery has been pretty well eliminated from the South Seas. The Solomon Islander is well on the road to becoming a respectable citizen of the British Empire. Most of the Fiji Islanders have left off cannibalism and have settled down and turned Methodist.¹

So, how wild is ‘wild enough’ to satisfy the modern travelogue-adventurer and his armchair audience? This passage is rife with the equivocations which characterise the conflicted travelogue ethos. Firstly, it is notable that, with no possibility of verification, merely being ‘fierce and naked’ is offered as sufficient evidence of cannibalism. Yet doubt resurfaces almost immediately: ‘I never quite felt they were the real thing’. Secondly, ambivalence is expressed towards the police entourage: being in need of protection proves both one’s own importance and verifies the existence of exotic dangers, but it also confirms the contemporary colonial setting. Thirdly, the language of contamination and spoliation is employed to describe cultural change. Fourthly an apparent geographical precision – the ticking off of one ‘spoiled’ Melanesian island group after another – masks indifference to cultural specificity: any savage will do to play the

¹ Martin Johnson, *Cannibal-Land: Adventures with a Camera in the New Hebrides*, (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 6. Henceforth *Cannibal-Land*.

‘cannibal’ role, provided he is sufficiently ‘fierce and naked’.² Fortunately for Johnson, the New Hebrides of this period, particularly Malakula, were indeed considerably less policed than the Solomons. The Big Nambas people of north-west Malakula had a genuinely dangerous reputation. They were Johnson’s best candidates so far for the ‘unspoiled’ savagery he longed for. Here, Johnson took the famous photograph that introduced this chapter.

It was shot on the first of his two trips to Vanuatu, in November 1917. The second trip took place in mid-1919. On both occasions he and his wife, Osa, met and enjoyed the hospitality of Nihapat and his people, while collecting still and moving images of indigenous Melanesians intended for commercial exploitation in the West.³ Nihapat became, quite literally, Martin Johnson’s poster boy. Filmed, photographed and luridly written about during and after the 1917 trip, Johnson promoted Nihapat and his Big Nambas community as embodiments of ‘authentic’ savagery to curious Western eyes. Ironically, their commercial value in the West was predicated on their presumed state of being ‘uncontaminated’ by modernity, even as the contemporary technology of image-capture intruded into their lives.

But circumstantial and photographic evidence – discussed below – places both Johnson and Nihapat squarely in the purview of Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries on Malakula in 1917 and 1919. In researching this period, a mission history was uncovered that brings into focus an alternative representation of this ni-Vanuatu chief, one occluded by his travelogue ‘stardom’. Although equally filtered through white prejudices, anthropologically opaque and intended for popular Western consumption to serve propaganda ends, nevertheless this other picture – gleaned from the pages of a mission newsletter – offers to readers, both then and now, some of the complexities of colonial modernity with which the man himself was wrestling. Moreover this missionary history acknowledges Nihapat’s personal agency, albeit attributing it to God’s grace. The contrast between the missionary and adventure-travelogue texts circulating around this one man demonstrates the conflicted agendas and discourses in play and available to ordinary, non-academic white people in forming their impressions of the ‘South Seas’. My

² It should perhaps be emphasised at this point that ‘nakedness’ is in the eye of the beholder: the Big Nambas’ signature bark belt and penis wrapper signified as much propriety for them as the elaborate and uncomfortable collars and neckties of Western men – it was simply the garb of a gentleman.

³ Below I will follow contemporary orthography in referring to the island as Malakula and this chief as Nihapat, while retaining other spellings where they appear in direct quotes.

argument is that, despite its simplistic interpretation, its ethnographic indifference and its smaller audience, the availability of this differently angled, alternative representation enabled the missionary viewpoint to disrupt conventional populist Western notions of the 'savage'.

Celebrity 'savages'

'... he featured the blacks and played them strong'

The Moving Picture World, 15 March 1919.

On their 1917 trip, having reached Vanuatu, the Johnsons sailed from their base on Vao (where they stayed as guests of the Roman Catholic mission house), round the coast to Tenmaru in northern Malakula. Striking inland they met and filmed Nihapat and his group, an encounter that produced the famous photograph.⁴ One of the salient characteristics of Johnson's genre is the need to insert himself, as intrepid adventurer, into the narrative. Hence he romanticises a fearsome physical encounter with the Other. As the Johnsons and their three equipment-toting companions are being escorted back down to the beach where their boat-crew awaits, he writes:

We had gone only a few steps when we were seized from behind. We had no chance to struggle. In the minutes that followed, I suffered the most terrible mental torture I have ever experienced. I saw only one slim chance for us. Osa and I each carried two revolvers in our breeches' pockets; so far, the savages had not discovered them, and I hoped there might come some opportunity to use them. Every ghastly tale I had ever heard came crowding into my memory; and as I looked at the ring of black, merciless faces, and saw my wife sagging, half swooning, in the arms of her cannibal captors, my heart almost stopped its beating.⁵

Nothing in either the prior or subsequent social interactions between Nihapat and the Americans justifies the idea that there was ever any threat of actual violence. The chief had, after all, just posed for photographs and allowed himself and his men to be filmed. One biographer suspects Johnson of exaggerating what may have been no more than an over-eager invitation to extend the visit.⁶ The sexual subtext is blatant, however; nor is it the only place where Johnson co-opts the presence of his pretty wife to sexualise the

⁴ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 18.

⁵ Ibid. 19.

⁶ Pascal and Eleanor Imperato, *They Married Adventure: The Wandering Lives of Martin and Osa Johnson*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 241 n19.

racial divide in classic silent-era film terms: ‘... the savage chief [has earlier] held her firmly with one hand and ran the other over her body.’⁷ The libidinous tension invoked by encountering or imagining the Other is a feature of the adventure-travelogue which is notably absent from missionary imagery, where an opposite tendency to infantilise and downplay adult sexuality is apparent. In practice, and for obvious reasons, this erotic fiction worked best for Johnson in the literary rather than the filmic realm, demonstrating the intrinsic problem of translating a fictional literary mode into visual ‘actuality’ film. The story continues with the Johnsons effecting a dramatic ‘escape’ from Nihapat’s clutches after the fortuitous appearance of the government gunboat in the distance cows the natives. (Again, the writer displays his conflicted relationship to colonial power, despised and depended upon in equal measure.) But the veracity of this ‘escape’ – during which, ‘tattered, bleeding, and terrified [they had] rushed into the water pursued by the yelling savages’ – is wholly contradicted not only by the warm spirit in which, as related in *Cannibal-Land*, Johnson and Nihapat renewed their acquaintance twenty months later but also by Johnson’s elaborate preparations for this much-desired reunion (see below).⁸

Nevertheless, this sensationalised incident, retold in popular press interviews and articles and finally bedded down, as quoted above, in the text of his travel-adventure book, formed Johnson’s justification for the subsequent publicity for his film, *Martin Johnson’s Cannibals of the South Seas*, released in July 1918. The colonising possessiveness of the film’s title and the prominent sub-heading frequently used in posters, ‘Photographed at the risk of life’ [sic], emphasise the personality of the intrepid white adventurer and the dangers faced by him, rather than any pretence at ethnography.

But what publicity! Unbeknownst to their original, Nihapat’s striking features glowered from posters and newspaper advertisements throughout the United States and Canada. In New York, a ‘massive signboard [was] erected on Broadway at Forty-seventh street ... graphically tell[ing] Broadway’s millions the wonders of [the film]’⁹; Chicago, ‘was plastered by 124 twenty-four foot stands, and an effective lobby display was arranged [in which] ... Savages peered from every wall. The wicked Nagapate, the Chief of the Cannibals, met everybody entering the theatre ...’¹⁰ In Indianapolis, Nihapat’s face

⁷ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 18.

⁸ Ibid., 60–62.

⁹ *Moving Picture World*, 21 September 1918, 1373

¹⁰ *Moving Picture World*, 12 April 1919, 260

graced numerous playbills for the show in which ‘Cannibals’ were found to be ‘so strong an attraction that [the theatre proprietor] billed them over ... Douglas Fairbanks ... [and] played them up like a circus ... he featured the blacks and played them strong.’¹¹

In terms of exposure to the white gaze, this level of mass publicity, which pre-dates by several years Frank Hurley’s media extravaganza for *Pearls and Savages* (1921), places Nihapat’s representation at the heart of a publicity frenzy encompassing film, book, magazines and numerous advertising platforms. Johnson himself captures how the cinema’s imperial eye/I could simultaneously be international in scope yet use celluloid to fold space so that the ‘Malekula jungle’ was only a few feet away:

Before many months, Nagapate was scowling out of the screen at audiences in New York and Paris and London, and villagers who would never go a hundred miles from home were meeting him face to face in the Malekula jungle.¹²

But this is a disempowered, colonised fame: Johnson’s proprietorial pride in his possession of these people (including appropriation of their virility), via their representations, is explicit:

In a sense, they were my people. They had encircled the globe with me and in the comfortable surroundings of great theaters had stood naked and terrible before thousands of civilized people. I had made their faces familiar in all parts of the world.¹³

Nihapat, although excluded from and ignorant of his own international fame, may well be the West’s first named and instantly recognisable Melanesian celebrity.¹⁴

A Colonial Quadrille.

Like Edward Salisbury with *Gow the Headhunter* (see Chapter Three), Johnson structures his *Cannibals of the South Seas* film so that the most ‘savage’ and hence most exciting

¹¹ *Moving Picture World*, 15 March 1919, 1492.

¹² Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴ Ironically, however, Johnson’s 1917 photograph of Nihapat was not the first to be published in the West. Swiss anthropologist Felix Speiser, author of the seminal *Ethnology of Vanuatu: an early twentieth-century study* (1923), earlier wrote *Two Years With the Natives in the Western Pacific*. Aimed at a popular audience, the latter details his experiences in the New Hebrides in 1910 and 1911. One of the photographs with which the book is illustrated – captioned ‘A Cannibal from Big Nambas, with nose-stick’ – is unmistakably of a somewhat younger Nihapat. Felix Speiser, *Two years with the natives in the western Pacific*, (London: Mills & Boon, 1913), opp. 61.

part of the narrative appears as its culmination and climax. In this case it happens also to follow the chronology of his actual trip, from the Solomons to New Caledonia to the New Hebrides, 'where the pictures I wanted were waiting to be taken ... and nowhere else.' Having fixed on Vanuatu as his pristine source of savagery, neither film nor book can afford to acknowledge any taint of missionary efficacy. Hence the Roman Catholic 'Father Prin' of Vao is the only named missionary referred to in *Cannibal-Land*, and his role in the book is only as a source of dire warnings and graphic stories of barbaric indigenous practices such as geronticide.¹⁵ The conversion effort is dismissed as ineffectual, a 'losing fight' against incorrigible 'savagery':

The converts themselves did not count for much, even in Father Prin's eyes. He had learned that the task of bringing the New Hebridean native out of savagery was well-nigh hopeless. ... The faith and perseverance he showed was a marvel to me. I shall always respect him and the other missionaries who work among the natives of Vao and Malekula for the grit they show in a losing fight.¹⁶

Only a faint textual trace here suggests that there may be 'other', anonymous missionaries in the vicinity. No photographs of missionaries or indeed any non-indigenous people, other than the author and his wife, were published in *Cannibal-Land*.

This is not the case with Osa Johnson's own memoir, *Bride in the Solomons*, published in 1946 but referring to the 1917 trip.¹⁷ The photographs used for this show something closer to the realities of colonial life in Melanesia – white traders and government officials, indigenous policemen and an indigenous prisoner in chains, even the 'mixed race' daughter of a white trader and his indigenous wife are depicted. One surmises that these were taken by Martin but rejected for publication in *Cannibal-Land* as too revealing of colonial modernity. Missionaries are still conspicuous by their absence from Osa's pictorial record, however, though the Adventist couple Norman and Alma Wiles make a brief but unmistakable appearance in the text (see below, 52-53).

¹⁵ 'Father Prin' is likely to have been based on Père Jamond, the Marist missionary on Vao. In fact, Johnson's appraisal of the Vao mission's lack of traction amongst the locals is endorsed by other commentators such as John Layard, who lived on Atchin and Vao in 1914-15. See John Layard, 'The Coming of the White Man on Atchin' in Haidy Geismar and Anita Herle, *Moving Images: John Layard, Fieldwork and Photography on Malakula Since 1914* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 164.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 11-12.

¹⁷ Osa Johnson, *Bride in the Solomons*, (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1946).



Fig 1.2: Martin Johnson, *Nagapate among the devil-devils*, photograph, c.1917

Nevertheless, missionaries were there, and their side of the story also begins with an iconic Martin Johnson photograph of Nihapat. It depicts him with two companions in a dance ground – an area of forest cleared and smoothed for sacred ceremonies. [Fig. 1.2] The men pose next to tall slit gongs with carved and decorated faces. The camera is far enough away to allow the full height of the five visible slit-gongs to be captured within the frame. Three are prominent, while the two behind are darker, their painted faces faded. Nihapat stands immediately beside the central, tallest one, gazing frontally at the photographer, and providing a scale for the upright drum which is twice his height. He holds a thick carved beater stick in his right hand. The two other men sit well to the left of the composition, on a haphazard cluster of stone seats ranged in front of the slit gongs. The leftmost man is turned away from the camera and towards one of the drums, but he regards us over his right shoulder. The other seated man has a white feather in his hair and lightly holds two small drumsticks, with which he appears to be playing a very much smaller, horizontal drum balanced across rocks. He too gazes directly towards us. Less striking to an uninformed Western viewer are the large dolmens erected among the slit

gongs. John Layard, the first anthropologist to do fieldwork on Atchin in 1914-15, later wrote detailed notes on the slit gong orchestras of Atchin, their socio-religious significance and the hierarchical arrangement of their drummers.¹⁸ Though not written up until 1958 and not published until 2005, Layard's observations coincide perfectly with Johnson's 1919 photographic record which, with its indiscriminate attention to detail, operates independently of the understanding of both photographer and viewer. Ironically the dubious truth-value of Johnson's narrative is trumped by the inherent truthfulness of his camera lens.

As with the head-and-shoulders cropped portrait, Johnson reproduced the photograph in *Cannibal-Land*, where it was captioned 'Nagapate among the devil-devils'.¹⁹ For reasons outlined below, I date this photograph to the second trip, around July 1919. Johnson's caption implies (though doesn't state) that Nihapat is on home ground, that being the village of Tenmaru in north-west Malakula. In fact, comparison with another Johnson photograph and one published in the memoir of Seventh-Day Adventist missionary Andrew Stewart, shows that this is a dance ground on Atchin, a Small Island off Malakula's north-east coast. Anthropologist Kirk Huffman arrived independently at a similar conclusion based on field work.²⁰

So, why did a Big Nambas chief from the Malakula mainland pay a visit to Atchin in 1919? In outlining here the cross-cultural entanglement between four stakeholders – a Big Nambas chief, an American adventurer, a British government official and Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries, I attempt to uncover what Johnson's photograph, for all its abundance of detail, conceals about the embeddedness of missionary presence in, and influence on, the travel-adventure genre in conditions of colonial modernity.

At the time, Atchin was the Seventh-Day Adventist's primary base for their New Hebrides mission, and had been since Mr and Mrs C.H. Parker arrived in 1912. The Atchin base was tiny, consisting only of a mission house for one, sometimes two, missionary couples, and no actual converts, although services featuring songs and picture

¹⁸ John Layard and Haidy Geismar, 'Slit Drums on Atchin,' *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 47, Spring 2005, 191–208.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, opp. 110.

²⁰ Heidy Geismar, 'Malakula: a photographic collection', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48:3, July 2006, 520-563, 554.

rolls were enjoyed by some local people.²¹ Undaunted, Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries had first made contact with a Big Nambas group in 1915, and a subsidiary mission station was established for a second couple – Norman and Alma Wiles – in 1916 at Matanavat, a village a few miles north of Atchin on mainland Malakula, with the strategic intention of using it as a stepping stone into Big Nambas territory. Regular visits between the Adventist missionaries and a particular Big Nambas chief, later referred to variously as ‘Nekambat’, ‘Nikambet’ and even ‘Yikambat’, had been made ever since, with the aim on both sides to establish a mission school close to the Big Nambas village as soon as possible.²² Photographs reproduced in Seventh-Day Adventist publications confirm that ‘Nekambat’ and Johnson’s ‘Nagapate’ are the same man, although that link is not made explicit in Adventist texts until much later.²³ While the missionaries naturally see the hand of God at work (‘The Lord seems to be opening the door to the Big Nambus people, and their big chief has attended two of our services, which he said he liked’, Pastor Parker reports, sounding slightly startled²⁴), Nihapat’s chiefly pragmatism is evident. In 1916 he enters into a deal with the Adventists whereby he will provide land to build a church-school, with the expectation that missionaries will come and build their own accommodation. In all his appearances within the SDA newsletters, Nihapat and his people are always in control of the relationship and clear about their demands. About an early visit, Pastor Parker remarked:

The leading chief and his brother called me to the outskirts of the village, and there showed me a piece of ground, which they said they would give us if we would only establish a mission among them ... When we take our next trip we are to take hammer and nails, which the Big Nambus [sic] requested us to do, so that they can build us a good schoolhouse.²⁵

Likewise, medicine is dispensed, but when the missionary’s medicine bag is depleted on this visit, its continued supply is ensured via gifts of food, with the initiative again being taken by the indigenes.

²¹ Ross James, *Australasian Record*, 17/3/1919, 4. The *Australasian Record* (hereafter AR) was the name of the Seventh-Day Adventist newsletters published and distributed from Wairoa, NSW. The Seventh-Day Adventist Archives have a superb online resource of scanned and searchable publications, without which this research would have been impossible. See <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>.

²² AR, various, 1916-1920.

²³ AR, 22/4/1946, 6.

²⁴ Calvin Parker, AR, 3/1/1916, 3.

²⁵ Parker, AR, 3/4/1916, 2-3.

Many brought yams, asking me to bring them some medicine in return the next time I visited them.²⁶

Non-compliance with either part of that friendly request – the bringing of medications and there being a ‘next time’ – is clearly not an option. The relationship being established is therefore not one of paternalistic charity to helpless ‘savages’ but an active indigenous harnessing of the valuable products of modernity available through adopting a missionary. Nihapat is in a hurry:

They are desirous of getting the building up, so that they can have their missionary.²⁷

In a revealing episode, we also see Nihapat exploiting the mission’s launch to engage with another aspect of the inexorable spread of colonialism, again in the interests of his people:

Last week Brother Wiles and I took their [Big Nambas] chief across to Santo, where he went to bring back some of his men whose term of service had expired, but the Frenchman for whom they were working would not let them go.²⁸

This single sentence paints a striking vignette of the conditions of colonial modernity in the Vanuatu of 1916: indigenous people find themselves valiantly engaging with modernity in their efforts to deal with missionaries, colonists both French and British, a joint Anglo-French administrative condominium, the labour trade, distance and European technology.²⁹

Nihapat maintains the pressure. In February 1917, he takes the steep track down to the coast to make a personal visit to Norman and Alma Wiles at Matanavat. The Big Nambas’ school building at Tenmaru is almost finished and he wants them to come. But the missionaries have spread themselves too thin around other communities, at least one of which, Tonmiel, is also building them a schoolhouse. Despite frequent appeals to their Australian constituency, no additional Adventist missionaries have come forward. Since

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Parker, *AR*, 19/6/1916, 3.

²⁸ Parker, *AR*, 19/6/1916, 2-3.

²⁹ This despicable behaviour on the part of French plantation owners on Santo is also attested by Tom Harrison, see *Savage Civilisation*, 285-286. Likewise, John Layard reports the practice of ‘company stores’ running on overpriced credit whereby workers at the end of their three year indenture period found themselves in debt to the tune of a further three years. John Layard in Haidy Geismar and Anita Herle, *Moving Images*, 164.

previous meetings have been on Big Nambas territory, to which the white men have gone alone, this is Mrs Wiles's first meeting with the man she has heard so much about:

We were pleasantly surprised this morning to receive a visit from Nekambat, the Big Nambus chief. This was the first time I had seen him, and my impressions were very favourable. He certainly is a fine, big, healthy-looking man. He was very much taken with our house. They have finished thatching their schoolhouse and the walls are partly done. They have promised to go ahead and finish it. But then they will expect us to comply with our promise – put up a teacher's house and go to teach them ; and what are we to say?³⁰

Again, it is apparent that the initiative is coming from the indigenous side. It would seem that the delay due to inadequate SDA manpower meant that Nihapat's people ended up building a temporary 'teacher's house' as well as the school, for around September 1917 the Wilesees spent a week at Tenmaru in 'the house which the natives had erected for the long-looked-for missionaries.'³¹ Nihapat finally has his missionaries on site, though not for long. During this week's visit Alma was invited to meet Nihapat's nine wives and 'school' was held each morning for the men and boys, in which the Adventist signature teaching aid, the picture roll, was used, and hymn singing encouraged. The chief's mana is underlined:

These people are very loyal to their chief and submit to all that he says. It would be hard for us were he opposed to our work, but fortunately this chief is among the most interested in the village and attends every meeting.³²

But it is here, in Norman Wiles's report published in the *Australasian Record*, that Nihapat's concerns are most explicitly outlined, and with them a glimpse into the realities of the drastic depopulation due to the depredation of introduced diseases that shaped so much of the indigenous response to colonialism. Tom Harrisson (1935), Bernard Deacon (1934) and John Baker (1929) were among the first anthropologists to quantify this

³⁰ Alma Wiles, *AR*, 9/4/1917, 8.

³¹ Norman Wiles, *AR*, 22/10/1917, 2. Almost certainly this house is the very one mentioned by Martin Johnson as the 'new' guest house they were hospitably shown to on turning in after their first day as Nihapat's guests, just a few weeks later: 'He led us to a new house and indicated that we were to make ourselves at home there.' *Cannibal-Land*, 80.

³² Norman Wiles, *AR*, 22/10/1917, 3.

appalling phenomenon.³³ Bearing in mind that in this life-world, ill-health and bad luck are always caused by black magic:

The chief declared that someone had planted poison in the ground of his compound. He brought a palm leaf on which he had kept the record showing the death of fourteen women and children, and seven pigs, the pigs and the women being totalled up together. He wanted to know whether the school coming to his village would alter things for him or not.³⁴

This is a poignant passage. Perhaps there were reasons beyond sullen ‘savagery’ for Nihapat’s grim demeanour in Johnson’s photographs. But it is remarkable not only because it shows the chief’s preoccupations so clearly but also because we are witnessing a leader who has either invented or adapted numeracy and record-keeping for his own purposes, and is using it to convey a specific and urgent indigenous history across a cultural divide.

The Wileses were sorry, they said, to return to Matanavat, but there was a further overnight stay by Adventist missionaries in early November when Stewart and Wiles took the visiting head of the Pacific Mission, Captain G.F. Jones, to meet their Big Nambas trophy.³⁵ Captain Jones’s wife, left on board the mission ship, *Melanesia*, relates the scene of the return of the three men from their inland trip. Her account is worth quoting, since not only does it show Nihapat in lighter mood but also expresses a certain level of assurance of the Big Nambas in their interactions with the missionaries.

As they were later returning than they had led us to expect ... we became somewhat anxious, and were much relieved to see them at last on the beach accompanied by about thirty of the Big Nambas people armed with muskets. They came over to us in two boatloads; the chief as well as many of the others having the stick through their nose, giving them a fierce appearance. They sang us a song with all their might ... [then] We entertained them with the gramophone, and they

³³ Harrison, ‘Depop.’ In *Savage Civilisation*, 261-280; Arthur Bernard Deacon, *Malekula: A Vanishing People in the New Hebrides*, ed. Camilla Wedgwood, (London: Routledge, 1934), xxxii-xxxiii, 19; John Randal Baker, *Man and Animals in the New Hebrides*, (London: Routledge, 1929), 39ff.

³⁴ Norman Wiles, *AR*, 22/10/1917, 3. Incidentally, while the missionary remarks on the commensurability of women and pigs as an indication of the low status of women, it is equally readable as a measure of women’s value as keepers of the tribe’s wealth. Harrison attests to the passionate esteem bestowed on (male) pigs and their close association with women. Women bred and hand-fed pigs, and tended the gardens that provided their fodder. See *Savage Civilisation*, 24ff.

³⁵ Marion Jones, *AR*, 17/12/1919, 8, and G.F Jones, *AR*, 31/12/1919, 5.

listened with rapt attention, at times breaking out into a hearty laugh, and showing their beautiful, white teeth.³⁶

Mrs Jones may be rather ambivalent about those teeth, but there is no reason to doubt her veracity. Postcolonial revisionist historians often lament the difficulties of recovering traces of indigenous voices from the colonial period. In this case, however, the relative immediacy of the Adventist missionary reports, filed from the field for publication in the newsletter, provide a resource for glimpsing, however indirectly, indigenous personalities otherwise lost to history. While the newsletter has a propagandist intent and hence must be read cautiously, there is little sense of sophisticated shaping or editing; the anecdotes have the ring of honest witness, albeit through Adventist filters. When Tom Harrisson rated the relative contribution of missionaries, by denomination, to ethnographic scholarship, he dismissed the Adventists brusquely: 'S.D.A. nil.'³⁷ Ethnologically oblivious they may have been, but in terms of the value of their newsletters to Pacific colonial historians I would suggest the reverse.

It is at this juncture, then, after several years of regular interaction between Nihapat's community and the nearest available missionaries, that Martin and Osa Johnson bounce in, on their first visit to the Big Nambas people outlined above. Indeed, the date given by Johnson for this visit is 10 November 1917, while the date of the overnight stay mentioned in Mrs Jones's report is 6 November 1917.³⁸ This is surely too close to be coincidental. It raises the question of whether the Johnsons did not arrive independently but were in fact guests on the *Melanesia*. And yet surely if that were the case the mission reports would have mentioned the presence of an American film-maker and his wife. Even if their visits were separate, at the very least this represents a busy period of intercultural sociality for the Big Nambas! In their biography of the Johnsons, Pascal and Eleanor Imperato uncritically but erroneously accept Johnson's depiction of this Big Nambas group as 'untouched by missionaries'.³⁹ Likewise, Nihapat's supposedly sexualised response to Osa plays into the conventional 'first white woman' trope, by

³⁶ Marion Jones, *ibid.*

³⁷ Harrisson, *Savage Civilisation*, note on Sources, 239.

³⁸ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 21. Johnson reproduces a letter from Merton King, dated November 10, that was purportedly left for him at Tenmaru Bay warning him off the Big Nambas visit due to internal warfare. Even if the letter was a fiction invented to crank up the danger index, there is little reason in this context to fabricate the date. G.F. Jones's report (see note 44) corroborates inter-village raiding at the time.

³⁹ Imperato *They Married Adventure*, 73.

which the animal lusts of dark-skinned ‘savages’ are dangerously aroused by the sight of feminine white skin. But, as we have seen, Nihapat and his community have already, very recently, met both Alma Wiles and Marion Jones in circumstances brought about by his urgent hope that this new religion might help solve his people’s predicament.

The SDA mission at Tenmaru in Big Nambas country stalled during 1918 due to the Wilese’s ill-health, which necessitated an extended furlough back to Australia. However Andrew Stewart (who replaced Calvin Parker on Atchin) maintained the relationship with Nihapat by continuing to make regular visits from the Atchin base. On the Wilese’s return in November 1918 the British Resident Commissioner, Merton King, forbade their return to Matanavat. North-west Malakula had been placed off-limits to whites after joint British and French forces had killed several ni-Vanuatu. This punitive expedition had been occasioned by the killing of a French recruiter shot as he tried to land on the north-west Malakulan coast, doubtless in retaliation for the kind of labour abuses described earlier. Hence, during the first half of 1919 the Wilese remained on Atchin.⁴⁰ A visit by Nihapat and his two companions to Atchin is reported by Andrew Stewart as being hurriedly organised in direct response to the news that the British Resident Commissioner himself intended to call on the Atchin mission within a few days.

So we planned at once to go to Big Nambas and bring the chief and some of his men here [i.e. Atchin] to wait upon Mr. King ...⁴¹

That ‘So’ implies that the reason for this action is obvious, and indeed the only rationale could have been to persuade Merton King to change his mind about the ban on the Wilese’s return to Matanavat. It is telling that their first impulse, on hearing of the impending VIP visit, is to fetch Nihapat, trusting in his self-advocacy. It would also be intriguing to know – for reasons outlined below – whether King himself expressed an interest in meeting the Big Nambas chief in person. At the least, given Stewart’s immediate reaction, it seems probable that King cited the Big Nambas situation as the reason for his visitation. Whatever the case, thanks to the mission’s fast launch, the mountain was brought to Mohammed. Nonetheless the mountain chose to come, and at short notice.

⁴⁰ AR, 22/12/1919, 2.

⁴¹ AR, 9/2/1920, 3.

Stewart's report does not state exactly when the meeting between Nihapat and the British Commissioner took place, but he does say it was soon after Adventist activity began on Santo, which, from other evidence, was early July 1919.⁴² Stewart also mentions that, in the event, the meeting venue was shifted at the last minute to Vao, the Small Island adjacent to Atchin off the north-east Malakulan coast, where King had opted to go instead. It may be no coincidence that Vao was also where Martin and Osa Johnson made their base in July 1919 and whence they were planning to make their second filming trip into Big Nambas country.⁴³ It is possible that King chose to drop in on Vao because he had struck up a relationship with the Johnsons in Nouméa, New Caledonia, where they had stayed for several days just a week or two earlier while en route to Vanuatu.⁴⁴ In *Cannibal-Land*, Johnson records their cordial relations in a passage that, moreover, shows him contradicting himself about his professed attitude to police escorts, while the Commissioner appears to be remarkably relaxed about the couple's plans to film on Malakula.

I was glad, while in Nouméa, to renew my acquaintance with Commissioner King of the New Hebrides, who had come to New Caledonia to have the *Euphrosyne* repaired. I talked over with him my proposed expedition to Malekula, and received much valuable advice. He could not give me the armed escort I had hoped to secure from him, for he had no police boys to spare. He promised, however, to pick us up at Vao, in about a month's time, and take us for a cruise through the group in the *Euphrosyne*.⁴⁵

King's attitude suggests that the previous year's unrest had settled, which must also have played a part in his decision to lift the ban on the Adventist mission at Matanavat.

More significant, however, is the evidence that Merton King, the British Resident Commissioner of the New Hebrides no less, was introduced to Nihapat's projected celluloid representation on the silver screen *before* meeting the man himself. Johnson continues:

⁴² AR, 22/12/1919, 2. Mr & Mrs Ross James settled on Santo 10 July 1919, see Les Parkinson, 'Establishing the First Permanent Base of Operations in Vanuatu - Part 8, Big Bay, Santo Island and Ambrym Island', *Journal of Pacific Adventist History*, 5:1 (June 2005).

⁴³ Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 77-78; *Cannibal-Land* 49ff.

⁴⁴ The Johnsons were in Nouméa from 23 June to 3 July 1919, initially in quarantine due to the influenza epidemic. *Cannibal-Land* 31-39.

⁴⁵ *Cannibal-Land*, 37-38

I wanted him, and the New Caledonian officials as well, to see some of my work, so I decided to show my films in the Grand Cinéma, the leading motion-picture house of Nouméa. I gave the proprietor the films free of charge, under condition that I got fifty seats blocked off in the center of the house. We invited fifty guests, and the remainder of the house was packed with French citizens of Nouméa, Chinese and Japanese coolies and native New Caledonians. I showed the five reels called "Cannibals of the South Seas." Then I showed my four reels of Malekula film, and ended up with a one-reel subject, Nouméa. We were given an ovation, and both Osa and I had to make speeches The next morning, we found ourselves celebrities as we walked through the streets of Nouméa⁴⁶

Thus in a curious conflux of colonial modernity that emphasises its international characteristics,⁴⁷ a British government official watches moving pictures of ni-Vanuatu people under his jurisdiction, filmed by an American and projected to a multinational audience in French New Caledonia, just a day or two after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (the Johnsons attended a celebratory Peace Ball in Nouméa on 29 June) and in the middle of a global influenza pandemic. It also serves as a reminder that the commercial products of travelogue-adventurers were not consumed solely in the West but also circulated in other contexts of colonial internationalism. In Johnson's description of his audience we get a glimpse of the multicultural bustle of Nouméa in 1919. Whether the Kanaks in the audience found the 'savage head-hunting cannibal' discourse offensive is unknowable.

What King thought of the film is another unknown, but the short space of time between the show and his actual meeting with Nihapat and the Adventists suggests at the very least a psychological if not a causal connection. Ironically, it seems as if his exposure to one aspect of colonial modernity – Johnson-style commercial 'cannibals' – galvanised him into taking action to promote the flip-side – Christianisation. A photograph in Canberra's National Film and Sound Archive is labelled with no indication of date or location, only 'Martin Johnson with four others'. [Fig. 1.3] It shows Johnson and Osa with an elegant, bearded white man in impeccable tropical whites. They stand in front of an elaborate building, close to two billboard posters for *Cannibals*. The Melanesian setting is confirmed by two indigenous men who stand rigidly to attention to one side of the white group. That this is in fact Nouméa can be deduced by the writing in French

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For the internationalism of colonial modernity see Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, xvi-xix.



Fig. 1.3: Martin and Osa Johnson and three unknowns before Grand Theatre, Nouméa, 1919. NFSA.

visible above the poster from which Nihapat's features glower: 'Grand Th[eatre], Samedi-Di[manche]'. This photograph clearly references the event described above by Johnson; hence the most obvious candidate for the identity of the man in white is Merton King himself, whose acquaintanceship was so important to Johnson, and whose VIP status is confirmed by the 'on duty' demeanour of his indigenous escort. I have not yet found an identified photograph of Merton King to confirm this supposition (the man could be the theatre proprietor) but if it is he then it both corroborates Johnson's story and confirms his support for the couple's adventures.

Having shown the film in Nouméa at the Grand Theatre in late June, the Johnsons sailed for Vao on July 3. Thus we can place the Johnsons, Merton King, Nihapat and companions, and the Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries Alma and Norman Wiles and Andrew Stewart all together on Vao and/or nearby Atchin at about the same time – mid-July 1919. My contention is that this was when the photograph of Nihapat and his officers on the Atchin dance ground was taken, and that it was surely shot on the same occasion and in the same place as two other Johnson photographs.

One, also published in *Cannibal-Land*, is captioned ‘Hunting for the Magic’.⁴⁸ [Fig. 1.4] It shows the same distinctive Big Nambas triumvirate contemplating a portable film screen set up on a pole framework propped on carved and painted wooden figures. On the far left a distinctively decorated slit gong is visible. The same slit gong is unmistakably evident on the far right of ‘Nagapate Among the Devil-Devils’. We can confirm the geography by comparing these two images with an uncredited photograph reproduced by Adventist missionary Andrew Stewart in his memoir. Firmly captioned ‘Discarded heathen drums on Atchin Island, New Hebrides’, this photograph shows *both* the wooden framework evident in ‘Hunting for the Magic’ (though without the screen) *and* the same slit gongs as ‘Nagapate Among the Devil-Devils’.⁴⁹ While Johnson’s captions are disingenuously vague as to location, this proves that – even if he did run the film on Nihapat’s beach as he narrates – that there was *also* at least one other showing on relatively tame and missionised Atchin to which he does not draw attention.

The other photograph is well-known in Adventist circles but never published by Johnson. It shows the Wileses seated in the same dance ground with the same Big Nambas men. [Fig. 5] Unlike the dance-ground photograph used in *Cannibal-Land*, this shows a pyramidal group portrait constructed both in racial and gendered terms. Alma Wiles, dressed in white, forms the central apex. Her white-shirted husband sits on a lower stone, while the three ni-Vanuatu men sit or squat beneath them, forming the base of the triangle. Little attention is drawn to the material surroundings; instead, the camera has drawn much closer so that the emphasis is on that conventional missionary-image cliché – the contrast between black and white, heathen and Christian, naked and clothed, and, in this case, male and female.⁵⁰ Nihapat squats squarely in front of Alma, his head on a level with her lap, her white dress providing a strong contrast to his black skin and hair. While Adventist viewers would probably have read the triangular arrangement as one of literal black inferiority, there is no reason to suppose that Nihapat himself would see it that way. His emphatically central position in front of the Wileses, flanked by his officers and showing off his valuable tusk bangles indicative of high rank, can equally be read as

⁴⁸ *Cannibal-Land*, opp 98.

⁴⁹ A.G. Stewart, *Trophies from Cannibal Isles* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1956), 146.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of this trope in mission imagery see for example Richard Eves, “‘Black and white, a significant contrast’: Race, humanism and missionary photography in the Pacific’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29:4 (2006), 725–748.



Fig. 1.4: Martin Johnson, *Hunting for the Magic*, c. 1919.



Fig. 1.5: Nihapat, 'Rambi', 'Atree', Norman and Alma Wiles, c.1919. AHC.

demonstrating his dominance.⁵¹ The Wileses are effectively penned in by the Big Nambas men. They have finally captured ‘their’ missionaries.

The upshot of the interview between Nihapat and Merton King, as recorded in various Seventh-Day Adventist publications, was that the former persuaded the latter to allow the missionaries to return to mainland Malakula and to build a new mission school close to the Big Nambas village. A safety compromise extracted by King was that rather than being sited up in the high inland village of Tenmaru, the new mission would be built somewhat inland but much lower down and closer to the beach. Adventist history grants this triumph to Nihapat, though it seems likely from the circumstances outlined here that King had already made his decision to rescind the ban. Nevertheless, King ‘listened to a deputation headed by Nakambat’ and ‘asked the chief a number of questions’ regarding his request.⁵² Once again, the Big Nambas chief’s concerns are utterly pragmatic and notably lacking in theological considerations:

The Commissioner questioned the chief closely ... each time he [Nihapat] replied ... ‘we want the missionary to come and live amongst us.’ ... When asked why he wanted the Europeans to live with them Nakambat replied that the school was good and if trouble arose he would have the missionary to represent his case to the Government.⁵³

In other words the missionary presence provided a shield between himself and a government with its gunboats and punitive raids, and a potential advocate in labour disputes such as the one in which he had failed to free his men from Santo. It also provided access to important technologies of medicine and literacy. Moreover, as we have seen, he hoped the new god might stop the apparently inexorable loss of life.

In this he was to be disappointed. In February 1920, the new mission (relocated from Matanavat) was struggling amidst intertribal tensions apparently related to on-going fallout from the 1918 incident. Norman Wiles reports another painful interview with Nihapat:

⁵¹ These two men, whom I refer to as ‘officers’, were probably closer to co-chiefs, with Nihapat as *primus inter pares*. They recur in the photographic and filmic record nearby Nihapat.

⁵² Andrew Stewart, *AR*, 22/12/1919, 2 and 9/2/1920, 3

⁵³ Paraphrased by Les Parkinson from the *bislama* recorded by Andrew Stewart in *AR*, see previous note. Les Parkinson, ‘Establishing the First Permanent Base of Operations in Vanuatu - Part 6, Tanmaru in NW Malekula’, *Journal of Pacific Adventist History*, 3:3 (December 2003), 33.

... the chief has lost another son, three or four years old. He says that he has lost twenty children by death, and ascribes it to the fact that some men from a distant village placed poison in his house. He says that he and his people come to school now, and why is it that God does not help him and stop his people and family from dying?⁵⁴

Wiles does not record his response. Just over three months later, on May 5 1920, he himself died of blackwater fever, a particularly virulent form of malaria. His young widow buried him as best she could with the help of a passing indigenous trader captain, and made her way with difficulty back to Atchin. Nihapat himself was deeply affected by Wiles's death. Mrs Wiles's account of this traumatic time provides another intimate glimpse into this chief's personality and typically pragmatic preoccupations unavailable from any other source:

I had not been alone very long when dear old Yikambet [sic] arrived. He had broken their rules of mourning and hurried down to see the face of him whom he called master and really loved. He did not say much but that hard grasp and those few words of affection for his master showed a warm heart under a brown skin. He was anxious to know whether I would stay and teach them and at first did not like the idea of a new master whom he did not know. We had a long talk ... He wished me to keep the money which he had given Norman. All morning long he sat around ordering his men to do the little things I asked. He was very anxious to see all my things moved to a place of safety for he said they would be stolen.⁵⁵

Despite the racial ranking of her use of such terms as 'master' (a normal *bislama* term of address for a white man, not necessarily signifying deference), real warmth is apparent, as well as an intriguing hint of monetary exchange. While not strictly admissible here since her diary was not published in the public domain, the Wileses' story nevertheless circulated widely in Adventist circles as an example of heroic self-sacrifice. Alma herself, much later in life and after a distinguished medical missionary career in PNG, was still addressing public meetings in the 1960s with the story of her 1920 Malakulan tragedy. The advertising bills for these public meetings feature another familiar Martin Johnson portrait – that of 'Rambi', one of Nihapat's officers. Thus the visual fame of these Big Nambas men was maintained in the missionary sphere as well as the secular, well into the post-war period. Given Alma's fondness for and rapport with Nihapat, it seems likely that her public addresses continued to extol his humanity rather than focus on alienating 'savagery'. But at the same time the advertisements for these talks headline her

⁵⁴ Norman Wiles, *AR*, 3/5/1920, 8.

⁵⁵ Transcript of Alma Wiles Diary, Seventh-Day Adventist Heritage Centre, Cooranbong.

‘Adventures among Cannibals’. Hence I offer this snapshot as further evidence of the phenomenon raised in the Introduction, that missionary representations simultaneously resisted and exploited ‘savagism’ tropes. While occasional visits by white missionaries to the various tribal groups on Malakula continued, from this point there was a tactical shift towards the deployment of ‘native teachers’ – primarily Fijians supported by the smattering of local converts – to man the mission outstations.

Johnson’s photographic traces in the missionary record

While early *Australasian Records* include only a few small photographs, later Adventist publications are more lavishly illustrated, using photographs from the earlier period, presumably from SDA archives or in the possession of the missionaries writing their articles or memoirs. Photographic credits are rarely given in these publications, but of those that are, several are credited to Martin Johnson. These include the one of the Wiles couple with the Big Nambas trio which was, for instance, published in the Church Calendar for 1956 over a caption that confirms the Atchin location as well as the mythic status of the story in Adventist history: ‘This picture was taken on the island of Atchin at the time the Big Nambas men came to request the British commissioner to allow Mr. and Mrs. Wiles to go to work for them.’ [Fig.1.5]

Likewise, an article called ‘Trailblazers of the South Pacific’, featured in an SDA youth magazine of 1944, is banner-headed by a Martin Johnson photo and assiduously credited as such.⁵⁶ [Fig. 1.6a] It shows an attractive island beach with shrubs and rocky outcrops. Johnson reproduced this in *Cannibal-Land* with the caption ‘The Watcher of Tanemarou [Tenmaru] Bay’.⁵⁷ [Fig 1.6b] The SDA’s rather more verbose caption quotes the Prophet Isaiah – ‘The Isles Shall Wait for His Law’ – to illustrate the theological imperative of mission work. What is significant here is that both the *Cannibal-Land* version and the SDA version include a silhouetted figure standing on a rock looking wistfully out to sea. But these figures, while similarly positioned, are not quite identical. Body angle, limbs and head are subtly shifted, the *Cannibal-Land* version having a more relaxed, contrapposto stance. Moreover while the camera angle is identical, there are shifts in the shoreline surf which indicate a slight time gap. This suggests that the Adventist author or

⁵⁶ Eric Hare, ‘Trailblazers of the South Pacific’, *The Youth’s Instructor*, 17 October 1944, 16.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, opp. 14

picture editor possessed a different negative or print taken during the same session. How would they have acquired such a thing? Professional photo-shoots involve multiple exposures, most of which are trials or duds. One can imagine Johnson asking the young man to pose and taking several shots, keeping for himself the most elegant, or the most usable. A photographic print from the same negative as that used for the ‘TrailBlazers’ article banner held in the Adventist Archives shows not only the figure’s slightly different stance but also that he was turned a little more side-on, such that his bulky nambas protrudes rather more obviously. [Fig 1.6c] For the SDA magazine reproduction, not only has the offending bulge been clumsily edited out, but the man’s head has been enlarged to make his fuzzy indigenous hair more emphatic. This suggests that Martin Johnson passed on to Adventists his rejects – prints or negatives he knew he did not want to use for his own commercial purposes, or those, such as the one of the Wiles couple, that they asked him to take to record their own activities. Either way, it implies some sort of temporary relationship on the ground and at the time, since if the Adventist author of the 1944 ‘Trailblazers’ article had had subsequent access to Johnson’s (better) published version he would surely have used it. Johnson set up a darkroom of sorts on Vao, so the passing on of prints in this way would have been possible.⁵⁸

The same 1944 article shows another photograph credited to Martin Johnson but never to my knowledge published in the Johnson oeuvre. It shows Norman Wiles conducting a Sabbath school for a dozen seated Big Nambas men (identifiable by their broad bark belts). In pride of place at the front of the group sits the unmistakable figure of Nihapat, who is gazing attentively at the image displayed by Wiles on his ‘picture roll’. Another white missionary, recognisable as Andrew Stewart, sits on the ground alongside Nihapat. There is nothing about the photograph, other than its photo-credit and the narrow date range within which it must have been taken, to connect this photograph to Martin Johnson. But the article’s author, Eric Hare, was a high-profile Australian missionary and a prolific writer with full access to the photograph archives of eminent Adventists – in this case Captain G.F. Jones. If he felt it appropriate in his article to credit this photograph to Johnson then we can assume he had good reason.

⁵⁸ Johnson describes his technical challenges in *Cannibal-Land* 103-105. He used motion-picture film, still camera Kodak film and glass plate negatives. By the second trip he had found a way of sealing film for later development, but on both trips the glass plates had to be developed on the spot.

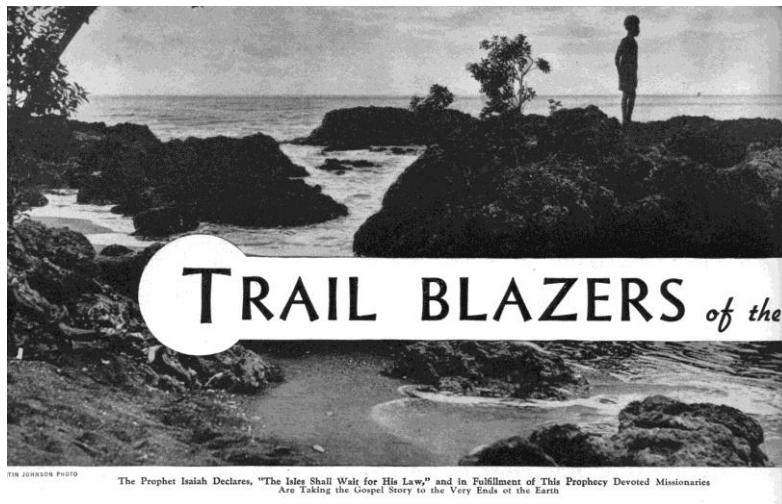


Fig. 1.6a: Banner photograph, 'Trailblazers of the South Pacific', *The Youth's Instructor*, 17 October 1944, 16.

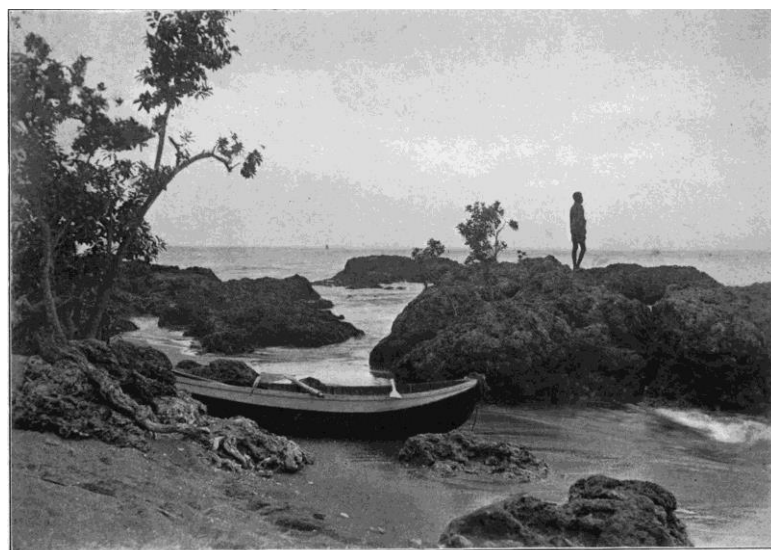


Fig. 1.6b: Martin Johnson, *The Watcher of Tanemarou Bay*, c.1917



Fig. 1.6c: Photographic print from which 'Trailblazers' banner was derived, Adventist Heritage Centre.

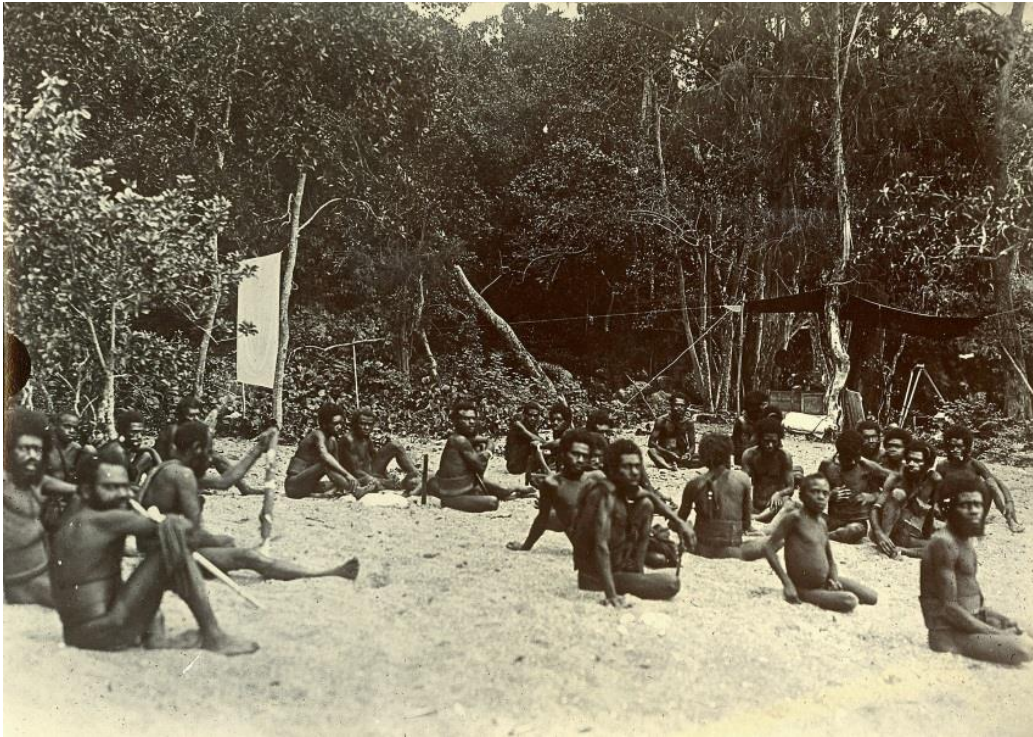


Fig. 1.7: Big Nambas men, Malakula, c.1919. Wiles Album, Adventist Heritage Centre.

While only the Tenmaru Bay seascape was reproduced in *Cannibal-Land* and hence definitively taken by Johnson, many of the photographs described above are to be found in Alma Wiles's photograph album, held by the Seventh-Day Adventist Heritage Centre in Cooranbong, NSW. These photographs are printed on proper photographic paper and appear to have been developed from original negatives. So, assuming that Hare's photo-crediting of Johnson is correct for the others as well as the seascape, this further suggests a direct relationship between the Johnsons and the Wiles. Also suggestive in this album, though unpublished, is a photograph depicting a beach with a film projector set up under an improvised awning, surrounded by seated Big Nambas tribesmen. [Fig. 1.7] It suggests the scene described by Johnson as locals waited on the beach for the film to begin.⁵⁹

Missionary traces in the travelogue record

Although Martin Johnson excludes missionary presence from his travelogue, his wife, Osa, paints a recognizable, if romanticised, pen portrait of Norman and Alma Wiles in her own memoir, published after Martin's death, in which she describes being hosted by the

⁵⁹ *Cannibal-land*, 95. See below, 56ff.

unnamed Australian missionaries on their ‘enchanted little island’ off the coast of Malakula. Osa’s verbal description precisely matches photographs of the couple.

A young woman in a white cotton dress ran down to the beach as we landed. ... Her plump cheeks were the colour of pink roses and her blond hair [was] gathered back into a bun ... Her young husband, an energetic little man, proved to be a doctor ... Although he was quite reserved, he was alert and evidently very capable ... ⁶⁰

Heads or tales: when genres collide

This chapter argues that even though Johnson at no time in his commercial output directly admits to the existence of any missionaries in the vicinity other than the ineffectual ‘Father Prin’ of Vao, there is a substantial body of circumstantial evidence suggesting not only proximity but contact and perhaps even collaboration. Johnson has framed his narrative to keep ‘his’ natives unsullied by missionary interference, allowing him to place himself in the dominant role of intrepid first contact. My point here is not to ‘prove’ that Johnson is being ‘untruthful’. Truthfulness is not, or not entirely, the issue. Johnson’s chosen genre of popular travelogue adventure has a long tradition of ‘vacillation between the authorities of fact and fiction’. ⁶¹ It is about constructing the Self in encounter with and opposition to the Other. Hence it requires a strong first-person narration if it is to be both entertaining and convincing. Yet ironically this necessitates the deployment of narrative techniques similar to those used by fiction writers. As emphasised in the Introduction, travellers’ tales occupy a genre space so close to the novel that it may be a question of debate ‘whether we may still speak of travel writing, for instance, where the distinction between travel writing and fiction becomes small, and the novel comes into being.’ ⁶² Writers from Defoe in the eighteenth century to Bruce Chatwin in the twentieth have revelled in that grey area. ⁶³ Thus a discussion of the discrepant images of Nihapat that emerge from the contrast between missionary and travelogue representations becomes as much one of genre distinction as it is of ‘truth’. All the same, while one understands

⁶⁰ Osa Johnson, *Bride in the Solomons*, 233-234.

⁶¹ Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

⁶² Zweder von Martels, ‘Introduction: The Eye and the Mind’s Eye’ in *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery, and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), xi-xviii, xi. quoted by Debbie Lisle, op.cit., 34.

⁶³ For the debate around the genre of Chatwin’s *Songlines* (1986) see Lisle, op.cit., 61ff.

Johnson's decision to exclude reality – in the form of Adventist missionaries – it is ironic that, as with so many of these 'adventurers' in Melanesia, his safe access to the notorious Big Nambas people was clearly mediated by them. In representing the Johnsons' contact with them as amiable rather than hostile, my intention is not to minimise the real potential for violence inherent to exploitative colonial relations. Traders and labour recruiters played a dangerous game with occasionally lethal results. Despite wishing to paint himself as similarly at risk, Johnson's hospitable treatment and safe passage support my contention that missionaries, whether directly or indirectly, facilitated his meeting with Nihapat's community, and that the latter's cordial and co-operative reception of the couple and their camera equipment was a result of prior warm and trustful relations with the only white people who appeared to be unequivocally committed to working for their benefit as they attempted to negotiate the social upheavals being wrought by colonial incursion.

If there is a clash of genres between travelogue-adventurers and missionaries, there is a further clash between travelogue-adventure and would-be ethnography, which in this case manifests in the same person. Travelogue-adventurers at least *aspire* to being taken seriously as ethnographers even though they know they occupy a slippery area with closer links to popular literature and commerce than with 'serious' anthropology. The osmosis between entertainment and science is evident in the way that anthropologists such as Bernard Deacon and Kirk Huffman valued Johnson's technical imaging skills even while they despised the commercial product.⁶⁴ Likewise, once they had turned their attention to big game in Africa, the Johnsons enjoyed prestigious sponsorship by the American Museum of Natural History. Johnson's conflicted relationship with truth is apparent in the passage near the end of his *Cannibal-Land* adventure memoir. It describes the (anti-) climax he had promised both the reader and himself from the start: the long-distance filming of a so-called 'cannibal feast'. Paradoxically, Johnson's fidelity to superficial truth-telling renders the event so unconvincing as a 'cannibal feast' that he would have done better to abandon all pretence at documentary and go for all-out fiction. His problem with that, however, is his attachment to the idea of substantiating his claim with the perceived truth-value of photographic 'evidence'. Thus he places himself in a double-bind arising from his dual occupation of adventure writer and photographer: on one hand his writing genre requires the yeast of narrative fiction to stop it falling flat; on the other his

⁶⁴ Heidy Geismar, 'Malakula: a photographic collection', 553-554.

journalistic commitment to documented visual authenticity prevents him from simply staging a re-enactment and lying about what was being eaten. From a distance he photographs a group of men dancing near a fire where meat is grilling. But the best evidence he can offer for its nature is his own profound desire:

I do not know what it was that made me suspect the nature of this meat. It certainly was not much different in appearance from pork. But some sixth sense whispered to me that it was not pork.⁶⁵

According to Johnson, he frightens the men away with a radium flare; they disappear into the forest, inconveniently taking with them most of the cooking meat; he approaches to photograph the remains of the ‘evidence’: ‘the only remnant of the feast that was left on the embers ... was a charred human head, with rolled leaves plugging the eye-sockets.’ He continues:

I had proved what I had set out to prove — that cannibalism is still practiced in the South Seas. I was so happy that I yelled. After photographing the evidence, I wrapped the head carefully in leaves, to take away with me. We picked the fire over, but could find no other remainder of the gruesome feast.⁶⁶

He had proved nothing of the sort, of course. In any case, no such close-up photograph of a head appears in *Cannibal-Land*, while the photographs and text in Osa’s version of the incident are equally unconvincing.⁶⁷ Yet Johnson seems averse to outright fiction if exaggeration or creative interpretation can be deployed instead; indeed he evinces a painful honesty alongside his posturing as intrepid adventurer: he admits that the meat looked very like pork and that there were no other remnants than the head. Perhaps this was merely to cover himself for the absence of conclusive photography. But then why not show the head if there was one? Ironically this incident reputedly occurred on Santo, not amongst the Big Nambas of Malakula whose cannibal reputation was so crucial to Johnson’s construction. Even more ironically, Johnson has earlier in the book provided a credible and quite respectful description – complete with a photograph that he *could* have misappropriated for use here – of the art of ‘head-curing’ amongst the Toman people of south-west Malakula. There the heads of venerated ancestors were mummified, Johnson

⁶⁵ *Cannibal-Land*, 187.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁷ In Osa’s account (*Bride in the Solomons*, 217-218) there is no head at all, but instead a ‘human leg and spleen’ – despite the fact that even an anatomist might have difficulty identifying the latter nondescript organ in a cooked state, or distinguishing it from that of a pig.

believed, using fire and clay, before being placed in shrines.⁶⁸ Thus Johnson knew full well the centrality of heads to New Hebridean mortuary rites, and it seems likely that if there is any truth to his ‘cannibal feast’ report then what he witnessed was a skull undergoing one of the steps of a similar ritual process.

Johnson’s difficulties here exemplify Jacques Derrida’s critique of earlier genre theorists such as Tzvetan Todorov.⁶⁹ Rather than imagining them as tidy *a priori* categories with definable constraints and boundaries, Derrida saw each genre ‘law’ as inherently ‘contaminated’ by pre-existing ‘counter-laws’ against which it must continually and ineffectually struggle to maintain its boundaries of self-definition.⁷⁰ (This model appears analogous to the ‘Self’ versus ‘Other’ constructs of colonial theory, so it is perhaps karmic that our Orientalist, Johnson, found himself stumbling through a jungle of competing genres.) Derrida suggests that ‘participation’ rather than ‘membership’ provides a better description of the fluid relations between a text and its genre(s).⁷¹ This distinction is helpful in considering Johnson’s generic fluctuations, but we must also consider these in relation to reception. Travellers’ tales, vacillating between fact and fiction, were a primary route by which non-academics acquired their confused notions of other peoples and cultures. I argue in this thesis that this makes the alternative viewpoint of missionary representations all the more important, not because they offered more ethnographic accuracy – they seldom did that – but simply because they offered an alternative picture, an alternative genre with its own features and priorities. Having a choice of genre through which to view the same man, I suggest, renders them visible as artefactual frames in a way that literary hegemony conceals. Moreover, in this particular case, the missionary frame also happens to bring indigenous agency into striking focus.

Film night at Tenmaru Bay

If the intended climax of *Cannibal-Land* falls flat between the conflicting demands of dramatic narrative and visual ‘evidence’, its true climax is an earlier scene involving

⁶⁸ *Cannibal-Land*, 155-156. The practice was more likely that of over-modelling the prepared skull of the deceased with clay, which was then decorated, fired and used as part of a venerated *rambaramp* funerary figure. See Joel Bonnemaïson et al., *Arts of Vanuatu*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 1.

⁶⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1978])

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Law of Genre’, trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7:1, Autumn 1980, 55-81, 57.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 59.

Nihapat and his community. Just as Johnson had shown the film *Cannibals of the South Seas* to a multi-cultural audience in Nouméa, he also brought other footage, which he must have prepared specially, back to Malakula in 1919, determined to show it to the same Big Nambas group whom he had caught on film in 1917.⁷² Johnson's intention, however, was not some kind of post-colonial restitution *avant la lettre* but rather a desire to *film* the indigenous audience's reaction to seeing themselves on screen – thus creating a cinematic *mise-en-abîme*. The result – as translated into *Cannibal-Land*'s text – is a tour-de-force of reflexivity that captures an essentially technology-driven moment in which modernity itself renders identity into a refracted, duplicated, framed, externalised, transportable artefact. Mirrors and photographs provide something of the same experience. But mirrors offer an immediate and fleeting phenomenon; stills are frozen slivers of non-time; and both are (usually) small with just a one- or two-person audience. Although psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan focussed on mirrors as the screen on which an infant's fantasy of a gestalt ego is projected, arguably only the intrinsically twentieth-century technological experience of seeing oneself and others projected as enlarged, unreversed, *animated* images provides that peculiar combination of self-recognition and alienation which he considered an inevitable component of cultural self-consciousness.⁷³ Walter Benjamin recognised this in his reference to Luigi Pirandello's novel *Shoot* (1916), which described the experience of seeing oneself cinematically projected as like 'the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror'.⁷⁴ But projected images also involve an intensely shared activity for an audience. They not only provide a 'simultaneous collective experience' but also induce 'individual reactions [that] are predetermined by the mass audience response ...'.⁷⁵ We laugh and cry more easily *en masse*. Moreover, rather than estrangement, film theorist Béla Balázs proposed cinema as a vehicle of universal mutual visibility for ordinary people formerly concealed from each other by a veil of written culture.⁷⁶

⁷² *Cannibal-Land*, 94-99. Incidentally, this intention also betrays the disingenuous nature of the threatened violence story on which their first visit supposedly ended.

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, (New York: Norton, 2006 [1966]).

⁷⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [1936]', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968), X 230.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XII, 234.

⁷⁶ Béla Balázs, 'Visible Man', [1924], in *Béla Balázs: early film theory*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 9-90. I discuss Balázs further in the Conclusion, see 262ff.

So, whether as a source of fractured identity or of shared solidarity, Johnson arguably brought a modern consciousness to the Big Nambas less by showing them the world beyond Malakula than by projecting their own moving images to themselves. In staging this scene Johnson is in his cinematic element. This manifests in writing far more relaxed and convincing than the hesitant, uncomfortable pseudo-ethnography of the so-called ‘cannibal feast’. The passage rings true. He invited the villagers down from their high inland plain and set up his equipment on the beach (an appropriate site, given Denning’s classic metaphor for cross-cultural encounter⁷⁷). [Fig. 1.6.] After much preparation:

The beach was already crowded with savages. I had thought they might be curious about my machinery. But they scarcely looked at it. ... By dark they were restless. They had received no tobacco. They did not understand all this preparation that culminated in nothing. They wanted action. ... Then I tried to persuade my visitors to sit in front of the projector, where they would get a good view of the screen. They were now thoroughly suspicious and would not stay where I put them. ... Osa saved the situation. She took Nagapate by the arm and made him sit down beside her. The rest of the savages gathered about them. Then the show began.⁷⁸

Thus, as with the photograph with Alma Wiles, modernity is negotiated via an active engagement between black and white, masculine and feminine.

In an observation reminiscent of David Summers’ comment about film’s inherent modernity, that ‘light from the centres of modern energy and power shines from behind the viewer as if in imitation of phantasia,’⁷⁹ Johnson is watching his audience attentively as they first respond to the medium of light projection itself, rather than its message:

First, a great bright square flashed on the screen. Then came a hundred feet of titles. The attention of the natives was divided between the strange letters and the rays of white light that passed above their heads. ...

Then a picture forms and the watchers witness a new technology of identity splitting:

Then slowly, out of nothing, a familiar form took shape on the screen. It was Osa, standing with bent head. The savages were silent with amazement. Here was Osa sitting at Nagapate's side — and there she was on the screen. The picture-Osa raised her head and winked at them.

⁷⁷ Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land : Marquesas, 1774-1880*, (Belmont CA: Dorsey Press, 1980).

⁷⁸ This and the remaining quotations in this section (other than the Derrida and Summers quotes) are all from *Cannibal-Land*, 95-98.

⁷⁹ Summers, *Real Spaces* , 620-621.

Pandemonium broke loose. "Osa — Osa — Osa — Osa," shouted the savages. They roared with laughter and screamed like rowdy children.

Johnson is disappointed in his attempts to impress the men with the wonders of Western civilisation: he shows them glimpses of New York, Los Angeles, Sydney, assorted emblems of technological advance, and a variety of unfamiliar animals, to little effect:

The savages were silent; they could not comprehend these things. So I brought them nearer home, with pictures taken on Vao, Santo, and other islands of the New Hebrides.

Eventually he sets up for the 'great scene', by which he means the filming of the audience watching themselves on screen. The technological teamwork required for this is itself emblematic of colonial modernity.

I instructed Paul [Mazouyer, a trader] in turning the crank of the projector and put Stephens and Perrole in charge of the radium flares. I myself took my stand behind my camera, which was trained on the audience. A hundred feet of titles — then Nagapate's face appeared suddenly on the screen. A great roar of "Nagapate" went up. At that instant the radium lights flashed on, and I, at my camera, ground out the picture of the cannibals at the "movies." True, about two thirds of the audience, terrified by the flares, made precipitately for the bush. But Nagapate and the savages around him sat pat and registered fear and amazement *for my camera*. (my italics)

Having 'coaxed back to their places the savages that had fled,' Johnson restarts the reel 'and ran it to the end amid an uproar ...':

Practically every savage pictured on the screen was in the audience. ... As each man appeared, they called out his name and laughed and shouted with joy.

From this we can see that Johnson's objection to having his subjects sullied by modernity was not absolute; it was fine provided he himself was the mediator and it made for good footage.

The uncanny capacity of cinema to haunt, to be a realm of visible but illusory phantoms and ghosts, is also presented to the Big Nambas group:

Among the figures that came and went on the screen was that of a man who had been dead a year. The natives were awe-struck. My magic could bring back the dead!

This echoes a comment that Derrida was to make decades later in Ken McMullen's experimental film *Ghost Dance* (1983). In it, the on-screen spectre of Derrida embraces

his own illusory presence ('Ici, le fantôme, c'est moi!') and rejoices in the irony that technology has engendered a modern proliferation of ghosts:

Cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms ... It's the art of allowing ghosts to come back ... the modern technology of images like cinematography ... enhances the power of ghosts and their ability to haunt us ... Vive les fantômes!⁸⁰

These are powerful forces indeed, and this passage by Johnson expresses the emotional energy released on both sides by exposure to them:

Midway in the performance I ... joined the audience. Osa was crying with excitement. And there was a lump in my own throat. We had looked forward a long time to this. When the show was over, a great shout went up.

What causes the Johnsons' tears of gratification? Both parts of their plan – the show and its filming – have come off despite technical and intercultural challenges, and commercially valuable footage has been captured of indigenous reaction to film. Yet their emotional response exceeds professional self-congratulation; it is intimately linked to their audience's reaction. The desire of adventurers to astonish indigenous people with their possession and mastery of Western technology is a persistent feature of travelogue texts, as is their disappointment at the latter's often stolid refusal to oblige. This is a quirk of colonial relations that hints at neediness on the part of Europeans to have their dubious 'supremacy' confirmed by black 'inferiors'. In this case, however, the indigenous men showed a gratifyingly ardent response. It should be noted, further, that the Johnsons achieved their own emotional catharsis by renouncing both racial separateness and technology and merging with the indigenous audience on the audience side of the camera. Osa was already sitting with Nihapat and Johnson joins them once he's safely appropriated their 'fear and amazement' for his film.

The outpouring of emotion on the Big Nambas side is intriguing in that it is triggered not by modernity per se but by modernity mediated via cinema, specifically cinematic images of *themselves*. Other manifestations of modernity – rifles, hammers, nails, medicines, launches, plantation labour, Christianity and lethal diseases – were being absorbed and adapted to stoically. It seems to have been bad form to express admiration or consternation at the influx of colonial technologies, even when they were perceived as desirable or, in the case of gunboats, terrifying. But in this case the audience's ferment is

⁸⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nm3uwqzbl>

evoked, not by the technology itself, nor by representations of Western ‘civilisation’, but by seeing living versions of themselves incorporated into a product of modernity. Even though (perhaps because) it could have no practical application to their everyday life, the men permit themselves a raucous reaction as cinema, all by itself, shifts their self-perception into a modern frame.

Thus cinema achieves in a stroke exactly the sort of change that missionaries sought to achieve metaphorically through inculcating Christianity. In the Introduction I suggested that Christianity and cinema paralleled each other as vectors of modernity – each involves both a universalising impulse and a requirement to translate and accommodate to the local. Here, again, one could argue for a correspondence between cinema and Christianity as vehicles of self-referential modernity: both involve maintaining a split awareness of the self *as viewed from outside* – by a camera lens or an omniscient God. Both, besides, provide homes for the dead wherein they achieve life everlasting.

Further filming on Vanuatu: three subsidiary case studies

If Johnson’s legacy on the ni-Vanuatu side was to leave behind an indelible trace of modernity in the flicker of a silver screen, on the Western side the popularity of Johnson’s *Cannibals* meant that Vanuatu in general, and the Big Nambas people in particular, continued to exert a magnetic attraction for film-makers in the pre-War period.

We have seen how Johnson’s residual respect for quasi-ethnographic evidence while still seeking adventure-travelogue sensationalism led to a narrative and photographic flop when it came to ‘cannibal’-hunting (see ‘Heads or Tales’, above). Later film-makers, however, attracted by the ‘authentic’ ‘savages’ made famous by Johnson, were less scrupulous.



Fig. 1.7: Film poster, c.1931

‘Second-hand cannibals’: *Chez les Mangeurs d'Hommes* (1927-28)

A French film – *Chez les Mangeurs d'Hommes* – was filmed on Malakula in 1927-28 by André-Paul Antoine and Robert Lugeon.⁸¹ Purporting to have been shot at great personal risk amongst the Big Nambas after the film-makers' ship was damaged by a typhoon off the Malakulan coast, it includes both *staged* scenes of warfare and scenes of *actual* ceremonies that the film-makers choose to describe as preparations for a ‘cannibal feast’. Needless to say no anthropophagy is evident; the actors were well-paid and willingly divested themselves of modern personal effects to play ‘second-hand cannibals’; the film was not shot in the Malakula interior but on the largely Christian islets of Vao, Atchin, Rano and Wala; and the film-makers were hosted throughout by the local Roman Catholic mission on Atchin.⁸² Again we see the centrality of missionary facilitation, and

⁸¹ I was able to view this at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Port Vila. Videotape numbers V364 and V400.

⁸² Patrick O'Reilly, ‘Le « documentaire » ethnographique en Océanie’, *Journal de la Société des océanistes*, 5 (1949), 117-144, 122-123. The term ‘second-hand cannibals’ is a translation of O'Reilly's ‘les cannibales d'occasion’.

again the co-operation of the cast is a significant marker of indigenous agency in a modern colonial setting. This is so even when it appears to place their self-representation (or in this case a representation of a neighbouring tribe) in an invidious light. The film was shown, edited and with added sound track, at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris, purporting to be *reportage* and promoted alongside a book of the same name.⁸³ When he discovered how the film was being presented in France, the bishop of the New Hebrides, Monsigneur Douceré, wrote an indignant article putting the matter straight.⁸⁴ But as this rebuttal was only printed in a Port Vila periodical it is unlikely to have made much impact on Parisian audiences. Nevertheless, the incident serves to underline the close but perplexed relationship between missionary facilitators and commercial operators. Over in the anthropology corner, Patrick O'Reilly and Mme. Laroche of the *Société des océanistes* point out that despite its adventure-travelogue sensationalism the film nevertheless contains much of ethnographic value precisely *because* the film-makers were ignorant of the culture they observed:

... due to the film-makers' scanty knowledge of Melanesia, *Les Mangeurs d'Hommes*, almost unbeknown to its authors, offers sequences of great ethnological and anthropological interest. ... There is a version in which the fictional sequences have been cut out: what remains is a very good ethnographical documentary, the excellent quality of the photography of which deserves special mention.⁸⁵

This phenomenon parallels the unwitting ethnographic illustration by Martin Johnson of the slit-gong 'orchestra' ('Nagapate among the devil-devils') which introduced this chapter, and indeed goes to the heart of why images made by early film-makers and photographers in the Pacific – amateurs, ethnographers, missionaries and commercial travelogue-adventurers alike – remain an important resource to historians, anthropologists and indigenous people wishing to reconnect with their recent ancestry.

Much as both missionaries and anthropologists deplored the artificially staged sequences of *Chez les Mangeurs d'Hommes* as gross misrepresentation, I suggest that sometimes it's

⁸³ Peter Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 25. Titaïna, André-Paul Antoine and Robert Lugeon, *Chez les mangeurs d'hommes (Nouvelles-Hébrides)* (Paris: Duchartre, 1931).

⁸⁴ Frouin and Mgr. Douceré, 'Chez les Mangeurs d'Hommes', *Le Néo-Hébridais*, 167, 1932, 13-16, referenced by M.-Ch. Laroche, 'Scientific Documentaries and Films of Documentary Interest shot by French Film-Makers in the South Pacific', UNESCO Report CS/0566.CLT.78.1, Paris, June 1966, 6.

⁸⁵ M.-Ch. Laroche, 'Scientific Documentaries and Films of Documentary Interest shot by French Film-Makers in the South Pacific', UNESCO Report CS/0566.CLT.78.1, Paris, June 1966, 7.

not just truth-value that counts in questions of indigenous representation. This film's sophistication allows its indigenous actors to be partners in crafting a story. It does not infantilise or disempower them by insisting that they occupy a passive role as objects of a 'pure' ethnographic gaze or a paternalistic missionary one, but rather engages with them so that they are freed of the burden of being 'authentic' representatives of their culture. Indeed this indigenous cast throws itself into the film's adventure-narrative aspects: sentries mime terror and pull their hair in alarm as 'savages' approach; a small comedy is played out around a crew member who takes to the bottle rather than his weapons; a chief performs beard-stroking thoughtfulness on discovery of an enemy arrow; at the conch-shell call-to-arms, warriors burst from their homes displaying ostentatious staunchness; finally a 'cannibal' rushes to obscure the camera as a captured 'victim' is supposedly prepared for sacrifice. It should be remembered that acting, including comedy skits, was a normal part of ceremonial gatherings in many parts of Melanesia. Indeed the unstaged actuality footage of a *suqe* grade ceremony incorporated into this film's narrative – the highlight of its anthropological value – includes just such a comic interlude.

My point here is to draw attention to the complexity of the adventure-travelogue genre. It is easy to denigrate its racist and sensation-mongering view of indigenous people in comparison to either purist anthropology or heathen-deploring missionary viewpoints. Yet ethnographers and missionaries, each in their own ways, were equally implicated in colonialism's inherent racial hierarchy. While the 'Boy's Own Adventure' approach to film-making was certainly guilty of racist misrepresentation, even so, in its blithe disregard for weighty matters of cultural salvage or spiritual redemption, it at least invited indigenous adults to actively participate in a modern enterprise that allowed them, for once, to be and be seen as playful, contemporary human beings rather than objects of concern.

Even after the indigenous cast are left behind (the final scene shows the film-makers bidding a fond *adieu* to the chief, termed '*le dernier mangeur d'homme*') the subsequent sophisticated editing of the film acts to humanise its participants. Other adventure-travelogue footage of the period – even that of the formidable Frank Hurley – tended to employ close-ups of 'native types' (in plodding imitation of ethnographic photographic records) interspersed with long takes of some activity or scene shot at a uniform distance. Antoine and Lugeon embed these 'type' shots into the narrative and use them to excellent effect in breaking up long takes. The council of war, for instance, offers opportunities for

dramatic cuts between close-ups of various personages as they listen to the exhortations of the *chef de guerre*. Likewise, the excitement of the raid itself is maintained by rapid cutting between close-ups of the chief inciting his troops, a conch-shell trumpeter and medium-distance shots of various scenes of battlefield pandemonium. Similarly, even the actuality footage of the grade ceremony sequences – electrifying in their own right – are cleverly enlivened by quick cuts between slit-gong percussionists, dancers and close-ups of elderly gentlemen watching the proceedings, enraptured. Such editing subverts the deadening and distancing effect of close-ups deployed as ‘type’ specimens, and serves to some extent to place those faces in a living cultural context. The film’s success is further augmented by the later appending of a sound track – a technical advance that became available to film-makers around 1928 and which the film-makers in the field must have anticipated being able to do since some of it – such as the conch-shell trumpet and the slit-gong orchestra – sounds authentic. Suitably dramatic chanting music, ‘based on Kanak choirs recorded on the spot’, also add atmosphere at appropriate moments.⁸⁶

Film historian Peter Bloom has pointed out that *Chez les Mangeurs d’Hommes* is unusual for documentary film of that period by not pretending that the camera is invisible.⁸⁷ In a (supposedly) first encounter with the indigenous group on the beach, two cameras are used such that the audience sees the meeting being filmed. Since the arrival of these ‘cannibals’ has been the occasion of panic amongst the Frenchmen’s ‘boys’, this deployment of the film camera also serves to link technological modernity with the calm courage of the observing colonial eye of the white men in a potentially dangerous situation. A little later the indigenous group admires the accoutrements of the whites’ campsite and, especially, the camera itself, through which their chief duly observes (and is filmed observing) one of the Frenchmen. Thus, in Bloom’s words, an ‘initiation rite is being performed, an introduction to the technological totemic practices of modernity. The infinitely versatile camera as the locus of cross-cultural communication is not simply an objective witness but a peacemaker and civilizing machine’.⁸⁸ While Bloom is doubtless correct in his assessment of the camera’s totemic status, as we have seen, Martin Johnson also used both cameras and projection equipment in precisely the same way. Indeed it is

⁸⁶ The opening credits refer to original music ‘*d’après les chœurs Canaques enregistrés sur place*’.

⁸⁷ Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary*, 24-27.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

virtually certain that the French team would have seen Johnson's *Cannibals of the South Seas* or read *Cannibal-Land*, the source of the Big Nambas' fame.⁸⁹

One of the film's most intriguingly camera-conscious moments, however, is the climactic scene in which the unseen camera (and hence the audience) is peering from the bush into a clearing where a captive is supposedly about to be slaughtered on a stone 'altar'. In a reversal of its role on the beach – where it was on-screen and visible as an actor in its own right, a 'locus of cross-cultural communication' and a 'civilizing machine' – the camera presence in this scene becomes the human eye of a lurking voyeur. This 'eye' is made explicit through the use of a lens filter with an eye-shaped aperture such that the audience cannot avoid its voyeuristic implications. As mentioned above, the spying is noticed and the film-makers 'eye' is closed before being able to record what purports to be the fateful evidence of cannibalistic sacrifice. This is an altogether more successful solution to the problem of non-evidence with which Martin Johnson struggled. But Lugeon and Antoine had the advantage of staging a fiction using complicit actors whereas Johnson still hoped for reportage. Nonetheless the film-makers wisely opted not to stage the deed itself. As with so much of Western fascination with cannibalism, they let the very lack of evidence bolster belief in its existence. As Bloom puts it, 'the non-representation of a human sacrifice contributes even more powerfully to the mythology of the cannibal'.⁹⁰ What I find most intriguing about this scene, however, is the camera's change of character between 'the beach' – where it is an upright and visible symbol of colonial modernity and technological mastery – and 'the bush' – where it is subsumed into its frail physiological alter-ego of the human eye. And a skulking eye at that, out of its depth, not in control, unable to see clearly through the foliage, helpless against the indigenous 'cannibal's' power to render it blind. If the beach is a 'contact zone'⁹¹ where white colonials stand tall and see clearly, then perhaps the bush remains, in the Western imagination, the realm of Conrad's primitivist heart of darkness.

⁸⁹ The Vanuatu Cultural Centre has a version of *Cannibals of the South Seas* with intertitles in Dutch, indicating that translation and European distribution took place. VCC Film Archive V1188.

⁹⁰ Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary*, 33.

⁹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

The Crane Pacific Expedition (1928-29)

While Martin Johnson's selective memory as regards missionaries is understandable, it is more perplexing to consider Johnson's apparent absence (at least in my research so far) from missionary reports and memoirs. One would have thought that an American couple travelling with indigenous entourage and copious camera equipment would have been cause for comment at the time. However the celebrity which Johnson brought to the Big Nambas had repercussions which did impinge on the missionary record. In 1929 Donald Nicholson, an Adventist now based at their new HQ on Aore, reports a visit made by wealthy Americans:

The British Government agent requested me to visit the interior of the Big Nambus territory with a party of scientists from America who were visiting the New Hebrides in a beautiful yacht owned by a multi-millionaire, Mr Crane. There were a number of scientists on board from the Chicago Field Museum, and representatives of the Harvard and Leland Universities. They were on a tour of the Pacific to gather information, the whole expedition being financed by Mr Crane. As Mr. Martin Johnson, the picture man and explorer, had visited the Big Nambus and brought them to the fore in America, the party were very anxious that they should not pass through the New Hebrides without seeing these people.⁹²

This refers to the (Cornelius) Crane Pacific Expedition of 1928-29 on the yacht *Illyria*. Primarily known for its documentation of the people, flora and fauna of the Sepik River of New Guinea, its institutional backing from the Field Museum meant that the participants prided themselves on their scientific credentials.⁹³ So it is interesting to note, once again, the highly porous nature of the divide between 'science' and travelogue adventure, together with the magnetic glamour that celluloid celebrity casts over even serious-minded investigators, for whom Big Nambas people had become a 'must-see' tourist attraction. Also notable is, once again, the key role of the (white) missionary as facilitator, translator and go-between. Donald Nicholson is uninterested in the 'information' being gathered – Adventists seem particularly indifferent to the cultures of 'heathens' – but he is enchanted by the yacht, whose fabulous fit-out he goes on to describe in some detail.

⁹² Donald Nicholson, *AR*, 2/12/1929, 3-4.

⁹³ For more on the Crane expedition see Virginia-Lee Webb, 'Official/Unofficial Images: Photographs from the Crane Pacific Expedition, 1928–1929', *Pacific Studies*, 20:4, December 1997.

Since the Wileses' time, Adventist attention to the Big Nambas had shifted from Tenmaru (where enthusiasm for having a resident missionary waned after the death of Norman Wiles) to another village, Nivimbus. It was with this chief that Nicholson had been in conversation over the previous few years, in a relationship very similar to that between Wiles and Nihapat, with a similar level of autocratic pragmatism being shown by the chief. This is evident in Nicholson's report of his first interview with him:

He said that a large number of their people were dying of epidemic, and the young people were uneducated, and they wanted a mission in their centre.... Then I asked him why he wanted the mission, and if he knew anything about God. He said, 'No, I do not know God. I do not know who He is. But I do know this, that the Tonmiel people [site of an active mission] are a changed people. We have heard the story of how they have built a new village ... and are living in a different way..... we want the same class of work done for our people.'⁹⁴

Hence, since Nicholson wished to maintain the relationship anyway, it is Nivimbus not Tenmaru that the American expedition visits, after negotiations involving entertaining the chief on the yacht (where he disdained to express amazement at its wonders, but enjoyed the sandwiches), followed by the long trek inland. Whether anyone explained to the villagers the reasons for their visitors' desire to film and photograph them is not known. Could they even have explained it to themselves? However, Nicholson describes an intriguing vacillation in the chief's attitude that suggests an awareness of the uneasy relationship between the appropriation of indigenous representation via a Western camera lens and cultural self-consciousness. The chief's solution is characteristically pragmatic.

In strolling through the village we came to the chief's house and saw his ten wives. One of our party endeavoured to obtain a moving picture of them. I noticed the chief was scowling, so I ... asked if he objected. He said, 'Yes, I think you had better not take any pictures of my wives.' But a little later he came to me and said that the objection was not so much on his part as it was on the part of his wives, and he told us that if we could obtain pictures in a quiet way without arousing their suspicions he would be quite willing. This was done with the use of a smaller camera later in the day.⁹⁵

While the chief negotiates the demands of modernity in his own way, the expedition members, despite their scientific pretensions, had inevitably been brought up on the same literary and filmic diet of popular travel adventure as, apparently, most white middle-class

⁹⁴ Donald Nicholson, *AR*, 2/12/1929, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

males in the Western world of the period. From the colonial viewpoint, ‘Melanesia’, like ‘Africa’, was a field of intrepid, manhood-testing endeavour, an inherently masculinist discursive domain of literary travel and adventure, stretching back in a continuous literary genealogy from Johnson to London, Conrad, Stevenson and Melville and beyond. Hence encountering dangerous ‘savages’ in the jungle and venturing where no white foot has hitherto trod was irresistible – even when, in reality, such feet were following in a white missionary’s footsteps! When musket fire is heard as they make their way back to the shore (the Big Nambas villages being in the midst of sporadic hostilities), the American adventurers make a boyish appeal – to the indulgent amusement of the missionary and the government official – to authenticate their Big Nambas experience. This is duly done, albeit with multiple qualifications of personnel and place:

Some of the members of the American party said to me, ‘Will it be all right for us to say on our return to America that we have actually heard the Big Nambas people fighting?’ I said, ‘Yes, it will be quite correct to say that.’ Mr. Adam [the government agent] said further, ‘I will give you a written statement to certify that you are the first party of white men, apart from Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries, who have ever been in this portion of Malekula.’⁹⁶

The Crane Pacific Expedition had numerous literary, visual and academic outputs. Virginia-Lee Webb identifies its success as being partly a result of the combination of private and public interests, with Crane himself keen to make an adventure-travelogue style record of the trip alongside the more sober investigators.⁹⁷ It would be interesting to discover to what extent the missionary facilitators are acknowledged in these. (In New Guinea the expedition depended on Father Kirschbaum of the Marienburg Mission on the Sepik River.)

One can also speculate on the extent to which this growing worldliness of the Australian Adventist operation in the late twenties, having belatedly caught up with Johnson’s role in the Big Nambas’ fame and now with experience of shepherding American explorers who travelled with film-processing equipment on their luxury yachts, influenced their decision to exploit film’s potential for their own purposes. For by 1929 Andrew Stewart himself (now Australasian Union Conference’s vice-president for the Mission Field) had acquired

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Virginia-Lee Webb, ‘Authorship and Image: Hand-coloured glass lantern-slides from the Crane Pacific Expedition’, in Anita Herle et al. (eds.), *Pacific Art: Persistence, Change, and Meaning*, 2002, 82-92, 84.

a film camera and set out to make a series of films promoting SDA work in Melanesia. These are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Tom Harrisson tries his hand at film directing

‘Hollywood prefers to design its own savages.’

Tom Harrisson, *Savage Civilisation*

Six years after the Crane Pacific Expedition, in 1935, maverick anthropologist Tom Harrisson records meeting Douglas Fairbanks on the latter’s multi-million-dollar yacht, *Caroline*, when it visited Vao on a world cruise. Ready to return to the West after two years of ‘going native’⁹⁸ in the New Hebrides, Harrisson accepted Fairbanks’s offer of a lift to Hollywood in return for a commissioned film:

Doug left Chuck [Chuck Lewis, Fairbanks’s personal trainer turned cinematographer], two boats, cameras, lots of money and trade, every sort of medicine, food, furniture and camp comfort. He commissioned me to get 20,000 feet of native film, said he would ... send the yacht back for us ... it could take me to Hollywood.⁹⁹

On this occasion, for once, no missionary appears to be on hand, Harrisson himself having sufficient experience to supply the translator-facilitator role. His account of the ensuing seven-week debacle is hilarious, though it was probably not much fun at the time. Despite the missionary absence, Harrisson’s tale is relevant to my argument since it further exemplifies the fissures between ‘authenticity’ and actuality in popular image-making of the colonial era:

[Chuck] could not get used to people who would not be bought into doing a thing that did not amuse them. We spent most of our time coming up against tabus, because he always wanted people to do what were to them impossible things; the Hollywood idea of savage. ... [Hollywood people] had their own cannibal dogmas. These include stone altars; cracked dances; spears about fifteen feet long, quite unthrowable – but easy to see on the film, I suppose. He taught those cannibals what they ought to be. They took it well, too. ... The worst of my job was that Chuck would take a scene, and want it done over and over again. That is not the native idea of life. I got roared hell by both sides. Otherwise the performers hardly reacted at all. Those who wanted

⁹⁸ His phrase. Harrisson, *Savage civilization*, 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 428.

tobacco came along. [The traders and recruiters] were ... mad, furious because we were supplying their best labour market with enough stuff to keep it quietly at home for a few years.¹⁰⁰

Thus the trade in imagery was disrupting the trade in labour. Significantly, both trades exploited the bodies of ni-Vanuatu for white commercial benefit; to do so, both depended on a third key element of colonialism – the economics of tobacco – about which much more could be written in the history of the Pacific.

Tobacco or no, however, again the agency of the Malakulan people, ‘who would not be bought into doing a thing that did not amuse them,’ is evident. Indeed, Harrison has to engage with ni-Vanuatu culture, rather than vice-versa, in order to generate some action:

We got some good film when I took the first step into chiefly society and erected a great new gong. The best dances in the island, and some of the best pigs came out in honour of that occasion and its Hollywood feast.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, having accepted that the Malakulans ‘were not Hollywood-conscious’, the film-crew removed to Santo, where they hoped the locals would be more willing to enact dramatic scenes. Mayhem ensues.

I had mentioned to Doug [Douglas Fairbanks] that on some islands the women often suckled the piglets. He said ‘Get that.’ The trouble we had getting that! The women were naturally shy about it, directly they realised it meant something different to the white.

Harrison, unfortunately, does not expand on that revealing observation ‘they realised it meant something different to the white.’ But it surely captures a crucial moment of cross-cultural, cross-gender insight on the part of these Santo women who have glimpsed themselves refracted through the lens of the white male gaze. Quite apart from the issues of nakedness, sexuality and dress this raises with regard to Western popular imagery of indigenous people, this passage also draws attention to how the making of *any* kind of ethnographic or pseudo-ethnographic representations render their (adult) objects instantly culturally self-conscious, provided they are aware of the camera. The Big Nambas chief described by Donald Nicholson who protected his wives from this experience by suggesting a concealed camera, intuited this; possibly the indifference to playing to the camera that Harrison notes in the ‘not Hollywood-conscious’ Malakulans was likewise a form of cultural self-protection. It is again evident that a simplistic approach to the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 428-429.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 429.

‘imperialist gaze’ on disempowered Others fails to cover the nuances of cooperative (or indeed uncooperative) situations where those being filmed are active in their own self-representation and those behind the lens are suppliants rather than autocrats. The inherent unruliness of colonial power relations is captured in Harrison’s description of what follows after the womens’ shyness had been ‘fixed’ (we know not how):

And when that [the shyness] was fixed, Chuck decided that a man, the evil savage husband, leering, matted hair, carrying a huge club, was to come along to his wife, the kindest-looking woman available. She was to be suckling her baby child. He was to wrench it away from her and ram a piglet into the place of honour ... When he [Chuck] had found the right woman and man, they would not co-operate for a long time; and then no one would give up their baby to this unknown conspiracy; and then only in private away from the village, secretly. When finally we got over all these complications, there was a rehearsal, at which the star, the piglet, bit the woman’s breast in a nasty way! While the baby misbehaved under emotional pressure, and the woman struck [presumably went on strike]. Finally it was done with a faked baby, made out of yam. The piglet had his snout securely tied.¹⁰²

Thankfully, it seems that this film never made it to the silver screen. But Harrison’s experiences must have played a part in his insight that anthropological study could be as fruitfully applied to European societies as to Third World ones. In 1937 he went on to co-found the Mass Observation project in Britain.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has offered a case study of an American travelogue-adventurer’s literary and photographic encounter with one corner of Melanesia in 1917 and 1919. Martin Johnson’s commercial products and the advertising it generated have been discussed in some detail to exemplify the preoccupations of popular producers and consumers of sensationalist indigenous representations of this period. The porous overlap between such commercial imagery and the nascent academic discipline of anthropology was touched on, but it is populist appeal rather than ethnographic accuracy that is mainly at stake here: adventure-travelogue books, films and photographs were a primary source of imagery, both visual and textual, available to the West about indigenous people elsewhere. Production, appropriation and control of stereotypic indigenous representations were significant components of colonial capitalism and the ideology that justified it.

¹⁰² Ibid., 429-430.

But while Johnson was undoubtedly exploitative, I am inclined to absolve him of the charge of cynicism. I have argued that he had aspirations towards journalism as well as the romantic streak of the imperial adventurer. Moreover the ready market for such material in the West indicates that both producers and consumers were gripped by a ‘primitivist’ fascination, the flip-side of white suprematism, which suggests an unconscious undertow of longing, loss and masculine anxiety in the face of industrial modernity.

This case study has explicated how Johnson’s encounter with ni-Vanuatu occurred, not in an essentialist vacuum between ‘civilised’ Self and ‘primitive’ Other, but as a complex interaction between multiple agents – adventurers, missionaries, government officials and indigenous people – each negotiating modernity in their own way. My particular focus in this chapter has been the (at the time) unacknowledged relationship that my research suggests existed between the travelogue-adventurers Martin and Osa Johnson and local Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries on Malakula and its offshore islets. Missionaries thus inadvertently provided *indirect* support for the production of indigenous imagery intended primarily for the sensationalised entertainment of popular European audiences. At the same time, they were also *direct* creators of indigenous imagery in their own right, although in this case study, ‘missionary imagery’ primarily comprises narratives describing experiences in the field which were published in a fortnightly newsletter and thus circulated throughout Adventist communities and beyond (Australian Adventist congregations were encouraged to share publications with non-Adventists). Although primarily intended to raise financial support and encourage missionary enlistment, these stories, I asserted, have the secondary effect of providing vivid first-hand insight into indigenous agency which subverts simplistic European notions of ‘savagery’: they show local chiefs talking, laughing, negotiating, making deals and actively promoting the welfare of their people in conditions of colonial modernity, despite their relatively disempowered status. I argued that the reason Johnson excluded missionary involvement in his imagery of Vanuatu was precisely to avoid contaminating the spuriously ‘untouched’ status of ‘his’ natives with the complexity of the indigenous predicament under colonialism.

This chapter went on to consider this clash of viewpoint over indigenous representation in terms of a conflict of literary genre. I argued that such genre tensions existed not only *between* travelogue-adventure and missionary narratives but also *within* Johnson’s own

oeuvre, where they further undermined the status of ‘evidence’ and placed Johnson in a double-bind.

I also considered cinematic representation as integral to a modern self-reflexive sensibility in relation to Johnson’s showing the Malakulans to themselves, even while he simultaneously filmed the audience during this revelation to create an extra filmic iteration of indigenous imagery for the amusement of Western audiences.

Johnson’s legacy, in terms of the filming of ni-Vanuatu for Western audiences in the pre-World War II era, was addressed by a brief consideration of three subsidiary case studies, all sited in Vanuatu and with similar aims. Two of these reiterated the centrality of missionary facilitation in the production of indigenous representations for American and European audiences; two focused on the vexed question of acting and re-enactment in relation to indigenous agency, a topic re-visited in Chapter Three. The subsidiary case studies also developed threads from the tangle of issues that the main case study raised: Western desire for and commerce in Melanesian bodies; the problem of ‘authenticity’ and the travelogue-adventurers’ double-bind; indigenous agency; the conflicting agendas of missionaries and adventurers and the significance of that conflict to indigenous representation in the West. These themes will continue to be developed in subsequent chapters.

This chapter has used a 1919 case study to set the scene of adventure-travelogue representation of Melanesia while revealing the centrality of a behind-the-scenes facilitating missionary presence – in this case Seventh-Day Adventist. In the next chapter we see missionaries moving from tacit facilitation to active commissioning of footage from professional cinematographers, with the intention of showing it to ‘home’ audiences as propaganda. The scene shifts forward a year or two to 1921-1922 and we will be considering a different Christian denomination – that of Anglicanism.

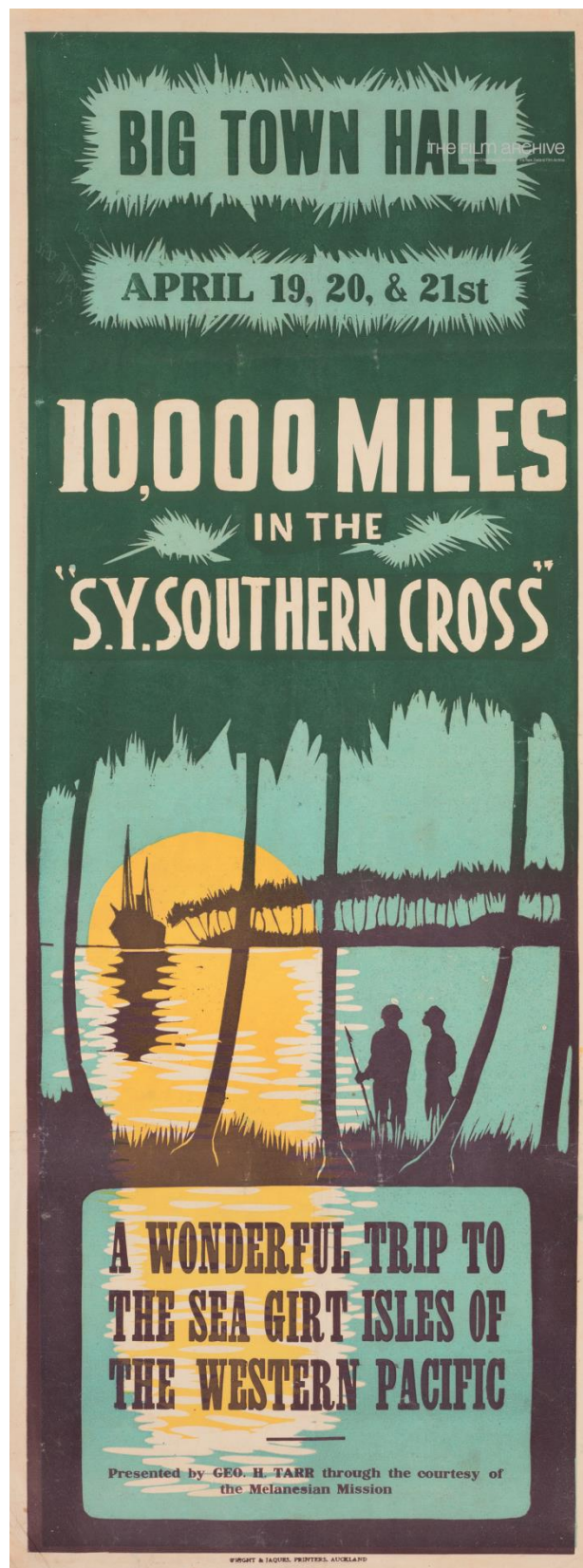


Fig. 2.1: Film poster, 1921. NZFA

Chapter Two: Commissioning: Missionaries Engage Help

‘All the Missionary Societies are now showing films If we have not one we shall be very much out of the running with the others.’

Reverend A.E. Corner, Melanesian Mission London Office, 30 June 1925.

The previous chapter considered the phenomenon of the travelogue entertainment genre, its appetite for ‘Cannibal-land’ imagery, and the often unacknowledged relationship between travelogue-adventurers and the missionaries who facilitated their access to ‘savages’. This chapter goes on to examine the next stage of that relationship, when mission organisations realised that the services of a cinematographer could make a valuable contribution to the propaganda arsenal needed to publicise and gain financial support for their own enterprise.

In 1921 the Melanesian Mission – the Anglican missionary society responsible for Island Melanesia – commissioned New Zealand film-maker George Tarr to travel with their mission vessel, the steam yacht *Southern Cross*, as it toured the archipelagos of the Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz and Vanuatu. The result was the missionary travelogue film *10,000 Miles in the S.Y. Southern Cross: ‘A Wonderful Trip to the Sea Girt Isles of the Western Pacific’* as its promotional poster put it, rather tautologically. The film premiered in Auckland on 19 April 1922, with the Bishop of Melanesia himself present to provide commentary, and was thereafter shown to paying audiences in Wellington and the provinces using the services – albeit briefly – of writer and travelogue speaker Hector MacQuarrie. It is clear from documentary evidence that the Mission saw this as a commercial venture, from which they hoped to profit financially, as a means of supporting the expensive running of the eponymous vessel. Tarr and the Mission had an agreement to split the profit. But, despite enthusiastic notices and reviews in the press, this turned out to be illusory. Despite attempts to extend its lifespan and geographical reach by appealing to international distribution companies, the film not only failed to make the hoped-for profit but ended up leaving the Melanesian Mission considerably out of pocket. Only gradually, as commercial gain failed to materialise, and under some pressure from other Anglican mission boards in New Zealand, Australia and the UK, did

the Melanesian Mission accept that the film was better deployed under direct church control, for propaganda.

The reasons for this failure can be attributed to confusion over the purpose, ownership and deployment of the film due to the conflicting agendas of George Tarr, Hector MacQuarrie and the Melanesian Mission. This case study examines the problem as an example of the unavoidable clash between missionaries and travelogue-adventurers over the display of Melanesian bodies.

Back Story

Based in Auckland from 1849 to 1867, then on Norfolk Island from 1867 to 1919, the Melanesian Mission's nineteenth-century strategy had been to sail around 'their' islands using the *Southern Cross* as a 'floating Mission House'¹ making contacts and offering an education abroad to likely lads keen to see the world. Boys and young men were taken initially to St John's in Auckland and later to St Barnabas on Norfolk Island, where they were given a Christian education before being returned to their homes several years later in the optimistic assumption that they would become beacons of evangelism to their communities. In the event, as a disillusioned missionary pointed out, '[i]t is not to be supposed that a nation is to be converted from the error of their ways [sic] all at once by the desultory and timid teachings of a few boys'², and returning scholars soon 'shed [Christianity] as easily ... as they parted with their unsuitable new clothes'.³

Missiologist Alan Tippett, in his study of the mission strategies of the main denominations, identifies this policy as having significantly retarded the spread of Christianity in the Solomon Islands.⁴ And yet its rationale stemmed from a unique Anglican characteristic dating, remarkably, from the beginnings of the Melanesian Mission in 1849: Bishop Selwyn's insistence that Melanesian Christianity was from the start to be indigenous and free from domination by a white missionary hierarchy. European missionaries were to be as hands-off as possible, non-resident, itinerant (hence

¹ David Hilliard, *God's gentlemen: a history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 10.

² Melanesian Mission Annual Report, 1876, 15, quoted in Hilliard, *God's gentlemen*, 20.

³ Hilliard, *God's gentlemen*, 19.

⁴ Alan Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: a study of growth and obstruction*, (London: Lutterworth, 1967).

the floating mission house), offering only education, support and guidance to a 'Native Ministry'. In a favourite simile, European missionaries were merely to be 'white corks' floating 'a black net'.⁵ A corollary of this was a tolerance of cultural diversity that was unparalleled in other denominations. Bishop Patteson, Bishop Selwyn's successor as director of the Mission, recommended that customary practices should be interfered with as little as possible, other than 'what is clearly incompatible with the simplest form of Christian teaching and practice'.⁶ Leaving aside the can of worms concealed by that blithe 'clearly', this is nevertheless a strikingly liberal attitude for the 1860s. Aware of the conflation of Christian mores and ethnocentrism, Patteson stated: 'I have for years thought that we seek in our missions a great deal too much to make *English* Christians of our converts ... Evidently the heathen man is not treated fairly if we encumber our message with unnecessary requirements.'⁷ Patteson believed that, rather than banning old ways and somehow enforcing new ones from outside, change should follow naturally as Christian values took hold.⁸

Thus although the non-residence policy was doomed to failure, the impulse behind it had been a radical, culturally tolerant, egalitarian Christianity which, albeit in diluted form, persisted into the twentieth century.

In 1894 a new bishop, Cecil Wilson, was ordained and in 1900 the non-residence policy for European Anglican missionaries was finally rescinded, allowing the establishment of mission stations – 'visible, permanent presence[s]' – in villages. By this time it was also possible to provide some measure of health and comfort to resident white missionaries: regular steamship runs from Sydney were bringing tinned food, tea, wine and the all-important mosquito nets.⁹ The new policy galvanised mission recruitment and fund-raising from Britain and New Zealand over the next twenty years. According to Hilliard, 'missionaries had no doubt that the first two decades of the 20th century had been a turning point',¹⁰ this despite the fact that most conversion inroads had been on the smaller

⁵ Hilliard, *God's gentlemen*, 10.

⁶ Charlotte Yonge, *Life of John Coleridge Patteson: Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands*, (London: MacMillan, 1875). Quoted in Hilliard, *God's gentlemen*, 56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, italics in original.

⁸ Hilliard, *op.cit.*, 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

islands of the Central Province, and in coastal communities of the larger ones (the island of Santa Cruz and the interiors of Malaita and Guadalcanal remaining largely unmoved). The indelible association between Christianity and Western modernity, as manifested in the increased flow of steamships and commodities, seems not to have deterred white missionaries from attributing their successes to the Word of God. Ironically, the residence policy that accelerated Christianisation also had the effect of undermining confidence, on both sides, in indigenous competence to manage their own church: there was less talk during Wilson's incumbency of white corks and black nets.

Although now having resident European missionaries, the two cornerstones of the older strategy – the Norfolk Island school and the touring *Southern Cross* mission ship – persisted. Despite the drain on resources, the value placed on the *Southern Cross* by the Melanesian Mission was inestimable. Like Hollywood's Lassie, the *Southern Cross* was of course not one but a series of vessels: Bishop Wilson wrote in his memoirs about the fifth 'floating mission house':

In 1903 ... I saw for the first time the new steamer which our friends in England and Australasia had given us. Three tall masts' appeared over the mangrove trees, and then the little steel ship of 590 tons. This new *Southern Cross* was a wonderful gift to us. She cost £22,000, which had been collected in four years. She could steam ten knots an hour, and we did two days' work in one day in her. But she had masts, and sails, and a full crew of sailors, in addition to her engineers and firemen, and my hair began to go grey when I heard from Auckland that she would cost £8,000 a year to run, for our income was only £11,000. ... To save expense we set to and coaled her ourselves, getting eighty tons into her in one day. Some of us filled the baskets, some shoved them to the ship, and others trimmed in the bunkers; not our best friends would have known us when we had done. But the wonderful thing which came to light afterwards was that the effort made in raising money for the ship had increased the income of the Mission by £4,000 a year; it had jumped to £15,000, and that was enough to pay for the ship's working, besides all the new work which we wished to do. From that time we were able to visit islands which we had not touched at all before, because they lay up to windward or were too far away. We had a beautiful little chapel on board. We had proper quarters for white women, and were able to open up women's work in the islands for the first time; very soon we brought down four ladies to work, two together, in Gela and in the New Hebrides. We could also fetch timber for houses and carry comfortably a hundred and forty boys and girls to Norfolk Island. This ship has served the Mission for twenty-eight years. Very soon it was found to be too costly to carry sailors as well as engineers and firemen, so the masts and the sails had to go, and she became a full-powered steamer with a native crew. She costs

a great deal to run and keep in repair, but it is not easy to see how a Mission like this can do without her.¹¹

This passage demonstrates not only the centrality of the ship to the Mission's propaganda and self-image but also its racialised and gendered spaces once fully operational. In the early days the racial divide is blurred as white men share the heavy work and acquire coal-blackened skin. Later, as the fund-raising pulling power of this romantic approach to mission work in the islands eases the finances, the *Southern Cross* reasserts colonial norms when it becomes a 'full-powered steamer with a native crew' with 'proper quarters for white women'.

In 1919 the Bishopric passed to John Manwaring Steward, whose inaugural policy declaration indicates that Selwyn's vision of an autonomous indigenous church was still alive even if its practice had lagged far behind: '... our Native Clergy must have exactly the same positions in our Councils as the Missionary Clergy. ... The one real justification for our presence in the Islands is that we intend, by God's grace, to build up there, an indigenous Church of Christ--The Church of Melanesia; and this, I am convinced, we cannot hope to do until and unless we give our Native Clergy a rank and position equal, in all Church matters, to that of the Missionary Clergy.'¹²

During 1920 the Norfolk Island base was decommissioned and a new Melanesian Mission head office established in Siota on Nggela Sule Island (then known as Florida Island), in the Solomon Islands' Central Province, and close to the administrative seat of the British Protectorate on Tulagi. The Norfolk Island school, St Barnabas, was demolished, but it had in any case already gradually been supplanted by a boys' Training College at Maravovo on Guadalcanal, established in 1916, and a school for younger children at Siota.

Thus, in 1921, the Melanesian Mission had both occasion for celebration – a new Bishop; a new HQ at Siota; a revived policy of indigeneity – and ongoing and increasing anxieties about money and manpower. In 1919, for instance, the new Bishop's report begged for

¹¹Cecil Wilson, *The Wake of the Southern Cross: Work and Adventures in the South Seas*, (London: John Murray, 1932), 184-185. http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/wilson_wake1932/08.html

¹²J.M. Steward, *The Primary Charge*, 6 October 1919. http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/steward_charge1919.html

‘very largely increased support both in men and money’¹³; by 1920 his plaintive tone has an edge of desperation tinged with anger:

We are continually being told that the Australian and New Zealand Churches accept the responsibility for these islands, but where are the offers of service that responsibility should produce? We need at once Priests who are willing to face considerable hardships and loneliness for Christ's sake ... Lack of men brings one naturally to lack of money. It is not a pleasant task to be continually begging for money, but money is needed after all. ... There are at present two very heavy items of expense which in our peculiar circumstances are inevitable. The first is the upkeep of the Mission ship, without which the Bishop is utterly unable to visit the scattered island diocese. At the prices ruling at present this costs no less than the truly alarming sum of £10,000 a year! The second is the cost of the erection of the buildings needed for establishing our headquarters in the islands. We are making every possible use of old materials salvaged from Norfolk Island, but even then the expense is very heavy. ... Now I think that I can guarantee that we shall be able to carry on for this coming year, but unless our supporters come nobly to our relief I cannot see how we can face 1922. ... it will be a crying shame if the Church has to relax its efforts in Melanesia owing to lack of money ...¹⁴

The timing of the filming trip strongly suggests that it was conceived in response to these pressures, with a view to either using it as fund-raising propaganda or marketing it as a commercial entity in its own right. But it augured badly that it was unclear from the start which of those options was intended. In 1919 the Reverend J.L.A. Kayll ‘consented to act as our Organising Secretary in Auckland and will perform the much-needed duty of keeping the Mission before the eyes of the New Zealand Church’¹⁵ Thus it was almost certainly Reverend Kayll who approached fellow-Aucklanders Tarr about the film project. Kayll was also to figure in the debacle surrounding the film’s New Zealand tour.

The Cinematographer

After a varied career in lantern slide talks, theatre set painting and cinema management, in 1914 George Tarr had ventured into film for himself, writing and directing New Zealand’s first full-scale ‘photo-play’, *Hinemoa* (1914).¹⁶ Based on the romantic Māori legend of Hinemoa and Tatanekai, *Hinemoa* was filmed at Rotorua with an all-Māori

¹³ J.M. Steward, Annual Report, 1919. <http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/jmsteward/report1919.html>.

¹⁴ J.M. Steward, Annual Report, 1920. <http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/jmsteward/report1920.html>

¹⁵ J.M. Steward, Annual Report, 1919. <http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/jmsteward/report1919.html>

¹⁶ ‘The first photo-play produced in New Zealand by entirely local enterprise.’ Promotional hand-bill, NZFA documentation collection.

cast, and enjoyed considerable success in New Zealand and overseas. Advertisements boasted that ‘every attention has been given to the detail of Native customs’.¹⁷ In what is emerging as a familiar pattern, Tarr’s access to his ‘natives’ was mediated by the Reverend F.A. Bennett, superintendent of the Māori mission at Rotorua, whose Māori choir supplied the cast.¹⁸ Tarr subsequently toured *Hinemoa* for five months through New Zealand as a ‘star picture’ with commentary and thus was familiar with the processes of securing premises, promoting and presenting.¹⁹ These credentials presumably recommended him to the Mission officials – almost certainly Reverend Kayll – who approached him with the proposal. Although Tarr had not actually been the cinematographer for the *Hinemoa* project – that had been Charles Newham – he knew how to run a film camera and had shot all the close-ups for *Hinemoa* himself.²⁰ Thus, although Tarr was not a deliberately self-inventing travelogue-adventurer like Frank Hurley or Martin Johnson, he had a strong commercial interest in filming ‘natives’ and could be expected to wield his camera with an eye for the exotic.

Ten Thousand Feet in the *Southern Cross*

A solicitor’s memorandum of agreement between Archdeacon Hawkins and George H. Tarr, dated 19 August 1921 stipulates that the sum of £100 was to be paid to Tarr on the understanding that the cinematographer was to equip himself as necessary and travel on the *Southern Cross* when it next left Auckland ‘on or about the 20th day of September 1921’. In the islands of Melanesia, he was to procure ‘such cinematographic and photographic pictures as may be of public interest, and be suitable for exhibition in New Zealand’, with the proviso that he produce ‘at least 10,000 feet of such cinematographic negative film in order to provide sufficient finished picture for a full three hours entertainment’. Perhaps it was the satisfying roundness of that figure of ten thousand that caused it to be transferred to the title of the resulting movie, magnified from feet to miles. For of course, although Island Melanesia covers an immense area, the sailing distances are not as huge as that.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ NZFA Accn AUD 1361 CD, interviews from National Film Unit

¹⁹ 1964 interview with Ray Hayes and Rudall Hayward, NZFA Tape #0686

²⁰ Ibid.

Yet the conflation of miles and feet is also suggestive of the shrinking and flattening translocation that befalls human beings when their representations are translated to celluloid. The vast and complex geographies of flesh and blood people in their physical surroundings becomes a virtual two-dimensional cinematic ribbon in which flickering simulacra are imprisoned, reduced, contained.

The memorandum allows that the ‘agents for the Commissary’ are to facilitate the cinematographer’s work and may ‘from time to time direct’ the Cinematographer to record particular images, but other than that there is no suggestion that the Melanesian Mission was to supervise the content or structure of the footage: Tarr was effectively given *carte blanche*. The agreement goes on to say that ‘the proceeds derived from the exhibition of the said pictures and from the sale of the said Cinematographic negative ... [after expenses] ... shall be divided between the Commissary and the Cinematographer in equal shares.’ A dry note was later appended by a Mission accountant in 1931, commenting that ‘there does not appear to be any liability on the part of TARR to contribute to any LOSSES which may occur’.

Thus George Tarr found himself with a double agenda: to produce and market a film for a missionary organisation that also had the potential to make personal profit as a commercial entertainment. The Melanesian Mission, despite its business-like memorandum of agreement, does not seem to have thought about ongoing issues of ownership and promotion. The agreement even envisages profits from selling the negative (i.e. the one-off original, rather than just positive copies), without apparently retaining control over to whom it might be sold or how it might be used. But this clerical naivety must be seen in the context of launching an untried venture into an uncharted industry without benefit of hindsight. Frank Hurley’s sophisticated but secular multi-media entertainment, *Pearls and Savages*, would not reach New Zealand until August 1922, Reginald Nicholson’s *Transformed Isle* (see Chapter Three) not till 1925. Even the notion of a structured coherent narrative, though well-established by this time in fiction feature films, was not applied to ‘educational’ cinema until *Nanook of the North* arrived in New Zealand in 1924. So it is not surprising that, despite *Hinemoa*’s success, Tarr approached the job thinking of variety rather than narrative: a moving version of a lantern slideshow.

The film's content

‘A sequence that is either a fertility rite or a christening’

Excerpt from typescript scene list by unknown film archivist

Apparently only twenty minutes of footage survive. The New Zealand Film Archive and Australia's National Film and Sound Archive both hold copies transferred to VHS. This footage found its way into the NZFA via pioneer film archivist Ray Hayes, who in the 1960s was seeking early New Zealand film to conserve. A letter from a then 83-year-old George Tarr, dated July 1965 and clearly responding to an earlier enquiry from Hayes, provides tantalising glimpses of content and context, as well as Tarr's own preoccupations:

... There is so much of it [that] can be made into ‘Interludes’ for Television apart from the Historical outlook for the Archives. I myself can give you film relating to the missionary outlook which [is] really factual and historic .You would really have to see the film in your laboratory to know what was of value to you and which was not. I presume it is the actual negative you are interested in. I am open to discussion on the matter of what you would select for your purpose on your own terms of a copy 16mm for myself. You can imagine my looking at 4 - 12 x 12” [four 12” square] tins of film and 5 circular tins 10” to be examined and edited at my age it is a bit overwhelming. However as to the Melanesian Missionary part of it which includes a Panorama of the whole of the missionaries at that time collected at Siota the headquarters of the mission, the missionaries entering the church in their robes, the Bishop collecting presents from the natives and showing the large Mission School at Siota also the Boys school at Maravovo I should say is about 500 feet. This could be made into an interesting subject starting with the arrival of the Old Southern Cross their first ship, lowering the whaleboat and the mission boys coming into the surf to unload the supplies a quite comprehensive picture of the mission at that time. I am sending you a short roll so that you can find out if there are any difficulties in the way of shrinkage of film or erratic movement owing to the different speed of projected films these days. It will be an interesting experiment anyhow. Here's hoping.²¹

It is plausible that the surviving segment in the NZFA is the ‘short roll’ Tarr refers to in his letter. The full original may yet survive amongst material passed from Tarr to Ray Hayes in 1965 and then on to Jonathan Dennis in 1981 when the NZFA was set up. Unfortunately the NZFA have no record of it. As to its content, the NZFA holds a typescript headed ‘Sequences in George Tarr's Film’, in which a dutiful archivist – quite possibly Hayes himself – under sub-headings labelled ‘Can Number One’ to ‘Can

²¹ Letter held in NZFA. Underlining in original. Some punctuation added.

Number Five' has logged around seventeen numbered sequences of footage per can. The archivist gives terse descriptions that epitomise the dispiriting inscrutability of ethnographic silent film: 'A native girl cuddling a dog'; 'A sequence that is either a fertility rite or a christening'; 'Two little boys in canoe'; 'Canoes ad infinitum'; 'More canoes'; 'A group of native dancers'; 'Native making some kind of artifact'; 'Various groups of Melanesians sitting looking at camera'. If these logs correspond to the five circular ten-inch cans that Tarr refers to, and each of these contained a 1000-foot reel, then this would make a respectable hour's worth of footage, whose opacity could be ameliorated by music and a talented commentator. Indeed, these lists contain a few indications of intertitles – evidence that these reels had undergone post-production work by Tarr – although the twenty-minute series of excerpts has none.

Overall the most striking characteristic of both the scene lists for the full film and the twenty minutes of extant footage is extreme disjointedness. Such fragmentation is par for the course in early ethnographic film, but in this case it is particularly tangled. While some individual scenes are identifiable, I am unable to consistently reconcile the brief descriptive tags from the logs to the extant segment, nor find mention in the former of key scenes from the latter. Sadly, this includes the intriguing 'sequence that is either a fertility rite or a christening'. This suggests that the twenty-minute segment was compiled separately to the five canisters, and one gets the impression of a plethora of different splices and edits that makes one wonder what happened to the original negative. Indeed the archivist, listing 'a long sequence of a Maori haka performed upon a raft', adds (rather wearily, it seems) 'I imagine it belongs to a different film'. George Tarr's suggestions to Ray Hayes that certain sequences 'could be made into an interesting subject', that parts would make good 'interludes' for television, that Hayes may be interested in keeping some bits but not others, all indicate that Tarr considered he had a piecemeal conglomeration of raw material rather than a coherent film called *Ten Thousand Miles in the Southern Cross*. Unlike *Hinemoa*, then, this film, as evidenced in the surviving fragments and the scene list, has no internal narrative.

Max Quanchi has written, in the context of photography, about what he terms the 'Papuan Gallery' – certain obligatory images that through repetition came to signify 'Papua' to Western viewers of the 1860-1960 period, and which hence continued to be recycled to provide the required sense of recognition. These 'iconic imperatives', as Quanchi terms them, included tree houses, *lakatoi* sailing vessels, sago-making, pot-making and 'belles

and dandies'.²² It seems that the same is true for moving images of the 1920s and '30s: certain scenes are repeatedly filmed; others never or rarely. The equivalent 'Melanesia Gallery' for moving images includes boys swimming and diving, peaceful scenes of solitary net fishing, a betel-nut chewing demonstration, how to shave with a clam shell, and a great deal of canoeing and dancing – all activities better captured by a movie camera than a still one. Often, the film camera is used rather like a still one, however, particularly with regard to portrait shots where a 'type' has been asked to stand and pose before the lens. A smooth panning shot of a lagoon village, taken from a moving boat, is a must. Missionary films have additional required scenes: missionaries must be seen addressing their flock; an indigenous congregation files into church and then spills out again; white medical staff give an injection or apply a bandage dressing to a black body. The requirement for natural light means that interior shots are rare or non-existent: with rare exceptions we do not see inside churches nor men's cult houses nor domestic homes. These stereotypical scenes – portrait 'types', dancing, demonstrations of native arts and crafts – are repeated *ad infinitum* and shared between missionary and the adventurer-travelogue films. 'Salt-water' people predominate, doubtless due to the difficulties of lugging film cameras uphill and inland. The repetition of such scenes has the same numbing effect as Quanchi's 'Papuan Gallery' – it obscures the geographic and historical specificity of the people and places shown; individuals become anonymous 'types'; places are anywhere and nowhere, generic Melanesia.

Ten Thousand Miles in the Southern Cross is replete with such standard iconography. A man shows us how to chew betel nut with the admixture of lime and pepper leaves; another demonstrates, carefully, knowingly, how to fish from a canoe using a large three-dimensional net. In both cases, as with the dancers, there is an awareness of and co-operation with the camera. The fisherman in his canoe is filmed from another nearby, being manned by local men who get caught in shot at one point. So once again these 'others' are simultaneously objects and agents of their own capture on celluloid, where they become not Malaitans or Vella Lavellans but inhabitants of 'Cannibal-land', a country where absence of evidence for actual cannibalism is no impediment to residency. Interspersed randomly through the footage are several examples of handsome young men

²² Max Quanchi, *Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imaging in the Public Domain*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 4. Quanchi makes the point that these 'iconic imperatives' represented just a fragment of coastal Papua that was geographically accessible to colonial photographers.

and older chiefly characters adopting a still, standing, warrior-like pose, both full face and in profile, in the cinematic equivalent of a still photograph. They look serious; they cross their arms, or hold spears; they wear shell necklaces and head adornments; but one older gentleman has the empty distended earlobes that indicate the erstwhile presence of ear discs that he has removed after Christian conversion. This man smiles a little, but otherwise there is no talking or interaction with the cameraman. There is no attempt to link these portraits to scenes before or after, or to integrate these individuals into the village or religious lives we see in other scenes.

Dance scenes are also *de rigueur*. Despite its brevity, *Ten Thousand Miles in the Southern Cross*, is dominated by its large group dance sequences (Tarr even experiments with different camera angles, and ventures a close-up of feet stamping with ankle rattles). There is also a fascinating but fragmented theatrical performance involving a dancer wearing knee rattles and a criss-cross painted costume. This performer bends and moves like a bird, and appears to undergo a mock attack led by a man and a boy who creep up armed with a pretend rifle and bow and arrow. Two other character dancers appear wearing eerie tree-bark layered costumes with full-face bark helmets. Significantly, these performances are clearly being staged *both* for the enjoyment of an enthusiastic indigenous crowd *and* for the camera: the tree spirit character (if such he is) directly approaches the camera as he draws an arrow into a bow and takes aims at the lens. Frustratingly, the sequence once more fragments at that point, so the intriguing relationship between weapon and camera is not further explored.

The relatively supportive Anglican attitude to custom dress and culture is evident here. The integration of customary dance and theatre celebrations into modern colonial life is evident in the mix of clothing visible. Whereas a travelogue director such as Edward Salisbury was at pains to exclude evidence of mission influence and colonial-era dress from his footage, while the missionary Nicholson was equally at pains to relegate nudity and dance to the pagan past (see Chapter Three), the dancers here, while mostly wearing body paint, ankle rattles, frond decorations and tall headdresses, include several in shirts, trousers, patterned cotton loincloths and an array of European hats. The bird-dancer wears shorts beneath his feathered costume. In a scene featuring a female dance troupe, several bare-breasted women wear crucifixes. Thus, these scenes of otherness are inflected with a visible colonial contemporaneity that, as I argue throughout this thesis, is a key feature of mission-made or mission-influenced films. Tarr, who must have been considering the

Western market for indigenous exotica, is nevertheless part of an Anglican entourage, limited to the Christianised actors available to him, and lacks the bargaining power to entice them to disrobe.²³ The effect of these visible elements of modernity, I suggest, is to position these indigenous Melanesian people matter-of-factly in a time co-eval with the Western audience rather than in an atemporal space reserved for Otherness.

If contemporaneity is one element of mission-commissioned film that subverts ‘Cannibal-land’ presumptions, another is openness to recording humdrum scenes, often featuring children who are not self-consciously ‘performing’ their culture for the benefit of interested foreigners but who are simply behaving naturally. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has underlined the semiotic complexity of performative cultural displays undertaken for the entertainment of outsiders: ‘... when people themselves are the medium of ethnographic representation, when they perform themselves ... they become living signs of themselves.’²⁴ While I have emphasised the presence of enthusiastic indigenous audiences captured on-screen, for whom this distancing effect is not true, the transmission of performance imagery back to uncomprehending Western audiences fits Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s recipe for decontextualisation. Infants behaving naturally, on the other hand, have a universal immediacy that transcends cultural otherness and speaks to an underlying shared humanity. Children are not absent from adventure-travelogue imagery – *Pearls and Savages* (1922) has a cute scene with a child cuddling four puppies; *Gow the Headhunter* (1925) shows gleeful lads diving for cans of tobacco thrown from off-camera by one of the film crew – but they are far less prevalent. The emphasis there is on adults, preferably fully adorned, performing their cultural identity for the camera.

The surviving segment of *Ten Thousand Miles* opens with a group of young boys playing in the surf, laughing and splashing at the camera. Soon after the surf-play, we see a girl baby of about ten months leaning companionably against the legs of a group of seated men, obviously feeling secure. Infancy is shown as embedded in village life. Men carry their kids on their shoulders. A little later there is a shot of a large group of naked young boys playing a co-operative game of wrap-around. With hands joined to make a long chain of bodies, they run round and round to coil themselves into a huddle, then uncoil, shrieking with laughter, in the same manner. The game, with its requirement for team-

²³ Unlike, for instance, Lugeon’s and Antoine’s *Chez Les Mangeurs d’Hommes*, see Chapter One, 62.

²⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Objects of Ethnography’, in *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display*, Steven Lavine and Ivan Karp, eds., (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1991), 386–443, 387–388.

work, gives the impression of being a missionary-taught exercise and probably shows mission schoolboys. But unlike the strict before-and-after division of the *Transformed Isle*, in which Christian marching and white clothes replace heathen anarchy and nakedness, the wrap-around game cuts back to the lads frolicking in the surf.

Later, a boy of about seven demonstrates his prowess at smoking a cigarette without removing it from his mouth. Puffing frantically, eyes streaming amidst billows of exhaled smoke, he gamely grins as he struggles to hold on. This shot is in relative close-up, and suggests a strong sense of co-operation and planning between the youngster (or whoever put the youngster up to it) and Tarr. Indeed, it is such a daft thing to film at all that one suspects the child or his off-camera friend must have been the instigator. Thus indigenous agency and good-humour in the making of these self-representations is shown to be not only the preserve of grown-ups or white men. Moreover the very modernity of the activity – showing off tobacco-smoking tricks for a film-camera – indicates that this mischievous lad felt no obligation to be demonstrating his cultural heritage. This is in marked contrast to other scenes showing girls demonstrating an indigenous juggling game or boys who participate in some of the formal dance scenes. Children and toddlers as part of a community continue to be in evidence in village scenes. A young mother smiles at the camera, a baby on her hip. A man poses proudly with two boys of approximately nine and four years, presumably his sons. A camera pan across a large group of villagers shows an elderly man carrying an infant. In this sequence some youngsters run around the back of the group, following the camera so that they can stay in shot – they seem already knowledgeable about such things. The final scenes of the twenty minute segment show a baby of perhaps nine months playing with a branch stuck in the earth. The baby pulls himself up to standing using the stick but is not quite able to walk yet, so he drops onto all fours and scuttles over to his mother who sits nearby.

The prevalence of children in mission film arguably mirrors the patronising attitude of colonial-era white Christians who tended to infantilise and desexualise indigenous peoples. Infants stand in for the infant state of new Melanesian Christians within the international religious community. Nevertheless, I suggest their effect is to promote the universality of infancy and parenting: it offers visual similarities to white audiences, rather than promoting Otherness.

The dominance of dance and festivity in the extant segment shows Tarr's interest in recording cultural exotica. But, as the memorandum of agreement makes clear, he was also expected to film missionary scenes as directed. George Tarr's description (from his 1965 letter) of 'the Melanesian Missionary part of it' is identifiable, to a point, in the available footage. Even if it falls short of his contention that it 'supplies a quite comprehensive picture of the mission at that time' it nonetheless forms a unique historical record. The fourth conference of the Melanesian Mission and the first synod of the Missionary Diocese of Melanesia were held at Siota from October 24 till 8 November 1921, and it is probable that Tarr's 'Panorama of the whole of the missionaries at that time collected at Siota' is a record of this gathering. The scene is indeed a striking display of the Melanesian Mission's relative but nuanced racial egalitarianism: the camera pans left to right over an assembly of approximately fifty white-clad personnel of both sexes, mostly but not exclusively European. A group of probably Polynesian or Fijian pastors are evident, but though they are part of the crowd they are seated a little lower than the others. Likewise, this scene is followed by a long procession of churchmen wearing full liturgical robes and carrying Anglican paraphernalia. Among them are several indigenous figures wearing chasubles, albeit with bare feet. Mission stations sited as a 'visible ... permanent European institution' in villages are also corroborated by a long shot from a craft moving close to shore which pans along the village and shore to arrive at European-style mission buildings in a clearing.²⁵ In striking contrast to the lofty seclusion of the Methodist mission on its hill on Vella Lavella, the Anglican mission is visibly part of, or at least close neighbours to, the village.

Promotion

This thesis throughout highlights the unresolved tensions between commercial adventure-travelogue representations of 'savagery' and the Christian version of shared humanity that missionaries necessarily endorsed, at least in theory. It argues that, despite good intentions, mission propaganda tended inexorably to fall under the spell of certain marketing buzz words that they hoped would draw audiences who would then be attracted by and informed about the mission enterprise. Thus the actors hidden behind these representations, the indigenous people performing for the camera, are necessarily

²⁵ Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen*, 143.

doubled, twinned and split between two antithetical but equally simplistic versions of otherness.

As we shall see with *Transformed Isle* in the next chapter, *Ten Thousand Miles* fell between a missionary propagandist impulse and a commercial venture playing to audience expectations of ‘savage’ exoticism. Unlike the former, however, the film’s purpose does not appear to have been clear to its funders when they commissioned Tarr to make it.

Was it to be a regular travelogue to be shown at commercial venues, or was it to have an explicit propagandist element to appeal to Christian sentiment? The debacle that surrounded the film’s tour and the subsequent frantic and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to recoup escalating costs make a case study of how easy it was to get it horribly wrong. This also throws into relief the far more successful Methodist experiment discussed in Chapter Three.

The tension is clearly evidenced in the advertising that circulated round the film in its various incarnations. The film’s premier, in Auckland, April 1922, was heralded by a promotional poster, in which the film is entitled *10,000 Miles in the ‘S.Y. Southern Cross’*. [Fig. 2.1] A still or frame from the film has been used as the basis for a sophisticated two-colour image: the viewer gazes through silhouetted palm trunks across a bay, to where the silhouette of the *Southern Cross* is moored near a low, tree-lined island. The dark shapes are seen against a setting (or rising) sun, and the ship casts a long shadow across shimmering water. Two male silhouettes near the viewer’s shore – whom we judge to be native based solely on the barbed fishing spear held by one – share our gaze towards the ship. A sub-heading announces that the film is to be presented by ‘Geo. H. Tarr through the courtesy of the Melanesian Mission’, thus explicitly identifying the film as a missionary venture. ‘Geo. H. Tarr’ was George Tarr’s usual mode of personal signature, and this combined with Tarr’s artistic expertise and the source of the image suggest that the design and wording were his own. A document listing expenditure on the venture shows that the substantial sum of £47.16s went on design, photo-engraving and printing, though it’s not clear how many posters were printed. However the care and professionalism taken with the poster suggest high hopes. Moreover that first week’s showing had the Bishop of Melanesia himself in attendance to provide commentary, demonstrating the importance the church placed on this venture. Advertisements in the

Auckland Star proclaimed this to be ‘A Wonderful Film, taken under the auspices of the Melanesian Mission’, with the addendum that ‘The Right Rev. the Bishop of Melanesia, being in Auckland on the date of the exhibition, has kindly consented to give the benefit of his Twenty Years life in the Islands, and will graphically describe the Film at every performance’. The advertisement goes on to claim that the film – still entitled, like the poster, *Ten Thousand Miles in the S.Y. Southern Cross* – ‘will take you to a Land of Wonder, Gorgeous Scenery, Customs, Life in General, of Natives hitherto unknown in the Annals of Filmland’. It goes on, with added emphasis (expressed, in that era, by upper case and line-repetition), to offer ‘A Real Representation of the Romantic South Seas’ and ‘A Night of Wonder’ with a ‘Specially Engaged Orchestra’.²⁶ Thus wonder, scenic spectacle, novelty, romantic exoticism and music are harnessed to the assurance of truthfulness and actuality: a ‘real’ representation. But a ‘real’ representation that somehow also belongs to an imaginary country called ‘Filmland’. Again, judging by the advertisement’s announcement that the film is ‘Photographed and Presented by GEO. H. TARR’, it seems that the multi-talented Tarr took on responsibility for the advertising as well. Perhaps this explains the total absence, other than the simple mention of the Melanesian Mission and the Bishop, of any Christian reference or framing to the ‘Natives hitherto unknown’. The poster and the advertisements discussed above were printed the week prior to the premier. Although the Christian theme is downplayed, these promotions are nevertheless relatively restrained in terms of their references to indigenous people, who, despite the ‘Wonder’ and ‘Romance’ of their Island homes, are allowed to have placid-sounding but unspecific ‘Customs’ and ‘Life in General’. However on the Saturday before the Wednesday premier the advertising suddenly expands and explodes in an energetic flurry of marketing hooks. Added to the original advertisement are a further eight somewhat hysterical and haphazard column inches proclaiming that ‘TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION’; ‘THE WONDERFUL ROMANTIC ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS’; ‘The Scenes of Jack London’s Famous Novel of Adventure, Driven from the Foreshore by the HEAD HUNTERS’; ‘These People Are Seen in Their Natural Environment’; ‘THE WILD PEOPLE OF SANTA CRUZ’; ‘A Medley of Enchanting Scenes, Dances, Spearing, Fishing, Customs, Etc. Etc. And a Host of Unheard Wonders’; ‘NOT A DULL MOMENT’. Whereas the earlier advertisements and press releases had emphasised ‘Gorgeous Scenery’ in ‘over 400 ports of call’, this one promises

²⁶ *Auckland Star*, 13 April 1922, 12.

to avoid potential boredom by focusing more on ‘these’ people and activity, the former framed in animal-like terms – ‘Seen in Their Natural Environment’ and ‘Wild’. Added to this abrupt re-calibration towards exotic people and literary adventure is a lively expansion of the musical elements of the evening: ‘FULL ORCHESTRA, Under the Leadership of Darcy Tarr. With a Specially Selected Musical Programme, including Full Effects with the Native Instruments, Etc.’ This reminds us that silent movies were never watched in silence: one would love to hear what the ‘Full Effects with the Native Instruments, Etc.’ sounded like.²⁷

Thus it appears that a tactical decision was made to inject a dose of marketing pizzazz for the weekend edition. We see the deployment, in emphatic upper case, of the iconic epithet ‘head hunters,’ here introduced in a tellingly ambiguous manner: does the scene of being ‘driven from the foreshore’ occur in the film or the ‘novel’? In fact, this is a scene described by Jack London not in one of his popular novels but in his non-fiction adventure-travelogue memoir, *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911), as happening in Langa Langa Lagoon, Malaita, in the Solomon Islands around 1908. The Jack London incident did in fact involve a tense moment between visitors and a crowd of locals (armed incidentally with Snyder rifles rather than tomahawks) when the formers’ boat grounded on the reef, raising fears of looting.²⁸ But not only was nobody ‘driven from the foreshore by head hunters’, but also a ubiquitous missionary was on hand to help contain the situation. So there is a double level of irony here, firstly that the epithet is evoked once again through reference to Western literature rather than any actual ethnographic observation, and secondly, that the literature in question in this instance fails to reference head-hunting.

There is little doubt that this advertisement would have appealed to a wider demographic than the more staid earlier ones, and it is tempting to associate the change in style either with new input from someone else (such as the suddenly-named Darcy Tarr, who was in fact George’s wife) or with a relaxing of clerical supervision. One wonders indeed whether the Bishop was even privy to this dramatic switch in tone, for it has the effect of wholly eclipsing the already attenuated Mission element. Tarr was operating on

²⁷ *Auckland Star*, 15 April 1922, 14.

²⁸ London, *Cruise of the Snark*, 287-291.

shoestring expenses in the hope and expectation of netting half the proceeds for himself: he needed to make this profitable.

The Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber had been booked for the film's initial mid-week run from 19 to 21 April, during which time its gross takings were almost £209. A further two showings on 22 and 24 April only grossed £51 however, and an abortive excursion to outer suburbs, including Onehunga and Devonport, less than £8.²⁹ This did not bode well. Outgoings for hall hire, posters and advertising, projector and screen hire, general expenses and the all-important orchestra were considerable, and Tarr was paying for these out of a special bank account set up for the purpose by the Melanesian Mission. There was also a hefty amusement tax to pay of almost £19.³⁰ This tax did not apply to charities, and it is indicative both of the Mission's naivety and Tarr's commercial mindset that neither seems to have considered presenting the evening as for a charitable cause. Returning to Auckland city, Tarr – now *sans* bishop and doing the commentary himself – took the film at the beginning of May to several central and inner suburb picture-houses for just one or two nights each: the Princess, Broadway and West End Theatres in Queen St, Newmarket and Ponsonby respectively. By this time the Auckland Star advertisement has abandoned 'Natives Hitherto Unknown' in favour of a forthright 'Exciting Trip to the Land of Head Hunting Cannibals ... Graphically described by the producer, Mr. George H. Tarr' and there is no mention of the auspices of the Melanesian Mission.³¹ This demonstrates the inexorable pull of adventure-travelogue discourse and shows the tendency of commercial operators to assume that a missionary element would be off-putting to potential customers.

Enter Hector MacQuarrie

However something remarkable then happens that adds an element of farce to the incipient financial failure, but which serves to demonstrate the commercial lure of popular pseudo-ethnographic film during this period and its uneasy relationship with missionisation. An Auckland-based travelogue writer, Hector MacQuarrie, contacted the

²⁹ George Tarr's income versus expenses list, Jonathan Dennis folder #38, NZFA, hereafter JD38. This trip is just referred to as 'the suburbs' in Tarr's expense list but the places are mentioned by name by MacQuarrie in his letter of 19 June 1922.

³⁰ http://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1918/NZOYB_1918.html

³¹ *Auckland Star*, 2 May 1922, 12.

Bishop of Melanesia directly – presumably by phone – offering his services in Tarr’s place as a lecturer. He followed up his call with a letter dated May 9, just a week after the West End Theatre showing. This is worth quoting in full since it expresses MacQuarrie’s character and milieu so comprehensively:

Addressed to ‘The Right Reverend, The Bishop of Melanesia, Bishops court, Parnell’ it reads:

My Lord Bishop

I was much too terrified to speak clearly to you on Saturday afternoon when I called to discuss [sic] “Ten Thousand Miles with the Southern Cross”.

Your obvious question which might be put baldly – “What do you get out of it?” I think I answered vaguely. Actually, according to my idea of the plan, I could get much if the Mission gained much, and nothing if the Mission gained little. I would go on a per-centage basis.

As a lecturer I have this advantage. I was a member of the Balfour Mission in America and lectured from coast to coast to enormous crowds. My last book, “Tahiti Days” which had a success in the States, and partially so in England, definitely associates me with what people abroad call vaguely, “The Islands”.

My idea was to lecture with the film throughout New Zealand, using a mass of press clippings and my books as publicity, and making the film enough money to launch itself in America. It is abominably true that I have not visited the islands pictured, yet reading Miss Coomb’s [sic] book, and having seen the film many times, I could talk quite glibly and not lie.

As I told you, I think the film might earn a large sum of money in both America and England. And while it is obviously a mission film, to get the crowd, one would not have to dwell too heavily on its propagandist quality. Therefore a layman might make the best lecturer.

I also forgot to mention to you that if the bishops now meeting in Auckland could be urged to stand behind the film during its progress through this country, a great difference might be made. And in America the Episcopal Church could be tapped.

I remain,

Your Lordships most obedient servant

Hector MacQuarrie.³²

³² JD38.

No shrinking violet, then. MacQuarrie was a published writer, public speaker and aspiring adventurer who had gained experience in public speaking in the United States during the war. His most famous book, *Tahiti Days*, had been published in 1920 by a large and reputable New York firm. Copiously illustrated with photographs, it is an irritatingly chatty memoir that begins – much like the letter to the Bishop – with a gush of false *bonhomie*:

Come step onto my carpet!

We're going to the South Seas, to the islands you've read about ... where a warm welcome awaits you from the gentle Polynesians. ... Yes, you'll come with me; I know it ... So step onto my carpet! ... it's woven with the threads of sheer delight ... held up with the bands of love – love for you, my fellow traveller.

We'll not worry about geography, ethnology nor geology – hard words – but we'll be distressingly casual and very lazy ...³³

In his letter to the Bishop, MacQuarrie acknowledges that the general public's vagueness about 'The Islands' is a benefit to him: it will allow him to re-promote *Tahiti Days*. His indifferent shrug as to his ignorance of Island Melanesia is brazen – 'it is abominably true that I have not visited the islands pictured, yet reading Miss Coomb's book, and having seen the film many times, I could talk quite glibly and not lie'. 'Miss Coomb' was Florence Edith Coombe (1870-1953), an Anglican missionary stationed on Norfolk Island who had published a book in 1911 – *Islands of Enchantment: Many Sided Melanesia*.³⁴ Coombe's book is a compilation of earlier ethnography – she cites Codrington (1891) and Guppy (1887) as indispensable sources.³⁵ It was largely illustrated by J.W. Beattie, an Australian studio photographer whose photographs made during a trip to Melanesia in 1906 circulated for decades afterwards in many different publications. Tellingly for my argument that white missionaries were central to the transmission and consumption of images of Melanesian people to the West, Beattie, like Tarr, travelled on board the *Southern Cross* at the behest of the then Bishop of Melanesia. Coombe's book is remarkable for its geographic specificity, with each island group and island carefully

³³ Hector MacQuarrie, *Tahiti Days*, (New York: George Doran, 1920), 15.

³⁴ Florence Coombe, *Islands of enchantment, many sided Melanesia seen through many eyes*, (London: Macmillan, 1911).

³⁵ Codrington, op.cit.; H.B Guppy, *The Solomon Islands and their natives*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887).

named and worked through systematically from south to north. Rich with anecdote and folk tales, it would indeed make a useful handbook for a popular lecturer where weighty academic discourse was not required. MacQuarrie had done his homework.

MacQuarrie waves before the Bishop vague financial enticement – ‘the film might earn a large sum of money in America and England’ – and he suggests that ‘to get the crowd’ the mission aspects should be downplayed further than they already were. This is a revealing comment as it indicates a belief that an explicitly Christian subtext would be off-putting. He does not seem to consider that it might attract as many as it offended. It also suggests that, despite the increasingly secular and sensationalist advertisements, Tarr’s *commentary* during the film had retained the mission context to the extent that MacQuarrie had not realised that the former was himself a commercial operator not a mission man: ‘... a layman might make the best lecturer’, he suggests, in what is clearly a dig at Tarr’s abilities. At the same time MacQuarrie displays a contrary eagerness to tap into Church support: he hopes the ‘bishops now meeting in Auckland’ (the Anglican Synod was in session at the time) will promote the film to their flocks (in which case why not promote rather than downplay the Christian theme?). Likewise, he shows off his US insider knowledge – and awareness of denominational competition in the mission field – by suggesting specifically that ‘in America the Episcopal Church could be tapped’. This desire to harness church backing while simultaneously avoiding the film’s ‘propagandist quality’ demonstrates a contradiction about what the film was *for* that remained unresolved. Education? Entertainment? Pass-the-hat fund-raising? New Zealand’s 1921 census reveals that over 95% of New Zealanders identified themselves as Christian, and 42% as Church of England – by far the largest denomination.³⁶ Many may have been Christmas Christians only, but that is not to say they would actively avoid a film with an element of religious edification if it also offered exotic spectacle. However both Tarr and MacQuarrie show a desire to distance themselves from the missionary aspect – Tarr in the advertisements, MacQuarrie in his advice to the Bishop – that in itself indicates a tacit awareness that there is a clash of values or purpose here. The availability of Melanesian imagery as raw material for showmen and entrepreneurs such as MacQuarrie is entangled with the churchmen’s more complex agenda as they feel their way uncertainly into the commercial environment.

³⁶ http://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1923/NZOYB_1923.html

The Bishop was swayed by MacQuarrie's pitch. That the highest officials of the Melanesian Mission were prepared to take his offer seriously itself speaks volumes for their investment in the success of the film, despite the fact that it was floundering financially. Takings over the first three weeks of May amounted to less than £21 (1931 report) whereas outgoings (including advertising, orchestra fee and hire of potted palms) were well over £160.³⁷ MacQuarrie's letter, with its hints of international distribution that 'might earn a large sum of money,' must have seemed a straw worth clutching. A meeting of the Melanesian Mission Finance Board Executive held on May 25 1922 (just a month after the premier) had 'The Film' as its first agenda item. That the minute-taker recorded it thus without feeling the need to explain it further adds to the impression that 'The Film' was dominating the Executive's attention. The hand-written minutes continue:

Mr Tarr [and] Mr MacQuarrie were present to explain the position regarding the future of the film. After discussing several propositions it was decided that the New Zealand rights of the film should be retained & that the showing of it through NZ should be conducted by Mr Tarr with Mr MacQuarrie as lecturer and that a letter of credit should be given to Mr Tarr for the amount of £300 in these terms: "That the Melanesian Mission undertakes the financial responsibility of the film running [?] in NZ up to £300." Resolved that for the purpose of financing the film an account should be opened at the Union Bank to be called "The Southern Cross A/C" and that the persons authorised to operate upon this account be Mr G. H. Tarr & the Rev Kayll operating conjointly.³⁸

This is in addition to more than £220 paid to Tarr for expenses involved in making the film in the first place, plus a further £100 supplied during April for the premier week. The introduction of the notion of 'rights', the rather belated setting up of a special account, and the recognition that a substantial sum would be required to kick-start a New Zealand tour, bespeak a newfound professionalism and optimism that may well have been emanating from MacQuarrie. However the joint account, while it changes the relationship between Tarr and the Mission to something more like a business partnership, also underlines a continued trust in Tarr: although supplanted as lecturer, he is still in charge of the tour (to MacQuarrie's chagrin, as we shall see). Nevertheless this new footing has still not led to any clear idea of how the film was to make money other than by attracting a secular audience willing to pay a shilling for a seat in the stalls, or two shillings in the circle (children sixpence). In the next chapter we will see a rather different business plan that would soon be adopted by the Reverend Reginald Nicholson in Australia for the

³⁷ Tarr's expenses list, JD38.

³⁸ JD38

showing of the *Transformed Isle*: Nicholson was unabashed about the propaganda purpose of his film and it was always either he himself or other Methodists who showed it, with no thought of personal or commercial profit. Posters openly announced that proceeds from ticket sales were intended for Mission Funds. Moreover, that film had a narrative structure that included a tremendously exciting sequence of staged action (the head-hunt re-enactment) and whose rhetoric culminated in a rousing call for support that was immediately followed, as the stimulated audience arose, by a further collection of funds for the cause. In contrast, the Melanesian Mission had a piecemeal collection of footage of people and places with no narrative beyond what the commentary could provide, plus two men contracted to run the show, neither of whom was a missionary and who both sought commercial profit. The next agenda item after 'The Film' at this meeting of the Executive Committee was headed 'Propaganda'. It would indeed have made sense to address this issue in relation to the film with force and clarity before proceeding. However it is significant that at this point the committee – as reflected in the Minute Secretary's sudden onset of waffle – flounders and procrastinates:

A considerable discussion [took] place regarding the question of propaganda & it was decided that this decision of the executive be deferred until after the next meeting of the executive ...

Whether anything was decided is unknown.

Ten Thousand Miles, accompanied by both Tarr and MacQuarrie, made its way to Wellington, where things did not go well. The film was shown at the Wellington Town Hall on Monday 12 June 1922, after an intensive advertising campaign in the Evening Post over the previous week. The advertisements not only clearly manifest MacQuarrie's distinctive 'voice' but also a significant and novel shift in pitch. Tarr's role as cinematographer is eclipsed as MacQuarrie's somewhat puffed resume now lends its glamour to the 'Greatest Travelogue that has ever visited New Zealand.' There is no explicit mention of the Melanesian Mission, but 'Head-Hunting Cannibals' are again definitely on the menu. MacQuarrie's favoured trope of the 'Magic Carpet' – as used in his introduction to *Tahiti Days* – is once again deployed, along with the recitation of a Western literary tradition within which to situate the proposed cinematic experience. Paralleling the now-familiar literary litany, however, is a new element in the following passage that suddenly drop-kicks the film into an international geo-political framework. In a period when white New Zealanders still referred to Britain as 'home' and the Pacific Islands felt more distant than Windsor Palace, MacQuarrie breathlessly urges New

Zealand to wake up to the Pacific's potential for colonial exploitation, and to position itself as central to that development before 'Europe, America, and Asia' muscle in. In a move aimed specifically at Wellingtonians, he suggests an imperial vision: 'Wellington has the opportunity to become capital of the Southern Pacific.' And hence in preparation we should educate ourselves by 'watching the wildest Heathen dances, the most magnificent scenery, the most interesting customs, and the funniest manners,' of its amusing indigenes, never forgetting that emblematic 'axe of the head-hunters' to which the advertisement copy inexorably returns before mentioning the ticket prices.³⁹ [Fig. 2.2]

This re-framing of the Pacific as New Zealand's colonial playground, and the film as a weapon of political consciousness-raising, demonstrates the malleability of propaganda. In the course of two months with the same raw material, we've moved from '400 scenic ports of call' in the 'missionary boat Southern Cross' with a polite commentary by the 'Bishop of Melanesia [who] kindly consented to give the benefit of his Twenty Years life in the Islands', through 'The Wild People of Santa Cruz' and 'An Exciting Trip to the Land of the Head Hunting Cannibals', to '... world interest is concentrated on the Pacific,' and 'Wellington has the opportunity to become capital of the Southern Pacific.'

MacQuarrie's geo-political turn is further in evidence in the next day's press release. We are reminded that 'the boundaries of New Zealand extend to the Cook Islands' and that 'the Dominion ... has the mandate for governing Western Samoa.' (This mandate had been given by the League of Nations in December 1920, so was indeed a novel development in New Zealand's colonial position in the post-WWI world, albeit one in which she acquitted herself extraordinarily badly.) Never mind that the Cook Islands and Samoa are in Polynesia and the Southern Cross film toured Island Melanesia – geography was not at issue as MacQuarrie cited the Polynesian links as encouragement 'to the people of Wellington to become better acquainted with the beautiful scenery of the Islands and the customs of their inhabitants.' Moreover he gives additional political clout to his vision of a New Zealand Empire in the Pacific by a topical reference, as he continues:

New Zealand should be specially interested in these islands for several reasons. Owing to the tariff arranged in Australia to protect the Queensland plantations, the islands of the Pacific should in the future become part of the rich heritage of New Zealand.

³⁹ *Evening Post*, 5 June 1922, 2.

10,000 **T**OWN HALL, MILES
 10,000 MILES
 10,000 Commencing MILES
 10,000 MILES
 10,000 MONDAY, 12th JUNE. MILES

GEO. H. TARR Presents—

HECTOR MACQUARRIE, B.A. Cantab.
 (Author of "Tahiti Days," "Over There,"
 etc., etc., and the Orator with the Bal-
 four War Mission to the United States),
 Describing the Greatest Travelogue that
 has ever visited New Zealand,

TEN THOUSAND MILES WITH THE
 TEN THOUSAND MILES WITH THE

STEAM YACHT,
 STEAM YACHT,

"SOUTHERN CROSS."
 "SOUTHERN CROSS."

TO THE LAND OF THE
 TO THE LAND OF THE

HEAD-HUNTING CANNIBALS.
 HEAD-HUNTING CANNIBALS.

It is a journey on a Magic Carpet to
 the Islands made famous by Robert Louis
 Stevenson, Stoddard, Melville, and Jack
 London, who wrote of Islands Sleeping
 on the Bosom of the Southern Pacific.
 SLEEPING! That's it! But the
 moment of awakening is fast approaching
 —world interest is concentrated on the
 Pacific. And the question! While Europe,
 America, and Asia are working and
 thinking—shall New Zealand sleep and
 wait? Wellington has the opportunity to
 become capital of the Southern Pacific.

TEN THOUSAND MILES WITH THE

STEAM YACHT,

"SOUTHERN CROSS."

You know the kind of thing—where a
 man can learn something stranger than
 fiction, more wonderful than romance,
 while, watching the wildest Heathen
 dances, the most magnificent scenery, the
 most interesting customs, and the funniest
 manners. New Hebrides, Solomons, Santa
 Cruz, Banks, Florida, Santa Anna Reef,
 and the famous Artificial Islands, where
 men and women build islets of refuge,
 where alone they may keep their heads
 from the axe of the head-hunters.

PRICES: 3s 2s, and 1s (plus tax).

Box Plan opens Wednesday.

Business Manager Geo. H. Tarr.

Fig. 2.2:
Evening Post,
 5 June 1922, 2.

While expressive of an exploitative colonialist mentality, this is nonetheless an insightful comment on Australia's relationship with its Pacific neighbours and the potential consequences of that for New Zealand. Australia had turned its back on the Pacific at the turn of the century when it first introduced the White Australia policy that saw Melanesian labourers expelled from the sugar plantations of North Queensland in 1906.

Australia's protectionist policies against Pacific imports continued and increased during the early twentieth century, with tariffs imposed against foreign sugar and banana imports, principally from Fiji, in order to promote the white-labour plantations of Queensland.⁴⁰ What Australia doesn't want from its Pacific neighbours, MacQuarrie suggests, New Zealand can and should have. MacQuarrie, with his experience of political rhetoric from the States, has hit upon a soap-box issue tailored for modern New Zealand as it finds its feet in the post-war world. Whether he is doing this cynically, as a marketing ploy to promote the film, or as a real commitment to a new Pacific Empire is a moot point. One gets the impression of a narcissistic personality given to fleeting enthusiasms that feel genuine enough at the time. Nonetheless it represents an intelligent attempt to deepen the 'travelogue' experience for a sophisticated secular audience into something more meaningful than scenic eye-candy. What he has forgotten is that the film was already intended to be more meaningful, though in religious rather than economic or political terms, and that the sense of a Pacific world of interlinked peoples with whom New Zealand had a special relationship was already a reality in both the Anglican and Methodist missionary worlds.

The theme of promoting New Zealand's intrinsic Pacific-ness continued into the following day's press release for the Evening Post's 'Entertainments' notices, in which we are reminded that '[Mr MacQuarrie's] addresses not only abound in information about people related ancestrally to the Maoris, but contain many quaint stories as to the customs and beliefs of the islanders.'⁴¹ The ancestral link is a nice touch, one indeed that has continued to increase in salience in post-colonial Oceania. As for the 'quaint stories,' Mr MacQuarrie doubtless owed much to Miss Florence Coombe, on whose book he happily confessed to rely, and who almost certainly received no acknowledgement

⁴⁰ 'Queensland Products and the Tariffs', Brisbane Courier 5 August 1921, 6.

⁴¹ *Evening Post*, 'South Sea Island Travelogue', 7 June 1922, 3

This notice marks another shift in pitch, since the final three promotional pieces before the opening on the 12 June drop politics in favour of tantalising titbits of tongue-in-check pseudo-ethnographic comment that promotes a sense of white superiority by emphasising the bizarre rather than the humane: ‘The women never dance with the men unless some rare occasion arises, when they are permitted to follow their lords and masters on their hands and knees.’; ‘... it is not unlikely that a white man would see the strange sight of a native, disguised as a tree, hunting flying money. The money exists on the breast of a red-breasted bird.’ Endemic violence is also promoted as an attention grabber. The notice printed on 12 June begins, ‘It would not be safe to wander about the forest in the Western Solomons, for the simple reason that some of the natives would dislike it so intensely that they would be compelled to club a careless person.’ One can safely assume that this easily identifiable tone of voice persisted in much of MacQuarrie’s commentary during the evening.

The plan was to tour the provinces after the Auckland and Wellington seasons. Confused marketing is attested by a typed form letter that has survived in the file compiled, without regard to chronology, by Jonathan Dennis. It was a puzzling document to discover, since it is undated and unsigned, with blanks for addressee, so it was not immediately obvious who had composed it or when. It purports to come from a churchman addressing colleagues – ‘We have arranged to tour the whole of the Dominion with a Motion Picture made under our auspices ...’ – and asks for support and assistance in making arrangements for the film’s visit to their neighbourhood. Yet it goes out of its way to explain that the religious aspects are to be downplayed as much as possible:

The picture deals with life, customs and manners existing throughout Melanesia, and is in no wise a “Church” picture, although we hope to gain much by its propagandist influence and the money it may earn to help the Mission.

And again:

The entertainment will appear as an ordinary Motion Picture Attraction, with no advertisement marking it as a definitely “Church” project. By this we hope to attract all the people ...

At the same time it optimistically suggests that local theatre managers will be co-operative about providing premises because ‘he will not want to offend so large a proportion of the town as may be represented by the Church.’ And it finishes with a burst

of evangelical enthusiasm: 'It will be fine to see what the church can do!'⁴² This contradictory strategy is difficult to reconcile with a genuine Anglican writer, but is entirely consistent with MacQuarrie's conflicted approach to marketing. And indeed a letter from MacQuarrie to the Executive Committee of the Melanesian Mission mentions in passing that he took it upon himself to send out 'a circular letter ... with posters to 20 vicars of twenty smaller towns. I urged each vicar to spy out the land ...', thus confirming MacQuarrie as author of the template.⁴³

Nevertheless, even though the promotional advertising and press notices, under Tarr's and MacQuarrie's influence, downplay the Mission almost to vanishing point, reviewers still respond warmly to the Christian theme. The day after the travelogue opened at Wellington Town Hall a substantial review of around 500 words headlined 'Isles of Eden' was published. The unnamed writer's tone and angle of interest are firmly turned away from the pseudo-ethnographic macabre and towards Christian enterprise amid ravishing scenery.

[The *Southern Cross* was] the steamer employed by the Melanesian Mission to deliver the message of Christianity to and spread civilisation amongst certain groups of islands of the Pacific, the New Hebrides, Solomons, Santa Cruz, and other adjacent groups ...⁴⁴

'The lecturer then stated some of the peculiar superstitions of the people,' the writer continues, but is not concerned to repeat any of them. Instead he or she once again displays a religious sensibility by launching into an awestruck description of relics of Bishop Patteson's martyrdom (shown as a lantern slide rather than part of the film), followed by 'some striking moving pictures' of the 'first diocesan synod' with its 'fine group of the missionaries – men and women.' The *Evening Post* reviewer goes on to wax lyrical about the lovely setting:

Some of the islands are mountainous and thickly wooded, whilst other are little more than coral reefs. These reefs ... are recognised as one of the wonders of nature ... The coloured photographs of the scenery of the shores of the islands as the *Southern Cross* steamed slowly along were beautiful in the extreme.⁴⁵

⁴² JD38.

⁴³ Hector MacQuarrie, letter to Executive Committee, 19 June 1922. JD38.

⁴⁴ 'Isles of Eden', *Evening Post*, 13 June 1922, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

He or she finishes with a comment on the orchestra, which played ‘specially selected music’.

This article not only provides a useful indication of some of the scenes now lost (the Patteson relics, a wedding, ‘different types of canoes’) but also demonstrates the multi-media, multi-sensory aspects of such evenings, in which silent motion pictures were not received in silence, hand-coloured lantern slides were projected as well, and the orchestra played on amidst the potted palms. More importantly for my argument, the reviewer’s relative lack of interest in ‘the peculiar superstitions of the people’ while showing considerable interest in both the film’s missionary components and its purely scenic aspects, shows that a ‘Church’ picture was not necessarily the marketing death-knell that MacQuarrie and Tarr believed it to be. The ‘Land of the Head-Hunting Cannibals’ promoted in the Tarr-MacQuarrie advertisements bears little relation to this reviewer’s ‘Isles of Eden.’

Every evening seems to promise more

Two days after the Wellington opening, a letter from George Tarr to Reverend Kayll back in Auckland hides increasing financial anxiety behind a veneer of unconvincing optimism. The hand-written letter requests a countersignature on a cheque on the joint account, that would allow George to draw for expenses, but it is also a report, and something of a confession.

I cannot say as to results of our season until we finish as every evening seems to promise more. ... Our takings up to last night are £77-0-0, but our expenses are up about £250. I am cutting down everywhere possible ... Hoping for the best.⁴⁶

The film account had been seeded with only £300, intended to kick-start a self-funding and profit-making tour of the whole Dominion. The long-suffering Kayll, the Organising Secretary whose idea all this had been, must have been horribly alarmed at the escalating losses, for he felt it necessary to travel post-haste to Wellington, despite personal illness, to assess the situation.⁴⁷ A long and revealing report from Kayll was later submitted to the Executive Committee, as was an even longer vitriolic epistle from MacQuarrie recording,

⁴⁶ Hand-written letter, Tarr to Kayll, 14 June 1922, JD38

⁴⁷ These were considerable sums. The average annual wage for working men in 1920-21 was about £200. http://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1923/NZOYB_1923.html#idsect1_1_178003

unsurprisingly, a total breakdown in his and Tarr's working relationship. Kayll's report includes a dismayed eye-witness assessment of the Wellington show:

On Friday evening I went to the Town Hall. There was an audience of about 300 persons. Mr MacQuarrie lectured. I was very disappointed to find that quite one-third of the film had been cut out and that the cut included some of the finest scenic portions. I also observed that the film had been put together without any regard for geographical continuity. At intervals throughout the entertainment the picture was stopped and a Lantern Slide shewn during which Mr MacQuarrie lectured. I was not at all impressed with the quality of the lecture, and the periods, one of which must have been 15 minutes at least, were far too long.⁴⁸

The comments that 'quite one-third of the film had been cut' and the film 'put together without any regard for geographical continuity' strongly suggest that the film as shown in Wellington had been re-edited after its Auckland season. Kayll would undoubtedly have attended the Auckland version in company with the Bishop of Melanesia who provided commentary, based on personal experience, for those first few showings in April when it was more explicitly promoted as a Melanesian Mission project. So although it is MacQuarrie who receives the brunt of ecclesiastical opprobrium over the debacle, Tarr was the one with the expertise, equipment and opportunity to re-edit. One suspects that this occurred during May, when the film had a brief sojourn in the outer suburbs before returning to play in a Ponsonby theatre. This was the point at which Tarr starts presenting the commentary himself, without Mission supervision, and also when the newspaper advertisements take on the far more sensationalist turn of phrase. It is common to regard the digital age as hallmarked by an uncontrollable proliferation of images and image fragments, but here we see that celluloid too allows for multiple reconfigurations and fluid polysemy.

Kayll's response was not merely a reaction to seeing a new version of a show he remembered differently. He also reports the negative responses of various Wellington church colleagues who were seeing it for the first time, and who hence had no criticism of the film imagery as such:

All of these expressed themselves as being deeply disappointed with Mr MacQuarrie's performance. One Clergyman said that he regarded it as a vulgar piece of self-advertising. Mr Henderson read me a draft of a letter he had proposed sending to this Executive [i.e. the MM

⁴⁸ Typescript report, Kayll to Executive Committee, undated, JD38.

executive committee of which poor Rev Kayll was the organising secretary] criticising the Lecture in a most scathing manner.⁴⁹

Clearly the clergymen's idea of what the evening's entertainment was intended to express and what it had become in MacQuarrie's and Tarr's hands are wholly at odds. That the clergymen had not anticipated this outcome and assumed more control over the tenor of the presentation shows that the conflicted agendas of the 'Cannibal-land' travelogue and missionary propaganda were not, at this time, apparent until they clashed head on.

What was particularly disappointing to the stakeholders, however, was the 'audience of about 300 persons' – not nearly enough to fill a large auditorium, nor to recoup the considerable costs involved. (It is worth remembering that in the small-town halls and provincial theatres of the South Australian tour of the Methodist film, 300 would have been a good turnout.) Three days of failed meetings, backbiting, bitter complaints and special pleading followed, at the end of which MacQuarrie's resignation was accepted and he returned to Auckland, whence he penned the diatribe against Tarr. Despite his dismissal the irrepressible MacQuarrie continues to nurse high hopes. 'In conclusion,' he writes (still three paragraphs before the end):

I may say that if Mr Tarr returns penniless [from the NZ tour], of which I have no doubt, I am still at your service. I will require no money from you, but I will undertake to regain your lost L300, if I may be allowed to be entirely free from the slightest interference from Mr Tarr. I will also take your film to America and England, and earn you much money.⁵⁰

Again the allure of international exposure and unspecified riches are offered as bait. This time, however, MacQuarrie was declined in a brusque note without further discussion.

The disparity between the fool's gold with which MacQuarrie had briefly managed to dazzle the Archdeacon and the depressing actuality is made clear by the final rueful paragraph of Kayll's report to the Committee:

My own opinion is the Mr MacQuarrie is a man of very limited attainment but excessive vanity and that he was exploiting the film in his own interests. ... he told me that the film was of very poor quality and not worth £200 for the Copyright. I asked him then to explain from what source

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Typescript letter, MacQuarrie to Executive Committee, dated 19 June 1922, JD38. There are discrepancies in the dates of these letters and reports that suggest one or other of the correspondents are a week out.

the £20,000 profits were to be derived that he had spoken to us about. He replied very modestly “My Name.” and that he was paid £75 per night for Lectures of this sort in America.⁵¹

What is significant here is not so much a group of naive churchmen being duped by a manic narcissist, as that, for a while at least, the sum of £20,000 had sounded plausible to both sides. We have already seen that the Melanesian Mission was desperately scratching for funds of this order for its expensive operation, and MacQuarrie too sounds as if he genuinely believed he could make serious money. The travelogue infotainment industry, after all, was big business in the United States, with Burton Holmes, Lowell Thomas, Martin Johnson and others making good livings. But these talented players had creative control over their secular material, whether lantern slides or moving pictures or both, whereas MacQuarrie had hoped to hitch a ride on someone else’s hobby horse, one that didn’t quite know where it was going or why. Meanwhile the gentlemen of the Melanesian Mission seem curiously hands-off and passive in their attitude to the marketing of the film they themselves had commissioned. This changed later.

With MacQuarrie deposed, less ambitious but reliable Tarr was back in the saddle. The 1931 document with the confused and conflicting ‘Receipts and Expenditure’ (‘Figures from Mr Geo. Tarr’) suggests the bottom line for that Wellington season of June 1922 ended up as a loss of nearly £246. Also there were still ‘outstanding accounts’ owing on the Auckland season of over £75. Nevertheless Tarr retained the trust of Reverend Kayll, despite the cutting of ‘quite one-third’, and despite the newspaper advertising which continued to display an inexorable morphing of film title, an issue which will be discussed further below.

It seems that a North Island tour did take place, because Tarr’s receipts and expenditure figures includes an impressive list of towns visited, including Whanganui, Waihi, Rotorua, Morrinsville and Hamilton. It seems that this occurred between mid-June and mid-July, by which time the film was back in Auckland, playing a two-night ‘Return Season’ at the Broadway Theatre in Newmarket: (‘Come and see the Head Hunters – the Mystic Dances and Curious Customs of the Savages of the Tropical Isles. Graphically described by the Producer and Photographer, George Tarr’.⁵²) The 13-town tour seems to have more or less broken even, with total takings and outgoings around £70. No profits

⁵¹ Typescript report, Kayll to Executive Committee, undated, JD38.

⁵² *Auckland Star*, 13 July 1922, 14.

though. However it enjoyed at least some measure of critical acclaim: a glowing endorsement written by H.T. Gibson, headmaster of Waihi District High School and dated August 1922, was reprinted by Tarr as an advertisement in September, when the film was once again back in Auckland, this time playing a brief 'Return Season' at the Princess Theatre. Mr Gibson's accolade is interesting in its total absence of religious content:

Your film is most interesting, instructive and amusing, and I have not seen any of its class that I like better. From an educational point of view it is by far the best that has been shown to New Zealand children. To me, the artificial island, made famous by Jack London and other South Sea Novelists, the native dances and games proved a revelation.⁵³

The comments about films 'of its class' and 'by far the best' suggest others had passed through Waihi. I would very much like to know which. Mr Gibson can approve of its pedagogical value for schoolchildren, but also, for himself, he responds warmly – yet again in a now-familiar pattern – to that romantic Western *literary* world which is the true location of 'Cannibal-Land'.

Competition

Tarr quickly adapted Mr Gibson's plug into a new marketing angle, which was opportune since a new threat to the struggling enterprise was looming.

An advertisement in the *Auckland Star* of 22 September 1922 is the splashiest (and hence most expensive) for some time. Tarr is now headlined not just as the film-maker of 'Positively the Most Wonderful Travel Film ever ...' but as an intrepid personality engaged in 'adventure through the lands of the HEAD HUNTERS.' This follows the pattern of the travelogue-adventure genre whereby the writer, photographer or film-maker *himself* becomes the hero of the adventure. As well as re-using some of MacQuarrie's copy ('You know the kind of thing ...'), it contains two feature boxes. One of these, doubtless inspired by the generous words of the Waihi schoolmaster, offers discounts for group attendance by student groups. The other states baldly, 'WHY WAIT A WEEK? SEE THE BEST NOW'.⁵⁴

⁵³ *Auckland Star*, 19 September 1922, 12.

⁵⁴ *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1922, 12.

The reason for the extravagant advertisement, and also why a reader might be tempted to ‘wait a week’ is explained by a competing attraction that had been announced in the amusements notices of the previous day’s *Star*:

‘PEARLS AND SAVAGES’

It is announced that on tomorrow week at the Strand Theatre the attraction will be Pearls and Savages, Captain Frank Hurley’s tremendous achievement in cinematography. It is the amazing motion picture record of an adventurous expedition to Torres Straits and Papua. His pictures of the Shackleton Expedition will be well remembered. His films of the expedition into the islands north-east of Australia, it is said, exceed in interest and attractiveness even the South Polar pictures.⁵⁵

The Strand and Princess Theatres were both in Queen Street, just a few metres from each other at numbers 272 and 232 respectively. Moving images of Melanesia were all the rage, it seems, and though there was no reason why they shouldn’t augment rather than divide each other’s audience – particularly since they were ‘about’ geographically distinct areas – the wording of Tarr’s advertisement, ‘SEE THE BEST NOW’, makes it clear that he, at least, viewed this competitively.

But if it was a competition then, unfortunately for Tarr and the Melanesian Mission, Hurley won hands down. Hurley – a brilliant photographer and consummate showman – had the further advantage of pre-existing fame based on his stunning visual record of his adventures in Antarctica with Shackleton. *Pearls and Savages* itself was an evolving and fluid accretion that involved a multi-media show incorporating lantern slides, movie footage (from two separate expeditions, the second made independently), original music (commissioned by Hurley and based on phonograph recordings of indigenous music), and personal appearances by Hurley himself, or an associate, who provided a lecture. [Fig. 2.3] The show toured Australia, NZ, Britain and the United States to much acclaim. It played in Sydney in late 1921 and early 1922, screening three times a day for five months before touring nationally; it played in Wellington in August 1922. Subsequent ‘editions’ toured in the UK and the US under variant titles: *Headhunters of Unknown Papua* and *The Lost Tribe*. The film and book also operated within an extraordinary avalanche of illustrated promotional material in the popular press.⁵⁶ Thus the reception and

⁵⁵ *Auckland Star*, 21 September 1922, 9.

⁵⁶ Robert Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 179ff.

interpretation of both 'missionary' films and competing 'adventure-travelogues' depicting Melanesia in this period must be understood as functioning in Hurley's shadow.



Fig. 2.3: Lantern slide, *Pearls and Savages*.

A contemporary advertisement gives a taste of Hurley's 'Synchronized Lecture Entertainments'⁵⁷:

Portland Pictures will present Capt. Hurley's great film, 'Pearls and Savages'. Capt. Hurley, lecturer, will be in attendance. A moving picture film of 100 magnificent slides, depicting life on the islands of the Torres Straits and New Guinea. It represents the essence of twelve months' labour; a mile and a half of the six miles of film taken; a collection of plates taken in natural colours, and a range of hand-colored slides selected from over 2000 negatives. In a couple of hours you are led through nine months of tropical wanderings, without other discomfort than having occasionally to endure the original Papuan music which has been notated from phonograph records. In the flash of a few seconds you frequently see a week's work.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Dixon *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, xxi.

⁵⁸ *Portland Guardian*, Victoria, 10 July 1922, 2.

The snide aside about ‘original Papuan music’ suggests images offered a richer, certainly more comfortable escapist entertainment than sound. According to Griffiths commerce appropriated ‘ethnography’s discourses and iconography’ as a means of ‘selling Otherness as visual spectacle’.⁵⁹ As the newspaper advertisement quoted above demonstrates, this spectacle was often framed in terms of virtual travel – a time-compressed and telescoped experience that evoked distant lands and other lifestyles from the comfort of home in the course of an evening: ‘in a couple of hours you are led through nine months of tropical wanderings, without ... discomfort ...’.

Towards the end of 1923 George Tarr spent several weeks in Sydney seeking a buyer for the *Southern Cross* film. A plaintive lettercard sent from there to Kayll reveals the chagrin provoked by Hurley’s ascendancy:

Dear Mr Kayll

The best terms I could get for the Film were £650 for 3 copies and Rights for Australia. It is very annoying to know that Hurley has received £5000 for his picture in America – he was financed by The Mission and gave them a lot of ordinary stuff and then floated a company and went to America. However, we’ll hope for something better out of our overseas dealing. I expect to clear £150 on the sale.

Kind regards & sincere wishes for a Happy New Year to yourself & family

Sincerely, Geo. H. Tarr⁶⁰

In the Heart of Frank Hurley

‘He ... gave them a lot of ordinary stuff and then floated a company and went to America’

George Tarr, referring to Frank Hurley, 1923

In parallel to the *Southern Cross* arrangement, Frank Hurley had indeed, in 1921, been commissioned by the Anglican Australian Board of Missions to film the work of the missions in Papua New Guinea, although in this case it was Hurley who made the first approach. This in itself underlines the *sine qua non* of mission support for white travelogue-adventurers venturing into Melanesia in search of indigenes to film. In

⁵⁹ Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference*, op.cit., 45.

⁶⁰ Hand-written lettercard, Tarr to Kayll, postmarked 22 December 1923. JD38.

keeping with the temporal trajectory of missionary involvement with travelogue-adventurers that this thesis traces, it also shows that 1921 was the moment when both Australasian Anglican mission organisations – New Zealand’s Melanesian Mission (responsible for the islands) and the Australian Board of Missions (responsible for PNG) – simultaneously hit on the idea of commissioning experienced secular film-makers to provide them with propaganda imagery.

The offer to make a mission film was a tit-for-tat arrangement by which Hurley gained permission to record footage on his own account. Thus Hurley, unlike Tarr at this stage, had a clear mental separation between mission propaganda and material for a ‘travelogue entertainment’.⁶¹ The latter took precedence. As discussed in the Introduction and as the disgruntled letter from Tarr quoted above shows, Hurley was the role-model for would-be entrepreneurs – particularly Australians and New Zealanders – dealing in Melanesian imagery of this period. But Frank Hurley’s remarkable contributions to the visual culture of colonial modernity have been extensively studied elsewhere.⁶² Hence he has been excluded from this thesis except as regards his dealings with the Australian Board of Missions (ABM).

Hurley’s arrangement was to supply the ABM with 5000ft of film and 100 lantern slides ‘for about £250, in return for his passage ..., transport and facilities at each mission area’.⁶³ This material was eventually delivered but not until after the first version of *Pearls and Savages* – based on the 1921 trip to Torres Strait and Papua – had already toured Australia. The ABM compiled an illustrated lecture from Hurley’s material called *In the Heart of New Guinea* which toured New South Wales in 1923 and 1924.⁶⁴ In what was recognised in press notices of the time as a rather daring innovation, this was shown in churches rather than halls.

⁶¹ Hurley diary entry: ‘the primary purpose [of the trip] is to take cinematographic films & plates for a travelogue entertainment’, quoted in Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 173.

⁶² In addition to Robert Dixon’s *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, see also Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic gods: travel, representation, and colonial governance*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 72-98; Alasdair McGregor, *Frank Hurley: A Photographer’s Life*, (New York: Viking, 2004); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 178-183; Helen Ennis, *Man with a camera: Frank Hurley overseas* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002); Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee, *The Diaries of Frank Hurley 1912-1941*, (London ; New York: Anthem Press, 2011).

⁶³ Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*. 172.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

FILM IN CHURCH

An innovation in church circles was introduced at St Aidan's ... last night, when in place of the customary sermon a series of lantern slides depicting mission work in New Guinea and 3000ft of film entitled 'The Heart of New Guinea' ... were shown. The pictures were specially taken ... by Captain F. Hurley, and were shown by Mr. H. Spencer of the cinema department of the Australian Board of Missions, by means of a Graphoscope Junior machine.⁶⁵

That the ABM boasted a 'cinema department' and that the projector make was so carefully identified, both indicate the excited sense of 'boy's toys' technical modernity now infiltrating the church. But any anxieties raised on that account were also addressed.

... Before the pictures were shown Mr Spencer made it clear that the object of screening them was not to supplant or do away with the church services, but to aid them.⁶⁶

A further newspaper notice references, somewhat defensively, the competing Hurley product, *Pearls and Savages*, while staunchly promoting *Heart of New Guinea's* value over the former in demonstrating the before-and-after effect that so frequently underpins white attitudes to Christianised natives:

Captain Hurley's picture was screened recently throughout the country, but the producers of the film declare that the picture to be screened this week on behalf of the Board of Missions is by far a finer production than anything of a like nature previously shown. ... [It] portrays the advancement of these interesting people under the spread of Christianity.⁶⁷

Thus, unlike the situation with George Tarr and the *Southern Cross* film, Hurley's photographs and footage were earmarked from the outset as belonging either to a missionary or commercial enterprise. However the press comments suggest ambivalence as to whether the two illustrated lectures were seen as being in competition. *Heart of New Guinea* was loyally offered as a 'finer production', but Hurley's fame is freely used as a drawcard for the mission show, suggesting that audiences for each substantially overlapped.

But scenic vistas rather than mission work dominated *Heart of New Guinea*. Indeed a fifty-fifty split between mission images and 'general views' had been stipulated by

⁶⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1923, 8.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Daily Advertiser*, Wagga Wagga NSW, 2 July 1923, 2

Hurley in the original contract.⁶⁸ He must have felt the former to be just too boring without scenic alleviation. The result was that by 1924 it was declared by the Church hierarchy to be ‘absolutely useless as a means of propaganda.’⁶⁹ Again, as with George Tarr and Hector MacQuarrie, this clash of values seems unsurprising, in hindsight, when an evangelical organisation commissions work from secular commercial agents. To avoid such problems, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, missionaries increasingly began to take more personal control of their propaganda. Meanwhile, however, the tensions between commercial and mission expectations continued in the afterlife of the *Southern Cross* film.

Afterlife of Ten Thousand Miles in the Southern Cross

In early 1925 the New Zealand office of the Melanesian Mission sent the negative original to its London branch, offering to sell it outright for £750 and suggesting the London office recoup the outlay by seeking a commercial purchaser for the UK and USA rights.

The previous year or two had seen many negotiations around the sale of the film, or parts of the film (the NZ Anglican Board of Missions, for instance, bought a 3000ft edited segment for £50), being conducted between Anglican officers in New Zealand, Australia and England, amidst increasingly querulous correspondence. The arguments centred on whether the film was saleable as a self-contained commercial entity to secular distribution networks or should be used, in whole or in part, purely for mission propaganda. There is much heated discussion between Auckland and London as to the status of the rights and ownership of the negative, in which Tarr’s fifty-fifty arrangement with the Mission is highlighted as a difficulty and a source of confusion.⁷⁰ The problem and its eventual resolution are outlined in an exasperated letter dated 30 June 1925 from Reverend A.E. Corner – Kayll’s opposite number in London – to the New Zealand Archdeacon.

... I am writing this letter about the film. I have spent much time in trying to find a purchaser, and have seen some of the principle film people, including Pathé Frères, [Sidney] Bernstein and Gordon Craig. None of them have any use for it. It’s no use as a commercial investment. Craig, who runs all the big lecture films, took a lot of trouble over it. He said we would never get

⁶⁸ ABM Minutes, quoted in Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 172.

⁶⁹ ABM Minutes, *ibid.*, 183.

⁷⁰ See for example Corner to Bourne, 20 October 1924 and Bourne to Corner, 26 November 1924. JD38.

anything like the price asked for it (£750), and he strongly advised us to use it for our own propaganda work. Almost all the Missionary Societies are now showing films, and they are preparing to do so on a big scale in the Autumn. If we have not one we shall be very much out of the running with the others. I spent a morning with the firm who makes all the S.P.G. [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel] and other missionary films. They have given me an estimate to prepare ours for the screen. ... To write it up and edit it as a complete lecture film, with full description will cost us £154 for the first copy ...

Now will your Committee agree to our using the film for this purpose? The Mission will, of course, benefit by it. But our Committee is not prepared to pay £750 for the use of the negative. ... We don't think the Committee should be asked to pay anything for the use of the negative. ... Of course we could always supply N.Z. or Australia with copies of the completed film. It is useless until it is written up for exhibition purposes.

If your committee agrees to this will you kindly send me a cable to that effect as we must put it in hand to be ready for the [northern hemisphere] Autumn ...⁷¹

This letter highlights a very different situation in the UK in 1925 to that tentatively explored by Tarr and the Melanesian Mission in New Zealand in 1922. Not only is there an openly competitive milieu in which European missionary societies are scrambling for motion picture footage, but there is now a firm specialising in post-production for mission films. But the purpose of these films is clearly delineated as being for promotion rather than commercial exploitation.

Corner's proposal was accepted by telegram; the Auckland office relinquished any lingering hopes that the product might turn a direct profit or even recoup its losses; the negative was eventually returned to New Zealand and into the keeping of George Tarr. A transcript of an invoice from a commercial company shows that a positive print was taken in London, edited and augmented with '275 ordinary title cards @ 1/6 each', 'special handwritten cards re Mission, etc @ 2/6 each' and animated maps (220 ft. @ 1/6 per ft.). A zinc transit case was included in the deal, which came to a hefty £265 16s 6d.⁷² That such an investment was made in creating a sophisticated, self-contained propaganda package strongly suggests that this film had an afterlife touring the church halls of Britain, although I have not yet found evidence for that. This packaged version of the film may survive – perhaps under a different name – in the Melanesian Mission archive held by SOAS in London, but if so I was unable to identify it from the list they provided. On

⁷¹ Letter, Corner to Hawkins, 30 June 1925, JD38.

⁷² Invoice, Joseph Best, 7 January 1926, JD38.

the invoice referred to above, the *Southern Cross* title has been dropped and it is referred to simply as *Melanesia*. It would be intriguing to compare this to the remnants that survive in the NZFA, particularly as regards its intertitles, which must surely have required input from someone familiar with the field.

Whether a copy of the British version of the film found its way back to New Zealand is not known. But it is significant for the theme of this thesis that Tarr was left as caretaker of the original negative, even though ‘possession’ was still a shared arrangement.⁷³ Moreover minutes of a 1931 meeting that officially wound up the ‘Film Account’ also agreed that:

Mr Tarr should be given for his sole use and property that portion of the Film negative dealing with scenic views and native dances – in other words that portion of the negative which does not have any reference to the work of the Mission. Mr Tarr thinks he may be able to do something with it and might recoup himself somewhat.⁷⁴

Ten years on from the original trip, Tarr must have breathed a sigh of relief. But again we see the neat and almost mutually exclusive division of interest between missionary and travelogue proponents, despite their shared fascination for Melanesian imagery.

Adventures in Cannibal Land

In the course of the film’s exhibitionary life under George Tarr, its title – as displayed in newspaper advertisements – drifted ever further from its mission-inspired anchor. *10,000 Miles in the S.Y. Southern Cross* (April 1922) becomes *10,000 Miles with the Southern Cross to the Land of the Head-Hunting Cannibals* (June 1922) then *10,000 Miles to Cannibal Land in the Southern Cross* (July 1922). Eventually the *Southern Cross* is eased out of the title altogether, and the film simply becomes *10,000 Miles to Cannibal Land*. (August 1922). The effect of this, semantically, is not only to nudge the mission ship off the brand, but to replace the idea of a convoluted inter-island tour which racked up sea-miles, with the notion of travel to that far-distant, non-specific realm called ‘Cannibal Land’. Meanwhile, Melanesian Mission officials seemed neither to notice nor fight this slippage, and in their own correspondence referred to it as merely ‘The Film’ or ‘The Melanesian Film’. Later still, during the 1930s, once Tarr had come to the

⁷³ Minutes of a meeting of the Melanesian Mission Finance Board, 9 July 1931.

⁷⁴ Melanesian Mission Finance Board Minutes, 26 June 1931.

arrangement described above whereby he was allowed to reconstruct for his own commercial use segments of ‘scenic views and native dances’, it was to become the fully-fledged *Adventures in Cannibal Land*. This is evident from a tinted title included in the scene lists compiled from the material given by Tarr to Ray Hayes in 1965, as well as a 1964 interview with Hayes, in which Tarr recalls touring the film with that title in the provinces.⁷⁵ ‘Adventure’ was a prerequisite for such entertainments, with its genre focus on the supposed dangers faced by the camera-wielder rather than the indigenes. I was excited to discover this title in Australia’s NFSA, but sadly it survives only as a 49-second opening sequence. [Fig. 2.4] Nevertheless, the sequence displays precisely the visual style and tone one expects of the genre: we are in a canoe sculled by an indigenous man, gliding down a river fringed by towering tropical vegetation; then we behold a ‘type’ portrait of a man in full native regalia; a panorama of palm-fringed shorelines; a collection of jewellery artefacts (which were, in fact, part of a church offering to the local missionary, though this context – evident from the *Ten Thousand Miles* footage – has been excised by Tarr). How this fragment found its way into the NFSA but not the NZFA is a mystery.

Thus Tarr’s footage, shot in 1921 on a commission arrangement for the Melanesian Mission, splintered and diversified according to the conflicting agendas of its stakeholders. The film and its advertisements, as toured as a cine-lecture in 1922 underwent continual adjustment in the tussle between mission imagery and the adventure-travelogue that Tarr and MacQuarrie imagined the audience wanted; the British mission version was tidily repackaged with maps and new intertitles as stand-alone propaganda; and Tarr’s breakaway version shed the mission material altogether and re-envisioned himself as an intrepid adventurer amongst cannibals.

To be fair to Tarr, a considerable degree of film-making intrepidity was indeed required, though not perhaps in the ways that he implies. A postscript to his 1965 letter to Hayes relates the following anecdote:

It might interest you to know that this film was developed in an old shed up on stilts on the Tulagi waterfront, the rats running around me like a flock of sheep. I was fortunate to have been able to obtain a few blocks of ice to keep the temperature down in the developer. Year 1922.

⁷⁵ NZFA Tape #0686

This chapter has illustrated the pitfalls of a missionary organisation commissioning propaganda imagery from a would-be travelogue film-maker with an alternative agenda. It demonstrates the malleability of indigenous *representations* when appropriated by colonial agents of diverse stripes while at the same time underlining the fact that indigenous people themselves engaged with their construction, with results that did not always necessarily comply with either Christian or adventure stereotypes.

The following chapter considers the next steps in this colonial tango: a conscious collaboration between a Methodist missionary in the Solomon Isles and a commercial travelogue-adventurer, each engaged in constructing an opposing narrative. As with this chapter, the next case study shows film's capacity to shiver and split into multiples under the tension of conflicted ideologies.



Fig 2.4: Freeze-frame, NFSA ID 38098

Chapter Three: Collaboration

The thoroughly modern missionary and the American movie-maker

‘The church cannot afford to hold herself aloof ...’

Reverend Reginald Nicholson, 1924

This chapter moves on to the next stage of the mismatched connection between travelogue-adventurers and missionaries. This case study examines the logical next step to the rather unsuccessful passive commissioning considered in the previous chapter: a more active collaboration in which a missionary constructs the film he wants by editing and adding intertitles to footage shot by a cinematographer with a different agenda, who also made his own film(s) from the same footage. The result is two separate films – *The Transformed Isle* and *Black Shadows* – made from substantially overlapping imagery. The differences again illustrate the clash of values at the heart of white attitudes to Melanesian bodies.

In 1921 the Reverend Reginald Nicholson, an Australian Methodist missionary stationed in Vella Lavella in the western Solomon Islands, made contact with a visiting American film crew headed by producer Edward A. Salisbury. Local people were recruited as the cast, and the result of their collaboration was a silent motion picture – *The Transformed Isle* – later toured to much acclaim around Australia and New Zealand. [Fig. 3.1]

From the missionary point of view, the purpose of the film was to raise funds for the Australian Methodist Foreign Mission Board, which had special responsibility for the Solomon Islands. However in the 1920s the use of moving pictures for mission propaganda was a distinctly modern venture and Nicholson was its enthusiastic advocate. While touring the film through the small town cinemas and church halls of South Australia in 1924 he wrote: ‘[t]he motion picture is undoubtedly destined to become one of the biggest educational forces of this generation and the Church cannot afford to hold herself aloof from it any longer.’¹

¹ Reginald Nicholson, ‘Motion Pictures and the Church. Their Influence on the Young’, *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 19 July 1924, 14.



Fig. 3.1: Freeze-frame, *Transformed Isle* (1922). Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision.

It is clear from correspondence held in the Methodist Archives that both Australia and New Zealand took the film very seriously as a propaganda tool in which it was worth investing substantial sums. Nicholson sought £1000 to recover expenses in making and retrieving it from the USA, and the South Australia and Victoria Laymen's Missionary Movements each pledged £500 to achieve this, in return for a copy of the film and a projector. A letter from the secretary of the Victoria Movement to the secretary of the New Zealand Methodist Missionary Society explains this and goes on to express the general excitement and hope that the film will be used not only nationally throughout Australia but on both sides of the Tasman:

We are hoping that your laymen & NSW men will so help that all the states and yourself [i.e. NZ] will have a duplicate film and a projector. We cannot too highly recommend the purchase of the film to your Board and laymen, as we are confident that the missionary appeal will be greater and the picture itself is well done. It simply thrills.²

² Letter, Poppins to Sinclair, 25 December 1924. Methodist Archives, Auckland.

In March 1925 a copy of the film was duly purchased for New Zealand for £300, and a projector acquired.

Someone from the South Australia Mission Board helpfully jotted down a comparison of 'Total Circuit Returns' for various South Australia districts in two columns, one headed 'No Film 1923' and the other 'With Film 1924'. A copy of this sheet found its way to Auckland. The bottom line is impressive: 'No Film' – £286 11s 9d; 'With Film – £909 14s 1d. This underlines how the traffic in Melanesian imagery – whether for commercial gain or mission endeavour – had a fascination that translated into monetary value.

By the time Australian audiences saw Nicholson's missionary film in 1924, many would not only have been entertained by Hurley's *Pearls and Savages* but also have been enthralled by Robert Flaherty's box-office hit *Nanook of the North* (Frères Revillon/Pathé, 1922), which had screened in Australia in 1923 and New Zealand in 1924, and thus already have been introduced to the notion that 'non-fiction' ethnographic film could also be feature length with named characters and a narrative form that told a dramatic story.

Into this vibrant reception environment, then, came Reginald Nicholson's innovative attempt to harness a narrative cinematic experience to fund-raising missionary propaganda.

Back Story

An early attempt at a Solomon Islands mission by Roman Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century came to an abrupt and bloody end. Not until the British Protectorate was established in 1893 in the south and east, and slowly expanded in geographical stages between 1898 and 1900 to include the whole archipelago, did missionaries venture back. Attempting – not very effectively – to avoid inter-denominational rivalry, the British Commissioner, Charles Woodford, had roughly divided the Solomon Islands in the early twentieth century into 'separate spheres of action'. Roman Catholic Marists took on the northern islands (Bougainville and Buka), Anglicans the east (Malaita and Ysabel) and Methodists the western islands of Choiseul, New Georgia and Vella Lavella. For genuine theological rather than political reasons, I believe, Marists refused to recognise such agreements, as did the later arriving Seventh-Day Adventists (1914). Convert-poaching

was common and caused considerable ecclesiastical annoyance.³ The Methodist missionary presence in the western Solomon Islands began in 1902 under the benign dictatorship of Reverend J.F. Goldie, whose mission station at Roviana on New Georgia became the seat of what was effectively a semi-independent fiefdom and a thorn in the side of the Australian Mission Board for the next 50 years.⁴ In 1907, Goldie's compatriot Reverend R.C. Nicholson took over the mission at Vonunu, in the Bilua region of the south-east coast of the island of Vella Lavella, part of the New Georgia group in the Western Province. Although Nicholson referred to himself as the 'pioneer missionary' to the island, in fact a Methodist mission had been established in 1904 run by two Solomon Islander lay teaching couples – Sam and Rachel Anqarao and Ratu Aparoso Rakuita and his wife Kelerani – who were displaced by Nicholson's arrival to start over again at a satellite mission in another part of the island.⁵ Goldie was a loyal and protective *bangara* (chief) to his chosen people, but it was characteristic of his reign that indigenous staff were not ordained as ministers or promoted as colleagues, and there was little encouragement for an autonomous indigenised church that might undermine his autocracy.⁶

By 1921 Nicholson had served fourteen years in the field. He was well aware not only of the importance of promotional propaganda to raise funds but also of the impact that live presentations can have over static photographs. In 1917 and '18 he had toured Australia and New Zealand on deputation with Daniel Bula, his first convert and right-hand man. By all accounts Daniel had fascinated and charmed the locals, 'gathering large audiences and stirring up great enthusiasm for Methodist Foreign Missions'.⁷ He was, of course, presented as a before-and-after success story. In Masterton, for instance:

Daniel Bula delighted the audience with a racy speech in his own language, which was interpreted by the Rev. R. C. Nicholson. The latter delivered an inspiring address, showing how, when royal proclamations and punitive expeditions failed, the evangel [sic] work carried to the Solomon

³ Hugh Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: A History of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), 43-44.

⁴ George Carter, *A Family Affair: A Brief Survey of New Zealand Methodism's Involvement in Mission Overseas, 1822-1972*, (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society, 1973), 76-78.

⁵ George Carter, *Ti'e Varane: Stories about People of Courage*, (Sydney: Unichurch Publishing, 1981), 3.

⁶ John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1992), 79-81.

⁷ *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 9 November 1918, 13

Islands by the missionaries had succeeded in transforming people of cannibalistic savage tastes into decent, peace-loving citizens. Daniel Bula was a sample.⁸

Bula's display had a significant impact on income: the collection on this occasion 'amounted to £14 4s 11d, and further promises were received of £26 7s 6d'.⁹ According to Methodist historian Eric Hames, the Nicholson-Bula double-act was a winner:

Between them they sold the Solomons to our people. Auckland got into such a fever that it wanted to double the budget for missions in twelve months, up to 30,000 pounds.¹⁰

After the trip, Bula returned to Vella Lavella to continue the mission work while Nicholson enlisted for the remainder of the war, only subsequently returning to the Solomons.¹¹ It seems that he was not shipped to battlefields overseas, so one could speculate that during this enlistment period in Australia Nicholson at last had leisure and opportunity to experience for himself the visual and emotional impact of ubiquitous cinema and lantern slide presentations. Moreover, in 1919 the Methodist Episcopal Centenary held in Columbus, Ohio featured an enormous custom-built motion picture screen, a clear Methodist endorsement of the educational potential of harnessing spectacle for religious purposes.¹² The Ohio Centenary was a vast and ambitious undertaking, showcasing international mission work along the lines of World Fair exhibitions. A story printed in the *New York Independent* on July 12 1919 was syndicated internationally, including in the *Adelaide Advertiser* of August 18 1919, under the headline: 'A Great Achievement – Methodist Church in USA Raises Over £28,000,000 in Eight Days'.¹³ If the event was making headlines in the secular press then it must also have been making waves within Methodist circles internationally.

⁸ *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 14 June 1917, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Eric Hames, *Coming of age : The United church, 1913-1972*, (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society, 1974), 28.

¹¹ *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 9 November 1918, 13.

¹² Terry Lindvall, *Sanctuary Cinema: Origins of the Christian Film Industry*, (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 111-112. See also www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Centenary_Exhibition_of_American_Methodist_Missions?rec=1388

¹³ *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 18 August 1919, 7. The extraordinary figure of £28,000,000 turns out, on closer reading, to be projected funds pledged over the following five years. Although it counted promises rather than cash in hand and hence may be over-optimistic, the astonishing sum nevertheless attests to the degree of evangelical enthusiasm of the period.

Thus Nicholson, buoyed by the success of his tour with Bula and enthused by the potential for motion pictures to play a role in winning hearts and minds, returned from Australia to the Bilua mission station after the War well primed for his apparently chance meeting with the American film crew which resulted in *The Transformed Isle*.

From Barbarism to Christianity: the film's geography

Subtitled 'From Barbarism to Christianity - fifteen years amongst the head-hunters of Vella Lavella', the film begins with a brief introduction to geography, terrain and occupants, in which the people of the Solomon Islands are characterised as having been 'a cruel, crafty, vicious race ... numbered amongst the most bloodthirsty savages in the Pacific'. We then witness an extended re-enactment of a head-hunting raid which occupies almost twenty minutes of the film's sixty-minute length. After a call to arms on the part of a chiefly protagonist named 'Gau', we follow the launching and sculling of dazzling war canoes in a three-pronged attack against an enemy island. On landing, we see the attackers creep stealthily through bush before launching a successful onslaught against unsuspecting villagers. The ensuing battle involves much rough action using a considerable number of enthusiastic extras. The warriors then make a triumphant return back across the sea to their waiting womenfolk; genuine skulls (not, unsurprisingly, fresh heads!) are carefully extracted from their pandanus wrappings and gleefully brandished to the camera; and the sequence ends with a ceremonial dance of victory on the beach.

But the film is not just concerned with indigenous ritual violence – disreputable white men are also shown as part of the 'bad old days' before the coming of Christianity: both a 'blackbirding' raid and the dastardly abduction of a native woman by white crew-members are staged.¹⁴

Nicholas Thomas has written elsewhere about the inaccuracies and elisions of these representations.¹⁵ Relations between unchristian whites and indigenous locals are represented as intrinsically abusive and violent acts of rape and kidnap perpetrated on

¹⁴ Blackbirding refers to the illegal kidnapping and forced transportation of Melanesian men from their homes to work as cheap or slave labour on the sugar plantations of Fiji and Queensland. This was a feature of early labour practices during the first half of the 1870s. It was displaced by indentured labour contracts whereby men signed up for several years in return for a cash payment. See Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation; a History of Solomon Islands Labour Migration, 1870-1914* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1973), 26-27.

¹⁵ Nicholas Thomas, 'Colonial Conversions', 366-389, esp. 381ff.

passive victims. In fact, despite undoubted exploitation, kidnapping workers had been a relatively short-lived abuse during the 1870s. Voluntary participation by Solomon Islanders – overwhelmingly Malaitans not Vella Lavellans – in the labour trade to Queensland and Fiji had been an established practice for many years. Likewise, consensual sexual relationships between white traders and indigenous women were common. As for headhunting in the Western Solomons, this too was, of course, an historically situated practice, not an essential defining attribute. While headhunting had certainly been practiced in the Western Solomons in pre-European times as a means of accruing chiefly prestige via the ritual desecration of enemies, the influx of iron axes and rifles that occurred after contact with European traders in mid-century destabilised the local political economy and made efficient mass raids possible.¹⁶ Flotillas of war canoes did indeed devastate communities, leading to substantial depopulation on some parts of some islands. These mass raids peaked during the late 1880s; in 1891, after the murder of a white trader, the British Protectorate signalled its intention to make the Solomons safe for white commercial and industrial development. It sent the *HMS Royalist* under Captain Davis to instigate a punitive crackdown – euphemistically known as pacification – which involved the confiscation and burning of entire villages and priceless war canoes around the Roviana Lagoon on New Georgia. The expedition apparently achieved its goal, at the expense, according to W.H.R. Rivers, of zest for life.¹⁷ A ‘canoe-borne’ native police force of Ysabel men was established on Gizo. ‘So effective was this mobile force that by 1900 they had stopped head-hunting from Roviana, Simbo, and Mbilua and enforced peace among adjacent peoples.’¹⁸ Thus, years before Nicholson began his mission on Vella Lavella in 1907, pacification had been achieved for economic reasons using a gunship, not for religious reasons using the gospel. Hence his claim in the subtitle to have spent fifteen years amongst ‘head-hunters’, together with his attributing the cessation of these practices solely to the advent of Christianity, is disingenuous.

¹⁶ Peter Sheppard et al., ‘The Archaeology Of Head-Hunting In Roviana Lagoon, New Georgia’, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109:1 (2000): 9–37; John MacLachlan McKinnon, *Bilua Changes: culture contact and its consequences, a study of the Bilua of Vella Lavella in the British Solomon Islands*, (PhD, Victoria University of Wellington, 1972); Christine Dureau, ‘Skulls, Mana And Causality’, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109:1 (2000): 71–97; Judith Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: a history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800-1978*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 90-91.

¹⁷ W.H.R. Rivers, ‘The Psychological Factor’, in *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

¹⁸ Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 107.

Nonetheless the arrival of the heroic Missionary (the capital 'M' features in the intertitle) is the turning point of the film, signalling 'The DAWN of a NEW DAY'. Nicholson plays his younger self arriving by boat and being piggy-backed to shore amidst a host of welcoming Islanders. His arrival signals a distinct change of mood and tone in the film. Scenes of peaceful village life (fishing, net-making, children playing) and indigenous artistry (an intricately carved shell decoration is reverently displayed by its maker) can be shown, as these are now somehow associated with the Missionary's calming presence. Inclusion of such scenes during the early segment would have complicated the message that pre-Christian islanders were submerged in an unrelenting 'Night of Savagery'. But there is also a new emphasis on women, children and what Nicholson terms (via an intertitle) the 'sadness of heathenism', rather than on energetic, masculine warriors.

Then comes the transformation: visually signalled by European-style construction (one sequence shows Nicholson preaching to a crowd from the verandah of the mission bungalow, another a road cut through the rainforest); clothing (young women wearing white dresses are lined up before the cameraman, their self-conscious smiles and giggles having the unmistakable air of being coaxed from off-camera) and – the cornerstone of Methodist conversion methodology in the Solomons – 'boys' husking coconuts on the mission copra plantation ('because', says the intertitle, 'they are taught that there is no such thing as a lazy Christian').

Baptism is shown to confer individuality in the form of a personal Christian (i.e. European) name. Several white-clad, mission-living young men and women are individually introduced, via intertitle, by European Christian name – Silas, Amos, Doris, Myra – to the camera, an honour not bestowed on any of the village-living people. The exception is the three chiefly warriors introduced by name as the raid leaders during the action sequence – 'Gau', 'Osopo' and 'Kavi'. But these are *dramatis personae* inserted by Salisbury into his own film, *Black Shadows* – of which more later – in what is effectively a separate project, diametrically at odds with Nicholson's.

Daniel Bula himself appears in the film *Transformed Isle* in three different ways. As his contemporary self we see him flanking Nicholson on the mission-house verandah as the latter addresses a gathering, and drilling young men dressed in white laplaps as they march in military formation into church. Disciplining of the body is a key visual marker of the before-and-after effect of Methodist conversion. Bula also appears as a lad in a

filmed re-enactment of a scene described in Nicholson's book – an anecdote of his amusing 'mistakes' when he first became Nicholson's 'cook boy' during the early months of the mission.¹⁹ The cook boy is 'played' by a lad who is younger than Daniel would have been in 1907 (about thirteen); Nicholson again plays his younger self, entertainingly miming the difference between ink and sauce for the benefit of both camera and an on-screen entourage of grinning men and giggling children. Finally, an intertitle showing Bula's still photograph above his name in emphatic upper case is inserted at the end of the sequence where young mission men – including himself – are introduced to camera. Daniel Bula died suddenly about a year after filming, shortly before the period when Nicholson would have been editing the finished version. This photographed intertitle was certainly added posthumously, as the filmic equivalent of a commemorative headstone. Thus in one form or another Daniel's life silently and unobtrusively pervades this film, as re-enactment, as real-time documentary and as grave marker. As I will argue below, his presence also pervaded the extra-filmic logistics and community effort involved in making it.

The final scene of *Transformed Isle* is shot from a high viewpoint. It shows white-clad villagers flocking towards the little white church on a hill cleared of native vegetation. As the accompanying intertitle states, 'The Path Ahead is Clear', as is the expected response to the final rhetorical question, 'Is The Work of Foreign Missions Worthwhile?' When the film arrived from Australia for its New Zealand tour, it came with a list of suggestions from the Australian Mission secretary to his opposite number in Auckland. Not surprisingly, this included the recommendation that a 'Collection and Appeal' be made immediately afterwards.²⁰ Another of the secretary's recommendations is significant for my argument that missionary propaganda operated in creative tension with generic adventure-travelogue material circulating as popular entertainment at the same time:

5. Get pianist to play "Pearls & Savages" (Palings 2/6) for first 2000 feet. Last 1000 (Transformation scene), missionary tunes.²¹

¹⁹ Reginald Nicholson, *The Son of a Savage: The Story of Daniel Bula*, (London: Epworth Press, 1924), 37.

²⁰ Letter Amos to Sinclair, 2 July 1925, Methodist Archives, quoted in Allan Davidson, 'New Zealand Methodists and 'Missionary Propaganda' in the 1920s', *Wesley Historical Society Journal*, supplement, 2006.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

This refers to sheet music published by Frank Hurley and Emmanuel Aarons, supposedly based on recordings taken by Hurley on his trips to Torres Strait and Papua, and which Hurley used for his shows.²²

Nature, Nurture and a Knife-edge

Although the film's structure is simplistic and painfully paternalistic, there are some significant ideas implicit within it. The emphasis on before versus after, of light following darkness, that transformation is both possible and desirable, posits culture as non-essential, malleable, a product of nurture not nature. If cultural behaviours are as hard-wired as skin colour, then the money and effort going into conversion are a waste of time.²³ In terms of the Christian conversion narrative, missionaries are always walking a knife-edge – on the one hand they must present heathen darkness – if there is no heathen darkness then why are they there? But equally they must present their charges as capable of change, worthy of salvation. It is a tricky balancing act, especially when the most dramatic of heathen practices are already a matter of history. It also requires the additional nuance that original barbarity must be shown to be sufficiently embedded that it would not have died out of its own accord or through autonomous cultural adaptation. The *external* introduction of Christianity must be shown as both a necessary and sufficient cause in itself to achieve it, without reference to other colonising influences or to history, politics or economics. Hence, for example, the film manages to give the impression that the mission plantation is a uniquely Methodist idea whereas in fact big commercial concerns such as Lever's Pacific Plantations and subsidiaries of the Burns Philp steamship company, as well as many smaller businesses and indigenous family enterprises, were actively involved in coconut plantation development from the turn of the century onwards.²⁴ After the overseas labour trade ceased in 1911, thousands of young men lived and worked for cash wages on these plantations, usually contracted for two years, and often away from their home islands.²⁵

²² Emmanuel Aarons and Frank Hurley, *Pearls & Savages: A Cycle of Papuan Melodies*, sheetmusic, (Sydney: Paling, 1921)

²³ Thomas, 'Colonial Conversions', 374.

²⁴ Judith Bennett, 'Roots of conflict in Solomon Islands. "Though much is taken, much abides": legacies of tradition and colonialism', (ANU Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies: *State Society and Governance in Melanesia*, 2002), 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

Alternative Constructions: Edward Salisbury Plays his Part

Movies are artfully constructed artefacts. Quite apart from the framing of shots and direction of participants, raw footage undergoes extensive post-production cutting, editing and splicing before emerging as an artefact for public consumption. The splicing editor controls structure, pace and flow, as well as the intertitles that function, like photograph captions, to constrain and direct the message.

By definition, films are unstable, unfinished – re-editing is always possible as long as you can get access to the film reel. Intertitles can be added or removed, and, once talkies arrived, voiceovers can be retrospectively added.

Bearing that in mind, let us revisit the other contributor to this project – Edward A. Salisbury and his film crew. Who was Edward Salisbury and what was the nature of this serendipitous collaboration? As told in the Methodist press, the story goes that a film crew just happened to be cruising the Pacific by ocean yacht. They landed at Vella Lavella planning to stay for just two hours, but the Reverend Nicholson persuaded them to stay for two weeks, during which time the film was made.²⁶

As far as I am aware, little attention has been paid to Salisbury in this context. Academic discussion of *The Transformed Isle* seems to take Nicholson's statement – asserted in an intertitle – that it was filmed under his direction and supervision at face value.

Salisbury was an independent adventurer and film-maker who clearly had either private means or substantial backers. The *Los Angeles Times* of 19 January 1921 carried the headline 'SAIL TODAY FOR SAVAGE COASTS' over a story detailing Salisbury's proposed venture. Interestingly the article places early emphasis on filming – one of its sub-headlines reads 'Round-the-World Trip Will Bring Film Harvest' – immediately suggesting the colonising notion that far-flung places are ripe resources, freely available for commercial reaping and gathering of goods or, in this case, images. The article continues:

With 150,000 feet of film stored in the hold, a trio of camera men among her passengers and a big supply of trinkets and jewelry, the yacht *Wisdom II* will set sail this morning at 9 o'clock on the longest cruise ever started from Los Angeles Harbour. The *Wisdom II* is owned by Dr. Edward A.

²⁶ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 'The Transformed Isle', 16 August 1924, 8. Diana Roberts, 'From Hollywood to Vella Lavella, *Touchstone*, November 2004, Methodist Archives.
http://www.methodist.org.nz/touchstone/lead_articles/2004/november_2004/methodist_archives_11_04.

Salisbury of Los Angeles and has been outfitting ever since last October for a voyage around the world that will take the party of seventeen into strange lands seldom visited by white men.²⁷

Presumably the 'big supply of trinkets and jewelry' is intended as gifts with which to woo natives, but it is notable that the journalist considers it unnecessary to make this explicit, as if this is common knowledge of how civilised explorers are to interact with uncivilised indigenes. A later passage gives a further insight into how Salisbury envisages his interactions with the people he may meet:

A special room for the development of films has been fitted up and a projecting machine is also being taken along so that films showing motor cars, flying machines and other features of modern life can be shown to natives of wild coasts.²⁸

This is a revealing passage on several levels. It shows Salisbury's touchingly ethnocentric ideas of what might interest foreigners. It also indicates a certain naivety in his belief that the places he will be visiting are wholly innocent of technological modernity, even in 1921. While the Solomon Islands were certainly relatively undeveloped, with most people living in hamlets on subsistence agriculture, foreign warships had been patrolling the archipelago since the 1870s and Burns Philps steamers out of Sydney started making regular runs in 1896. A steady influx of metal tools, guns, fabric, tinned goods and tobacco had been arriving for decades, vastly increasing in the twentieth century with the growth of a local cash economy based on commercial copra exploitation.²⁹

Literary lineages

However, long before he had reached the Solomons, Salisbury, just like Martin Johnson before him, had met with inevitable disillusionment and, to his credit, coped with good-humour. Or, at least, he succeeded in translating his disappointment into a literary form of self-deprecating irony for the purposes of his travelogue magazine articles. His trip had taken him and his crew on an east-west trajectory which had included Hiva Oa in the Marquesas, Tahiti, Samoa and Fiji. In an article later published in *Asia* magazine, Salisbury ruefully contrasts his erotic imaginings of the Marquesas – fuelled by Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846), which was itself fuelled by Bougainville's descriptions of Tahiti

²⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 'Sail Today For Savage Coasts', 19 January 1921, II6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Bennett, 'Roots of conflict in Solomon Islands', 3.

in *Voyage autour du monde* (1771) – with a contemporary ‘reality’. On reaching landfall at their first Marquesan island, he writes:

I thought of the hundred romantic tales I had heard of these islands from boyhood--Bougainville, Porter, the mutiny of the "Bounty". I pictured the island girls swimming out and swarming over the rails of Melville's ship, clinging to their shrouds, laughing, their long, heavy black hair only half covering perfectly formed naked bodies. ... Half an hour we waited. Then we saw a single little outrigger canoe heading toward us. It floated against the yacht's side. Three brown faces, sickly and drawn, one smallpox scarred, stared up at us. The legs of the man steering were hideously swollen. Elephantiasis.

"What place is this?" we asked in French. The bloated man lifted his face listlessly.

"A leper village," he replied.³⁰

Salisbury deploys ironic contrast again later in the same article as they reach Suva:

The thing I remembered principally about the Fijians was that a generation ago they had been the fiercest cannibals of the South Seas.

... The next morning we stood into Suva Harbor on the island of Viti Levu. A 15,000-ton steamer and also two smaller ships were alongside stout concrete docks on which worked gangs of Fijians--tall, dark, strongly made, their masses of bushy black hair impossible for any style of hat. Near them were swarms of turbaned Hindus, imported from India for labor. Ashore, automobiles rolled merrily along well-paved streets, lined with concrete stores. At each important street intersection were bareheaded, barefooted, khaki-clad Fiji traffic policemen. On the slope of the hill back of the town were numbers of fine residences surrounded by gardens or small parks. And we dined that night at an ultra-modern hotel, the best in the South Seas, among men and women in conventional evening clothes. A Carnegie library on the main street completed the picture.

We had come to wild, cannibal Fiji.³¹

This strikes one as being an excellent, and plausible, word-picture of colonial-era Suva, albeit one drawn from a wealthy white expatriate point of view (it being unlikely that much ‘bushy black hair’ was in evidence amongst the diners in evening dress at the ‘ultra-modern hotel’). The attribution ‘fiercest cannibals of the South Seas’ is of course the brownie badge awarded to whichever Melanesian location is currently under consideration. And, as always, these cannibals are situated in the past, but not long in the past – only ‘a generation ago’. History is kept on a short leash, never allowed to wander

³⁰ Edward Salisbury, 'Cruising in Coral Seas: Pen-Pictures of Vanishing Races,' *Asia*, August 1922.

³¹ *Ibid.*

off too far, always close enough to be tweaked back to heel, even when, as in this case, it is with wry irony: 'We had come to wild, cannibal Fiji.'

Thus Salisbury contrives to deploy the conventional tropes of the Polynesia-Melanesia divide – on the one hand, feminine Polynesian eroticism and, on the other, masculine Melanesian savagery – while simultaneously demonstrating their falseness in both cases under the conditions of contemporary life in a colonised country. He gives his readers cake even as he pulls away the plate. This doubling of presence-absence, this constant invoking of what is not manifest, is a characteristic technique of the travelogue-adventurers, one which allows the continued currency of certain images and epithets regardless of the lack of evidence. It suggests a powerful yearning for the absent phenomenon. A Jungian analysis would suggest that these tropes are therefore projections of suppressed aspects of (white) consciousness - what Jung called the 'ethnic shadow'.³² But the very literary lineage invoked by Salisbury suggests that these constructions reside less in the subterranean streams of the unconscious as in that demonstrable manifestation of collective consciousness known as Western literature. Ideas circulate and perpetuate themselves through a network of cultural transmission. In the passage quoted above Salisbury references youthful literary sources in Bougainville, Melville and the *Bounty* mutiny (probably he means R. M. Ballantyne's novel *The Lonely Island* (1880)). Later in the same article he mentions being referred to (by disaffected erstwhile crew-members) as a 'reincarnated Wolf Larsen' – a less than complimentary reference to adventure-writer Jack London's captain in his thriller *The Sea-Wolf* (1904). Wolf Larsen, though, despite being a violent bully, is a powerful and extremely masculine man. Hence, one suspects, Salisbury's willingness to repeat the slur against himself: it lends him a certain literary glamour and aligns him with a treasured adventure-story tradition.

Literary connections also resonate in the fact that, before leaving Los Angeles, Salisbury had arranged to rendezvous with travel writer Frederick O'Brien on Samoa, who would then join the cruise.³³ O'Brien was the (supposed) author of the 1919 best-seller *White Shadows in the South Seas*,³⁴ and had been living in American Samoa. *White Shadows in*

³² Jo Collins, 'The Ethnic Shadow: Jung, Dreams and The Colonial Other', *Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language*, 2009.

³³ *Los Angeles Times*, 'Sail Today For Savage Coasts', 19 January 1921, II6.

³⁴ According to William Holtz, although O'Brien supplied the plot it was actually ghost-written by Rose Wilder Lane, who, unacknowledged, grew embittered by O'Brien's prosperity at her expense. William Holtz, *The Ghost in the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri

the South Seas recorded the author's year in the Marquesas, liberally spiced with traveller's tales. It was a direct descendant of Melville's *Typee* not only in its setting but in its disgust at the corruption of Edenic innocence by white greed. The acceptance by Western readers of this guilt-ridden inversion of white supremacist assumptions is an intriguing phenomenon which can be traced back to Rousseau, Diderot and Voltaire, but which also seems intimately linked to modernity-related angst in the immediate post-War period. Popular interest in the Pacific in this period at this time can be judged from the fact that *White Shadows* was listed in *Publisher Weekly*'s top ten hard-cover best-sellers – rather dubiously in the non-fiction category – for 1920 and 1921, right up there with John M. Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.³⁵ Jeffrey Geiger in fact cites the book as 'set[ting] off a wave of popular interest in the islands and cultures of the South Pacific'.³⁶ O'Brien was famous and rich as a result. In 1928 a fictional film of the same name would be made by MGM which reconfigured a different O'Brien story into a tragic tale of doomed love steeped in anti-colonial guilt.³⁷ This film was selected as the vehicle for MGM's first foray into using a soundtrack synchronised to an actor's speaking mouth (having been pipped by Warner Bros. the previous year with *The Jazz Singer*). The moment chosen was the key scene in which the white hero makes first contact with the beautiful golden-brown native princess (actually a Mexican actress flown in for the purpose). There is surely a remarkable symbolic nexus of film and colonialism in the fact that the first word ever heard by MGM audiences was that ur-utterance of cross-cultural encounter: 'Hello'.

Press, 1995), 103. This is germane to my thesis since it reminds us of the literary nature of colonial imaginings about Pacific paradises: they do not require actual visits.

³⁵ <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~immer/books1920s>

³⁶ Jeffrey Geiger, 'Imagined Islands: 'White Shadows in the South Seas' and Cultural Ambivalence', *Cinema Journal* 41.3 (2002): 98–121.

³⁷ Ibid. *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928), dir. W. S. van Dyke, starring Monte Blue and Raquel Torres. Robert Flaherty was originally chosen to direct but was sacked for taking too long.

Elegy

But, back in 1921, Edward Salisbury, bolstered by the literary heritage of the writer-adventurer, was out to make a movie in the spirit of salvage: he begins his article: 'The "Wisdom II" had been made into a motion-picture laboratory, for I purposed to try to catch and hold for history a photographic record of the fast dying races of the South Seas islands.'³⁸ His August 1922 article for *Asia* covered the Polynesian and Fijian legs of the trip, and he clearly shot footage in Tahiti and the Marquesas (some of which, incidentally, finds its way into the Reverend Nicholson's film purporting to be Vella Lavella). But for the September 1922 issue of *Asia* he submitted not only an essay entitled 'A Napoleon of the Solomons' but also an eight-page bonus insert of photographs under the heading 'Head-hunting Through The Magic Eye'. In addition to *Asia*, a series of twelve articles was syndicated in various major newspapers under lurid headlines such as 'Eighteen Months on the Trail of Cannibals' and 'Most Bloodthirsty and Savage People on Earth'.

Clearly the agendas of these two archetypal modern white colonials, Salisbury the filmmaker and Nicholson the missionary, are in conflict. The transformation of heathens is the last thing Salisbury or his popular readership is interested in. 'A Napoleon of the Solomons' refers to the same notional protagonist, 'Gau', who stars in the head-hunting sequence of the *Transformed Isle*. The *Asia* article begins by introducing him and describing him in the present tense: 'Gau is the war-leader of the most famous head-hunters of the South Seas ...' However the article emphasises the past – 'the Lost Art of War'³⁹ – and its overall tone is elegiac for 'the loss of the old flavour and zest of life that will return no more'.⁴⁰ Salisbury uses the 'Napoleon' analogy to praise Gau ('cunning as well as brave'⁴¹) for uniting various tribes into a unified fighting force capable of mass raids over hundreds of miles. He then goes on to describe how this stopped:

And then off Vella Lavella appeared, one day, a great grey canoe with guns that could kill a score of warriors with one bullet. The natives fled into the hills. The white men had come. They landed

³⁸ Salisbury, 'Cruising in Coral Seas'.

³⁹ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', *Asia*, September 1922, 708.

⁴⁰ Salisbury, 'Head-Hunting Through the Magic Eye', *Asia*, September 1922, n.p.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and, with deliberation and thoroughness, destroyed every war-canoe they could find. Gau's power was broken ... The great chief had led his last head-hunt.⁴²

Needless to say his account is over-simplified to the point of nonsense – white men had been fuelling the carnage by trading in firearms and metal axes since long before 'pacification'. However in essence it is true. Judith Bennett confirms that in the 1880s astonishingly huge fleets of canoes from the Western Province of the Solomon Islands did indeed carry out massive raids against Choiseul and Santa Isabel.⁴³ One such famed warlord was Ingava of Roviana Lagoon (d. 1906); another was Maghratulo of Mbilua, Vella Lavella (d. c.1893).⁴⁴ If we assume that Salisbury was told specifically Vella Lavellan stories, Maghratulo may be the model for 'Gau'. McKinnon elucidates the historical economic processes by which the power of these 'big men' burgeoned mid-century along with their monopoly of particular white trader relationships; how the trade in 'tortoiseshell' (actually the shell of hawksbill turtles) was intimately interconnected with annual, escalating mass head-hunting raids; how a growing, unified peace at home, was indeed, Napoleonic-like, purchased at the expense of war further afield; and at last how the domination of the big men inevitably dwindled as they lost their monopoly on trade negotiations and the demand for tortoiseshell declined as that for copra increased. Times changed. 'Pacification', while deeply demoralising and doubtless a contributory factor, was not by itself the conclusive reason for the end of mass headhunting raids.⁴⁵

However, back in the Hollywood version, Salisbury gives the colonial powers a religious rather than an economic rationale for imposing pacification:

He recognized the white man as his master, and this master made a strange law: 'Thou shalt not kill.' But a law to be obeyed. For ... at Tulagi, the tiny capital of the white chief, there is a tall wooden gallows, from which swing the bodies of those who break this law.⁴⁶

Perhaps Salisbury is being deliberately ironic in couching in Christian terms his juxtaposition of native corpses with colonial rule, but again his assessment of the situation

⁴² Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 707.

⁴³ Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*, 91.

⁴⁴ T.W. Edge-Partington, 'Ingava, Chief of Rubiana, Solomon Islands: Died 1906', *Man* 7 (1907): 22–23. McKinnon, *Bilua Changes*, 95–101.

⁴⁵ McKinnon, *Bilua Changes*, passim.

⁴⁶ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 707.

is more accurate than Nicholson's, who gives credit for 'pacification' only to God, not the gallows.

If, as Salisbury suggests, his 'Gau' is around fifty years old in 1920 then he may well remember something of the great raids of the 1880s from his childhood, but it seems doubtful that he himself would have been old enough to participate. In 1908 another inhabitant of the Western Province, Anggo of Simbo, drew for the anthropologist Hocart extraordinary pictures of massed war canoes; but he too was drawing from memory, describing how things once had been, not how they were now.⁴⁷ Neither pencil drawings nor filmed re-enactment, then, are taken from life, but are representations of imagined or remembered ideas.

In commenting on indigenous 'loss of the old flavour and zest of life' Salisbury is following W.H.R. Rivers, who bore witness to this melancholy in 1907.⁴⁸ Rivers suggested that the adoption of Christianity went some way to mitigate the loss and in this is more positive about the mission's role than Salisbury, who writes:

Frequently I am asked how much the missionaries have been able to do towards Christianizing the savages of the Solomons. Little, I am afraid. It seems to me the chief thing the natives have learned from the missionaries is to play.⁴⁹

The pretentious piety of that 'Little, I am afraid,' is nauseatingly disingenuous. The 'play' refers back to a photograph showing a group of men and youths captioned (inaccurately) 'Natives of Vella Lavella Receiving Instruction in Bowling'. The sub-caption summarises Salisbury's dismissive position on missionaries – a neat, total inversion of how Nicholson sees his own project: 'The One Missionary on the Island Has Attempted to Substitute Simple Games and Simple Work for the Lost Art of War and Thus to Bring Some Content to a People Who Are Wretched Without Their Principal Occupation.'⁵⁰ However if it is true that this question about Christianization was one that was 'frequently' put to him, that in itself suggests a public awareness of and interest in the missionary enterprise even among the secular social circles of wealthy Euro-American tourists and *Asia* readers

⁴⁷ Nicholas Thomas, 'Introduction' in Nicholas Thomas and Peter Brunt, eds., *Art in Oceania: A New History*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 11-23, 16.

⁴⁸ W.H.R. Rivers, 'The Psychological Factor' in *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922)

⁴⁹ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 710.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 708.

and writers. It also makes it all the more remarkable that there is absolutely no mention in the article of the filming of the footage that eventually comprises the second half of the *Transformed Isle* film. And yet he and/or his camera crew did shoot it. Thus the tension between Salisbury and Nicholson, between travelogue-adventurer and missionary, is palpable even as their relationship is symbiotic.

Whose script? Side-lining the missionary.

Salisbury's relationship with Nicholson is described very differently in the *Asia* article than the version emerging from the Methodist press. The Methodist story is that Nicholson instigated the film: Salisbury's yacht intended stopping at Vonunu for only a short while to allow the film crew to take scenic shots, but Nicholson persuaded them to stay on 'for two weeks' on Vella Lavella to allow time to make a much longer film. In contrast, according to Salisbury's account, he 'had picked [Nicholson] up' on Gizo (a small island south-east of Vella Lavella and seat of the provincial government of the Western Province) as he (Salisbury) toured with the local government agent. While it is probable that Salisbury did indeed give Nicholson a lift home on the *Wisdom II*, the tone of the phrase 'I had picked him up' connotes a disparity in size and power between picker and pickee that is maintained throughout. Thus Salisbury paints himself as master of the project from the start, even telling his readers that he had to persuade Nicholson and the local British government representative to co-operate: 'The Missionary and the British resident feared that the staging of a head-hunting raid, with its realistic reproduction of past battles, would arouse all the dormant passions of the natives,' he writes. 'Finally they yielded.'⁵¹ The phrase 'dormant passions' is a useful device, managing to assert the essential, innate nature of behaviours that are not in fact being displayed. Thus the expression operates identically to the reductive epithets 'cannibal' and 'head-hunter', which, as discussed earlier, act to make ever-present that which in fact remains unseen.

Salisbury acknowledges the mission's existence. Ever the movie director, he even provides a dramatic screenplay for the missionary's imagined arrival in 1907:

The small boat from the trading schooner landed them with their few bundles of baggage on the beach and then raced back to the ship. They looked about. Above, on the plateau, they could see the thatched roofs of a village, but neither man, woman nor child. ... The young Australian looked

⁵¹ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 709, 707.

out toward the ship and swung up his arm to show that all was well. He and the woman silently watched the vessel sail away, then turned and hand in hand walked up the rough path ... Soon, as if by signal, appeared out of the jungle the people whom they had come to teach the ways of the white man's God ... The white girl crept close to her husband, not daring to look at these fierce head-hunters and cannibals ... Then [chief Gau] made a sign – and the menacing circle melted away. The young missionary's cool courage had won.⁵²

So fully realised is this scene in cinematic terms that it must have been a disappointment to Salisbury not to have shot it for the film. *The Transformed Isle* has a much less dramatically satisfying but more historically accurate re-enactment of the arrival scene involving no pretty, frightened wife (Nicholson did not marry till 1913) but a warm welcome by hordes of polite and helpful Vella Lavellans and the customary ungainly piggy-back from launch to shore that white men of the period seemed to require. Since Salisbury, left to himself, would undoubtedly have directed an arrival scene closer to the 'screenplay' quoted above, this demonstrates that Nicholson was far from voiceless in this project. At the time of writing (presumably around mid-1922) the filmed piggy-back version of the re-enactment of Nicholson's 1907 arrival, which contradicts in every detail the *Asia* text version, had already been shot. This shows that Salisbury had no intention of allowing his *Asia* readership to be aware of the extent of missionary involvement in his film project.

While he indirectly acknowledges Nicholson's role in facilitating his introduction to his star – '... on the sand outside Nicholson's house, I had my first meeting with Gau'⁵³ – Salisbury's article allows the missionary only a brief further appearance in the role of interpreter, and there is no mention whatsoever of the filming of the 'after' side of the conversion equation. Indeed Salisbury further sidelines the missionary by presenting him as worn out and ill. He is first introduced as 'burned gaunt with a thousand nights of fever',⁵⁴ and subsequently referred to as being 'down with one of his frequent attacks of fever'.⁵⁵ This allows Salisbury to present his relationship to 'Gau' as virtually unmediated

⁵² Ibid., 708.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 707.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 708.

and unsupervised. With Nicholson ill, language interpretation, he writes, was provided by 'Gau's son', who now 'lived as a "mission man"'.⁵⁶

This unnamed indigenous translator was almost certainly Daniel Bula. As well as translation it is highly probable that he was actively involved in the extra-filmic logistics. Salisbury writes of this mission-living 'Gau's son' as providing not only his services as a translator but also, conveniently, a close family connection to 'Gau'. He is, besides, trusted by the missionary to handle these interactions in his absence. Assuming that this is true (and Salisbury certainly needed a skilled translator and facilitator), Daniel Bula would seem the obvious candidate. Nicholson writes of Bula's long apprenticeship and talent as a meticulous translator and interpreter;⁵⁷ Nicholson attests that Bula's father was indeed 'a notorious headhunter'.⁵⁸ Although such assertions are unreliable, they may well have been relayed to Salisbury. Moreover, Nicholson was accustomed to delegating to Bula, and left many customary village issues up to him, citing Daniel's considerable organisational abilities as well as his influence over local people.⁵⁹ Salisbury needs to imagine his warrior chief 'Gau' as capable of mustering his impressive cast of hundreds of co-operative and enthusiastic extras. While some chiefly facilitation would also have been a necessary precondition, McKinnon, in his analysis of mission-dependency makes it clear that nothing happened in that period without mission permission.⁶⁰ As Nikolo's 'right-hand man' on the spot, particularly one who was savvy about the white men's world following his Australasian tour in 1917, it seems more than likely that Bula was delegated to facilitate this project.

Salisbury is fond of presenting himself, through Gau's eyes, as a 'white chief', thus awarding himself the powerful masculine status he clearly feels entitled to. He presents the movie project to Gau in terms suggesting that he possesses 'followers' and 'warriors' of his own:

I told him I had a magic eye, which could always see again anything it had ever beheld, and that what my magic eye saw, my followers who looked into it when I returned home, could see also.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Nicholson, *The Son of a Savage*, 72-74.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 107-110.

⁶⁰ McKinnon, *Bilua Changes*, 128.

Then I said my warriors had heard of the fighting abilities of his men, and I wished my magic eye to see for them, that they might learn. He solemnly assented ...⁶¹

Whether this constitutes informed consent is dubious, to say the least, since there is no indication of the commercial nature of cinema or the public contexts in which the footage might be viewed. Tulagi, the small colonial capital of the Solomons, boasted at this time amenities such as hotels, clubs, golf courses and tennis courts.⁶² So there may also have been a cinema. However such facilities were strictly whites-only and were in any case far from Vella Lavella. Some – including Bula – may have known about cinemas from their travels. But knowledge of this form of entertainment for most Vella Lavellans would have been, at best, hearsay. Oddly, it does not seem to have occurred to Salisbury – at least not in the context of constructing this article – to demonstrate motion pictures to ‘Gau’ in the manner promised in the *Los Angeles Times* article when they first set sail; that is, by taking him to the yacht’s own projection room, where ‘films showing motor cars, flying machines and other features of modern life can be shown to natives of wild coasts’.⁶³ Again, the point is that Salisbury’s presentation of the project – ostensibly to ‘Gau’ but actually to his *Asia* readers – both aggrandises himself and wholly occludes the missionary.

Clearly Salisbury is aiming not for missionary ‘before and after’ propaganda but for a motion picture that will appeal to a ready market for adventure travelogue and sensationalist pseudo-ethnography. The question is, did that film, Salisbury’s film, get made? And if so how does it fit with Nicholson’s version, *The Transformed Isle*? I have not found Salisbury’s name in connection with the film in any of the documentation in the Methodist archives, which simply refers to an anonymous ‘American film crew’. Salisbury was excised from, or never existed in, any Methodist memory other than Nicholson’s. Likewise, there is no mention of a film named *The Transformed Isle* in any documentation I have so far found relating to Edward Salisbury. Nevertheless, there is indisputable evidence that Salisbury and his cameramen shot the film.

⁶¹ Salisbury, ‘A Napoleon of the Solomons’, 709.

⁶² Bennett, ‘Roots of conflict in the Solomon Islands’, 4.

⁶³ *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Sail Today For Savage Coasts’, 19 January 1921, II6

Evidence from *The Son of a Savage*

Reginald Nicholson wrote the original version of his book *The Son of a Savage: the Story of Daniel Bula* while teaching himself to edit, splice and make intertitles for his version – that is, the *Transformed Isle* version – of the footage recovered from Salisbury's filming. It was written to honour his first convert, translator and friend, Daniel Bula, who had died suddenly in 1922, at the age of twenty-eight, after a rapid illness. The book started its public life in 1924 as a 'forty-eight page booklet under the title *Daniel Bula*'.⁶⁴ That edition sold out rapidly, and the following year a much expanded edition was published in London by Epworth Press. Nicholson's book – and Daniel Bula himself – deserves closer consideration than is possible here. But the very fact that Nicholson published a popular book celebrating this man and their fifteen-year friendship is in itself a contribution to my argument that missionaries were a significant factor in humanising Melanesian otherness for European audiences. Its publication coincided not only with the circulation of *Transformed Isle* but also with C.F. Goldie's 1924 tour of New Zealand with Solomon Islanders Opeti Pina and Belshazzar Gina. This likewise generated considerable enthusiasm and funds for the mission enterprise.⁶⁵ No single piece of propaganda works in isolation, but as a synergistic package.

So what evidence does Nicholson's book *Son of a Savage* provide to confirm that Salisbury shot both the 'adventure' and 'mission propaganda' parts of the film? The main edition – that is, the expanded second edition of 1925 – contains forty photographic illustrations. Somewhat unusually for the period, each is carefully credited to a photographer or photographic studio, as if the author had learned the hard way about acknowledging copyright. Twenty-one of these are credited to one 'E. A. Salisbury'. Eight of these are stills from the first 'pre-conversion' part of the footage that became *The Transformed Isle*; two are stills from the second, 'post-conversion', part. These show the young men's marching drill ('Drill At Vella Lavella', facing 112) and the congregation flocking to the church on the hill ('The Hour of Worship', facing 113). In addition, the two other photographs on these pages – 'Daniel Addressing A Missionary Gathering' and 'Sunday at Vella Lavella' – though not direct analogues of film sequences that made

⁶⁴ Nicholson, *Son of a Savage*, 3.

⁶⁵ See for example *Evening Post*, Wellington, 21 May 1924, 3.

Nicholson's final cut, have patently been shot during the same session as film sequences that did become part of *The Transformed Isle*.

Stills are not frame enlargements from the celluloid reel, but still photographs taken on set to document the filming. They are often posed so as to duplicate scenes from the action. Prior to the Second World War, stills were often taken on large-format glass plate negatives, meaning that the images are of far higher quality than an individual frame enlargement could provide.⁶⁶ Stills are usually used for publicity purposes, though in Salisbury's case he clearly has one eye on illustrating his written articles as well as publicising his films. Only two of the twenty-one *Son of a Savage* photographs credited to Salisbury also appear in the *Asia* article that describes the filming; however again some are such close analogues that they indicate a single photo-shoot.

Evidence from Middleton in the Middle

In addition to the photographer credit on several photographs used in *Son of a Savage*, further evidence for Salisbury's crew filming the second half of *Transformed Isle* comes from Thomas Middleton, one of Salisbury's cinematographers. By 1927 Middleton was no longer working for Salisbury but was now part of the entourage of novelist and deep sea fishing enthusiast Zane Grey. Grey frequently sailed the Pacific and in April 1927 his ocean yacht *The Fisherman* was docked at Tauranga, New Zealand. A story in *Open Door*, New Zealand's Methodist Missionary journal, records that some of the yacht crew were strolling through Tauranga when Middleton noticed that *Transformed Isle* was being shown in the community hall to an audience of 600 people. He introduced himself, saying that he had helped shoot it and would love to see the whole film as he '[had] never seen the missionary parts'. A special screening was then arranged for the whole crew. Middleton said he was pleased to see the missionary scenes, as he was himself a Methodist and 'was much impressed with what he saw of missionary work in the Solomons.'⁶⁷ Evidently, while he had shot the footage, Middleton had never seen it edited into its final form. Since it is unlikely that an employee could have appropriated expensive equipment and film stock without the boss's express supervision, this clearly

⁶⁶ Ray Edmondson and Andrew Pike, *Australia's Lost Films: The Loss and Rescue of Australia's Silent Cinema*, (Canberra: National Library Australia, 1982), 11.

indicates both Salisbury's involvement with the shooting and his intention of *not* using the mission scenes for his own project.

On the cutting room floor: 'A savage Mary Pickford'

Significantly, however, several of the photographs in the *Asia* article have no correspondence to either *Transformed Isle* footage or photographs reproduced in *Son of a Savage*. This suggests that Nicholson could not fit them comfortably into his tidy conversion narrative and so rejected them as unsuitable for mission propaganda purposes. In particular there is a half-page photograph showing a 'marriage ceremony', Salisbury's lengthy explanatory caption making it clear that this is a still from a filmed re-enactment:

No clergyman ties the knot; no Lohengrin motif fills the air at a Vella Lavella marriage ceremony. The little bride-to-be, the most attractive and talented actress I could find for the role on Vella Lavella, is standing in the doorway of her father's house, as she would stand if she were actually being married ...⁶⁸

The caption goes on to describe bride-price arrangements, in the process alluding to the difficulties, cross-cultural confusions and unintended consequences arising from the missionary's attempts to discourage the practice. These difficulties largely revolve around the separation of the spheres of the mission and the villagers – a deliberate strategy characteristic of the Methodist ethos, but one which Alan Tippett cites as one of several inadvertent obstructions that well-meaning Methodists erected that retarded the growth of an indigenous church.⁶⁹ It seems plausible that discomfort about these difficulties led Nicholson to censor them from his version of the indigenous story: they concerned complex, contemporary, ongoing socio-economic and cultural issues with which he was currently wrestling, rather than dramatic practices now safely confined to the past.

Salisbury's concern, on the other hand, is to translate customary practices into what he hopes passes as filmed ethnography, and in doing so his Hollywood priorities become clear:

A girl is bought and sold without regard to the highest bidder. I took a picture [i.e. shot some footage] representing such a marriage. At the beginning it was impossible to make the natives

⁶⁷ *Open Door*, Auckland, September 1927, 13.

⁶⁸ Salisbury, 'Head-Hunting Through the Magic Eye'.

⁶⁹ Alan Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, 57-59.

carry through their parts. First I was forced to play each role myself – be the bride, groom, dissatisfied suitor and father. I found, too, great difficulty in obtaining my stars. Most of the pretty girls were stupid or afraid. But at last I found one young girl who responded readily to instruction. She was vivacious, and after her fashion charming – a savage Mary Pickford.⁷⁰

He then goes on to describe the scene he conceives and directs, in which an auction-like transaction takes place. The successful suitor trumps another with an extra pig, then leads off his purchase by the wrist. No such scene appears in *Transformed Isle* and neither does it appear in Salisbury's film *Black Shadows*, discussed below. This is not to say that it was never used at all. So even though it no longer survives, the 'marriage ceremony' sequence can be treated alongside the 'head-hunting raid', the 'abduction of the native girl', the 'blackbirding raid', the 'Missionary's arrival' and the 'cook boy's mistakes', as examples of filmed re-enactments from Vella Lavella that have a narrative component – i.e. tell a story requiring people to play a part – rather than those sequences which simply demonstrate some aspect of lifestyle, such as fishing or betel-nut chewing.

According to anthropologist Douglas Oliver, bride-price is a misnomer as it is not a purchase, still less an auction, but rather a customary gift made by the groom to the woman's family.⁷¹ Its amount is carefully negotiated by each side beforehand. Bride-price still forms the basis of customary marriage in the Solomons. One can envisage the burly Salisbury miming the parts to his version and attempting to recruit his cast: it would have been a scene at least as informative and entertaining as the resulting sequence he describes.

Salisbury's ready reliance on re-enactment, particularly a re-enactment that illustrates his own idea of how bride-price works rather than an indigenous viewpoint, demonstrates his directorial ambitions. Typically for the time, he sees himself as an active director of narratives rather than a passive, impartial witness to unfolding reality. And, like Frank Hurley, his articles showcase himself rather than his ostensible subjects.

The mix of genres in *Transformed Isle* – part filmed snapshots and part dramatised re-enactment – contributes to its relative lack of coherence to contemporary viewers. It occupies a transitional state between productions such as *Pearls and Savages* which,

⁷⁰ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 710.

⁷¹ Douglas Oliver, *Oceania: The Native Cultures of Australia and the Pacific Islands*, vol. 1, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 707-708.

while comprising only ‘scenes of this and that’, acquired their extra-filmic coherence from the in-theatre narration, and fully-fledged re-enactment documentaries such as *Nanook of the North*, which maintain internal coherence through the sustained narrative conceit of following the family’s ‘typical’ lifestyle.⁷²

Agency and collaboration

In 1920 the term ‘documentary’ had not yet been coined, but the film-maker and the film who were soon to inspire Grierson’s neologism, Robert Flaherty and his seminal *Nanook of the North* (1922), also relied on dramatic re-enactment rather than passive observation of ‘actuality’, since only the artificial re-construction of events could make their structure clear. The classic instance of this was the famous igloo-building sequence which involved an enlarged mock-up for the interior shots to allow room for the camera and lights.

Flaherty has been criticised for concealing the contrived nature of his shooting – a charge that could not be levelled at Salisbury, who, at least in his *Asia* articles, is happy to flaunt his directorial presence. However as Fatimah Tobing Rony emphasises, Flaherty’s relationship with the *Nanook* cast was one of conscious collaboration and intent focus over an extended period. He followed his lead actor, Allakariallak, for a year, from August 1920 to August 1921. Unlike Salisbury’s flying visit as part of an extended travelogue trip, there was time for mutual discussion of how best to portray aspects of a lifestyle that was already anachronistic; the cast understood the nature and rationale for the project. It is this collaborative aspect that Rony sees as redeeming Flaherty from accusations of exploitation.⁷³

But Salisbury’s cast, too, in its own way, was actively collaborating in this document of ‘salvage ethnography’. One of the most striking aspects of the re-enactment sequences of *Transformed Isle* is the sheer numbers of people involved. A scene in which warriors, gathering for a council of war, file past an impressive array of decorated war canoes goes on and on. It is difficult to estimate but there appear to be hundreds of extras, all dressed in full regalia. The battle scenes, likewise, are thronged. Given that on Vella Lavella at

⁷² ‘[S]cenes of this and that’ is how Robert Flaherty dismissed his pre-*Nanook* travelogues, quoted in Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2000), 75.

⁷³ Fatimah Tobing Rony, ‘Taxidermy & Romantic Ethnography: Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*’ in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press Books, 1996), 99-128.

this period the population lived in small scattered hamlets of only a few households,⁷⁴ this display of community involvement is remarkable (though not unprecedented, as will be discussed below). Salisbury writes of ‘hundreds of natives’ arriving overland or by canoe, ‘their women carrying provisions for the stay’.⁷⁵ The gathering camped for a week in the open during the filming. There must surely have been something of a carnival atmosphere. But it must also, in the minds of the participants, have been associated with the mission’s position as the *de facto* focus of community, especially if, as I am suggesting, the person Salisbury refers to as ‘Gau’s son’, whom he recognises as Nicholson’s deputy, was in fact Daniel Bula:

Nicholson was down with fever, but, using Gau’s son as interpreter, I prepared to begin my pictures immediately. The natives entered into the spirit of the game.⁷⁶

The multitude of extras makes for rumbustious crowd and battle scenes. Watching them, one has some sympathy for Salisbury’s comment in the article that ‘if the savages had not all been under Gau’s influence, my screen production would have ended in an actual battle with heavy casualties’.⁷⁷ Salisbury wishes to imply that the violence became genuine (those ‘dormant passions’ awakening in a suitably thrilling manner). However, a cooler Health & Safety appraisal would not require any invocation of ‘savagery’ to explain the potential dangers of being an extra in a frenetic battle scene. Spears fly, but fortunately their bone barb tips had been removed.

Acting and re-enactment

As well as the extras, however, there are also individuals among the cast who are not just being part of a crowd scene but who are acting their parts to further the narrative. The thespian prowess of the ‘savage Mary Pickford’ mentioned above may be lost to history, but the head-hunting sequence contains, for instance, an exchange between a scout and the leader of an attack corps which eloquently mimes ‘Sssh – our enemy is over there, come stealthily this way’. The young woman abductee struggles fearfully against her kidnapper. The young men enticed aboard the ‘blackbirder’ portray a complex of

⁷⁴ McKinnon, *Bilua Changes*, 19-20; Nicholson, *Son of a Savage*, 13-14.

⁷⁵ Salisbury, ‘A Napoleon of the Solomons’, 711.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 712

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

reactions: apprehension fighting with curiosity and desire. Salisbury must have been gratified, and probably congratulated himself on his directing skills.

While the camera may have been a novelty, however, one should not assume that play-acting was in itself a Western-introduced concept for Vella Lavellans, since the dramatisation of stories was an integral part of many Melanesian societies. For instance Maurice Leenhardt, talking about New Caledonia, describes a *grand pilou* (a large intercommunity dance festival) in which dramas are enacted that reflect current concerns.⁷⁸ Raymond Corbey quotes ethnographer Paul Wirz on the ‘vibrant, expressive mimicry’ of the Marind Amin people of south-west New Guinea, where ‘there is little difference between the telling of a myth and acting it out’.⁷⁹ And Gregory Bateson was fascinated by the theatricality of the naven ritual of the Iatmul people of the Sepik.⁸⁰

Captured in the hold

Reverend Nicholson’s personal visibility on film, playing versions of his earlier self, has already been commented upon. However Salisbury, too, appears on screen, playing not himself but the ‘unattractive thuggish-looking’ blackbirding captain in the sequence in which young Vella Lavellan men are enticed into the hold with bribes of axes.⁸¹ [Fig. 3.2] Positive identification rests on several photographs currently in the Library of Congress showing Salisbury filming Choiseul Islanders and otherwise interacting with unidentified indigenous people. Likewise, given that the resident white population of Vella Lavella at that time was still small, members of his own crew almost certainly play the rifle-toting crew of the blackbirder, and the *Wisdom II* their ship.⁸²

That Salisbury should cast himself and his own crew as violent kidnappers is understandable in the circumstances. Besides, his persona as the blackbirding captain is not a million miles from his *alter ego* as the bullish Wolf Larsen referred to earlier. However there is a richly ironic parallel between the fictionalised narrative of people tricked into imprisonment in the hold of a ship and the virtual capture of their images on

⁷⁸ Maurice Leenhardt, *Gens de la Grande Terre*, 166-168.

⁷⁹ Raymond Corbey, *Headhunters from the Swamps: The Marind Anim of New Guinea As Seen by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 1905-1925* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010), 54.

⁸⁰ Gregory Bateson, *Naven*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1936).

⁸¹ Thomas, ‘Colonial Conversions’, 382.

⁸² In 1907 the adult European population of Vella Lavella was fourteen. McKinnon, *Bilua Changes*, 103.



Fig. 3.2: Edward Salisbury plays a black-birding captain, c.1921. Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision.

celluloid which was apparently processed in that very hold. Plantation recruiters sought the use of men's bodies for labour, transporting them overseas for commercial profit; Salisbury sought the use of men's bodies for a complex act of scopophilia, transporting their representations overseas for similar reasons.

However the willing collaboration and agency of the cast should not be underestimated: most of the extras were young and participation in this thoroughly modern project must have been exciting. No doubt presents were lavished by the director on the main actors in his efforts to encourage them, but the cast of extras is too vast for everyone to have been recompensed. Their enthusiasm suggests an element of community fun. They did it because the mission asked them to, but also because it was amusing. As with the Atchinese cast of *Chez Les Mangeurs d'Hommes* in Chapter One, it provided an opportunity to participate playfully in modernity. Did the cast have the opportunity to watch their captured performances as 'rushes' in the hold? Or did they expect to have the

finished, edited product brought back and shown to them, as Martin and Osa Johnson did on one occasion with ni-Vanuatu? There is no record of either event.

In describing his directorial efforts in the *Asia* article, Salisbury mentions two problems that further illuminate his relations with the local people.

Avoiding the direct gaze

One was maintaining the illusion that the camera is not there: 'The chief difficulty,' he writes, 'was to prevent the savages from staring into the camera. That "magic eye" fascinated them'.⁸³ Salisbury claims, unconvincingly, to have achieved this using threats which promote to his readers a 'savage' belief-system, telling them 'that to look at it was taboo and that its mysterious spirit would bring down terrible punishment on whosoever stared into it'.⁸⁴ Given that his translator is either Nicholson himself or a 'mission man' who was probably Daniel Bula, it seems unlikely that either would have been willing to endorse this animist view. More probably, like most film subjects regardless of ethnicity, the cast simply became accustomed to the camera's presence: 'As the picture progressed, things became easier.'⁸⁵

However Salisbury's requirement that the camera be ignored – the avoidance of the direct gaze – applies to the dramatized re-enactment sequences rather than the more old-fashioned sequences from the *Transformed Isle* which operate more like moving photographs, such as the man who methodically demonstrates betel-nut chewing, or the copra-husker who flashes a grin at the camera. Tom Gunning has pointed out that early non-fiction film frequently features 'the gaze directed out at camera and viewer which transfixes the act of looking ...'.⁸⁶ Gunning associates this with the exhibitionary mode of early, predocumentary non-fiction. In these cases a relationship is enacted that appears to pierce the screen and encompass the invisible viewer as complicit in the film project. In a study of the trope of the returned gaze within postcolonial film studies, Paula Amad reminds us that it is the cameraman, not some hypothetical and invisible future audience,

⁸³ Salisbury, 'A Napoleon of the Solomons', 712.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Tom Gunning, 'Before Documentary: Early nonfiction films and the "view" aesthetic' in *Uncharted Territory: Essays on early nonfiction film*, ed. Daan Hertogs and Nico de Klerk (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), 9–24, 18.

with whom the actor is actually interacting. The returned gaze as a much-studied site of contested colonial power relations is therefore, she argues, something of a sticking-plaster fantasy for postcolonial liberal guilt, mistaking ‘an actual encounter between filmed subject and camera-cameraman’ with a ‘desired encounter between filmed subject and historically and/or racially distanced spectator.’⁸⁷ While Amad’s corrective is surely apt, I suggest that the relationship – even if acknowledged as mediated indirectly and triadically via the film-maker rather than as an illusory dyad – is nevertheless on offer to the spectator. The spectator can engage with it imaginatively, or not, depending on historical or political context, but at least it is available.

Uncasted outcasts

The other challenge Salisbury had with filming is likewise related to maintaining the purity of the re-enactment illusion: the problem of keeping modern clothing out-of-shot. Again, we only learn of this by considering the film alongside Salisbury’s *Asia* article that describes the filming, in which the author’s directorial issues are always entangled with his efforts to convey in the text both his own mastery and his disdain for the mission project. Thus, describing the filming of the council-of-war scene in which ‘Gau addressed his warriors’:

It was a wonderful scene, but many feet of film were spoiled, because the mission men, dressed in shirts and breeches and unarmed, were so stirred by the sight of their great chief making a war-speech that they crept in among the savage warriors to listen to him. I had to stop the cameras and drive them away.⁸⁸

And after the dazzling fleet had surged off in a state of high excitement:

The mission men, downcast and miserable, huddled together – outcasts from the wonder and glory of the hunt for heads.⁸⁹

While one can quibble with the ‘shirts and breeches’ – a knee-length calico waist-wrap was more usual – Salisbury has skilfully expressed his view of the dispiriting and emasculating effect of Christian modernity even as he projects his noble-savage nostalgia

⁸⁷ Paula Amad, ‘Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory’s Gift to Film Studies’, *Cinema Journal*, 52: 3, 2013, 49–74, 64.

⁸⁸ Salisbury, op.cit., 712.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

against the ‘mission men’ who creep and huddle, weaponless, deprived of warrior virility. Outcast status is thus explicitly linked with emasculation. And Salisbury allows himself and his reader to side-step for a moment that what they are outcast from is the making of a film, rather than an actual head-hunt.

Reverend Nicholson goes to Hollywood

The precise nature of the agreement between Nicholson and Salisbury is not known. But Nicholson’s son Ian believed there was a written contract as well as a gentleman’s agreement.⁹⁰ Indeed there must have been something in writing in order for Nicholson to have had the legal leverage he seems to have been able to wield. Salisbury having failed to fulfil his part of the bargain (there are echoes here of Frank Hurley dragging his heels over delivering *Heart of New Guinea*), Nicholson took extended leave of absence in 1922 in order to travel to Los Angeles to retrieve his film. In the event he never returned to Vella Lavella. Nicholson had to trace the film reels through multiple owners and threaten legal proceedings before they were released into his possession.⁹¹ Allan Davidson also interviewed Nicholson’s son, Ian, who recalled ‘how his father collected something like 10,000 feet of film from the film-makers and taught himself how to edit and splice’.⁹² So Nicholson himself *is* the author of *The Transformed Isle*, in so far as he edited it into its final form and also undoubtedly wrote many of its intertitles.

Black Shadows

However it seems equally clear that Salisbury had already been working on his own version of the film before he was obliged to hand over a copy of it to Nicholson. A film called *Black Shadows of the South Seas*, produced by Edward A. Salisbury, was released in 1923 by Pathé Exchange, the same distribution company who handled *Nanook of the North*. Its IMDb summary states: ‘Edward Salisbury leads an expedition to the South Sea Islands, including the Marquesas and Samoa. They observe cannibals and headhunters in the Fiji and Solomon Islands.’ It seems to have opened in mid-June in New York but

⁹⁰ Martin Hadlow, transcript interview with Nicholson’s son Ian, 2007. Methodist Archives, Auckland.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Davidson, 2006, op.cit., 7.

rapidly fallen foul of the censor and been withdrawn.⁹³ If this was due merely to the visibility of women's breasts, it would be richly ironic given their free circulation in staid missionary circles. But perhaps it was the scenes of dramatized inter-racial violence – white men manhandling indigenous women and the conflict after the blackbirding kidnap – that disturbed the censor. The choice of title is interesting given the contemporary fame of Frederick O'Brien's best-selling novel *White Shadows of the South Seas* (1919) and the fact that O'Brien himself had joined the *Wisdom II* at Samoa. It is inconceivable that Salisbury did not intend some level of echo or contrast.



Fig. 3.3: Intertitles, *Black Shadows/Transformed Isle*, 1923, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision.

⁹³ *New York Times*, 'The Screen', 19 June 1923, 22; 'The heavy hand of the censor is the most striking feature of *Black Shadows of the South Seas*, the latest travel feature film to come to Broadway' *Los Angeles Times*, 'Censors Hit South Sea Tale', 24 June 1923, III26

I have not been able to trace that particular film but its presence nevertheless haunts *Transformed Isle*. This is particularly apparent in some of the intertitles used for the head-hunting sequence. [Fig. 3.3] Clearly designed by a professional artist, these pictorial intertitles work hard to inject not only some semblance of a plot but also a melodramatic mood. Salisbury's personal involvement is evidenced by the names used for his main characters – Gau, Osopo and Kavi – which match those mentioned in the *Asia* article. The artist has borrowed an incongruous Javanese or Balinese aesthetic, and some of this imagery suggests that the title of *Black Shadows* may already have been decided upon. Whoever wrote and designed these was assuredly not the same person who wrote the one in which one-room living arrangements are described. [Fig. 3.4]

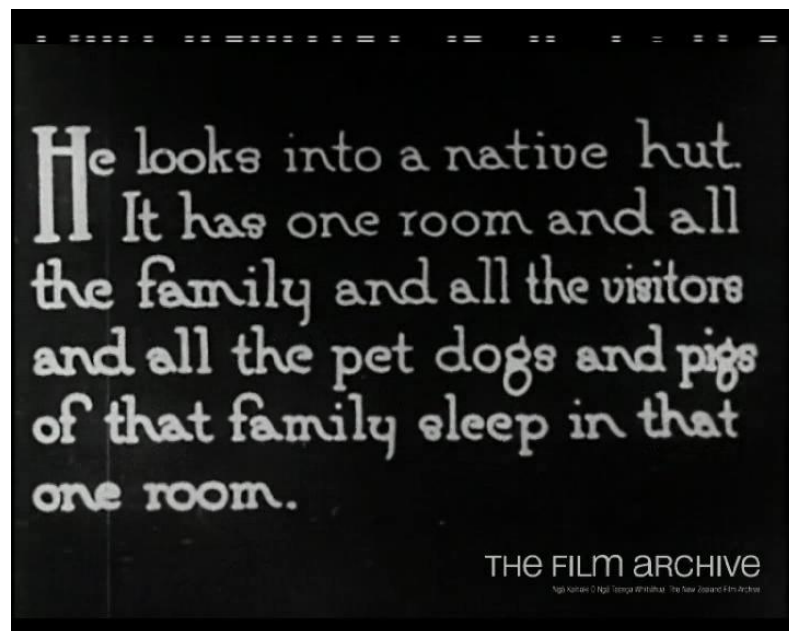


Fig. 3.4: Intertitle, *Transformed Isle*, c. 1924, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision

Not only do they have different fonts and visual styles, but also two very different voices, the latter sounding like a Sunday School teacher earnestly invoking the awed condescension of middle-class white children. In fact, this intertitle echoes an almost identical statement in *Son of a Savage*, thus confirming Nicholson's authorship.⁹⁴ Similarly, the wording of an earlier intertitle, attesting that pre-Christianity Vella Lavellans were 'a cruel, crafty, vicious race ... numbered amongst the most bloodthirsty

⁹⁴ Nicholson, *Son of a Savage*, 34

savages in the Pacific' is mirrored in *Son of a Savage*.⁹⁵ Thus Nicholson's editing of the propaganda film and the writing of the book appear to have gone hand in hand, as the timing of the release of each would seem to confirm.

Salisbury did not let the set-back of the film's rapid demise faze him. He turned to writing – with fellow *Wisdom II* crew-member and camera-man Merian C. Cooper – a travelogue book of his adventures, *The Sea Gypsy*.⁹⁶ But valuable footage is ripe for recycling, and in 1928 Salisbury released a new title – *Gow the Headhunter*, later re-released as *Gow the Killer* (1931), then subsequently recycled yet again – six years before his death – as *Cannibal Island* (1956). While the name has been phonetically simplified still further, from Gau to Gow, the structure and content of *Gow* suggest at the very least a strong family resemblance to the missing *Black Shadows*.

Like the description for *Black Shadows*, and despite its title, *Gow the Killer* is in fact primarily a pseudo-ethnographic travelogue that follows the east-west geography of Salisbury's 1921-22 trip. Sailing west from Los Angeles, it shows footage of his encounters in the Marquesas, Samoa, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. A voiceover (narrated by William Peck but clearly written by Salisbury) and dramatic music largely supersede intertitles, and the original pictorial intertitles have been dropped in favour of a cooler, more modern style. The narrative structure of the documentary follows the conventional cliché of the Polynesia/Melanesia divide. To quote another of Salisbury's *Asia* articles: 'There is a strangely different panorama as one sails steadily westward from the laughter-loving, sensuous Polynesian races of the Marquesas, Tahiti and Samoa to the blacker, less kindly mixed breeds of the Fijis, then on to the headhunters of the Solomons and the near-savages of the New Hebrides and New Guinea. It is as if nature had drawn a mathematical graph of descending values ...'⁹⁷ The voiceover echoes this precisely.

Whereas the meta-narrative of *Transformed Isle* was of diachronic transformation from past to present, the meta-narrative of *Gow* is of synchronic movement – from Polynesia-to-Melanesia, soft-to-hard, light-skinned to-dark-skinned, feminine-to-masculine, sex-to-violence, all the while trending towards an increased 'savagery' that stages the raid

⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁶ Edward A. Salisbury and Merian C. Cooper, *The Sea Gypsy*, (New York: Putnam, 1924). Cooper, of course, went on to fame and fortune as the creator of that other well-known ethnographic film, *King Kong* (1933).

⁹⁷ Salisbury, 'Cruising in Coral Seas'.

sequence as the culmination and climax of the entire film, thus justifying the movie's title and hence its key selling point.

The sequences used for the head-hunting raid, plus numerous other scenes of a vaguely ethnographic nature, are precisely those filmed for *Transformed Isle* seven years previously. But while the footage of the head-hunting raid is the same, not only its position, but also its captioning, in terms of intertitles and voiceover, are significantly different. The plot line has been strengthened, in that Gow/Gau has now been given psychological motivation for the raid by presenting the abducted native girl as his beloved daughter whom the white kidnappers have sold into slavery to a rival tribe. Gow's attack is thus reconfigured to Western taste by being staged as justifiable rescue and revenge. While the notion of 'historical re-enactment' is briefly acknowledged, it is swamped by conspicuous deployment of the present tense in both intertitles and voiceover. Taken out of the missionary 'before and after' framework, 'savagery' is thus situated in the timeless ethnographic present, where it is explicitly presented, not only as innate to the essential nature of Solomon Islanders, but as a source of an almost homo-erotic frisson for the white male viewer. Peck's sonorous voiceover for a scene of four fully manned war canoes being rhythmically paddled against a romantic sunset encapsulates the racial and libidinous fascination:

The islands of the Western Pacific cast a strange spell over a white man at any time. Particularly is this true if the white man is witnessing the return of a victorious tribe of head-hunters from a raid. The queer chant and the very weird ceremony send a strange sensation up and down a white man's spine.⁹⁸

So our two colonial collaborators, the missionary and the movie-maker, while coming into close contact in the making of these films, end up with a peculiar hybrid that utilises the same raw material in diametrically opposite ways. Inadvertently they have created a kind of Surrealist 'exquisite corpse' – a collage of collaborative imagery pulling in different directions but held in uneasy tension by the medium. Two voices in the fractured cacophony of 'colonial discourse', they exemplify Nicholas Thomas's view that colonialism is better thought of as a series of disparate, disorganised, often conflicting projects, rather than as a single monolithic enterprise.

⁹⁸ Voice-over from *Gow the Killer* (1928).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has been a case study of a collaboration between a travelogue-adventurer and a Methodist missionary in the production of footage that became (at least) two distinct films, one constructed as ‘before-and-after’ missionary propaganda, the other as a travelogue describing an escalating graph of ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ savagery culminating in an imagined climactic head-hunting raid. The constructed nature of both narratives – what is included and what left out – provide a clear example of the differing purposes to which imagery of Melanesian people is subjected for the edification of popular white audiences. At the same time, consideration of extra-filmic texts – Nicholson’s book and Salisbury’s magazine articles – has provided material for deeper analysis, as well as further evidence of indigenous agency.

This chapter concludes Part One of this thesis, which considered the entanglement of travelogue-adventurers and missionaries in their respective aims of constructing and transforming imaginary ‘Cannibal-Lands’. It has traced an evolution of relationship from missionary facilitation of the production of Melanesian imagery for Western audiences, to passive commissioning of such image production for their own use, then on to active collaboration with image-makers in stage-managing propaganda imagery. Part Two goes on to investigate the next stage of missionary experimentation with moving image-making: owning the equipment and managing the content themselves.

PART TWO

Alone at last? Missionaries Roll Their Own

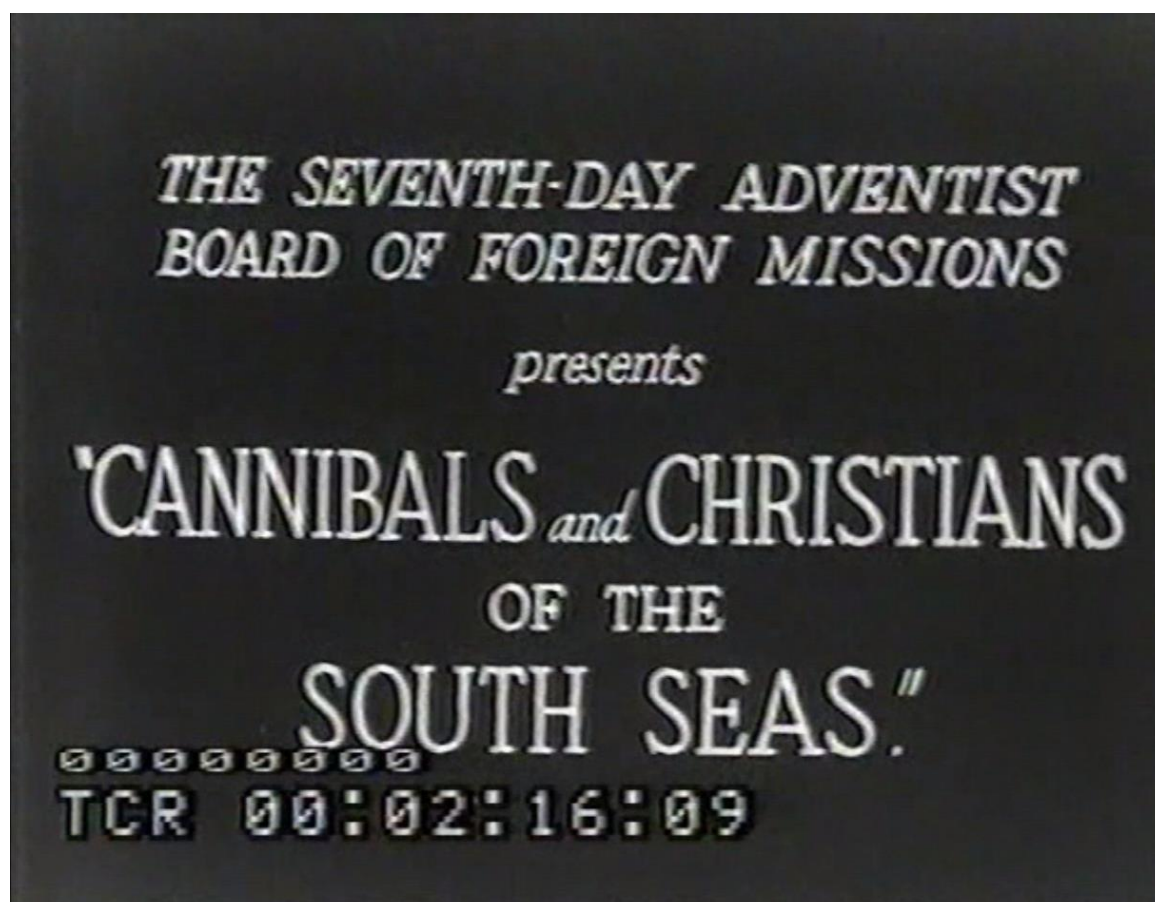


Fig. 4.1: Freeze-frame Title, c. 1929. NFSA.

Chapter Four: Missionaries Roll Their Own: Part I

Seventh-Day Adventist Case Study: Cannibals and Christians

Introduction

The preceding chapters have sketched a progression from missionary facilitation of adventure-travelogue activities in Melanesia (Chapter One), through the commissioning of professional cinematography (Chapter Two) followed by active collaboration with adventure-travelogue film-makers (Chapter Three). Each stage has been shown to have its drawbacks, from the missionary point of view. Mere facilitation meant neither control over how 'their natives' were portrayed nor more than token acknowledgment of missionary presence. Commissioning professionals led to a conflict of interest over what was captured on film and how the resulting footage was edited and used commercially. Collaboration gave the missionary presence a much stronger role but was still subject to copyright tensions and agenda conflicts, combined with a lack of control over the proliferation of positive copies that could be re-edited for the commercial adventure-travelogue market. Only by owning their own equipment and doing their own shooting could missionaries control content and deployment. Australian Seventh-Day Adventists appear to have jumped straight from the first stage of facilitation for others to the fourth stage – that of ownership and management of the means of production – thereby bypassing the pitfalls described in Part One of this thesis.

Chapter Four is the first of two case studies of why, how and with what results mission organisations began to capture their own film footage of their fieldwork in Melanesia during the colonial period, rather than engaging non-missionary assistance. This chapter examines Seventh-Day Adventist footage shot by Pastor Andrew Stewart between 1929 and 1931 for use in public talks given in Australia and New Zealand over many years. It is divided into two sections.

The first section surveys Stewart's films as one component in the broader context of Adventist propaganda imagery in general. I consider what these moving images add to the archive of Melanesian imagery when considered against a background of popular secular travelogue entertainments then prevalent.

The second section comprises a detailed analysis of one particular sequence featuring Big Nambas men from Malakula, and in particular their chief, Maluan Vavau. In considering the history of this footage, and whether – and if so why – this sequence is a propaganda ‘failure’, I uncover an autonomous indigenous history that demonstrates how moving images can – sometimes – counter the flattening, fragmenting, silencing effect of still photography and perhaps even escape the control of the colonial gaze altogether.

Section One: Seventh-Day Adventist Propaganda Imagery

Adventists and Film

‘... we believe that this marvellous invention has great educational possibilities ...’

Seventh-Day Adventist General Committee Minutes, 3 October 1928

Chapter One outlined evidence suggesting that American travelogue-adventurer and film-maker Martin Johnson’s access to Big Nambas people of north-west Malakula was mediated by Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries. In that chapter I puzzled over why missionary reports of the time (1917 and 1919) omitted to mention the interaction. The first mention of Johnson’s name in connection with his coverage of the Big Nambas seems not to have appeared in Adventist publications until 1929.

One reason for this omission in the pre-1929 published record was perhaps the fact that, at the time, Johnson was yet to achieve fame. But another reason may have been Adventist ambivalence about the motion picture medium. Perhaps this made missionaries reticent to mention visiting American film-makers in their published accounts. The religion’s nineteenth-century founder, Ellen G. White, denounced attendance of theatres and dance-halls on the basis that ‘no Christian would wish ... to be found there when Christ shall come.’¹ By extension, in 1932, the SDA’s Australian president, W.G. Turner, credited picture theatres with ‘satanic influences’ that were ‘destructive to character of all found thereat.’² His disapproval extended even to instructive films: ‘Parents of S.D.A. children can never allow their children at any time to attend such places, be they advertised to show educational pictures or otherwise ...’. This was due to the risk of

¹ E.G. White, *Messages to Young People*, 1882, 398.

² W.G. Turner, *AR*, 27/6/32, 5.

‘something suggestive, salacious or obscene’ appearing elsewhere in the programme, in the accompanying short or advertising trailers.³

Although Turner’s castigation applied only to commercial ventures outside the purview of the Church, Adventist suspicion of the movie industry had meant that it was not until 1928 that the SDA’s central US administration recorded tentative formal approval for the use of filmed images for church propaganda. Under the heading ‘Motion Picture Photography’, the General Conference Committee Minutes of 3 October 1928 stated:

Some time was taken to discuss the use of motion picture photography, it being brought to the attention of the Committee through several inquiries, and in response to this request for counsel the secretary was ordered to record the following statement:

Responding to many inquiries on the part of our people and also from mission field directors as to whether there is a proper field for the use of motion pictures in the presentation of educational and mission subjects, --

We would express it as our conviction that while motion pictures have been so largely prostituted to the presentation of theatricals, nevertheless we believe that this marvellous invention has great educational possibilities and is being employed in this field by many, including some of our own institutions.

While unhesitatingly condemning the moving picture, and earnestly warning our people old and young to avoid its contaminating influence, we recognize a legitimate field for the use of motion picture photography in the presentation of purely educational subjects and mission field developments.

But we would earnestly caution that, in any use which is made of motion pictures by our institutions or field workers, each picture be carefully examined beforehand by a proper committee so as to eliminate any objectionable features, and that in no case shall pictures of drama or theatricals be used.⁴

There is in this ambivalent statement a pervasive anxiety that suggests something of the clamour infiltrating from the outside world. Significantly, moving pictures were not seen as being merely an extension of the still photographs and lantern slides that had been the staple of illustrated talks since the previous century: the association of the medium with Hollywood’s perceived licentiousness was too strong. The use of the term ‘prostituted’ to

³ Ibid.

⁴ General Conference Committee Minutes, 3 October 1928, 719.
<http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/GCC/GCC1928.pdf>

signify the medium's primary purpose as a vehicle for entertainment emphasises the sexual nature of the puritan distaste. That 'some time' was taken over discussing the ruling indicates a matter both weighty and contentious; the repetition and escalation from 'several' to 'many' enquiries with which the committee had been bombarded hint at both a widespread urgency and a sense of beleaguerment; the acknowledgment that educational use was already being used by 'many' suggests a concern at being left behind in a competitive field as well as something of an internal *fait accompli*; yet the cohabitation of 'contaminating influence' and 'legitimate field' in a single sentence implies a tension round the committee table not entirely resolved by the final vague and cautious compromise.

Nevertheless this resolution endorsed the possible value of educational film in general and gave a worldwide go-ahead for Adventist propaganda film in particular, provided it eschewed staging enactments or other 'theatricals'. It is probably no coincidence, then, that it was not till 1929 that SDA missionary Donald Nicholson both woke up to Martin Johnson's fame as a film-maker (by that stage at its height) and was allowed to facilitate the Crane Pacific venture into Malakula, which involved a significant 'educational' film component.⁵ Nor can it be coincidence that 1929 was when Andrew Stewart, now the Australasian Union Conference's vice-president for the Mission Field, decided to add film footage to the repertoire of mission imagery he already used for promotional public talks in Australia and New Zealand.

The footage produced by Andrew Stewart, self-taught cinematographer, is, by definition, both amateur and concerned with little other than white missionary activity and a display of conversion successes and medical work. While it was not so unusual for missionaries of other denominations – particularly Anglicans – to have some interest in and respect for the indigenous cultures they encountered, Adventists of this period apparently saw nothing positive about 'heathen' art, artefacts, adornments or customary ceremonies, which tend to either appear only incidentally in their imagery or are presented as examples of discarded heathenism.⁶ Hence one has to agree with Tom Harrisson's

⁵ See Chapter One, 67ff.

⁶ There are one or two exceptions to this Adventist indifference to material and performed culture in the footage I have been able to examine: one is the almost obligatory betel-nut-chewing demonstration common to most footage of Melanesia of whatever ilk (see for example *In Primitive Papua*, NFSA #33989, at approx. 12:50); another is a smiling mother demonstrating the advantages of a bilum as a baby carrier (see [Missionary Visit to the Solomons, Bougainville & Rabaul c. 1929], NFSA #33977, at approx. 10:50). The most dramatic example is that of a ceremony featuring dancers in splendid duk-duk costumes cavorting and

brusque assessment of SDA contribution to ethnography as ‘Nil.’⁷ But although the descriptions – photographic, filmic and textual – to be discussed below lack variety and cultural specificity, they offer other insights. As I argue throughout this thesis, the significance of missionary imagery does *not* lie with its anthropological value but rather with its re-presentation of indigenous Melanesians to non-specialist Western audiences within an ideological frame that differs significantly from adventure-travelogue stereotypes that were circulating in the popular sphere at the same time.

Methodologically, the filmed material is challenging to analyse due to the disjointed character of the assorted scraps of footage held by Australia’s National Film and Sound Archive. Some of the Archive entries are explicitly recorded as Seventh-Day Adventist in origin; others were only recognised as such on viewing. What at first sight seems copious material turns out to be rife with duplication, sequences repeatedly reappearing in different contexts. Haphazard copying, editing and splicing seems to indicate either a mix-and-match approach to narrative or an accidental result of the transferral processes by which the material came into the Archive’s possession. Deciphering the tangle has not been entirely possible though a fair attempt was necessary to allow some grasp of what is after all a unique glimpse into a particular colonial history. Rare intertitles are invaluable in anchoring footage to geography; people, places and dates can also sometimes be cross-referenced to articles and photographs in the SDA newsletter *Australasian Record*, which published missionary reports from the field.

As far as I can ascertain, Andrew Stewart made three filming trips to Melanesia between 1929 and 1931. Between April and June 1929, veteran missionary Pastor G.F. Jones and Stewart left on an official visit to the Solomon Islands and a pioneering visit to the Mandated Territory of New Guinea.⁸ As discussed above, the decision to film the trip to publicise Adventist mission work was a new venture, and it is significant that Stewart himself, as vice-president for the Mission Field, shoulders the camera. The two senior Adventist missionaries, Pastors Stewart and Jones, travel by Burns-Philp steamer from Sydney to Tulagi in the Western Solomon Islands. Here they meet up with the mission ketch *Melanesia* on which they sail to Guadalcanal, Sinarango on the east coast of

chasing youths on a beach. This suggests the Tolai people of New Britain, probably filmed near Rabaul on the same 1929 trip (see NFSA #12009, erroneously labelled [The Solomon Islands], at approx. 8:30).

⁷ Harrison, *Savage Civilisation*, note on Sources. 239.

⁸ *Australasian Record* (hereafter *AR*), 3/6/1929, 2.

Malaita, then Batuna on the Marovo Lagoon of New Georgia for an Adventist convention before heading north-east to Choiseul, then Inus, Bougainville and through the Buka Strait to Rabaul, New Guinea, ‘Where Pastor Jones was opening a new mission.’ This journey seems to have provided the core of the film footage compilation *Cannibals and Christians of the South Seas*.

At the end of September 1929 Stewart set off again with his film camera, apparently on his own, and travelled to Samarai and Vilirupu, in south-east Papua New Guinea.⁹ This trip forms the core of the footage shot for *In Primitive Papua*. However it is apparent that these titles – particularly the former – are geographically fluid and sequences from other trips were almost certainly included on different occasions.

A third tour in 1931 sees Stewart and Pastor W. G. Turner, President of the Australasian Conference, sail, again by Burns-Philp steamer, from Sydney to Nouméa, New Caledonia and thence on a trading barge to Port Vila in (what was then) the New Hebrides. Here they transfer to a mission launch before visiting missions on Aore, Santo, Malakula, Atchin and possibly Ambrym. A third title – *In Cannibal Isles* – dates from this 1931 trip. Oddly, this title appears in the NFSA archive (in two versions or volumes, one of which includes a confirming title slide) but seems never to have been advertised or referred to as such in contemporary newspaper reports or advertisements. A possible reason for this is explored in the detailed analysis of these sequences considered in Section 2 below.

Before considering the 1931 footage in more detail, let’s consider some of the more generic traits of the three named films and how they differ from adventure-travelogue imagery.

Ships, wharves, markets and churches: modernity as a built environment

‘Brother Stewart will have some rare pictures to show when he returns to the homeland.’

Pastor G.F. Jones, *Australasian Review*, 1929

A striking feature of all three films is that they begin in Sydney or nearby Wahroonga, thereby situating the narrative as a journey with a fixed geographical *starting point* in familiar Western contemporaneity. *Cannibals and Christians* shows Pastor and Mrs Jones – the latter with her pet cockatoo – leaving their Wahroonga home, followed by extensive

⁹ AR, 18/11/29, 2.

scenes of the Sydney Harbour wharves, passengers boarding, crowds with streamers, and the cranes and gantries around the half-built Sydney Harbour Bridge (which did not open until 1932). An intertitle sets the scene: ‘Leaving the headquarters of the Australasian Union Conference, Wahroonga, in company with Pastor G. F. Jones, we sailed from Sydney on the S.S. Mataram.’¹⁰ *In Primitive Papua* and *In Cannibal Isles* do not have the views of Sydney Harbour but nevertheless each expends an intertitle to be precise about the journey’s beginning: ‘Leaving Sydney by the ‘S.S. Montoro’ we trans-shipped at Samarai ...’; ‘Four days sail from Sydney brings us to Nouméa, New Caledonia.’¹¹ *Mataram* and *Montoro* were Burns-Philp steamers which made regular runs to the Pacific Islands. The journey to Nouméa was on the Pacific Colonial Company’s *La Perouse*. The effect of this precision, I suggest, is to position Oceania as accessible, part of the same coeval, colonial world as Sydney. The same insistence on proximity to Australia – ‘They are only a few days sail from us’ – featured in Reginald Nicholson’s concluding exhortations in *The Transformed Isle*.¹² In contrast, travelogue-adventurers configure their journeys as intrinsic to their intrepid adventure into the timeless, barbaric unknown: Edward Salisbury’s yacht in *Gow the Headhunter* is not filmed mundanely berthed in Los Angeles but romantically breasting the Pacific waves; Antoine and Lugeon pretend a ship-wreck off Malakula for *Chez les Mangeurs d’Hommes*; Hurley’s *Pearls and Savages* begins not in urban Sydney but with himself heroically alone in a darkened space indicating on a spot-lit globe, with proprietorial pride, the region of his explorations (the area circled being far larger than the locations actually visited).

Similarly, a significant characteristic of these Adventist films in comparison to those of the travelogue-adventurers is their willingness to embrace and display urban modernity in their *destinations*. This likewise has the effect of reducing the sense of distance, emphasising a Pacific neighbourliness rather than alien remoteness. *Cannibals and Christians* includes the following intertitle alongside a wide, panning shot of Tulagi, the capital of the Solomon Islands Protectorate, showing a busy harbour and colonial buildings clinging to a hill: ‘Arriving at Tulagi, we had a fine view of the harbour and the Government S[team]. Y[acht]. “Ranandi” coming alongside.’ *In Primitive Papua* shows Samarai, then administrative capital of New Guinea, as a well-established colonial town

¹⁰ See NFSA #12009, at approx. 1:30-3:30; also NFSA #33977 and #12097.

¹¹ See NFSA #33989 and #12027.

¹² *Transformed Isle*, at approx.. 1:01:40.

with extensive wharves, leafy streets and substantial European buildings, including the well-named Cosmopolitan Hotel.¹³ *In Cannibal Isles* gives us a fascinating glimpse of Nouméa in 1931: we see horses and drays, a tractor and many indigenous workers, wearing trousers and caps rather than lava-lavas, unloading barrels from a trading barge. We witness Nouméa's town centre – a busy cosmopolitan street scene with market stalls, bicycles, fashionably dressed and hatted women of European, Asian and indigenous ethnicity. The camera shows a group of women chatting at the market; one of them notices the filming and points it out to her friend, a young Asian woman, who is startled and runs out of shot, causing much good-humoured hilarity. These incidental scenes are background to the meeting and greeting between resident and visiting missionaries, but nonetheless they serve to present a view of cosmopolitan contemporary Pacific life that may have surprised audiences brought up exclusively on Frank Hurley's Papuan films, for instance. Indeed, even for us, these moving pictures of Melanesian colonial modernity are an almost untapped historical resource. Port Vila's wharf – filmed from the high steamer deck – is crowded with a multitude of ethnicities and the streets of Vila itself, though noticeably less developed than Nouméa, are seen to carry industrial trucks full of marketable produce. Pastor Stewart shares with the viewer his interest in the technology of commerce: a fairly lengthy sequence records how 'at Norsup, Malekula, the steamer received copra from trading vessels'.¹⁴

Travelogue-adventurers, committed as they are to a nostalgic fantasy, tended to avoid showing such imagery (though they may mention it in text, ruefully, as Salisbury does with Fiji¹⁵) in the interests of promoting distance and difference. When modernity enters their filmed scenes, they want to be the personal bearers of it, bringing it in from the 'outside' world in hope of capturing the presumed amazement of the indigenous inhabitants. For example, Hurley's famous sea-planes were brought to New Guinea at great expense and duly filmed surrounded by gratifyingly intrigued natives in canoes.¹⁶

¹³ For Stewart's textual report of this trip and his impressions of Samarai see AR, 2/12/1929, 3.

¹⁴ NFSA #12027 at approx. 7:51

¹⁵ See Chapter Three, 133.

¹⁶ See *Pearls & Savages* and Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 183. An exception that proves the rule here is Martin Johnson, who gives a self-serving but fascinating glimpse of 1919 Nouméa in *Cannibal-Land*, 33ff, and whose *City of Broken Old Men* (1917), shows a different side of colonial New Caledonia.

One of the most obvious missionary film tropes and point of difference with adventure-travelogues is of course the emphasis on conversion, as displayed visually by scenes of mission houses, churches and – a hackneyed scene played out *ad nauseam* in these Adventist films – a white-clad indigenous congregation filing into a ‘native-materials’ church then, after an indeterminate period, duly filing out again. Presumably it is too dark to film in the interior. *Cannibals and Christians* includes such a scene located on Guadalcanal where a congregation under the pastoral care of a Choiseul Island Adventist named Jugha had built a particularly fine patterned-weave church.¹⁷ Demonstrating his indigenous credentials with aplomb, Jugha summons the congregation with a conch shell trumpet. A report in the *Australasian Review* by Pastor Jones describing this event hints at the evangelical tenor of the commentary that may have accompanied the showing of the film, as well as providing a very rare mention of the fact that Stewart was actually filming:

On Sabbath morning we dedicated the new church, and those poor people just emerging from heathenism, gathered from among those wild mountains, streamed in and sang our hymns like a people glad to be freed from the bondage of slavery. Brother Stewart will have some rare pictures to show when he returns to the homeland.¹⁸

In Primitive Papua presents the same scene. But the church this time is on stilts, being built on an estuary at Vilirupu, Central Province, Papua New Guinea, and the white missionary, Brother Mitchell, dings a bell while his wife supervises the congregation’s entering.¹⁹ *In Cannibal Isles*, being set on Vanuatu, shows a church with two gender-separate entrances. Here the congregation is called to worship by drumming on a slit-gong, albeit an uncarved, unadorned one. Despite their numbing similarity, these three instances with their distinctive differences illustrate the persistence of cultural norms and forms despite Christianisation. Or rather, they demonstrate the emphatic *indigenisation* of Christianity that has been such a feature of the phenomenon throughout the Pacific. Every world religion has had this remarkable capacity to absorb and reflect the flavour of whichever culture it infiltrates, allowing it to operate simultaneously at both universal and local levels. To what extent this early capture and display of indigenised Christianity to

¹⁷ *AR*, 3/6/1929, 2 and 8; NFSA #12097 at approx. 5:30-7:00.

¹⁸ *AR*, 3/6/1929, 8.

¹⁹ NFSA #33989 at approx. 8:10-9:10.

white Australian audiences impinged on racist presumptions is unknowable. But at least one can assert that it made the perception available.

In Sickness and in Health

‘... close-up views of some of the stricken natives were a little revolting ...’

Film review, *The Bendigo Advertiser*, c. 1933.

The most dominant visual trope in Adventist imagery, however, is Christianity as a sanitising force. A 1930 press review of *Cannibals and Christians* bears evidence of having been written and supplied by Stewart himself (some phrases duplicate those of intertitles) and so provides a useful glimpse into the likely content and tenor of his commentary which otherwise can only be guessed at.²⁰ He begins by characterising ‘these people’ (Solomon Islanders, in this instance) as ‘ferocious in their nature’ and Malaita as a place where ‘cannibalism is still practised’ – displaying the essentialist and sensationalist terminology of the adventure-travelogue that often infiltrated even missionary texts when directed towards a popular audience who expected nothing less. But then the reviewer reverts to a well-worn path that epitomises the sanitary and medical agenda of Adventist missions and which pervades its propaganda imagery:

The pictures demonstrated the terrible conditions under which the natives live, and of the insanitary rules obtaining in their village life. Pigs are almost as numerous as people, and share the dwelling houses with them. Island sores, which afflict the whole body of the natives, are being combated by the efforts of the missionaries in an encouraging manner. The missionary societies in the South Seas are spending large amounts of money annually in endeavouring to eradicate the universal disease known as yaws. The transformation wrought in the individual, in the village, and in the community, was clearly seen in the various pictures depicted.²¹

Footage of people being treated for sores does not sound as attractive a prospect to Western taste as the scenic views, quaint customs, dances, feathers and face-paint that were the staple fare of adventure-travelogues and which, as I have shown, also fed into the missionary imagery of other denominations. One reviewer admitted to finding ‘close-up views of some of the stricken natives ... a little revolting’.²² But Seventh-Day Adventist theology places great store on physicality, in the sense of bodily health and

²⁰ *Sunday Times*, Perth WA, 9 March 1930, 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Review in *The Bendigo Advertiser*, date unknown, quoted in *AR*, 27/2/1933, 5.

purity, and accepts Old Testament food laws concerning the uncleanness of pork and shellfish. A great many Adventist missionaries undertook medical training.²³ Smoking, alcohol and jewellery are rejected and most Adventists are vegetarian. Moreover, as we have seen, Adventist curiosity about the cultures of their indigenous targets was almost non-existent and Adventist puritanism made for a disinclination to show outlandish dance, theatre or adornment that were regarded merely as distasteful emblems of heathenism. Hence – in the absence of the spectacular theatrics available to other denominations and to travelogue-adventurers as signifiers of ‘savagery’ – it is the sanitary and medical aspects of the SDA missionary enterprise that were given prominence in Adventist representations of indigenous people. Like the Methodist’s *Transformed Isle*, then, the emphasis in the film is on visual signifiers of transformation from heathenism to Christianity. But in this case the transformation is characterised more emphatically at the personal, bodily level, as being from sickness to health and from dirt to cleanliness, rather than from the broader socio-economic shifts from head-hunting to commercial copra plantations.²⁴

The panoply of indigenous bodies with hideous afflictions being treated by white missionaries with makeshift surgery, injections, ointments and dressings is at its most extreme not in the film footage but in the annual Adventist magazine *Appeal for Missions* which provided an illustrated round-up of mission field activity. To browse through multiple *Appeal for Missions* covering the years from 1920 to 1935 or so is to compress hundreds of photographs into a single trope: a seated or prostrate brown diseased body being ‘healed’ by an upright, white, apparently healthy one.²⁵ For Adventist image-

²³ ‘... almost half of our missionaries in the islands of the South Pacific are trained nurses, the product of the Sanitarium Training School.’ AR, 21/9/31, 2. See also Dennis Steley, *Unfinished: The Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the South Pacific, Excluding Papua New Guinea, 1886–1986*, (PhD, University of Auckland, 1989), 129–134.

²⁴ It seems remarkable that a religion that abhors pigs, tobacco, betel nut chewing and personal adornment made any headway at all in Melanesia. Yet an iconoclastic impulse towards a clean slate seems to have been a not uncommon indigenous response to acceptance of a new religion. See Tuzin, *The Cassowary’s Revenge*; Nicholas Thomas, ‘Cosmologies and Collections: New Guinea 1840–1940’ in Thomas and Brunt eds., *Art in Oceania*, 131–157, 132–145; Jeffrey Sissons, *The Polynesian Iconoclasm: Religious Revolution and the Seasonality of Power*, (New York: Berghahn, 2014). Dennis Steley characterises this phenomenon amongst SDA converts as a ‘package deal’ approach: since indigenous religion was already tightly bound with the many customs and tabus of everyday life it was easier, he argues, to accept a total change of ‘world view’ along with the new religion than it was to try to keep a foot in each camp. ‘Acceptance of the SDA mission thus meant ... the exchange of one complete lifestyle for another.’ Steley, op.cit., 194–196.

²⁵ *An Appeal for Missions*, annual missionary magazine, Adventist Heritage Centre. For movie footage of medical treatment of Melanesian people see for example NFSA # 33977 approx. 5:50–6:20; NFSA #33989 approx. 13:40–14:00. For more on the relationship between medical missionary work and conversion in Africa, see Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*, (Stanford CA: Stanford

makers, medical spectacle replaced conventional ‘savage’ spectacles of dancing and outré adornment.

Thus one of the striking contrasts between missionary and adventure-travelogue imagery is this emphasis on indigenous physical disease and frailty in the former, compared to the display of robust health and superb physique in the latter. Both of course were true²⁶ – life in small-scale non-industrial societies generates both extremes of that spectrum and my intention here is not to minimise the real medical benefits brought by missionaries. But the salient questions are why those representational choices were made and what effect did they have on Western audiences? Missions needed to present heathenism as intrinsically sickly and benighted so that Christianity could be framed as the only route to health and enlightenment. Although this applies to all denominations, it is particularly clear in imagery deployed by Seventh-Day Adventist missions. Moral malaise and physical impurity are equated. Commercial adventurers, on the other hand, needed to present ‘savages’ as remnants of a golden age of muscular, dangerous warriors, whom they, the adventurers, sought out at great personal risk.

It is sadly ironic, therefore, that while, as far as I know, no Western travelogue-adventurers of the period suffered direct violence in the field, many missionaries, missionary wives and missionary children, both white and brown, died, occasionally by violence, but far more often by debilitating illness. Although such losses – at least amongst Europeans – were reported and lamented with due veneration in the mission propaganda newsletters, ill-health amongst Europeans was never *visually* relayed or emphasised to sponsoring audiences.²⁷ White suffering could be spiritually offered up in the abstract, but its abject reality was never viscerally evoked. The enormous physical and psychological tolls of the mission enterprise could thus be kept in the high-minded realm of godly sacrifice, while the ideology of Christianity as a bringer of health, hygiene and happiness would not be undermined by the portrayal of visibly emaciated and sick white Christians.

University Press), 1991, 55-76. Vaughan shows that hospitals were regarded as significant sites of conversion, with treatment often extended unnecessarily in order to promote dependence and assimilation.

²⁶ Harrisson, for instance, describes relatively high mortality and morbidity at both ends of life – infancy, and old age – but ‘once grown to near man’s stature, there is little that can make ill ... For the most part the men and the women are healthy and strong when they are full grown.’ *Savage Civilisation*, 55-57.

²⁷ Norman Wiles’s death from blackwater fever, mentioned in Chapter One, is a case in point, as is that of Emmet McHardy, considered in the next chapter .

There is further tragic irony that the indigenous ailments treated by missionaries in the early decades of the twentieth century were not the ones causing the massive declines in population. Introduced European diseases such as measles, whooping cough, tuberculosis and influenza killed children and adults of child-bearing age due to lack of immunity, thereby depleting populations. Endemic tropical diseases such as yaws and elephantiasis, in contrast, were painful, sometimes disfiguring and in extreme cases crippling, but they were not lethal in the short term. Yaws was primarily a disease of childhood and generally resolved (or appeared to resolve) by itself.²⁸ Unlike influenza, however, it was both spectacularly gruesome – involving open, weeping sores – and, apparently, equally spectacularly ‘curable’ by means of a single injection, in this pre-penicillin period, of arsenic-based medications such as neosalvarsan and navarsenobillon, known as NAB. A series of such injections was needed to cure the disease; but in practice, so effective was even one injection at suppressing symptoms and reducing cross-infection that both patients and medical missionaries, not understanding that the yaws had merely become latent, believed they had a magic bullet.²⁹ As a propaganda tool advertising the health benefits of Western medicine harnessed to Christianity, NAB could hardly be surpassed.

Medical treatment was one of the few frames within which inter-racial touching was visible in missionary imagery. Other sites of allowable physical contact were greeting behaviours such as hand-shaking and shoulder-patting, full-body immersion baptism scenes, and the holding of babies, though this last also often had either a medical or ‘mothercraft education’ context. In all cases a racial power hierarchy is strictly maintained, with indigenous people almost always on the receiving end of the touch, never the initiators. Rather like missionary illness, instances of indigenous touch initiation are not so much censored as relegated to text or speech rather than transmitted visually. And again, as with illness, the situation tends to be there reframed in heroic terms that allow the missionary to retain dominance. Pastor Stewart, for instance, was wont to recite an anecdote dating from an early Big Nambas visit in which he describes himself and Wiles being physically examined by their hosts: ‘I noticed they got their hands inside the shirt sleeves of Brother Wiles and felt his lower arm, while my own trousers were pulled

²⁸ See Harrisson, *Savage Civilisation*, 280. Spontaneous remission lasting throughout adulthood could be due to the disease entering a latent phase, eventually re-appearing in old age in its more severe tertiary form. Dr Chris Thorn, pers. comm.

²⁹ Marc Dawson, ‘The 1920s Anti-Yaws Campaigns and Colonial Medical Policy in Kenya’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20:3 (1987): 417–435.

up until they could get a good look at the calves of my legs.’³⁰ By 1931, a newspaper report advertising the showing of his (by this time) two films, shows how the Malakulan men’s intercultural curiosity had been reconfigured to public taste:

As a missionary amongst the cannibals of the wilds of Malekula ... Mr Stewart has had some thrilling experiences, and speaks feelingly of the occasion when cannibal hands were run over him to ascertain how much flesh he was carrying.³¹

So in Adventist discourse, as in other denominations, brown-white touching was unseen and mentioned only with a delicious shudder of discomfort, whereas white-brown touching was the highly visible stuff of mission work. There is a biblical undertow in these scenes of serving the brown body whereby touching, rather like foot-washing, becomes an inverted badge of spiritual ascendancy.

Was white-brown touching also a sexual displacement activity? Despite the ubiquitous colonial phenomenon of white male traders and plantation owners marrying or living in marital relationships with indigenous Melanesian women, and despite the preference of (non-RC) Mission Boards for missionaries to be married, so firmly established was sexual apartheid in Christian circles that inter-racial relationships, even between consenting Christians, were apparently unthinkable and certainly unshowable in this period.³² This can be contrasted with the travelogue-adventurer approach. This, though never explicit, acknowledged inter-racial sexual attraction indirectly, either via coy ‘native belle’ imagery or, reversing genders, through the supposed sexual threat we saw Martin Johnson attribute to Nihapat in relation to pretty Osa in Chapter One.

As with Methodism, SDA values combine hygiene with the Protestant work ethic. These are clearly signalled by an intertitle in *In Cannibal Isles*: ‘The clean, prosperous mission at Big Bay, Santo, is a most cheering sight.’³³ Health, cleanliness, order, fecundity and

³⁰ AR, 4/12/16, 4.

³¹ *Launceston Examiner*, 13 March 1931, 6.

³² Presumably not undo-able, however, though naturally this is impossible to ascertain. The preference for non-Catholic missionaries to operate as married couples hints at an awareness of bachelor temptations thus avoided, as well as being a useful way of doubling the manpower and setting a Western example of Christian family life. I have encountered no evidence of any Colenso-style scandals in Melanesia of this period, although in the 1890s at least three white schoolmasters were expelled from the Anglican School on Norfolk Island for inter-racial sexual misdemeanours (Hilliard, *God’s Gentlemen*, 155). But then such revelations are unlikely to find publicity in mission propaganda newsletters! Although inter-racial marriage was very common in secular colonial circles, it would often have been almost equally shocking in middle-class suburbs of Washington, Wellington or Melbourne during this period.

³³ NFSA #12027 at approx. 11:00

clothing are presented as visible Christian antithesis to indigenous ‘nakedness’ and disease. Children do drill marching.³⁴ Healthy brown babies are displayed to the camera.³⁵ A young woman in a Mother Hubbard dress is encouraged to show off her baby who is chucked under the chin by a smiling Pastor Turner; a small girl is filmed chopping a coconut with a machete while she – rather alarmingly – grins over her shoulder at the camera.³⁶ The camera’s attentiveness to happy children, babies and mothers among indigenous mission adherents again shows a significant difference to travelogue-adventurer imagery. Children in adventure-travelogue films, in contrast, tend to be deployed to illustrate and emphasise cultural difference. If play is pictured it is likely to be showing off specifically South Seas life-skills – diving, canoe-paddling, tree-climbing or fishing – older boys’ activities that add to the sense of warrior bodies in the making as well as representing an exotic and ‘primitive’ lifestyle. Alternatively, children and babies may be presented to the camera as ‘type’ specimens to demonstrate an outré cultural practice, such as the skull elongation of Toman Islanders filmed by Johnson with the snide intertitle, ‘Perhaps the idea is to make a little brains go a long way’.

While mission film and photographs often show direct-to-camera engagement with mothers and infants, they are presented as trophies rather than representatives of Otherness. This is particularly true of full ‘mission’ Christians, such as the dressed young mother with the baby described above, who are presented to the camera as clean, docile and a picture of fecund health. On the other hand, and almost by definition, non-Christian or proto-Christian babies require medical attention and their mothers require instruction.³⁷ In neither case is a display of ‘culture’ at issue. Cultural differences in child-rearing practice – with the possible exception of bilum baby-carriers – are of little interest in the mission milieu.³⁸ Mother-infant images also have obvious Christian overtones that add to their universalism for Western audiences.³⁹

³⁴ See for example NFSA #33997 approx. 9:30

³⁵ NFSA #33989 approx. 12:40

³⁶ NFSA #12027, approx. 11:50.

³⁷ AR, 27/2/1933, 6.

³⁸ Indeed child-rearing practice gained little attention at all, in either travelogue entertainment or emerging anthropology, until Margaret Mead’s and Gregory Bateson’s *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures* (1954) based on footage collected in Bali and Papua New Guinea between 1936 and 1939.

³⁹ For a Māori example see Leonard Bell, *Colonial Constructs: European Images of Maori 1840-1914*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 1992), 89.

Despite the paternalism of such images, I suggest that the display and promotion of healthy brown babies were nonetheless a significant visual counter-argument to Western viewers still under any illusion that non-white races were doomed by contact with white 'superiority'.⁴⁰ As we have seen in regard to the catastrophic depopulation of the New Hebrides, there have been moments when this had seemed a real possibility.⁴¹ Hence missionary promotion of the intrinsic human value of babies of all colours transmitted to Western audiences an essentially optimistic and inclusive vision.

The Cinema Lecture Circuit: Distribution, Promotion, Reception

'... we showed seven thousand feet of our mission film in the largest hall available and this was packed to the doors.'

Australasian Review, 9 May 1932.

As with my other case studies, it quickly becomes apparent that it is not possible to consider one propaganda medium in isolation. The public talks given by SDA speakers, which from 1929 incorporated motion picture footage, also included lantern slide projections and – given the emphasis Adventists placed on religious literature – there would inevitably at such meetings also have been a table distributing books, tracts, newsletters such as the *Australasian Record* and illustrated magazines such as *The Youth's Instructor* and the annual *Appeal for Missions*.

In 1926 Pastor Andrew Stewart returned from the mission field of Fiji having been appointed president for the Western Australia division of the SDA administration.⁴² An advertisement and separate church notice printed in Perth's *Daily News* on 17 April 1926 – prior to the introduction of filmed footage – mark the next phase of his ministry:

⁴⁰ 'Dying race' theory was common amongst nineteenth-century social Darwinists and still prevalent during the early twentieth century. It is encapsulated by Australian amateur ethnographer Edmund Milne, who wrote: 'The Stone Age cannot blend with the Steel Age - the stone must crumble before the metal. The black man's work is done; sooner or later he must drift across the border-line into the land of vanished peoples, and his place amongst the races of the earth will be - must be - vacant.' E.O. Milne, 'The passing of the lithic people: a story of the coming of white wings to Australia', *Life*, 1 April 1916, 304.

⁴¹ See Tom Harrison, 'Depop.' In *Savage Civilisation*, 261-280.

⁴² 'Life Sketch of Pastor A.G. Stewart', *AR*, 21/4/1975, 1.

LECTURES.
"CANNIBALS AND CHRISTIANS"
"CANNIBALS AND CHRISTIANS"
 Is the Title of an
ILLUSTRATED LECTURE
 by PASTOR A. G. STEWART, -NEXT
 SUNDAY, APRIL 18, at 7.45 p.m.,
 at the
EAST FREMANTLE TOWN HALL.
 100 Good Slides. Everybody Invited.
 All Seats Free. Offering for Missions.

THE CHURCHES

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS.

Pastor A. G. Stewart, who with Mrs. Stewart has recently returned to Australia from the South Seas, is to deliver a lecture entitled "Cannibals and Christians" at the East Fremantle Town Hall on Sunday night, April 18, at 7.45 o'clock, for the general public. Pastor Stewart has 100 good slides to show, including one of the king of the cannibals. After a long experience in the islands Pastor Stewart speaks with authority.

As a comparison with the Anglican and Methodist case studies of Chapters Two and Three respectively, it is worth noting how this promotion is handled. Like the handbill for the Methodist *Transformed Isle* [Fig. 0.1], the epithet 'Cannibal' is deployed as a marketing hook, in pleasingly alliterative contrast to 'Christian'. The advertisement needs nothing more geographically specific than that title to indicate the possible visual delights of those '100 Good Slides'. The church notice is almost equally vague with its 'South Seas'. Despite the hazy location, the notice singles out the particular attraction of a slide showing 'the king of the cannibals'. Another alliterative phrase, it not only neatly illustrates the extent of popular indifference to ethnological accuracy but also demonstrates once again how easily sensationalist adventure-travelogue terminology infiltrated mission propaganda. Given the relationship outlined in Chapter One, the image referred to was almost certainly Martin Johnson's famous photograph of 'Nagapate'. Stewart himself referred to this man as 'king of the cannibals' in other publications which

likewise reproduced it.⁴³ Thus, despite having had a personal relationship with the chief of this Big Nambas group, about whom he had written in some detail in various *Australasian Review* reports, when it came to public promotions Stewart fell back on simplistic sensationalist staples to attract his audience.

Another point of comparison is the pricing strategy that the Anglican case study, *Ten Thousand Miles in the Southern Cross*, had struggled with: a modest Town Hall venue (emphatically *not* a ‘satanic’ picture theatre); all welcome; seats free; an offering for missions requested. Thus – despite the ‘cannibal king’ carrot – the evening is clearly signalled as non-commercial mission propaganda rather than a commercial money-making venture. Newspaper advertisements and notices show that Stewart valued this mode of public promotion: he delivered his illustrated lecture many times across Western Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales. In October 1928 the talk was still illustrated by a ‘hundred slides’, but by August 1929 these are supplemented by film footage – an innovation now cautiously blessed by the SDA central administration and which Stewart had clearly enthusiastically adopted. The title of the illustrated lecture slid seamlessly into the film’s title when it was premiered for an Adventist audience during a visit to Avondale College in New South Wales:

‘Cannibals and Christians’ is the title of the first moving picture film to be used by our Union Conference in showing those in the homeland the work and progress of the message in the island field. The photography was done by Pastor A. G. Stewart, and on Saturday night, assisted by Pastor Hare, he gave the initial presentation of the film. It shows a tour of 1,600 miles on the mission ketch *Melanesia*, visiting the principal mission stations in the Solomon Islands, and then crossing to the Mandated Territory [New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville]. Every one appreciated the pictures and their graphic portrayal of real life in the islands. At the close of the meeting an offering was taken up for the Ambrym mission [recently destroyed in the volcanic eruption of June 1929].⁴⁴

This footage had therefore been shot by Stewart, processed and edited between October 1928 and August 1929.

The trans-Tasman circulation of the film, together with its financially measurable impact, is evident in a report detailing the annual SDA summer camp held in Oamaru, New

⁴³ See for example A.G. Stewart, ‘Meeting a Cannibal Chief’, *Advent Review and Herald*, 25 June 1959, 17, the late date of which further attests to the continued currency of the Malakula stories in the annals of Adventism forty years on.

⁴⁴ *AR*, 2/9/1929, 6.

Zealand in February 1930.⁴⁵ Annual statistics for the preceding year mentioned that ‘offerings for foreign missions’ collected from New Zealand’s fourteen Adventist Sabbath Schools had amounted to £936.⁴⁶ Pastor Stewart attended the summer camp along with Mitieli Nakasamai, a Fijian missionary of longstanding service. Evidently *Cannibals and Christians* was shown, for both film and Fijian were recalled by popular demand for a repeat performance:

The presence and influence of Mitieli was much appreciated both by our own folk and also the *outside public*, and a request was made that Mitieli should address them again and also that the pictures should be repeated. This was done on the last Saturday night, Pastor Stewart and Mitieli taking the platform from 7.30 p.m. until 8.45 p.m., then the film was run through [my emphasis].⁴⁷

The attendance of the general public at these events supports my contention that missionary imagery had a wider social impact than can be calculated from counting congregations. While the report fails to mention the earlier showing of the film (implied by the request for its repetition) its financial impact is evident in the report that ‘the appeal by Pastor Stewart on behalf of foreign missions brought £557 in cash and pledges ...’. Two showings of the film at summer camp, in other words, made more than 50% of what had been collected by the Sabbath Schools throughout the entire previous year. It is not possible to disentangle Mitieli Nakasamai’s contribution to that result from the appearance of the film by itself, but the two together were clearly a winning combination. Indeed the powerful propaganda effect of visiting Melanesian Christians on Australasian congregations is a recurring theme across denominations in this period. Arguably it should be included in the matrix of Christianity-mediated visual information aimed at white audiences about Melanesia and Melanesians, alongside photographs, films, and printed material. As a comparison with other media, it should be noted that film and personal appearances trumped the printed word: the ‘tastefully arranged’ book tent raised just £100, this nevertheless representing record sales.

By March 1930, the energetic Pastor Stewart was back in Western Australia, showing the film (still ‘interwoven with colored slides’) at another camp meeting that, judging from a

⁴⁵ AR, 17/2/1930, 5.

⁴⁶ Sabbath Schools are for adults as well as children and offer voluntary communal Bible Study and ‘discipleship through religious education’. While the Seventh-Day Adventist church’s main source of income is from tithing, Sabbath School collections were apparently discretionary and so funds raised in this way are to some extent a measure of personal enthusiasm rather than religious obligation.

⁴⁷ AR, 17/2/1930, 5.

press notice in the Perth Sunday Times, was likewise open to the public.⁴⁸ In May of that year a contingent of Australian and Fijian Adventists sailed to San Francisco for an international SDA convention. Pastor Stewart reported from the ship en route:

On Sunday evening, by invitation, we held a stereopticon service in the dining room, when we had a crowded house. We showed views of our work in Fiji and the New Hebrides, and were loudly applauded as we told of the wonderful transformations wrought. ... They have asked us to present the film, 'Cannibals and Christians,' in the second class a little later during the voyage.⁴⁹

While any entertainment at all on an uneventful voyage may be better than nothing, that 'they' requested both slideshow and film indicates both a secular interest in Melanesian imagery and a non-denominational openness to missionary values. This is at odds with the belief shared by many travelogue-adventurers that showing evidence of Christian interference was commercial suicide. A hymn sung in their own language by the Fijian delegates was also apparently well received.

But even without personal appearances by actual Melanesians, Stewart's film lecture continued to attract full public audiences and lucrative responses to financial appeals. One showing at the following year's 1931 summer camp in Hobart, Tasmania, attracted an audience of 'over 600 people' and collected 'over £200' before going on tour with several further public shows in Launceston's Albert Hall.⁵⁰ Stewart took it to New Zealand in early 1932, apparently showing to full houses, including the Concert Chamber of the Wellington Town Hall, where the evening was advertised as an 'Unusual and Fascinating Cinema Lecture.'⁵¹ This advertisement appeared alongside a taste of the other entertainments on offer to Wellingtonians that week – 'Daughter of the Dragon', a Fu Manchu adventure redolent with the 'Exotic lure of the East', and 'My Sin', a 'Tense Love Drama' starring Tallulah Bankhead. Thus *Cannibals and Christians* could and did compete for a popular audience.

⁴⁸ *Sunday Times*, Perth WA, 9 March 1930, 1.

⁴⁹ *AR*, 7/7/1930, 8.

⁵⁰ *The Mercury*, Hobart, 2 March 1931, 5; *The Examiner*, Launceston, 13 March 1931, 6, 8.

⁵¹ *The Grenfell Record*, NSW, 31 March 1932, 3 mentions the New Zealand tour to full houses; Wellington's *Evening Post*, 2 February 1932, 2, contains the advertisement.

THE REGENT
 Direction J. C. Williamson Films.
 SCREENING 11 a.m., 2.15 p.m., 8 p.m.
THE FINAL ADVENTURE
OF DR. FU MANCHU.
 Exotic lure of the East—swift
 action of the West, glamour,
 mystery, charm, excitement.

“DAUGHTER OF THE DRAGON”
 With
ANNA MAY WONG,
WARNER OLAND,
SESSUE HAYAKAWA.
 Her honourable father is the relent-
 less Fu Manchu, and she has sworn
 to finish his revenge.

FRIDAY — COMMENCING — FRIDAY.
 GLAMOROUS BEAUTY MATED WITH
 GREAT PERSONAL CHARM.
TALLULAH BANKHEAD and FREDERIC MARCH.
 TWO FASCINATING STARS TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME
 IN PARAMOUNT'S TENSE LOVE DRAMA,
“MY SIN.”
 YOU KNOW you want to see the exquisite star who sets the fashions
 for two continents, portraying a woman whose sin is the salvation of
 the man she loves!
 BOX PLANS AT REGENT, TELEPHONE 44-144, AND BRISTOL.

UNUSUAL AND FASCINATING.
CINEMA LECTURE
 BY
PASTOR A. G. STEWART,
 A MISSIONARY OF 20 YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN THE ISLANDS.
“AMONG CANNIBALS AND CHRISTIANS
IN THE SOUTH SEAS.”
CONCERT CHAMBER, TOWN HALL,
WEDNESDAY, 3rd FEBRUARY,
AT 8 P.M.
 ADMISSION FREE. PUBLIC CORDIALLY INVITED.

From Narandera, a small town in NSW, the *Australasian Record* proudly reported that:

On the Sunday night we showed seven thousand feet of our mission film in the largest hall available and this was packed to the doors. The pictures provided the topic of conversation during the following week and numbers who were not present expressed their regret and wished another opportunity of seeing them.⁵²

This section has discussed the contribution made by motion pictures to the range of propaganda methods deployed by Seventh-Day Adventists promoting their work in Melanesia, and reviewed their reception in Australasia. It shows that missionary imagery of Melanesia held a fascination for many Western people despite and alongside other popular exotica on offer to white audiences.

The next section goes on to consider some footage from Malakula shot in 1931 that, I argue, offers an inadvertent antidote to standard Adventist fare and a remarkable insight

⁵² AR, report from Narandera, 9/5/1932, 4.

into one particular indigenous story that was closely tied to the film-maker's personal history. The purpose of this second analysis is to demonstrate how – despite owning the means of production – colonial film-makers are not necessarily in total control of the imagery of indigenous people they attempt to frame.

Section Two: Andrew Stewart and Maluan Vavau

Stereotype conflicts versus stereotype refusals

‘The most interesting experience was on Malekula, among the “wild and woolly” BIG NAMBUS’.

Andrew Stewart, intertitle, c. 1931

The first section of this chapter reviewed Adventist propaganda imagery, with particular reference to films shot in Melanesia and their impact on popular Australian audiences. This section goes on to consider in detail one of these films.

One level of my argument is that the humanising effect of mission imagery emerges despite its simplistic stereotypes, allowing Western viewers an alternative to the ‘cannibal head-hunter’ populist package. But I suggest that there is a further level at which film (and sometimes photographs) can act to undermine stereotype altogether. This is particularly so in the case of cinematographers in the field whose control of the *mise-en-scène* is incomplete or non-existent. Children, especially but not exclusively, can be powerful vehicles of stereotype-resistance because of their lack of self-consciousness. This makes them indifferent to tacit or explicit demands that they should ‘perform’ either their own customary culture or an expected view of Christian demeanour. The resulting naturalism cannot help but escape cliché and display shared humanity that transcends gulfs of cultural difference. This factor was discussed in Chapter Two in connection with certain scenes from the Anglican film *10,000 Miles in the Southern Cross*. In these Adventist films, I suggest a similar phenomenon can be seen at certain moments: a sequence in a ‘developed’ town somewhere in Papua New Guinea (there are water tanks of corrugated iron and buildings of Western materials) shows an indigenous woman helped onto a decidedly non-indigenous pony for an impromptu ride, amidst great hilarity;⁵³ at the last moment of a filing-into-church scene, after the missionary wife herself clambers through the raised doorway, a little girl peeks back out at the camera;⁵⁴ just before a scene of white-clad marching children, we glimpse a toddler carried piggy-back on his father’s shoulders and a mob of cheeky boys, grinning broadly and flaunting their earrings and necklaces.⁵⁵ Such scenes doubtless also happened in footage shot by

⁵³ NFSA #33977, approx. 12:00

⁵⁴ NFSA #33989, approx. 8:10

⁵⁵ NFSA #33989, approx. 9:50-10:50

travelogue-adventurers, but my contention is that their management of narrative made such tiny ‘escapes’ more likely to be edited out if they do not fit the cinematographers intention.⁵⁶ It is with this phenomenon in mind that I wish now to consider in more detail the film *In Cannibal Isles*. This is Stewart’s 1931 filmed record of a return visit to the mission field of Malakula, which he had left in 1923, first for service in Fiji, then for senior positions within the Adventist Australasian administration.

That this film was always intended as formal mission propaganda for a public audience is clear from the addition of intertitles, including its illustrated title slide and subtitle: ‘In Cannibal Isles: photography by A.G. Stewart’. In fact, two errors in one of the intertitles provide a glimpse into the process by which the film was readied for public consumption, since they indicate that the creation and insertion of intertitles was outsourced, with perhaps little opportunity for proof-reading or corrections. That companies existed to provide this service is also apparent from the Anglican case study discussed in Chapter Two. One imagines that Stewart hand-wrote the words he wanted and that possibly his handwriting was not always entirely clear, for the approach to Aore is described thus: ‘At second channel we were met by our mission ketch “Ledhare” and taken to the Aore Training School’.⁵⁷ ‘Second’ should read ‘Segond’ – the name of the narrow channel separating the New Hebridean islands of Santo and Aore – while the ketch’s name was *Le Phare*. This must have been an annoyance during presentations since neither typo was one that Stewart himself, as head of the Adventist’s Pacific Mission Board, could have made, particularly since *Le Phare* (The Lighthouse) was a proud new addition to the mission fleet, built in Sydney and launched only a few months previously.⁵⁸ That intertitles had been outsourced, leading to the error, indicates a relative lack of control over the production process: the Adventists were learning that owning and wielding the camera could not entirely prevent unforeseen, disruptive traces infiltrating the end result.

Unforeseen traces also infiltrate the moving images themselves, and it is these that I wish to consider in more detail as they exemplify the ‘stereotype-resistance’ phenomenon described above, in which Melanesians briefly escape the representational strategies imposed on them by the West. I refer particularly to the second reel of what appears to be

⁵⁶ See for example, Salisbury’s comment about footage being ruined by clothed Christians coming into shot, Chapter Three, 152.

⁵⁷ NFSA #12027 at approx. 9:30

⁵⁸ AR, 3/11/1930, 4.

a continuation of the 1931 trip to the New Hebrides, as the *Le Phare* proceeds from Santo to Malakula.⁵⁹ Shots of the foredeck taken from on board show the boat approaching another shore while an intertitle sets the scene: ‘The most interesting experience was on Malekula, among the “wild and woolly” BIG NAMBUS’.⁶⁰ This brief intertitle is worth unpacking, particularly in the light of ensuing scenes. That Andrew Stewart considered the Big Nambas encounter as the ‘most interesting’ of the trip suggests that Santo and Aore are less so, that he prefers the challenge of winning new converts from the bush to the more measured pace of established missions. Perhaps he is also aware that this aspect of the trip will be more interesting to a general audience. He opts to place the cliché ‘wild and woolly’ in quote marks that serve to mark his awareness of its banality. But do they also serve to distance himself (and hence the audience) from its signification even as he deploys it to acknowledge the Big Nambas’ fearsome reputation? The cliché denotes ‘rough, uncultured and lawless’ and originally referred to conditions on the nineteenth-century Western frontier of the USA. As used here it is also a phrase with a more immediate racial connotation concerning the Big Nambas men’s dense frizzy hair. As it happens, hair as a marker of racial difference features significantly in subsequent sequences, and one wonders whether this resonance suggested the phrase when the intertitles were later compiled. Thus the phrase’s meaning is undermined in several ways – by its hackneyed status, by its referential instability, and by its distancing quotation marks. Even more interesting is that Stewart, in doing this, has rejected those other familiar racist epithets that often permeated white discourse about Melanesians.⁶¹ This is not to say that they did not emerge in the spoken commentaries that accompanied screenings; the film’s ostensible title – *In Cannibal Isles* – suggest that they did. Nevertheless this intertitle, in deploying one cliché so oddly, serves to undermine the others. Most telling of all, the intertitle finishes with upper-case star-billing for the tribe’s name.⁶² If his intention had been simply to introduce the name, Stewart would not have put it in all caps. This implies that Stewart expected his viewers to recognise and be excited by it. Assiduous readers of the *Australasian Review* newsletter could indeed be

⁵⁹ NFSA # 14603: [Seventh Day Adventist Missions, Papua New Guinea Islands, c1931]

⁶⁰ Ibid. at approx. 1:42.

⁶¹ For instance the intertitle used by Reverend Nicholson in *Transformed Isle* to introduce the people of Vella Lavella as having in the recent past been ‘a cruel, crafty and vicious race ...cannibalistic headhunters numbered amongst the most bloodthirsty savages in the Pacific.’ See Chapter Three, 126.

⁶² ‘Nambus’ rather than the more correct ‘Nambas’ seems to have been a consistent SDA transliteration.

expected to be familiar with the name. However the most likely root of awareness amongst the general public was via adventure material such as Martin Johnson's films and illustrated book. As discussed in Chapter One, Adventist tardiness in their awareness of Johnson's film fame had been rectified by 1929 and this must surely have influenced Stewart's decision to play on the tribe's notoriety.⁶³ Representations of Melanesians once again become the field on which the uneasy and interdependent relationship between travelogue-adventurers and missionaries is enacted.

The historical role of the Big Nambas-Adventist connection is then invoked by a sequence showing three white missionaries (identifiable as Pastors Stewart, Turner and Parker) and two brown ones – presumably from the Aore School – making a pilgrimage through grassland and bush to the grave of Norman Wiles. Eleven years after his death, the grave now has a headstone and a white picket fence. Doubtless viewers would hear and re-hear this founding Adventist tale. This sequence shows some sophistication: the camera has been set up at a position somewhat uphill from the grave and captures both it and the party of five approaching in single file. A close-up shot of the headstone has also been taken and carefully spliced into the appropriate place as we are invited to see what they see. Both of these touches require planning rather than the somewhat haphazard point-and-shoot approach of earlier trips. They also invite the question of who is manning the camera, as this may in fact be the first time that we have seen Pastor Stewart on screen. In footage from both the Solomons and New Guinea he is conspicuous by his absence, being himself behind the camera. In fact it seems likely that the unseen cameraman is a fourth European missionary – J.C. Radley – a multi-skilled engineer in charge of both the mission fleet and the Aore Training School. Possibly Stewart felt that, as he was now amongst a people with whom he himself had had extensive contact in his earlier days as a missionary pioneer, he could with some justification hand over the camera and include himself in his film. Stewart underlines the historical continuities in which he is imbricated in a parallel *Australasian Review* report:

A few more miles by water brought us to the Tonmaru anchorage, and to where the Big Nambus tribe live, for whom we first commenced work, and where our much lamented fellow worker, Norman Wiles, lies on the hill, about half a mile from the seashore, with his face toward the

⁶³ In fact, Stewart may have inadvertently missed his mark in this, since Johnson persistently referred to the group as 'Big Numbers' rather than either the proper 'Big Nambas' or the Adventist variant, 'Big Nambus'. Stewart himself comments on Johnson's error in a 1946 article (*AR*, 22/4/1946, 6). However in 1931 it is unlikely that he had actually read or seen any of Johnson's work.

interior. We were more than pleased to learn that we now have a nucleus for a Christian village in this locality. One of their own number ... conducts worship and Sabbath school regularly, attended by a number from the large village on the hill. ... During our council meeting, we definitely appointed Joe from Ambrym, with his amiable wife, LeRakrak, an Atchinese young woman of sterling character, to labour among this Big Nambas tribe. The appointment is very acceptable to Maluan Vavau, the high chief of the tribe, and successor to Nikambat. Maluan Vavau attended our council with several of his counsellors.⁶⁴

The outline of a new generation of contact is delineated, in particular highlighting the tactical shift, evident in the years following the loss of Norman Wiles, from white missionaries to indigenous (if not necessarily local) ones. But continuity is also apparent in the mention of Nihapat/Nikambat, the current Tenmaru chief's father and famous predecessor, whose centrality was discussed in Chapter One.⁶⁵ The anchoring relationship with the current chief, Maluan Vavau, is likewise recognised as crucial. Moreover, as with Nihapat, the current chief retains the initiative. It appears – reading between the lines of the newsletter reports – that not only has he appropriated a tacit right of veto regarding 'acceptable' appointments but that his prospective attendance at the Adventists' council meeting on Aore was at his own insistence. Reporting on the same encounter, Turner wrote that, on leaving Tenmaru village that evening, the missionaries were 'informed that the chief would like to attend our general council at Aore to be held in two weeks time.'⁶⁶ This participation in Adventist meetings echoes that of 1919 when Nihapat and his men met British Resident Commissioner Merton King on Vao.⁶⁷ But it also captures an intriguing moment as modern indigenous agency counters habitual European paternalism: the white men were 'informed' that this Big Nambas chief expected to be included in a meeting that concerned him and his people. Would they have thought to invite him if Maluan Vavau had not brought it up? Had he waited for an invitation in vain that day, finally insisting on one only when the missionaries were leaving?

This is the background to the moving pictures recorded on that occasion by, let us assume, J.C. Radley, using A.G. Stewart's film camera. These are significant in their radical difference to adventure-travelogue representations of indigenous Melanesians. No

⁶⁴ AR, 27/7/31, 3.

⁶⁵ Big Nambas have hereditary patrilineal chiefs. See Gilbert Herdt, *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 122. Moreover Maluan Vavau is elsewhere referred to by Stewart as Nihapat's son (see AR, 22/4/46, 6.).

⁶⁶ AR, 29/6/1931, 2.

⁶⁷ See Chapter One, 41ff.

dancing, no ceremonies, no slit gongs, no display of self-adornment beyond basic combs and bangles, no sullenly posed ‘types’, no warfare re-enactments. Given Stewart’s history, his somewhat proprietorial attitude to his interlocutors is perhaps understandable and may explain the remarkable level of physical touching that he exhibits in subsequent sequences. Pastor Turner’s report on the same encounter describes Maluan Vavau as ‘a short, nice-looking, bearded native [who] quickly made us welcome and took us through his village’.⁶⁸ It may well be this man – meeting that admittedly vague description – who next greets the *camera* with a broad smile as he shakes hands with the white men. The sideways hand-shake while facing the lens is a politician’s gesture that strikes one as distinctly camera-savvy and modern. Much affable interaction ensues. We see, though of course cannot hear, the indigenous men speaking, laughing and joking, with each other and the Europeans; they engage directly with the camera; they pass comments to each other. Stewart meanwhile makes many opportunities for touch beyond handshakes: he pats shoulders, jingles tusk bracelets on an arm, strokes a jaw in an unsuccessful attempt to coax a good-humoured though evidently embarrassed elder to display his bad teeth. He wishes to compare them with a false set that he brandishes, presumably as another display of superior health care. It’s a display that encapsulates Tim Armstrong’s notion of prosthetic modernity whereby the body is invaded, fragmented and augmented by technology.⁶⁹ Seen in this light, one could argue that the Big Nambas man’s polite refusal to open his mouth becomes a refusal of colonial invasion. With one partial exception (discussed below) Stewart’s touching is all one way, underlining the lurking power differential. The European’s impertinent bonhomie is wearing to our eyes, but the affability and immediacy of these interactions as the indigenous men speak and smile on camera, are engrossing and all but audible. This is a rare phenomenon in both missionary and adventure-travelogue film. Generally, missionary cameras are intent on seeking out and displaying their signature ‘before-and-after’ contrast: miserable, ‘benighted savages’ versus happy, healthy Christians. ‘Native teachers’ may sometimes be depicted as friends and shown in conversation with white missionaries, but the objects of their attentions, whether heathen or converted, are rarely seen to speak. On the other hand, adventure-travelogue Melanesian personages may be shown waving their weapons and declaiming

⁶⁸ AR, 29/6/1931, 2.

⁶⁹ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3, also quoted by Dixon, *Prosthetic gods*, 62.

to each other – as do the warriors of *Gow the Headhunter*, *Chez les Mangeurs d'Hommes* and *The Jungle Woman* – but in such cases they are self-consciously enacting ‘savagery’ on request for the benefit of the camera.

Here, instead, Maluan Vavau and his men – ‘heathen’ but patently neither diseased nor ‘benighted’ – are seen to speak and laugh, both to each other and to the visitors, in normal conversational tones and in non-dramatic mid-range shots. I suggest this has a humanising effect powerfully augmented by the film medium. No still photograph could capture this animated interaction or the strong sense of autonomous male voices. Despite the silence of the medium, these scenes speak volumes. Engaged neither in performing their own cultural ceremonies nor in staging a white man’s fantasies, these men demonstrate a, confident cross-cultural sociability to an extent probably unintended for a missionary propaganda film. Western Christian mission propaganda, after all, though concerned to promote a multi-ethnic brotherhood, did it within the constraints of the conventional racism of the period. Race is seen in terms of an idealised familial hierarchy, parents raising children, older siblings helping younger ones.⁷⁰ The conventional ‘heathen’ versus Christian before-and-after trope falters before the good looks and robust intelligence of these Malakulan men. The camera thus transmitted to Western audiences images of Melanesians that were not easily subsumed into either Christian stereotypes or, given the absence of cultural performative baggage, travelogue-adventure ones.

Helen Gardner, Jude Philp and Christraud Geary have discussed the difference between a still photograph of unnamed people used for mission propaganda, for example, and the more personal meaning the same image may have for a photographer, who knows the people depicted. Thus the semiotics of propaganda, family snapshot and anthropological ‘evidence’ lies entirely in the context of reception.⁷¹ Moving pictures, on the other hand, are imbued with their own built-in temporal momentum, which makes them perhaps less susceptible to external factors. A commentary or an intertitle can certainly direct an interpretation of a sequence, but is less likely to be able to insist on one at variance to its own internal visual dynamic. Christopher Pinney has referred to this semantic narrowing

⁷⁰ Richard Eves, “Black and white, a significant contrast”, 725–748.

⁷¹ Helen Gardner and Jude Philp, 'Photography and Christian Mission', *Journal of Pacific History* 41.2 (2006): 175–190; Christraud Geary, 'Missionary Photography: Private and Public Readings', *African Arts* 24:4 (1991): 48–100.

as film's ability to 'constrain meaning through a narrative chain of signification'.⁷² Hence, I argue that filmed sequences that allow individual personalities to show through – rather than a pose or a performance imposed from without – act to accentuate shared humanity and undermine stereotype more effectively than do either still photographs or orchestrated re-enactments. This is the case with these sequences of the Big Nambas men. Stewart's personal relationship with them is captured by the camera such that more conventional tropes are temporarily side-stepped. Likewise, the Big Nambas men's assertive attitude to both camera and missionaries is mediated by their chief's political decision to welcome both.

Men from these genial scenes are then filmed rather desultorily laying a pole against a cross-beam of a new building – presumably the beginnings of a church – with one eye self-consciously on the camera. They seem reluctant and give the impression of having been asked to do this for the sake of the film. Possibly such work is beneath their rank. The next sequence shows Maluan Vavau, the three white missionaries and their two brown assistants emerging from the low door of a hut. This is presumably the 'skull house' referred to by Turner in relation to Maluan Vavau's hospitality:

He even let us into the skull house, sacred to the men, and then led us into his compound and brought out three of his eight wives. The others were elsewhere and we met them later.⁷³

Nothing underlines the gulf between missionary and adventure-travelogue preoccupations more than this indifference evinced by Turner about the interior of a men's club house. For Martin Johnson, Frank Hurley or George Tarr, gaining access to the interior of this epitome of Melanesian alterity represented the height of their adventurer aspirations. All were breathless to write about and capture pictures of skulls and associated artefacts and did so as often as possible, not always with indigenous permission. In this case, even had the chief allowed it, filming in the dark interior without artificial lighting would have been impossible (as we saw in relation to the absence of internal church scenes). However the additional absence of any kind of verbal description by Turner or Stewart suggests a

⁷² Christopher Pinney, 'The Lexical Spaces of Eye-Spy', in Peter Crawford and David Turton, eds., *Film As Ethnography*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 26-49, 27. Alison Griffiths nuances Pinney's position by pointing out that pre-documentary ethnographic film often comprised lengthy static shots that had no more narrative than still photographs and were thus just as reliant on captioning. Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference*, 119. My point here, though, is that Stewart has captured something far more vital than the static pose.

⁷³ AR, 29/6/31, 2.

tactical decision to avoid transmitting culturally active ‘heathen’ paraphernalia to the ‘home’ audience. Inactive, abandoned artefacts – trophies of conversion – were a different matter.⁷⁴ This is not to say that the missionaries were oblivious to their hosts’ values: Turner recognises that they have been granted a surprising honour – ‘He even let us ...’ – and concedes that the place is ‘sacred’ to them. Again, we see missionaries cautiously negotiating a space between actual relationships ‘in the field’ and what they perceived as the requirements of propaganda. While these *Australasian Review* reports were written with an Adventist audience in mind, it seems likely that they approximate the tenor of the public commentaries.

There follows a scene intertitled ‘The savage “shoots” with the motion camera.’ ‘Savage’ is unusual in Adventist discourse of the period, ‘heathen’ being the preferred term, but in this instance the alliteration with ‘shoots’ has proved too seductive. A Big Nambas man holds a small hand-held motion picture camera directly aimed at the camera which is our viewpoint. He handles it steadily in front of him, gazing into the viewfinder so that his own face is obscured. If he is actually filming, it would have been a nice touch to splice in some of his footage of ‘our’ camera looking at him, but as there is no evidence of this perhaps he is just experiencing the image in the viewfinder. Small hand-held motion picture cameras like this were fairly new to the mass market and still expensive. That this missionary expedition had at least two motion picture cameras on board emphasises how well-resourced was the Adventist enterprise. But the scene also repeats the well-worn trope which is summed up in the intertitle which captions it: ‘They marvel at the white man’s magic’. This insistence that indigenous people should not just admire but be demonstrably *astonished* by Western technology permeates both missionary and adventure-travelogue representations. It is simultaneously a symptom of white supremacist notions and the anxiety that those very notions serve to mask. The great flood of technological achievement that characterised capitalist modernity in the West was also a source of angst, as Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931) attest. That many white men wanted so badly to see ‘their’ technology as a source of awe and desire in others suggests an underlying unease in their own relations

⁷⁴ Another Adventist film shows a wooden figure with painted face being manhandled by Pastor G.F. Jones and three indigenous men in a rowboat, accompanied by the self-important intertitle: ‘Our missionaries convey to the Government a deserted idol sent in from the Inus station’. Quite what the ‘Government’ were expected to do with it is unclear, but it is noticeable that despite its ‘deserted’ inertness, the indigenous men are careful to hold the anthropomorphic figure upright. See NFS # 33994 approx. 14:40.

with it. The common invocation of magic, by projecting it onto supposed indigenous perception, nevertheless allows the word to be used. ‘Any sufficiently advanced technology’, science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke has famously written, ‘is indistinguishable from magic.’⁷⁵ The industrial era is the first in which ordinary people consume everyday commodities whose function is understood but whose design and manufacture are mysterious to them. Such technological alienation is deepened by Marx’s insight that, under capitalism, objects themselves become the phantasmagorical focus of desire rather than the social relations which underlie their production. Thus the supposedly marvelling ‘savage’, voyeuristically watched as he peers through a viewfinder, studies a film projector, examines the fabric of a movie screen or listens to a phonograph, becomes not only a displaced embodiment of the unseen Western audience’s own unspoken technological incomprehension but also enacts its own commodity fetishism. In so doing, the celluloid Melanesian man both expresses and validates the modernity of the West, rather than revealing anything about himself.

Oddly enough, the intertitle discussed above – ‘They marvel at the white man’s magic’ – is spliced in at the *end* of the sequence of the indigenous man with the camera, so that it could easily be taken to refer to the immediately following scene. In this, Pastor Stewart has taken off his hat and bent his head towards a man – the same whom Stewart had earlier teased with dentures – who strokes his short pale hair with apparent delight. This is a rare instance of active brown-white indigenous touching being recorded on screen. As evidence of indigenous agency, however, it barely counts since Stewart, having clearly made the invitation, retains his dominance. The Big Nambas men give every impression of ‘marvelling’ more at the white man’s hair than they do at his ‘magic’. Since blond hair – whether natural or bleached – is not especially unusual in Melanesia, one surmises that it is the smooth, straight texture of Stewart’s that is of interest.⁷⁶ Inter-racial hair comparisons continue with a later sequence – again much duplicated in both missionary and adventure-travelogue films from throughout Melanesia – in which a man demonstrates the use of his carved hair ornament that doubles, in this case, as both comb and eyeshade. These handsome men are proud of their bushy hair and smile knowingly at the camera. In offering his own smooth head for stroking, Stewart may be drawing

⁷⁵ Popularly known as ‘Clarke’s Third Law’. Arthur C. Clarke, ‘Hazards of Prophecy’ in *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, London: Gollancz, 1974 (2nd edition, revised), 39.

⁷⁶ Tom Harrison also reports cutting a dash amongst Big Nambas women who were fascinated by his long, straight fair hair. *Savage Civilisation*, 399.

attention to genetic difference, or demonstrating his idea of culturally superior hair hygiene, or showing off to the audience his intimacy with Otherness by allowing this on-screen touch. Regardless of the intent, however, the effect is one of a gentle tactility. This is refreshingly at odds with either the medical missionary model of inter-racial touch or the touch-avoidance of the travelogue-adventurers, who generally prefer the optic to the haptic. It is another example of missionaries sometimes producing images that fit neither adventure-travelogue stereotypes nor their own, thus inadvertently dislodging both. Jean and John Comaroff also discuss the tactility of hair-stroking amongst other manifestations of 'physical playfulness' and 'intimacy, even eroticism' of brown-white touch in early encounters between high-ranking Tswana people of Africa and missionary Robert Moffat in the early 19th century. They suggest that such interactions were only feasible in early contact situations and were quickly quashed by the 'bodily politics' of colonial power.⁷⁷

A sequence follows that begins with what seems a conventional 'type' portrait close-up of a silent young indigene. But then the camera pans to reveal a frowning older man making serious comments to the younger one. The 'type' trope gives way to a human conversation. Given the direction of the older man's looks, his comments may be about the camera or its operator or indeed the entire visit. One longs to know what he is saying. The sense of living, indigenous voices talking quietly to each other, saying things we can neither hear nor understand, disrupts the white noise of stereotype. The tantalising breath of the spoken word escapes the fixative effect of two-dimensional imagery. It is freed all the more by the absence of caption constraint, opening a silent, fluid space of semantic possibility.

Then the missionary mainstream returns with the filming of a service using the SDA's signature teaching-aid, the picture roll. An intertitle announces: 'Having gained their confidence, we hold a simple service using the S[abbath] S[chool] picture roll.' Unlike the scenes of affable conversation with the high-ranking men, this is a formal set-piece with a group of around twenty men and boys gathered around an easel on which is displayed 'The Story of Creation'. The camera films from behind the group as the missionary expounds. The scene is an echo of the pair of photographs from a decade before, showing Norman Wiles and a younger Andrew Stewart in the same role (Chapter

⁷⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Through the Looking-glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1988, 1:1, 6-32, 26-27.

One). Indeed it is likely that Maluan Vavau, as a youth, was also in those photographs. For some reason the men in this picture roll scene are encouraged to approach, point to and touch the print on the easel. It is a peculiar process, but one which allows Stewart further opportunities for touching hands and arms as he orchestrates this interaction. The tactility of Stewart's dealings with these men – the desire for them to physically touch and be touched by the Message he represents – underlines the intimacy of what he so desires to achieve here. It parallels the intimacy of the act of Creation shown on the picture roll. The image depicts a newly minted Adam, whose white-skinned primacy with God must have been a chastening lesson for its brown beholders. As requested, men dutifully touch the figure, all the while glancing back over their shoulders at the camera, acutely aware of being filmed. Thus they are hemmed in on both sides by the West's obsessive image-making technologies, required to gaze even as they are required to be gazed upon. Thus – in another sort of creation story – visibility joins prosthesis as both a marker and generator of Christian modernity.⁷⁸

Still photographs also have a role in this process. Parker shares out small snapshots to the men, which must have been taken on a previous trip and processed on Aore. One of the unnamed indigenous missionaries helps distribute and explain them. These cause considerable interest and draw big smiles. They are passed from hand to hand; people peer over shoulders at them. We cannot see them and there is no helpful intertitle, but the chatter and degree of enjoyment shown by the men suggests that these are portraits of people they know. As Martin Johnson had found a dozen years previously, visual modernity elicited far more enthusiasm when used as a mirror rather than a window.⁷⁹ This emphasis on image-making technology continues with a man being shown how to use a large still camera, this time by Radley. Stewart, presumably, is back behind the film camera. The still camera is held at waist-height with a strap around the neck and a look-down viewfinder with a large, fold-out leather hood. Thus worn as an apparatus of the body, the camera becomes another prosthesis. As with the earlier shot with the movie camera, this Big Nambas man stares into the viewfinder, watching the film camera watching him, his vision now mediated by several sets of lenses. It must have felt at times

⁷⁸ For visibility's relationship to modernity see Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and visuality*, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

⁷⁹ See Chapters One and Five. Gardner and Philp, 'Photography and Christian Mission', also discuss the importance of photography for forming relationships in the field. On the significance of mirrors as gifts and trade goods in early colonial encounters see Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Through the Looking-glass'. 21.

that modernity was synonymous with the capture of images of people through prosthetic means. And indeed the analogy between photography and imperialism was not lost on Susan Sontag, who noted that ‘from its start, photography implied the capture of the largest number of subjects. Painting never had so imperial a scope.’⁸⁰

Despite these stock tropes, I have argued here that this footage of Maluan Vavau’s Big Nambas men, shot in 1931, has features that escape the bounds of standard propaganda, just as the men themselves did (as we shall see below). In contrast, when the scene changes from north-west Malakula to another site – probably Malua Bay⁸¹ – we are back on familiar ground, with a white-clad congregation, men dressed in T-shirts and shorts, women in island dresses, filing into and then out of a church. Successful conversion scenes are then repeated on Ambrym on a larger scale, with an outdoor service. A map of the world, emphasising the broader geographical horizons offered by Christian modernity, has pride of place at a sizeable village gathering. One man ostentatiously hitches up his new long white trousers; we admire a European-style modern church; a slit-gong summons; and yet further scenes of converted ‘natives’ attending church. Ambrym’s success, in mission terms, is the climax of this segment, and Stewart acknowledges the key role played by Pacific Island teachers: shots of an indigenous pastor banging the slit-gong, and a smiling brown missionary couple – possibly Fijian – with their baby, are accompanied by a magnanimous intertitle: ‘We have hundreds of converts on this island, mostly won by natives.’ None of them, however, are given an individual voice or personality visible on screen. The congregations are homogenised, the pastors smiling but silent. None of them are filmed playing with photographic equipment, either. The pleasurable frisson to Western audiences of watching a ‘Cannibal with a Kodak’ (a typical Martin Johnson caption for that particular trope) vanishes the instant the ‘cannibal’ pulls on a singlet and becomes a ‘boy’.

By filming the still-heathen Big Nambas people followed by the Ambrym success story, it seems likely that Stewart intended a standard-issue before-and-after conversion contrast. Perhaps he later realised that his relative intimacy with the actual people and personalities of the Big Nambas group meant that this had not come off. Propaganda messages operate better using generic stereotypes. So he finishes by tagging on a further scene to the end of

⁸⁰ Susan Sontag, *On photography*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 7.

⁸¹ See AR 29/6/31, 2.

the Ambrym sequence. This shows presumably unconverted women, bare-breasted and fibre-skirted, sitting on the ground, pointedly ignoring the camera as they chop coconut to hand-feed the pigs that nose around them. To Adventist eyes this unremarkable New Hebridean domestic scene is deplorable on multiple counts. There is no intertitle, but it would no doubt have been used to illustrate a closing appeal for funds concerning the 'work' still to do.

I have spent some time analysing the Big Nambas section of the footage because it inadvertently records historical indigenous personalities who are neither 'benighted' nor 'redeemed' nor colourfully 'savage'. They are instead shown as vital individuals, chatting, teasing, laughing, interacting with each other and their visitors on relaxed and confident terms. Somehow these men have escaped the stilted stereotypes favoured by both missionaries and travelogue-adventurers in their representations of Melanesians.⁸² In Adventist propaganda terms this Big Nambas group was in fact a failure, and this may be why the film's ostensible title – *In Cannibal Isles* – seems not to have enjoyed the same newspaper promotion as Stewart's other titles, *Cannibals and Christians in the South Seas* and *In Primitive Papua*.⁸³ I've argued that the imagery 'fails' as propaganda precisely because it succeeds in displaying 'pagan' Melanesian men as autonomous and independent. But in this case the propaganda also 'fails' because the conversion outcome for which Stewart prayed was not forthcoming. In this case he was never able to attach a visibly converted 'after' to the pagan 'before'. To understand why, we must backtrack briefly to 1920. Again, Adventist newsletter reports provide a valuable glimpse of indigenous agency operating independently of colonial desires.

⁸² That the footage all but excludes women indicates the strongly gendered nature of this imagery. The missionary group were disappointed not to meet more of the Big Nambas women, whose huddled forms beneath their extraordinary head-dresses would have made better visual candidates for cultural disapproval. The downtrodden status of heathen women was a key Christian propaganda element across all denominations and all areas of Melanesia. That women were not forthcoming about being filmed, despite the undoubted desire of missionaries to film them, again indicates that, nevertheless, some form of indigenous control over their representation is at work.

⁸³ Both of these titles, often together, are mentioned in the context of advertisements for Stewart's illustrated talks. This is not to say that some of the footage from *In Cannibal Isles* was not mixed, matched and re-used under the general title, for promotional purposes, of *Cannibals and Christians*, which was still being promoted in newspaper advertisements well into the 1930s.

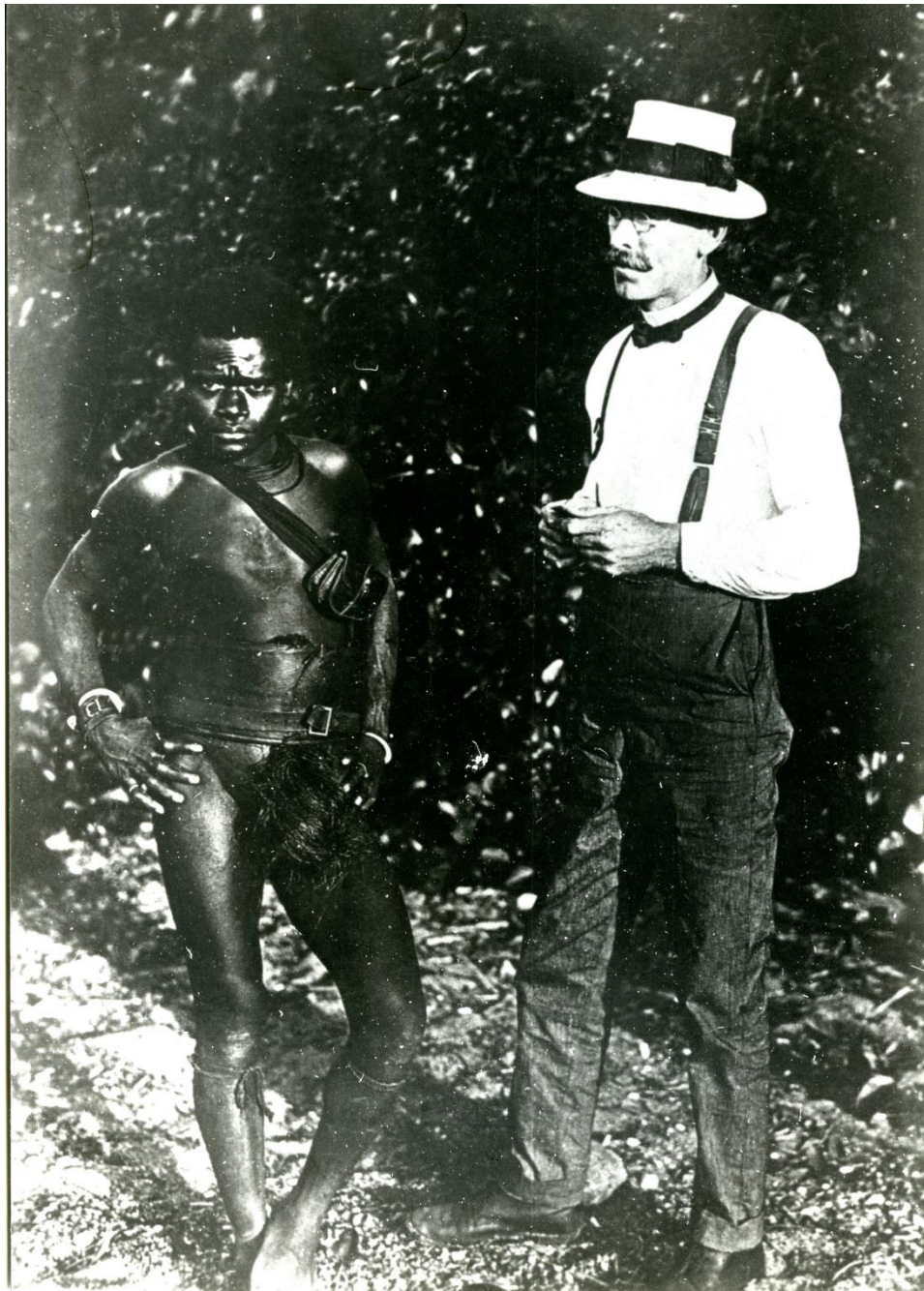


Fig. 4.2: Maluan Vavau and Andrew Stewart, c.1920.

As discussed in Chapter One, Norman Wiles's abrupt death in May 1920 seems to have genuinely dismayed – and indeed destroyed the power of – the Tenmaru chief of that era, Nihapat. Soon afterwards he ceded chieftainship to a young man whom the Adventists initially call 'Vil Vil'. This chief was, in 1920 or '21, disparagingly termed a 'wily young man' of 'about nineteen or twenty years of age'.⁸⁴ 'Vilvil' is in fact a grade title on the

⁸⁴ H.M. Blunden, *AR*, 9/1/22, 2.

suge status system.⁸⁵ Since the Big Nambas are patrilineal, it seems likely that this young chief – subsequently called Maluan Vavau in Adventist reports – was in fact Nihapat’s son.⁸⁶ A photograph of Stewart with a short young man in the Adventist Heritage Centre’s archive supports this supposition: it is annotated on the back: ‘Vilvil (Big Nambus chief’s son) and Pr. A.G. Stewart’. [Fig. 4.2] The age of both men in the photograph fits the October 1920 date of a rather heroic visit by Stewart in which he seemed – with the aid of hymns translated and taught by Wiles – to have broken the ice which had taken hold in the aftermath of Wiles’ death.⁸⁷ This photograph is reproduced in subsequent years with Maluan Vavau’s name, status and story excised, captioned only ‘Stewart with a Big Nambas man’, further demonstrating how easily lost are the four-dimensional deep histories behind two-dimensional snapshots.⁸⁸ The young man’s cocky, hands-on-hips stance and direct, frowning glare at the camera are almost identical to those of his predecessor in Martin Johnson’s famous image. His almost aggressive interaction with the camera lens contrasts with Stewart’s diffident, diagonal gaze out of shot, and their awkward stances relative to each other, suggest tension. Despite his ‘joining in the chorus’ of the hymns, Maluan Vavau’s demeanour in the 1920 photograph does not suggest an incipient convert.⁸⁹ In fact, although negativity was little reported in the *Australasian Review* at the time, the optimistic reports from 1931 retrospectively suggest that Maluan Vavau had, as a youth, actively countered his father’s openness to missionary intervention:

God’s Spirit is working upon the hearts of the natives of this stronghold of heathenism, and especially of Maluan Vavau, the Big Nambus chief, who, in the early days of our work on Malekula, so bitterly opposed the work of Brother Norman Wiles, but who now seems to be earnestly seeking for the light.⁹⁰

The result of Nihapat’s abdication and Maluan Vavau’s opposition was that Adventist efforts during the 1920s had been deflected towards other Big Nambas villages, notably Nivimbus, to which Donald Nicholson conducted the Crane Expedition personnel in

⁸⁵ Jean Guiart, ‘L’organisation sociale et politique du Nord Malekula’, *Journal de la Société des océanistes*, Vol 8, 1952, 149-259, 194.

⁸⁶ See n.66.

⁸⁷ *AR*, 10/1/1921, 5

⁸⁸ *Journal of Pacific Adventist History*, 3:2, December 2003, 31.

⁸⁹ *AR*, 10/1/1921, 5

⁹⁰ *AR*, 28/9/31, 6.

1929.⁹¹ After such high hopes from Nihapat's friendship between 1916 and 1920, the turnaround at Tenmaru must have been disappointing. The revival of friendly relations with Maluan Vavau and his co-chiefs was therefore of great significance to Stewart and Turner and doubtless informed the scenes filmed by the visiting Adventists in 1931. As viewed on the 1931 footage, the 'short, nice-looking, bearded native [who] quickly made us welcome and took us through his village' could easily be the same man at 30 as the short, nice-looking, clean-shaven youth of 19 who had been photographed glowering beside Stewart in 1920. Adventist optimism for an Ambrym-style transformation was misplaced however: by 1934 the *Sydney Morning Herald* – relying on an account by Pastor Turner who had recently returned from another trip – reported tribal tensions in the north-west that were threatening the local mission teacher's family. In the confused article, Turner quoted Maluan Vavau as admitting that 'he was unable to control his people' and that 'he could not prevent his followers from driving off the mission boys'.⁹² Cannibalism and polygamy feature heavily in the sensational account: fatalities were, naturally, reported 'eaten' and, for reasons unclear, the chief's 'many wives' seemed implicated in the violence. Turner's missionary zeal faltered under his exasperation. 'As a result of gross immorality and inter-tribal warfare,' he declared, 'the people of the Malekulan coast were killing themselves off. They were a fast disappearing tribe.'⁹³

Missionary 'failure' with this particular Big Nambas group almost certainly coloured how the 1931 film sequences were subsequently used, and indeed whether they were used at all. Moreover, and possibly not coincidentally, the sequences also 'fail' as simplistic propaganda precisely because the men are too fully realised: they resist the distancing and silencing effect of stereotype on camera because – unlike the Ambrym sequences for instance – Stewart himself was too personally involved with them. Again, we see the tricky space negotiated by missionaries in the field who are trying to juggle both personal relationships – in this case suffused with nostalgia for the chalk-face fieldwork of a dozen years previously – and propaganda demands. Each context frames indigenous acquaintances differently. Unfortunately the absence of newspaper reviews that specifically identify these sequences makes any assessment of contemporary audience reception impossible. Nevertheless they must have had some exposure to Australian

⁹¹ See Chapter One, 67ff.

⁹² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 June 1934, 9.

⁹³ Ibid.

audiences, as the insertion of intertitles makes clear. Moreover they still stand as an extraordinary historical document of the colonial period on Malakula.

Maluan Vavau's next and final appearance in Adventist annals is, sadly, in the form of a lengthy obituary, written by A.G. Stewart in 1946.⁹⁴ It records the chief's assassination at the hands of a tribal enemy. Stewart's assessment is an interesting document, not only because it reflects his religious views ('what a man sows he will also reap') but because of the glimpse it gives into the ever-encroaching modernity of the colonial and wartime world of the intervening years: the waning power of the chief as young men grew frustrated at the elders' warfare and harem-keeping; the increase in men leaving for plantation recruitment or other forms of education; the rupture of World War II, when the 'compound of the chief became a rendezvous for American officers and servicemen'. Fascinatingly, the chief himself 'was for a while the guest of some of the officers at one of the largest Allied bases in the South Sea Islands'. But still he resisted:

Ignoring the overtures of the missionaries to forsake his old haunts and settle down in a more accessible place where he could have his children educated, and take advantage of the amenities of present-day life, he continued to live in his more or less secluded compound, endeavouring to perpetuate the superstitious practices of his forbears. Thus he was engaged [in a kava-drinking ceremony] when the fatal shot brought his life to an untimely end, aged about forty-five years.⁹⁵

That none of the above information from the previous fifteen years had made its way into earlier editions of the *Australasian Review* indicates Maluan Vavau's thorough expulsion from Adventist publications. At the same time it shows that Stewart continued to be aware of what his friendly young enemy was up to. The distinction between private missionary relationships and public propaganda needs is again evident. Stewart himself felt the chief's death removed a barrier to progress:

It may be that greater facilities will now be given the missionaries to extend their work; and probably they will have easier access to the young people, who are giving evidence of a desire to separate from the old ways and live in peaceful conditions.⁹⁶

In the obituary, Stewart remembered Nihapat fondly, comparing him favourably with his recalcitrant son. This also occasions a rare reference to Martin Johnson's films (in which

⁹⁴ *AR*, 22/4/1946, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Stewart takes the opportunity to correct Johnson's stubborn error with the tribe's name – he must finally have read or seen some of Johnson's work). From then on, Adventist publications recalling missionary feats on the New Hebrides always return to the original, unsullied, heroic story of 'Nikambet' and the Wilesees.⁹⁷

In 1935, Maluan Vavau and his people went on to have another brush with celluloid fame, albeit an equally doomed one. Tenmaru (or Tonmaru) was also the village that Tom Harrisson tried filming for Douglas Fairbanks before giving up on the Big Nambas in preference for Santo.⁹⁸ A photograph of Big Nambas women in Harrisson's *Savage Civilisation* identifies a girl in the cast as 'the chief of Tonmaru's daughter'. Another photograph, captioned 'On The Set', shows the cinematographers at work with the actors and gives a profile glimpse of a short man who may well be the chief. Another from Harrisson's book shows 'My friends Kali and Morkate, war chiefs'. Kali is instantly recognisable from the Adventist film as one of Maluan Vavau's officers or co-chiefs.⁹⁹

Conclusion: a dynasty of film stars

Thus Maluan Vavau and his people had a lengthy experience with white men and their cameras. His father, Nihapat, had first been photographed in 1910 by Felix Speiser.¹⁰⁰ In 1917, as a teenager, he can be seen in Martin Johnson's film emerging from the bush path onto the beach with his soon-to-be-internationally-famous father. At around nineteen, in 1920, he succeeds to chiefly power and is photographed with Andrew Stewart asserting his new status. Mission progress at Tenmaru seems to falter under his stewardship, but in 1931 – as discussed in this chapter – he is filmed enthusiastically welcoming another Adventist delegation. And in 1935 – despite the inter-tribal fighting that had made the mission untenable – it seems his own daughter may have appeared in a film made by Tom Harrisson for Douglas Fairbanks. Maluan Vavau is confident around cameras; he knows that white people are interested in looking at him and he is interested in what advantage may emerge from that. But this is not the focus of his life. The uncovering of this indigenous history counters the tendency for images to come adrift from the

⁹⁷ See for example *Advent Review and Herald*, 22 March 1956, 22 and 25 June 1959, 16-17, 19-20; and an advertisement for Mrs. N. Wiles public talk on 'a poignant mission story throbbing with pathos, faith, and courage...', n.d., AHC.

⁹⁸ See Chapter One, 70-72.

⁹⁹ *Savage Civilisation*, plates between 240 and 241.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter One, 32, note 14.

circumstances of their creation. Maluan Vavau's story adds ballast and context to the two-dimensional sliver of time in which he is caught in the colonial gaze. It draws attention to the continuity and autonomy of indigenous lives lived under colonialism. It shows them managing their affairs as best they can, between and despite their intermittent representation in Western media made for Western audiences by Western observers with their own preoccupations and agendas, whether missionaries, adventurers or anthropologists.

Having analysed how European modernity 'requires the constant manufacture of others' in order to establish its own self-identity, Terry Smith discusses an alternative kind of otherness – an 'otherness other to that generated by/within modernity', an 'otherness which is of-itself'.¹⁰¹ Smith cites contemporary Australian tribal Aborigines as an example of the continuous agency of the 'non-modern' operating within and around modernity.¹⁰² The Big Nambas village of Tenmaru – flickering intermittently into Western sight then vanishing again, its continuity unrecognised, its concerns disregarded – likewise represents just such an alternate non-modern agency of its period, adapting as best it can to colonialism without relinquishing autonomy. Smith comments that in the 'resistances, reluctances and refusals which [colonialism] constantly provoked in its subjects ... [i]t installed ... the postcolonial in all of its beginnings.'¹⁰³ Thus the seeds of post-colonialism are generated in the very act of colonisation. He suggests an optimistic definition of post-modernity precisely in the rejection of modernity's solipsistic version of 'othering' in favour of celebrating agency and diversity in all its many voices. In this light, even if the Adventists' footage of the Big Nambas men failed as 'normal' propaganda, by filming these incorrigibly 'heathen' men just being themselves, Stewart perhaps inadvertently made a surprising contribution to post-modernity.

The following chapter considers our final case study in autonomous missionary film-making, considered in the wider context of propaganda media for the Roman Catholic Marist mission on Bougainville, 1929-1935.

¹⁰¹ Terry Smith, 'Modernism, Modernity and Otherness', *Australian Journal of Art*, 13, 1996, 145–166, 147, 158.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 147.

**The Marist Missions of Oceania Cry Out With the Voices of
A Thousand Islands**

for

PRIESTS, LAY-BROTHERS, SISTERS

and

ZEALOUS PROMOTERS IN NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

WILL YOU ENROL?



Please
Send
Us
Some
Missioners

Help
Them
To
Keep
Us Good.

"WE DO NOT EAT THEM NOW."

The Diocese of Lyons has sent 71 Priests and Brothers of the Society of Mary and 50 Sisters to engage in the most lucrative career of all, untroubled by the worries of unemployment.

WHAT WILL THE FOUR DIOCESES OF NEW ZEALAND DO

? ? ?

**WANTED—YOURSELVES OR YOUR CHILDREN.
YOUR PRAYERS AND YOUR ALMS.**

The Solomons in Particular Appeal.

Fig. 5.1: *Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1933, 10.

Chapter Five: Missionaries Roll Their Own: Part II

Roman Catholic Case Study: Saints and Savages

Introduction: a cry for help

‘Please Send Us Some Missioners ... We Do Not Eat Them Now’

Advertisement, *The Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1933.

Within the framework of my thesis, this case study occupies the final stage of an arc of missionary involvement with travelogue-adventurers – from facilitation (Chapter 1), through passive commissioning (Chapter 2) then active collaboration (Chapter 3), to ‘do-it-yourself’ independence (Chapters 4 and 5). As we saw in the previous case study examining Adventist propaganda imagery from 1929 and 1931, the mission enterprise finds it impossible to completely escape the rhetorical demand to invoke the cannibal/head-hunter/savage trope so central to the travelogue-adventure genre. It perpetually finds itself in an oscillating tension with it. The following example illustrates the same tension.

A full page advertisement in a Roman Catholic New Zealand monthly, *The Marist Messenger* of 1 June 1933, features a photograph of four Melanesian children posing behind the shell of a giant turtle. [Fig. 5.1] Framing the photograph are numerous textual fragments whose disjointed structure and varied fonts suggest a mild hysteria. ‘The Marist Missions of Oceania Cry Out With the Voices of A Thousand Islands ...’ proclaims its heading, and, to be sure, multiple voices are audible within the text of this advertisement. The plea for volunteer ‘Priests, Lay-Brothers, Sisters’ to serve in the Islands (‘The Solomons in Particular’) is harnessed to an appeal for ‘Zealous Promoters’ to work at home in New Zealand and Australia. Blatant nationalistic competition is staged through the challenge that ‘The Diocese of Lyons has sent 71 Priests and Brothers of the Society of Mary and 50 Sisters ... *WHAT WILL THE FOUR DIOCESES OF NEW ZEALAND DO???*’ This is followed by the solicitation: ‘Wanted – Yourselfs Or Your Children. Your Prayers and your Alms.’ There is an oblique reference to the Great Depression that pinpoints this appeal within a wider social and economic environment: it

entreats volunteers, wryly, to ‘engage in the most lucrative career of all, untroubled by the worries of unemployment’.

Amidst these exhortations are words supposedly placed in the mouths of the Melanesian children depicted: ‘Please Send Us Some Missioners. Help Them to Keep Us Good. WE DO NOT EAT THEM NOW.’ Like the Methodist advertisement for the film *The Transformed Isle*, the hackneyed spectre of cannibalism is evoked even as it is countered by an image of smiling, unthreatening children.¹ While the statement was undoubtedly intended as tongue-in-cheek, the positioning of this supposed cannibalism sometime in an unspecified past (‘we do not eat them now’ implies they did so once) in no way removes it from a Western audience’s attention. Rather, of course, the invocation does exactly the opposite. Thus, as with the Methodist example, Catholic propaganda simultaneously both adopts and resists the discourse of popular white fascination with imagined black ‘savagery’. The admonition ‘Help Them to Keep Us Good’ is a nice play on this temporal tension. It implies that backsliding into an earlier state of evil is inevitable without mission influence and, moreover, that such a deplorable result will be the fault of the advertisement’s readers. In keeping with the rather cacophonous text, the children’s ventriloquised ‘voices’ appear to address the reader directly, over the heads, as it were, of the putative ‘missioners’ who are referred to in the third person as ‘them’. Nonetheless, that Melanesian people be given even puppet words with which to ‘speak’ directly to a white popular audience is an unusually humanising step.

The photograph used in the advertisement had been taken sometime between 1929 and 1932 on Bougainville by a young New Zealand Marist missionary, Father Emmet McHardy, S.M.² McHardy was a meticulous caption-writer for the ‘snaps’ he sent home to his brother, John, who compiled a photo-album recording the former’s tragically brief career. McHardy’s original caption for the print is strikingly different to that later used in the advertisement. It reads ‘Four little Rorovana kiddies play with a fine turtle shell.’³ Another photograph on the same page shows the oldest girl peeking playfully over the shell. McHardy’s caption for this demonstrates in a few words some of the salient

¹ See Prologue.

² S.M. stands for Society of Mary and is an honorific appended to the name of all Marist priests. For brevity, I will use it only on first mention.

³ Emmet McHardy, caption C75 to photograph 24.1, McHardy photo album, 24. Marist Archives, Wellington, (205/20 MAW). Hereafter, McHardy album.

characteristics of his dealings with Melanesian people and hence how these were transmitted, via his brother, to a wider audience at home. It reads ‘Matepai trying to imagine she is a turtle’. [Fig. 5.2] The tone is chatty and intimate; the child is granted the ‘dignity of naming’.⁴ The photographer has entered into an imaginative engagement with his subject. The warmth between McHardy and the children is palpable, and very different to the sullen demeanour of the subjects of many such photographs, including the Methodist advertisement discussed earlier.

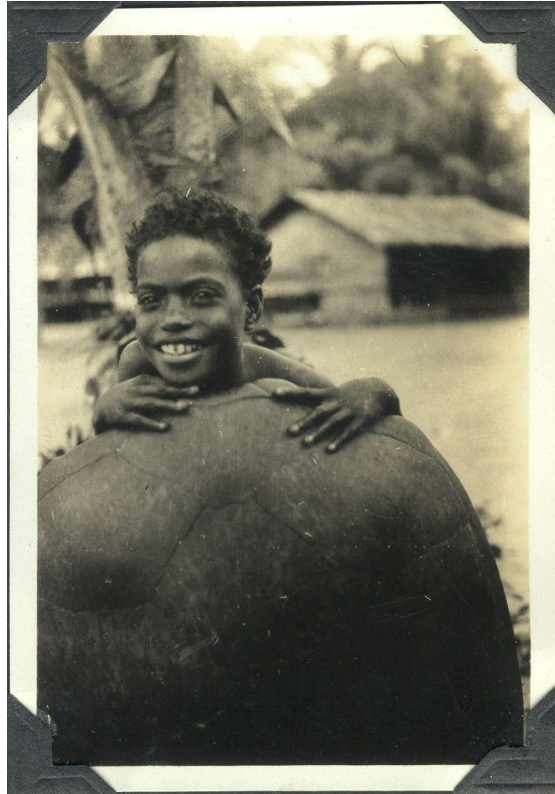


Fig. 5.2: Emmet McHardy, ‘Matepai trying to imagine she is a turtle’, Rorovana, c.1930.

The redeployment of McHardy’s ‘Rorovana kiddies’ in the advertisement pleading for mission support from Australia and New Zealand illustrates the fluidity of missionary representations of Melanesian people intended for white consumption. In both cases – companionable photo-album and strident advertisement – the image depends for its interpretation on its discursive frame. Both aim to raise awareness and support, but in very different ways. McHardy’s friendly style is perhaps partly predicated on the relative intimacy – at this stage – of his intended audience. As regards the advertisement, it seems

⁴ David Hansen, ‘Seeing Truganini’. *Australian Book Review* (May 2010): 45–53, 48.

that the more impersonal and general the appeal, the more likely it is that the trope of ‘cannibal savagism’ infiltrates missionary propaganda. This was a trend we also saw with Andrew Stewart’s uneasy discursive relationship with his friend Nihapat, so-called ‘king of the cannibals’, in the previous chapter.

The advertisement – ‘We Do Not Eat Them Now’ – has a particular history and context for that time and place, as does the somewhat desperate tone of the text.

The papacy of Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) – known as the ‘Pope of the Missions’ – had ‘stimulated missionary endeavour’ throughout the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ In 1927 the newly canonised St. Thérèse of Lisieux was proclaimed joint patron saint of Missions, alongside St. Francis Xavier, while the Pope pursued a policy of expanding and consolidating mission fields, known in the trade as Vicariates and Prefectures Apostolic. New Zealand’s Roman Catholics had long regarded *tangata whenua* as their appropriate mission focus, with French Marist and British Mill Hill missionaries coming in to tend Māori flocks in the rural North Island. Pius XI’s initiative encouraged New Zealand-born missionaries to turn their attention for the first time to the islands of the Pacific.⁶ John Fotheringham was the first Marist priest from New Zealand to volunteer – he left for Samoa in 1928. Emmet McHardy was the second, volunteering specifically for the Solomons in the same year, almost immediately after his ordination.

Needless to say, these movements had political aspects as well as religious ones. Australia and New Zealand found themselves with greater responsibilities in post-1918 Oceania following the confiscation of Germany’s erstwhile Pacific colonies. This shift applied both to colonial administration and to the various Christian denominations that had interests in the region. For Roman Catholic Marists, the desirability of having English-speaking missionaries from white Australian or New Zealand backgrounds was even more pressing due both to the post-World War I colonial environment and to intense rivalry between the denominations. A French Marist priest from Alsace, with the German name of Boch, had been appointed the Prefect Apostolic of the formerly German North Solomons (i.e. Bougainville and Buka) in 1920. According to Durning, Father Boch S.M.

⁵ Francis Durning, *Here I Am, a Failure !: Emmett C. McHardy S.M.*, (Hawkes Bay: Mount St.Mary’s, 1985), 53. This section is indebted to Father Durning’s work.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-56.

‘gradually became aware of the handicap under which the Catholic Church was labouring’ because

all the priests ... were German or French or American but never British. The rather bitter sects now pouring into the territory from Australia and elsewhere were spreading the story that the British were Protestant and only non-British were Catholic.⁷

Hence McHardy’s application was swiftly accepted. Although he had requested the British South Solomons, which also suffered from a severe shortage of priests, for the reasons outlined above his nationality ensured that he was allocated to the Northern Solomons Prefecture. McHardy was well aware of this. In a letter to his parents describing his early journeys around the various stations as he settled in, he comments:

And there is another reason why I am travelling around so much – Father Boch is using me as living propaganda to show that the Catholic Church really can embrace a Britisher or two!⁸

The story of Father Emmet McHardy’s mission on Bougainville from 1929 to 1932 deserves closer attention than is possible here. Throwing himself into his work, developing a mission station and school at Tunuru and travelling extensively under conditions of physical duress, McHardy’s health eventually broke down. He was invalided to Sydney in May 1932 and died in Wellington a year later at the age of twenty-eight.

The *Marist Messenger* of 1 June 1933 – in which the advertisement appeared – was therefore published barely a fortnight after McHardy’s death. An open letter appearing on the facing page of the magazine provides some insight into the current predicament of Catholic Bougainville. It is written by Father Thomas Wade S.M., an American missionary of long-standing service in the region, who had been made Bishop of the Northern Solomons in 1930 when the region was promoted from a Prefecture to a Vicariate Apostolic. Wade had been appointed over the head of Boch for reasons largely akin to those that had seen the prompt acceptance of McHardy’s application: a ‘Britisher’ would have been preferable but, failing that, a 37-year-old English-speaking American was a better political choice than a 55-year-old Francophone Alsatian with a German

⁷ Ibid., 56. The ‘bitter sects’ were primarily Australian Seventh-Day Adventists and Methodists. The gentlemen’s agreement that had formerly allowed Marists the run of the North Solomons had broken down with the Australian Mandate. See also Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 59-60.

⁸ McHardy, letter to his parents, 15 June 1929, reproduced in Emmet C. McHardy, *Blazing the trail in the Solomons*, ed. Eileen Duggan, (Sydney: Dominion Publishing, 1935), 25.

name. Wade, moreover, was affable and modern in outlook, whereas Boch, though dear to his colleagues and congregations, was notoriously belligerent to outsiders and had a history of furious scrapes with Methodists.⁹ Bishop Wade's open letter for the *Marist Messenger* was written from Kieta, Bougainville, at the end of March, before McHardy died but after it was apparent that death was imminent. Knowing the grief and dismay that McHardy's loss would rouse in New Zealand's Catholic community, and which he clearly shares, Wade takes the opportunity to make the *cri de coeur* of the illustrated advertisement and to write the letter detailing his manpower problems.

I wish ... to make a very special appeal to New Zealand friends whom I let off so lightly during my visit, thinking that Father McHardy would follow later to give a hand in this very needy field. Little did I dream in what melancholy capacity he would return to his homeland.¹⁰

Like the advertisement, the letter bears the mark of Wade's religious conviction as well as his sense of humour, indefatigable even in desperation.

The shortage is now exceedingly serious and so unnecessary ... thousands are going to die without Baptism simply because they have no one to find them, to instruct them and to baptise them. ... It takes a courageous man to volunteer, but New Zealand never lacked that virtue so we are preparing to handle the rush. ...¹¹

Not only has he lost the 'magnificent zeal' of his most energetic young colleague, but also, Wade explains, Father Brosnahan, McHardy's replacement at Tunuru, was now on sick leave, soon to be invalided home. Father Boch had also tried to hold the fort but had burned out and been moved back to light duties in the southern, British part of the Protectorate. Saddest of all, a young German missionary, Father Wissing, had died of cerebral malaria in March, just three weeks after his arrival on Bougainville. 'God,' Wade sighs, 'is laying it on heavy ... [but] we get up and struggle on.'¹² Given the debilitating effects of Melanesian climate and disease, hypothetical cannibalism would seem to be the least of the worries of anyone rash enough to consider volunteering for mission work. One wonders, indeed, whether Wade was wise to emphasise this sorry toll. In the circumstances, it makes the 'WE DO NOT EAT THEM NOW' quip all the odder, and underlines once again the extraordinary tenacity of the 'cannibal' trope in Western

⁹ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 58-59, 62-64.

¹⁰ *Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1933, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* See also Durning, *Here I Am, a Failure!*, 132-133.

perceptions of Melanesians. While no doubt used in the jocular manner typical of Wade, it also speaks to the persistence of the supposed danger of cannibalism as part and parcel of romantic and heroic Western ideas of what it meant to be a missionary. Better to emphasise that, perhaps, than the grim realities of, for instance, blackwater fever.

Father McHardy's legacy

‘Father Boch has told me to put this place on the map ...’

Father Emmet McHardy, 12 October 1929

During his short life McHardy was invaluable to the Bougainville mission not only as an itinerant priest but as a medic, builder and engineer.¹³ He was also a keen photographer and a lively and prolific letter-writer. Both played a major role in promoting the mission in New Zealand, Australia and – particularly posthumously – further afield. Publicity was a key task, not least because each missionary was expected to raise their own funds from supporters at home.¹⁴ ‘Father Boch has told me to answer every letter,’ McHardy wrote quite early in his service:

He would like some of the people to be interested in our Prefecture. ... it is a pretty big job; last mail kept me busy for a week before the steamer ... However, it is part of the game. ... “Anne” of the “Tablet” wrote asking me to write to her little ones, and, of course, that is good business, for it reaches many, and the more prayers we get the better. Last time I sent her off a few pictures; if she includes them, that will be good.¹⁵

After ‘Anne’s’ invitation, the evolution in McHardy’s mind of the potential for his writing and photography to be harnessed together to publicise the mission is rapid. In October he writes again to his Auckland uncle, who had connections with the Catholic press there, asking for an entrée:

¹³ ‘... one’s duties are innumerable: first of all, of course, one is a priest, and then one is a doctor ..., and then one is a carpenter and a tinsmith and an engineer and everything!’ McHardy, letter to Mabel Reeves, 14 December 1929. Unless otherwise stated, all correspondence referenced is held in McHardy Archive #205, Marist Archives, Wellington.

¹⁴ ‘... I have been tipped right out on my own as far as the founding of this station and Cathéchist school goes, and even though I am exercising rigid economy the money seems to go. ... I will get all my buildings up and the school equipped with the £200 that I had when I left home. But when my school boys come along ... I am not too sure just how I will manage. ... It is just a matter of getting people interested, Uncle, and there is no one else here to do it, so I regard it as a duty.’ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 12 October 1929.

¹⁵ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 28 August 1929, reprinted in *Blazing the Trail*, 38. ‘Anne’ was the pen-name of the editor of the children’s pages for the Dunedin-based Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*.

Father Boch has told me to put this place on the map as far as New Zealand is concerned ... For this reason I would like to get something in the "Month" ... [but] I am not too sure of the etiquette in such matters. ... By the same mail I am posting off a letter and a dozen pictures to an American Catholic Journal, even dollars, you see, are good here!¹⁶

William McHardy – Uncle Willie – must have jumped to it without further consultation, for another letter soon after expresses McHardy's dismay at finding himself unexpectedly in print:

It was a bit of a knock to see extracts from some of my letters in the "Month". ... Father Boch was very pleased, but there were a few things there that I would not have written had I known the letters were due for publication. I was particularly sorry to see the great big "I" appearing all through.¹⁷

Having realised the importance of making a distinction between private and public readership, McHardy, immediately after seeing his extracts in *The Month*, wrote again hoping to forestall his uncle concerning another letter he had recently sent him. This had contained a description of the visitation in September of the Very Reverend Father Ernest Rieu, World Superior-General of the Society of Mary, based in Rome. That this VIP of the Roman Catholic world toured the Pacific at all (he also visited New Zealand and Australia) indicates the increased significance of Oceania to the Vatican.

I sent you a long account of the visit of our Father General ... if the "Month" wants it ... it would be well to keep it until I can send you some pictures – I hope to be able to get them away to you by next mail, and they will make it so much more interesting ...¹⁸

Thus, the work was underway of trying to co-ordinate, from afar, the printing of his photographs (at that stage being done in Sydney) with the publication of his articles in New Zealand. This letter continues with another reason for his hoping to catch his uncle before he submitted to the magazine the passages about Father General's visit.

If it is not already published you could delete that passage about our District Officer McAdam. It is all absolutely true, but if it appeared in print our enemies up here might use it against us ... it will

¹⁶ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 12 October 1929. *The Month* was an Auckland-based Catholic magazine. This letter is reproduced in *Blazing the Trail*, 53, edited to remove the implication that McHardy initiated the enquiry about publication.

¹⁷ McHardy, letter to his parents, 18 November 1929, *Blazing the Trail*, 76.

¹⁸ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 12 October 1929.

be a great assistance to have had a few such letters in the “Month” ... I am sure they make a few more people pray.¹⁹

The passage in question criticised Kieta’s District Officer for snubbing the visiting Father General. McHardy was aware of the political background to this blatant rebuff – the perceived non-Britishness of the Roman Catholics had made them unpopular with the Australian administration – but saw it as an insult to Father Rieu’s distinguished station. So this letter demonstrates McHardy’s management of publicity in two respects: the benefits of photographic illustration to offer veracity and stimulate imagination; and the self-censorship of politically sensitive material.

The significance of all this letter-writing, article-publishing and photography for my thesis lies in the content and tone of his representations of Bougainville and its people. Within the limits of the ubiquitous racism of his era (to which he was not entirely immune), McHardy’s correspondence, photographs and captions portray Bougainvilleans in humane, vivid and generally non-judgemental terms. Moreover he takes an intelligent interest in cultural norms. Just a few examples from a substantial body of work will need to suffice: an open letter to ‘Anne’s Little People’ (as the children’s page of the *Tablet* was saccharinely called) invites his readers to imagine the life of Solomon Islands youngsters.

On the whole, they do not like school very much, and they just hate having to do what they are told, and it must be pretty hard for them, for the Little People have such wonderful times up here – and the boys have better times than the girls! The seashore boys play and swim and fish and sleep all day ... and when they are hungry or thirsty they have merely to chew a piece of sugar cane fresh from the garden, or climb a Coconut tree for one of the big nuts filled with ever such a lovely drink. ...

The mountain boys have a very good time too, but instead of fishing and swimming and paddling canoes, they hunt opossums in the bush, and try to shoot birds with their bows and arrows.

The little girls have a care free life, but they have to do a certain amount of work. The gardens are left to the care of the women: they have to plant taros, kau-kau, sugar, paw-paws and all the other things that go to make a native garden, and as soon as the little girls are big enough to help they have to go too. It seems a shame at times to see them with such big loads of wood or vegetables on their backs, but they have always had to do such work and so they do not complain. And even though there is work there is plenty of play too.

¹⁹ Ibid. Uncle Willie must have followed those instructions, for the surviving typescript of the Father Rieu letter has neat read pencil-lines deleting the offending paragraph.

Particularly on the beautiful moonlight nights, when the air is as cool as it ever gets up here, all the little people love to get together to sing and dance around. And they do enjoy it!

And all the little things that are so tiresome to us at times – such as tearing our clothes, and washing up plates and dishes and all that! – do not worry them in the least, for all these things are “fashun b’long white man”, and they know nothing of them yet!

[After making friends] ... they are always ready with a big smile and an outstretched chubby hand. I have often wondered what they would think of white Little People: probably they would be afraid; they think there are very few white people in the world, and look at one unbelievably with their big black eyes if one tells them there are plenty away down over the sea.

But I am sure you would like them all – and I am sure you could all make friends too ...²⁰

Twice it may be, but this passage is remarkable, in missionary terms, in that it represents indigenous life as idyllic rather than degraded. Not only does it give a vivid and informative picture of actual village life, it also fails to frame otherness in disapproving terms. There is no criticism of the children’s freedom; no distinction made between heathen and Christian; no mention of disease or dirt; no disapprobation of community celebrations. Exercising a cultural relativism worthy of Montaigne or Diderot, Western middle-class norms are criticised as ‘tiresome’ in comparison. Even that classic bugbear of white middle-class disapproval of Melanesian culture – the manual labour of women – is treated with a sense of perspective: ‘... even though there is work there is plenty of play too’. Melanesian children are offered as objects of envy rather than pity. White New Zealanders are even invited to make an imaginative leap to consider how they themselves may look through indigenous eyes. It assumes that a relationship between white and black children will be one of friendship rather than *noblesse oblige*.

Further examples of McHardy’s distinctive style of representing Melanesian people to white audiences are taken from the detailed captions he wrote to accompany the many photographs he sent to his brother, Father John McHardy S.M. in Wellington. Of a photograph of two bare-breasted young women, adorned with cicatrice markings and swathed in strings of valuable shell money, who pose smiling for the camera with their arms round each other:

Pitakai and Tapisoko – two aristocratic young ladies in Rorovana. Pitakai, the younger, is baptised Doreen. Tapisoko is still preparing for baptism.²¹

²⁰ McHardy, letter to ‘Little People’ for *The Tablet*, 20 October 1930.

And another of a similar subject:

Spring fashions in the Northern Solomons! And they think they are as swish as anything (just as white girls do!)²²

Of an older woman wearing a rain cape:

This lady lives about three days hard going from Tunuru; the little cape she is wearing is made from very strong leaves cleverly sewn together.²³

Of a group of young men going net fishing:

The net they made themselves out of a very strong cord which they twist from the bark of some jungle tree. Nothing neater or stronger could be bought.²⁴

Women are always, respectfully, ‘ladies’. The images of the younger women could so easily, in other hands, be co-opted for the ‘native belle’ genre. But McHardy wishes to introduce them as named individuals with a social rank that has not been obliterated by the new baptismal name. Baptism was of the utmost spiritual importance to McHardy; for Roman Catholics it symbolises rebirth in the body of Christ and is a prerequisite of salvation. Baptism is a topic that pervades his letters and he often talks about the Western names he chooses for those he baptises. Nevertheless, he seems content for Pitakai to remain Pitakai *as well as* ‘Doreen’, and indigenous names appear frequently in both his captions and letters. (This can be compared to the Methodist film discussed in Chapter Three, which presented well covered white-clad converts with their baptismal names only.) Likewise, as regards dress and adornment, McHardy demonstrates imaginative cross-cultural relativism in how he wants his New Zealand audience to think of these Melanesians: he acknowledges otherness but frames it in terms of similarity: ‘... they think they are as swish as anything (just as white girls do!)’. Indigenous skills and freedom from Western commodity dependence are emphasised: the rain cape is ‘cleverly sewn together’; the net is better than a store-bought one.

While these photographs and captions appear at first to be in the private realm of McHardy’s exchanges with his brother and, by extension, his immediate family and

²¹ McHardy album, 45, caption to photograph E48.

²² Ibid., 45, caption E37 to photograph 45.1.

²³ Ibid., 22, caption C83 to photograph 22.4.

²⁴ Ibid., 37, caption C43.

friends, there is no doubt that the McHardy brothers evolved a joint project aiming for eventual public display and promotion of the mission. Emmet McHardy went to a great deal of trouble with his photographs and their captions – like his letters, the latter were typed late at night by lamplight in his little ‘presbytery’ at Tunuru. He had to hand either the negatives, developed by himself from the film, or positive prints of his negatives. Prints were processed for him, initially in Sydney, but later by Father John himself in Wellington, who took over this task for his brother when his Sydney benefactor returned to the United States. One early letter – prior to the systematic captioning project – explains the challenges of photography in the tropics, which in themselves indicate the importance he accorded it.

Photography is difficult here; for instance, one cannot leave a film in a camera. Once you take picture number one you must take the lot or lose them, and they must be developed as soon as possible after exposure. But I am getting into the way of it now. It is almost impossible to make good prints. The water is too hot. Just now I am getting most of my printing done in Sydney; a fine American Catholic called John E. Kennebeck is getting them all done for me at his own expense ... I am sending him more negatives on this boat.²⁵

The avidity with which McHardy’s photographs were received at mission headquarters is a measure of their significance:

I got a great swag [of processed photographs] up on the last steamer, but Father Boch put a nasty hole in them; he cleaned me right out of some prints! I am glad to have something he likes.²⁶

Father Boch, of course, is collecting imagery not only for himself but for fund-raising efforts aimed at his own constituency in France. Photographs depicting Melanesians and European priests were routinely converted into postcards with the printed heading ‘Missions des Pères Maristes en Océanie’. Once again, we note how closely entwined is colonial modernity with this eager international trade in Melanesian bodies, whether in the context of labour, entertainment or Christian mission.

²⁵ McHardy, letter to Father John, 11 August 1929, *Blazing the Trail*, 37. Kennebeck was an American executive with the Australian division of Paramount Pictures, and a staunch supporter of the Marists, whom McHardy had met in Sydney. Later, he also processed, *gratis*, the negative of Bishop Wade’s film. See Kennebeck’s obituary, *Catholic Press*, Sydney, 28 January 1937, 16.

²⁶ McHardy, letter to Father John, 18 November 1929, *Blazing the Trail*, 71.

The switchover from Kennebeck to Father John in providing McHardy's processing service can be pinpointed in the same letter that laments Boch's appropriation of his 'swag':

John E. Kennebeck leaves for America at the end of this month for a holiday, and I don't know what I am to do until he returns!²⁷

John McHardy clearly stepped into the breach, and it is from this point that the systematic captioning project must have got underway between the brothers, with the intention of, initially, constructing a photo-album, but which soon evolved into a lantern slide public presentation. We can trace their *modus operandi* – and the effort involved – in further letters:

Dear Jack ... I am afraid I am letting you down a bit this time for I am sending down a bunch of negatives without spills [typed captions]; sorry, Jack, but I stopped writing spills at 12:30 last night, and the *Gabriel* is now waiting to take me down to Kieta. As I say on the papers, index one of each of my copies that you send back and I will return a spill by next mail. I am hoping this business will not be too much of a burden on you. I think rather enviously of your nice album, it should be interesting.²⁸

The album – now in the care of the Marist Archives in Wellington – is indeed interesting. Father John has studiously pasted McHardy's typed captions beside the photographs. This is significant because it shows John's acceptance of his brother's approach to representing Bougainville people to New Zealand audiences. By early 1932 – close to the end of the road for McHardy, though he was not to know that yet – Father John is actively making glass lantern slides from some of the negatives. Emmet McHardy writes to his brother:

Pictures arrived safely – all O.K. Pretty good this time. Ever so many thanks for all the trouble you go to on my behalf ... But I am sure that all those negatives will be worthwhile. The slides, too, sound very attractive to me. I think you had better keep the outfit in N.Z. for the time being. Should I change my mind and want it up here I will let you know. ... Have been a bit off lately with fever ...²⁹

Father John had many of the slides hand-coloured (I return to this below). This colouring is probably what McHardy is referring to by saying they 'sound very attractive', since he

²⁷ McHardy, letter to Father John, 18 November 1929, *Blazing the Trail*, 71.

²⁸ McHardy, letter to Father John, 18 July 1930, *Blazing the Trail*, 124.

²⁹ Ditto. February 4 1932, *ibid.*, 177.

was already, of course, familiar with the original image. The ‘outfit’ must be a slide projector plus slides. That there is some brief uncertainty about whether the equipment is wanted in Bougainville or New Zealand is interesting in that it shows the ambivalence of the slides’ deployment at this stage: are they for showing to mission folk or indigenes, or for drumming up support at ‘home’? Father John clearly continued printing ‘snaps’ but also sent more information about the projection equipment and has chosen more slides:

My dear Jack – the box of prints came, and the bigger picture of my Chinaman friend. ... Had a bad innings since the last steamer. Malaria was severely gastric, and somehow or other it got mixed up with a bit of pneumonia. But I am better now ... I like the look of the projection outfit. And the selection of slides is OK. Should be pretty interesting. How do they show up on a screen? ...³⁰

Thus, as McHardy’s illness deepens, Father John is gearing up to show these images in public settings in New Zealand, while keeping his brother fully informed. These slideshows are further considered below.

Although one hopes that something of the respectful tone of McHardy’s articles, letters and captions eventually rubbed off on his readers, this was not necessarily the case, as we noted with Bishop Wade’s appeal with which this chapter was introduced. Conventional condescension is also apparent in an open letter to children published in the *Marist Messenger* during McHardy’s final weeks.

... Father Emmet is very ill – he offered his health and his very life for the brownies ... his poor boys ... are almost like lost sheep ... they need our brave New Zealander ... or they may be stolen by Satan from our Holy Faith.³¹

McHardy’s lively, human children are reduced by the racist diminutive to a cipher without agency. They are pushed aside as the figure of McHardy as sacrificial national martyr grows and takes centre stage: the heroic New Zealander who gave his life ‘for the brownies’. In both cases – Bishop Wade’s advertisement and ‘Pardy Gar’s’ open letter quoted above – we note the threat of imminent indigenous relapse used as a rhetorical device to engage a sense of white Christian responsibility towards helpless brown children: ‘... Keep Us Good’; ‘... or they may be stolen by Satan ...’.

³⁰ Ditto. March 15 1932, *ibid.*, 182.

³¹ ‘Pardy Gar’, children’s page, *The Marist Messenger*, 1 March 1933.

Bringing It All Back Home.

‘It is surely one of the greatest joys of photography to take snaps of people who have never seen a camera before ...’

Father Emmet McHardy, c. 1930

Before going on to consider the transition from private ‘snaps’ to public slides that Father John McHardy oversaw, I want briefly to discuss the multiplicity of roles played by McHardy’s photographs on Bougainville itself. This is to emphasise that they were not just documents of the white man’s colonial gaze, but had their own significance for the indigenous and immigrant residents of the colonised region.

The ‘bigger picture of my Chinaman friend’, referred to by McHardy in the letter quoted above, is the tip of another story of colonial modernity— one that was enlarged both literally and figuratively in McHardy’s photography and captions. The ‘Chinaman’ in question was Wong You, trader and storekeeper in Kieta. The McHardy album has several photographs of the interior and exterior of his store. ‘He is a pretty cute [acute] Chinaman,’ writes McHardy, meaning Wong You is a sharp businessman,

but he is very straight, and goods that he can get from China and Japan are very much cheaper than we can get from Sydney – everything from a needle to an anchor.³²

And again:

He is a very enterprising and progressive chap ... believes in small profit and big turnover. ... [He] started as the D[istrict] O[fficer]’s cook – saved enough to start a wee trading and shelling station up the Coast – saved enough more to start a store in Kieta, and now he has a turnover of over £1,000 a month!³³

Chinese lanterns and fabric used for decorating the Tunuru church at Christmas came from Wong You, the cloth afterwards being used for the blue-and-white lavalavas that became the uniform for McHardy’s mission school.³⁴

Wong You’s wealth and dignity are exemplified by the elegant headed notepaper on which he typed a ‘thank you’ note for the photo-enlargement referred to above.³⁵ While

³² McHardy album, 48, caption D82 to photograph 48.2.

³³ Ibid., 76, captions F17 and F18 to photograph 76.2.

³⁴ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 20 January 1930, 13-14.

his English is imperfect, the letter's typography is impeccable, bespeaking his cultural confidence and lack of servility in dealing with white clients.

Clearly he had requested or been offered photographs and was keen to acquire these permanent visual emblems of his success. Equally clearly, McHardy's friendly disposition made him willing to go to the trouble involved of acquiring extra prints. Thus we are reminded of the multicultural, multinational character of commercial and colonial modernity. Then as now: it was never a simple binary division between white coloniser and brown colonised.

While this may seem a private transaction between Wong You and McHardy and hence irrelevant to my thesis, the Marist Archives holds Father John's glass slides, several of which of which show Wong You and his store. Hence he and what he represents (like the marketplace in Nouméa filmed by the Adventists) find themselves in the frame of a public picture-show of Melanesian life in a way that would, perhaps, have been less likely had a travelogue-adventurer constructed the narrative in terms of the perils of 'cannibal-land'.

McHardy's photographs were also a thrill for their indigenous subjects, with whom he seems to have been assiduous in sharing copies of his prints:

It is surely one of the greatest joys of photography to take snaps of people who have never seen a camera before; the exclamations when the finished snap goes round!³⁶

There was, of course, a significant time-lapse and a considerable international journey between taking the 'snaps' and handing round finished prints. That McHardy conflates the two stages together in a single sentence underlines the continuity of his relationships with his subjects. Moreover it shows that the pleasure he takes in the second stage is already in his mind during the first. So his 'snaps' are not exploitative; sharing photographs is here a modern means of cultivating friendships rather than merely acquiring mission propaganda.

A caption to an unposed shot of a young woman adjusting her husband's crucifix in preparation for a more formal portrait further exemplifies the community life of

³⁵ Wong You, letter to McHardy, 3 March 1932, MAW.

³⁶ McHardy album, 26, caption D5.

photographs, as well as the intimate relationship between modernity and photographic self-consciousness.

Preparing for the snapshots! Baria's Catechist cross was not hanging to Maria's satisfaction; she is here straightening it. This was a genuine [i.e. unposed] snap, and caused a whole lot of amusement in the village.³⁷



Fig. 5.3: Emmet McHardy, 'Baria's Catechist cross was not hanging to Maria's satisfaction', Tunuru, c.1930.

Since this image appears – hand-coloured – amongst Father John's lantern slides, it also had the opportunity to inspire that trans-cultural rapport encouraged by any such immediately natural and identifiable human gesture that transcends cultural specificity.

Nor were his 'boys' excluded from experiencing their role as propaganda in New Zealand. The *Tablet*, like the *Marist Messenger*, was re-circulated back to the mission field. In a postscript to an open letter to 'Anne's Little People' – the children's page of the *Tablet* – McHardy makes clear this full-circle of imagery (not to mention the reciprocity of prayer):

My boys always pray for you all – they were excited to see their pictures in "im green fella paper b'long Noo Zelan".³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 77, caption F52

As on Māori *marae* during the same period, photographs were also rapidly adopted by the indigenous people as a link with the dead. A caption to a portrait of an influential chief who ‘died a couple of months ago’ records that ‘this snap is in great demand’ by local people seeking a memento.³⁹

Photography also mediated Father McHardy’s own demise to the indigenous community: a formal deathbed portrait of McHardy was returned to Bougainville. And even this fact was transmitted back to New Zealand by Bishop Wade as a humanising ‘picture’ of the ‘natives’:

Last Sunday there was a big turnout at Tunuru because the distribution of the pictures of Emmet had been promised to all the catechists and to all the important people until the pictures ran out. You should have heard the comments of the natives when they got the pictures.⁴⁰

The natives could not restrain tears when the picture of Emmet in death was shown at Tunuru. They dearly loved him! These are our reputed savages!⁴¹

Again it is noticeable here that this courteous view of the Tunuru community – ‘These are our reputed savages!’ – occurs in a personal letter, albeit one that Wade knew would be widely shared. Wade also had personal relationships with some of those ‘natives’. This bears out the tendency, noted elsewhere, that missionaries appear to negotiate the propaganda knife-edge between ‘savagism’ and inclusivity discerningly: the more public and impersonal the appeal, the more racist rhetorical tropes are deployed.

The transnational traffic in Father Emmett McHardy’s photographic imagery continues today. During 2013, the contents of the McHardy photograph album were scanned, digitised and returned on CD to the new Bougainville Library in Arawa. It is hoped that, like the library itself, these images from the not-so-distant past will help ‘re-unite fractured communities’ after the Bougainville war.⁴²

All of these examples underline the polysemous role of photography in forming a network of connections between cultures, values and periods that transcends any

³⁸ McHardy, letter to ‘Anne’s Little People’, 1 June 1930.

³⁹ McHardy album, 58, caption D29/#3.

⁴⁰ Bishop Wade, Letter to Father John McHardy, 26 October 1933.

⁴¹ Bishop Wade, Letter to Emmet’s father, John McHardy Snr., 1933.

⁴² Ken Scadden, *The Bougainville Heritage Centre Project – Helping Reunite Fractured Communities*, unpublished paper presented at Pacific History Association Conference, December 2012, Marist Archives, Wellington. For more on the Bougainville Library Trust see <http://bougainvillelibrary.org.nz/>

simplistic reduction to an exploitative colonial gaze. Rather like the strong and flexible fishing net made from bark fibre described by McHardy, it forms a semiotic web for capturing intercultural transactions.

From snaps to slides – the posthumous deployment of Emmet McHardy's photographs.

I have argued above that Father McHardy's photography, like some of his letters, quickly became harnessed to mission publicity. We saw how he was sending photographs to an American Catholic magazine, to 'Anne' for the *Tablet's* children's page, and to his brother John in New Zealand – initially for an album but latterly so that Father John could construct a lantern slideshow for public consumption.

The transition from private 'snap' to public 'slide' is exemplified by the onomatopoeia of the nouns. 'Snap' emphasises the photographer's indexical presence at the beginning of the process – a finger presses a button and the camera shutter clacks. 'Slide' suggests the slow sweep of movement at the end of the process, as a hand slips glass plates into a holder and swishes it on a runner before a beam of light. The former emphasises he who captures the image; the latter he who projects it to an audience. The 'snap' begins life as an open-ended possibility – occurring in a dynamic, lived network of personal relationships with a myriad of intentions behind it and potential uses in front of it. To that extent, it is analogous to McHardy's personal letters home, which had a private, subjective aspect as well as the potential to be more publically distributed. The 'slide' intended for public instruction has a much less complex and narrower remit: to promote mission work to strangers. Its discursive accompaniment is the commentary. The semantic fluidity of the private 'snap' and the personal letter solidifies into formal propaganda. Before switching our attention to Father John's slideshow, however, for the purpose of comparison I wish to briefly review another slideshow extant in 1929.

Father Boch's Slideshow.

‘Here the devil remains very strong ...’

Lantern Lecture on the Mission of the North Solomons, c.1929

Father John's was not the first public slideshow of the Bougainville Roman Catholic mission. A 'Lantern Lecture' document held at the Marist Archives lists 62 slides complete with a typescript commentary to accompany each.⁴³ Various clues in the commentary indicate that it describes the visit and tour of Father General Rieu in 1929, when Father Maurice Boch was still Prefect Apostolic. Although Father McHardy accompanied the touring party and may well have shot some of the images, neither the content nor tone of the descriptions fits his distinctive 'voice'. Some spelling oddities and other hints suggest that the author may have been the francophone Father Boch himself, albeit writing in English. I include some brief excerpts from this Lantern Lecture to demonstrate the continued infiltration of the cannibal-headhunter-savage trope into missionary propaganda discourse, thus emphasising how unusual was Father McHardy's inclusivity in comparison. Several slides on the list, in fact, have come not from Bougainville but from Choiseul and New Georgia. With titles such as 'A Fleet of the Head-Hunters', 'Head of a War-Canoe', 'Taboo House of the Head-Hunters', this stock Solomon Islands adventure-travelogue imagery could easily have been shot by Edward Salisbury (Chapter Three) or his ilk. Although the commentary acknowledges that the South Solomons is geographically distinct from Bougainville in the north ('Let us get away quickly from the country of the Head-hunter ... Let us cross the border ... to the Australian mandated territory'⁴⁴), the text describing the mission tour proper continues with sensationalist and essentialist comments alien to McHardy's personality. One slide, of frustratingly unknown content, is entitled 'A Pagan Trinity'. It carries the caption:

Here the devil remains very strong ... there reigns here the threefold tyranny, here represented, of superstition, distrust and revenge. ...⁴⁵

⁴³ *Lantern Lecture on the Mission of the North Solomons, c.1929*, Marist Archives, Wellington (618/98).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, #10 and #12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, #21.

Another, entitled ‘An Old Man-Killer At Buin’, describes a chief and announces that ‘This particular individual has, they say, as many murders on his conscience as he has bracelets on his two arms.’⁴⁶ Likewise, regarding the closing of an inland mission station:

... it became necessary to abandon [Konua station] because of the fewness of missionaries, and also – worse still – because the Father who was provisionally in charge had already had his name written on the menu of a cannibal banquet, of which he was to be the staple article ... Behold the inland folk of Bourgainville [sic], man-eaters.⁴⁷

We note once again that, as usual, hearsay easily trumps evidence when it comes to regaling avid white audiences with the bloodthirsty behaviour of blacks, and which persists even in missionary publicity. We may compare this to McHardy’s more measured comment that ‘[the central interior is] another region in which I am now sure there is no cannibalism.’⁴⁸

The geographic scope and international reach of such Roman Catholic slideshows of Oceania are indicated by the notice at the end of this typescript commentary. It invited mission promoters to write to addresses in France, England or the USA to obtain ‘other series of missionary views, with text.’ Options available included Fiji, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and ‘the Moaris’ [sic] of New Zealand.

Father John’s Slideshow

‘The reproductions were wonderfully clear and there was nothing in them resembling the posed and artificial portraits of a more civilised community.’

‘Mission Lecture’, *Hutt News*, 20 September 1933

While Boch’s slideshow may have had wide exposure through conventional mission distribution paths, Father McHardy’s ‘views’ also gained a measure of influential international recognition, albeit posthumously. The widely distributed book of his edited letters was illustrated with some of his photographs, while Father John McHardy’s lantern slide collection presented many more.

⁴⁶ Ibid., #31.

⁴⁷ Ibid., #36.

⁴⁸ McHardy, *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons*, 164.

The McHardy lantern slide collection held in Wellington's Marist Archives is contained in two original wooden boxes.⁴⁹ The vast majority of them are from Emmet's negatives and duplicate those in the photograph album. My contention is that, given their collaboration and the joint effort infused into the captions, Father John McHardy's commentary to this slideshow would have roughly followed the tenor and content of his brother's 'voice' and values, which, I have argued, are qualitatively different, even to those of his fellow mission-promoters, let alone the travelogue-adventurer genre.

To what extent these slides were displayed as a coherent show during Father Emmet McHardy's lifetime is unknown: I have found no public advertisement for such an event in New Zealand newspapers. However the set as held in the Archive was clearly compiled after his death: the title slide of the set reads 'Blazing the Trail in the South [sic] Solomons', echoing the book title of McHardy's edited letters – *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons* – published posthumously in 1935. Moreover, an early slide in the set shows McHardy's funeral cortege at Saint Mary of the Angels, Wellington, in May 1933. Hence, whatever plans the brothers may have had for visual events that simply publicised the mission, these were overtaken by Emmet's illness and death such that promotional representations became explicitly elegiac and commemorative. The deliberate sharing of the title *Blazing the Trail*, as well as several photographs, between book and slideshow also demonstrates the conscious crafting of a coordinated publicity package – a feature that we explore further in connection to Bishop Wade's film, discussed below.

The differences between the private photograph album and the public slideshow are slight. As mentioned earlier, Wong You's shop is featured, as is a motor car temporarily acquired for the visit of Father General Rieu from Rome, so colonial modernity was not shied away from.⁵⁰ There is perhaps a little more emphasis in the slideshow on conventional mission activities of education and healthcare: nuns with schoolgirls; a medical injection; an older man with growths on his face; a nun feeding indigenous toddlers at the baby care centre. But these are balanced by many scenes of village life and beautifully adorned, healthy, grinning indigenous youngsters of indeterminate baptismal status. Perhaps the most telling difference is the hand-colouring of many of the slides – a venture that Father John undertook, no doubt, to render them more attractive for a public

⁴⁹ Marist Archives, Wellington, ACC 205/35/4 and 205/35/2

⁵⁰ McHardy also doubled as chauffeur. See *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons*, 48-49.

audience. Green bush and blue skies form lush backgrounds to orange jewellery and fabrics. The colourist seems to have favoured pale orange, perhaps as a pleasing colour-wheel contrast to the predominant green. Thus white opossum-teeth necklaces and school lavalavas that we know were blue acquire an unlikely sunset glow. While visually appealing, the addition of artificial colour adds a verdant exoticism rather than increased realism, and this tends to act against McHardy's down-to-earth personal manner. It distances the people portrayed into the realm of the picture-postcard.

How far this devolved into conventional 'othering' via quaint spectacle depends very much on the extent to which Father John McHardy's commentary borrowed its content and tone from his brother's letters and captions. While we cannot know for sure, it seems more than likely that he would have leant on them. An article in the *Hutt News* describes one of Father John's 'very instructive and interesting' evening lantern lectures in the Saints Peter and Paul Church, Lower Hutt on 14 September 1933.⁵¹ The journalist praises the images in terms of the mildly anti-Western, romantic cultural relativism that was characteristic of many of Emmet McHardy's own remarks and which the writer may be echoing from the commentary:

The reproductions were wonderfully clear and there was nothing in them resembling the posed and artificial portraits of a more civilised community.⁵²

Emmet McHardy's memory was explicitly invoked as creating a particular bond with the Solomons in the inevitable appeal for funds. John McHardy's own voice can be heard despite the stilted grammar of the (presumably) cub reporter.

We in New Zealand have a special interest in the Solomons because of the late Father McHardy, one of our own New Zealand youth, and his work there. Though we have our financial troubles in the Dominion, conditions here are nothing to those in the Solomons.⁵³

This immediate absorption of Emmet McHardy's personal sacrifice into the propaganda machine surrounding the mission was repeated in a further element of the publicity

⁵¹ 'Mission Lecture', *Hutt News*, 20 September 1933, 5.

⁵² Ibid. In fact, although the writer is surely referring to the warm demeanour that McHardy elicited in so many of his photographic subjects, many of the portraits were indeed posed and artificial. For instance, McHardy habitually distributed lavalavas to ensure a modicum of Western modesty. See McHardy album, 26, caption to photograph B98: 'Sicope – one of my old Evo *kukerai* friends – demonstrates bow & arrow ... You can see from the inexperienced way he wears his lava-lava that it was presented to him for photographic purposes.'

⁵³ Ibid.

package: the film *Saints and Savages* (1935), compiled, edited and promoted by Bishop Thomas Wade. This film is analysed below, but it is worth mentioning here that it did not make the still photographs obsolete. Rather they worked synergistically. At one point in February 1935, when the film was for some reason unavailable, the *Catholic Press* reports that the ‘cultured and eloquent’ Bishop Wade used McHardy’s slides for an ‘exceptionally well attended’, ‘entertaining, instructive and invigorating’ lecture at the Marist Brothers’ College in Randwick, NSW. Doubtless Wade, unlike Father John, based his commentary on direct rather than vicarious experience, and so McHardy’s ‘voice’ would have been displaced by Wade’s. However, significantly, the Bishop made sure that Father McHardy’s name was explicitly credited for both still photographs and the motion picture, which he assiduously plugs.

The slides, which were the work of the late Father E. McArdle, S.M., [sic] are a triumph of photographic art. “Saints and Savages,” due to be released shortly, is likewise due to this highly skilled amateur photographer.⁵⁴

Similarly, an advertisement for the film in the *Catholic Press* uses a McHardy photograph rather than a film still,⁵⁵ and both lantern lecture and film were sometimes deployed at the same event, as when Father John McHardy crossed the Tasman to visit the small towns of New South Wales:

The film, “Saints and Savages,” ... was screened to a large audience in St. Patrick’s Hall [in Goulburn] on Saturday afternoon The film was preceded by slides, both portions of the programme depicting the work of the missionaries in the North Solomons. The Lecturer was Rev. Father McHardy, S.M.⁵⁶

Saints and Savages: Making the Film

‘He purchased a moving picture camera ...’

The Catholic Press, Sydney, 15 November 1934.

After Thomas Wade’s appointment as Vicar-Apostolic to the Northern Solomons in 1930, he quickly harnessed McHardy’s talents to the Bell-Howell movie camera Wade had

⁵⁴ *The Catholic Press*, Sydney, 28 February 1935, 16. In fact, the film had already been shown in several Sydney venues throughout January, so its absence from Randwick College was for an unknown reason.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1935, 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1935, 30.

acquired for recording mission activities.⁵⁷ The footage thus acquired (partly but not exclusively filmed by McHardy) was edited by Bishop Wade after McHardy's death into a feature-length film that was toured in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States. Wade even hoped he might show it to the Pope during a visit to the Vatican in 1936, though it is not clear that this actually took place.⁵⁸

The immediate motive for the film was financial stress rather than recording for posterity. But it was characteristic of Wade to embrace modernity as intrinsic to Christian propaganda. An article in Sydney's *Catholic Press* of November 1934 explains the Bishop's investment:

A young missionary Bishop whom Australians have met and loved, finding the advancement of his mission suffering from a shortage of funds, has made out of his meagre resources such a remarkable effort to help his own cause that the action should win him great sympathy. He purchased a moving picture camera and has made a 4000 feet film of magnificent Solomon Island scenes. As to the manner born, he has edited and connected the parts, and in a few weeks will distribute throughout Australia a number of copies for screening in prominent theatres. They will prove most enjoyable entertainment, and, it is hoped, bring a welcome windfall for the propagation of the faith in the Solomons.⁵⁹

Wade rather than McHardy is credited with cinematography here, probably because the former was prominent in Sydney's Roman Catholic community whereas the latter was as yet only well-known in New Zealand circles. As we shall see below, Wade himself was keen *within* the film, once released, to wholly credit McHardy. Notably, the intention is to show the film in 'prominent theatres' to secular audiences, with the aim of providing 'entertainment' as well as promoting the mission. The article goes on to describe the mission's growth alongside the financial stress occasioned by its 'scant and precarious income'. Moreover, another of the Bishop's ambitious technological ventures had ended badly. A German mission-support organisation, MIVA, had donated a motorcycle, a launch and a light aircraft, but this last was:

⁵⁷ On 31 May 1930 the Northern Solomons became a Vicariate with Wade as the Vicar Apostolic. He was ordained in Sydney, in St. Patrick's Church, on the feast of Christ the King, 26 October 1930.

⁵⁸ *The Catholic Press*, Sydney, 10 January 1935, 19. 'Bishop Wade will take the film to Rome shortly, and it is probable that the Holy Father will witness a screening ...'

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1934, 16.

... unfortunately a land and not a seaplane, and after the Bishop incurring several hundred pounds' expense for landing the machine, for the making of a clearing and a hangar, the plane crashed on its fourth flight and the damage is too costly to repair.⁶⁰

Fortunately neither of the pilots was injured; fortunately also, the bishop himself had evidently taken to the air on one of the more successful first three flights, taking the film camera with him and thus recording for us some scratchy but historic aerial footage of Kieta and environs.⁶¹

Wade's deliberate conflation of modern Western technologies with Christianity can be seen in a newspaper report of a public address he made in Melbourne while attending a conference. 'The Bishop relates many amusing stories of the natives of his diocese,' writes the journalist, who goes on to quote Wade directly:

One has to shun all semblance of humility when addressing them ... The first thing to do is to establish in their minds a conviction that you are in every way a most admirable competent man: a very prince among humankind, who can produce light by pressing a button, induce carriages to run without horses, and even (sometimes) fly in the air if necessary.

Then you have prepared the ground for implanting in their minds a good idea of God. You simply indicate that there is a certain "Big Feller Up Top" who can do all these things far better than you, and many more that you could never do if you tried for centuries. And the native has grasped the idea of the Supreme Being without any further trouble.⁶²

This outrageously racist hubris must be taken with a large pinch of salt. Wade's self-deprecating style is evident and one can well imagine the audience's laughter. Moreover, in fairness to Wade, it must be noted that, despite the inevitable paternalism of his era, he unfailingly commended the intelligence and expertise of Bougainville people to European audiences.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ That Wade himself ventured aloft is evident from a photograph showing the Bishop in flying gear, standing with his pilot, Father Tonjes S.M., by the little biplane. McHardy was already deceased by the time the plane arrived, which is sad, as he had earlier written home of his enthusiasm at the possibility of a mission plane. McHardy, *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons*, 99.

⁶² *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 8 January 1935, 7.

⁶³ For instance, an article on an address made by Bishop Wade to the Millions Club of New South Wales reported, 'He had always found that the natives, when known and understood, were gifted with remarkable intelligence ... The little house boys ... could tell the name of every flower and plant, and later on, as boat boys, soon learned all about marine engines, and became remarkably efficient in the handling of motor boats.' *The Catholic Press*, 15 November 1934, 16.

Nevertheless, the passage quoted demonstrates how *both* sides of the mission's racial divide were encouraged to see modernity and Christian faith as operating hand-in-glove. Hence film-making, motorcycles, boat-repair and aeronautics all fitted snugly into the propaganda package transmitted both to indigenous Bougainvilleans and to Western audiences via the film. The concrete materiality of this Christian vision also seemed to suit both sides. Wade commented to a colleague in 1928 that many local people identified Sydney with Heaven.⁶⁴ As the passage above indicates, he himself was disinclined to dispel this impression. In an interesting reversal of the traffic in indigenous representations we have been considering, he even showed photographs to his Bougainville flock of 'Sydney Catholics attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion'.⁶⁵ He commented that images of Chicago had failed to impress: 'they know nothing of the place, nor are they interested'. But Sydney was a real place that they had heard much of; all of the white people they knew of had been there; the Burns-Philp ships came from there; it was a place that was more-or-less in their part of the world; some of those who had worked on plantations may even have visited it.

Saints and Savages: Content

'No white man has ever witnessed ...'

Scene list for *Saints and Savages*, c.1935

Newspaper coverage of Bishop Wade's promotion of the film makes it clear that it was intended as a single 4000-5000 foot feature, to be delivered with a spoken commentary.⁶⁶ At 16fps – the most likely option for a silent film – this would run for between 67 and 83 minutes. One report mentions a run time of an hour-and-a-half.⁶⁷ Notes from the Marist Archives in Wellington, which holds a copy of the film, indicate that it came into their possession as either three or four separate short films. It seems likely that these 'short' pieces were originally 1000-foot reels – the standard length of 35mm film stock. The copy to which I had access was a 40 minute DVD transferred from a VHS tape made by New Zealand National Archives before putting the celluloid reels into cold storage.

⁶⁴ Letter from Wade to Father Rausch, 20 July 1928, quoted in Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 85-86.

⁶⁵ Laracy, *op.cit.*, 86.

⁶⁶ *The Catholic Press*, Sydney, 15 November 1934, 16.

⁶⁷ *The Catholic Press*, Sydney, 20 December 1934, 20.

The Marist Archives holds a working document – dating apparently from the mid-1950s – compiled by archivist Father Maurice Mulcahy S.M. as he worked on re-editing the original footage and recording a taped commentary to accompany it.⁶⁸ This document includes a typed scene breakdown of what seems to be the original film. This includes several titles of a ‘chapter heading’ nature. To the margins of this document, Mulcahy has added hand-written timings and annotations. (‘Far too long’, ‘not needed’ and ‘cut out’ appear often, which perhaps explains the brevity of the surviving version.) There is also a typed summary of headings for Mulcahy’s revision, together with some handwritten notes on his editing choices. Even though these date from two decades later, his comments make a revealing contrast to Wade’s approach and are discussed further below. The order of narrative imagery of the version to which I had access could perhaps fit under Mulcahy’s revised headings (‘Salt Water People’, ‘Nuns, Priests and Bishop at Pororan’, ‘Kieta Sunday’, and so on). But if so what appears on screen seems more like a rough draft than a finished version. For instance, other than the title slides and a number of static transition slides, there are no intertitles. Haphazard splicing is evident in that some of the transition slides of Catholic imagery (‘Our Lady Queen of the Missions’, ‘Sacred Heart’, and the like) have been given insufficient frames to be other than almost subliminally glimpsed. Moreover the main title and credit slides have been reversed and ‘Our Lady’ has been spliced in upside down! Thus it’s likely that the version discussed here is neither Wade’s original nor Mulcahy’s finished revision, but a working draft for the re-edited footage. Nevertheless, by combining the scene breakdown of the original Wade version (as recorded in Father Mulcahy’s notes) with identifiable scenes from the surviving version, we can gain an impression of how Wade’s film may have played out in public picture halls with live commentary in the 1930s. Below we further consider how Father Mulcahy re-edited this for a Marist audience a quarter of a century later.

Bishop Wade’s Version

A professionally produced main title slide shows a restrained plain cross overprinted with text: ‘Saints and Savages: A story of faith in the Solomons’. This is followed by the credits, announcing in a large, assertive font that the film was: ‘Produced by Right Reverend T. J. Wade, S.M., First Vicar-Apostolic of the North Solomons’. Beneath, in

⁶⁸ Father Mulcahy, a New Zealander, had an interest in film and was Marist Archivist in Wellington from 1962-1988. See <http://thecommunityarchive.org.nz/node/65906/description>, accessed 11 February 2014.

smaller font, but still prominent: 'Photography by Father Emmet McHardy, S.M.; Edited by John Edward.' The effect is to focus on the formal religious credentials of the film-makers rather than on any thrill factor attaching to the word 'savages'. The audience is left in no doubt that this is to be a mission film. The printed scene list shows that the credits were followed by a 'Foreword' intertitle headed 'Resting on the bosom of the far off Pacific ...' Although the visual is missing from my copy, we may guess this provided the audience with a quick geography lesson. This is followed by the exhortation from Matthew 28 – 'Teach Ye All Nations' – accompanied by a static image of Christ pointing out the horizon to Apostles. The photography credit is then reiterated with a static insert showing a smiling McHardy in his formal ordination portrait, giving his name with the caption: 'Cinematographer of "Saints and Savages"'. As mentioned above, Father McHardy shot some, but by no means all, of the footage. But the film was not edited into a propaganda piece for public viewing until after McHardy died. While the film was undoubtedly Bishop Wade's idea and he apparently shot significant parts of it himself, it seems he was keen to give *all* credit for cinematography to McHardy, even where this could not possibly have been the case (as in the scenes of Wade's consecration in Sydney and the aerial shots from the biplane). A little later in the movie, two similarly designed static slides depict Bishops Epalle and Colomb, mid-nineteenth-century founding fathers of the Marist Fathers' ill-fated early incursion into Melanesia. By including McHardy's portrait in this august company Wade is – I think quite deliberately – harnessing McHardy's tragic early death to a tradition of missionary martyrdom, thereby transferring some of that poignant posthumous charisma to his film.

However, when Wade first acquired a film camera he did not anticipate this sad outcome. The new bishopric was a big deal in the Roman Catholic world. It marked the promotion of the North Solomons from a Prefecture to a Vicariate; Wade was young, modern, enthusiastic and ambitious. So the first scenes in Wade's film are not in fact of Bougainville at all but focus on himself: 'First however be introduced to Bishop Wade,' reads the scene heading following McHardy's portrait. This is followed by extensive sequences of convivial meetings, greetings and processioning of Wade and his ecclesiastical colleagues during his consecration 'At St. Patrick's Church in Sydney.' Subsequent scene headings suggest further geographical and historical background on the formation and current status of the North Solomons mission. A slide of the recently canonised St Thérèse, patron saint of Missions, presumably reminded the audience of the

spiritual underpinning of the exercise. Then, as in the Adventist films, the steamship bearing Bishop Wade back to Bougainville leaves Circular Quay, waved off by crowds. The journey is romantically signified by cinematic seas swirling in the ship's wake, followed by cloudscapes over a distant island, whose mountainous aspect grows clearer as we approach.

Regardless of who shot the footage of Sydney or the ocean scenes en route to Bougainville, McHardy almost certainly took over the task at Wade's behest after the latter's return. McHardy had been a keen photographer and technophile since his schooldays.⁶⁹ He and Wade got on well and McHardy's station, Tunuru, was closest to the Bishop's base of Kieta. At this stage the emphasis is still on recording Wade's first official duties as Bishop. Wade's version continues with scene-setting shots of Kieta harbour; a palm-treed shoreline; outrigger canoes being paddled or sailed; the mission fleet anchored in the bay. At some point the location must shift to Tunuru, visited by the Bishop on 19 March 1931.⁷⁰ The Bishop is seen being rowed to shore in a dinghy and there are scenes of numerous indigenous craft. We have our first proper glimpse of Bougainvilleans as Wade is greeted on the wharf and we realise the canoes were gathering in his honour. A band of indigenous people flock up from the beach, feathers in their hair. The men carry spears and axes decorated with tassles; the girls and women, mostly bare-breasted, have fine dance fans. Without being able to see whether they wear a crucifix it is not at all obvious which are Christian, which 'pagan'. The Bishop sits on a throne in an impromptu open-air bower; people line up to kiss his ring.⁷¹ The camera pans across the gathered indigenous crowd, simultaneously taking in the buildings – the white-washed church, McHardy's 'presbytery', the 'boys' dormitory, the school – that have been erected over the previous two years. The Bishop preaches to the gathering with expansive and emphatic arm gestures.

Later there is striking footage of a sing-sing, featuring a mock spear fight, pigs trussed and stacked on poles, platform oratory over the unfortunate pigs, a roasting fire, distribution of pork parcels and a great deal of 'animated dance' including a tight-circled

⁶⁹ Durning, *Here I Am, a Failure*!, 23.

⁷⁰ McHardy, *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons*, 144.

⁷¹ Even this is no evidence of conversion. In a letter to his father, McHardy describes the 'great day' of the Bishop's 'first pastoral visitation': 'Many natives came down [from the inland villages] ... Some of the bush people were quite mystified [by the ring-kissing ritual], but they imitated the others. (Looking closely, I saw one or two lick His Excellency's ring – but you will not tell anyone that!)' *Blazing the Trail*, 144.

‘merry-go-round dance’ (as described on the scene list). Without the original commentary it is impossible to know whether the sing-sing was presented as sensationalist ‘savagery’, but given that this appears to be a celebration held in the Bishop’s honour it seems unlikely. Unlike some Protestant sects, indigenous dance is acceptable even in the context of a nominally Christian fete. Indeed in one of his still photograph captions of a similar – possibly the same – scene, McHardy comments how attractive the feathered headdresses are: ‘they look very pretty as their wearers dance around.’⁷² In the version to which I had access the Bishop is seen to leave in a dinghy, smiling back at the movie camera, apparently prior to the sing-sing. But the dance footage itself has been chopped up and redistributed into different places, though various clues suggest that it records a single event. This dismemberment may have been an artefact of Father Mulcahy’s subsequent redesign (discussed below). Certainly the sing-sing is a family affair, and McHardy’s camera captures some humanising moments that transcend mere cultural performance. A boy of about nine has acquired a very fine tall feather headdress with two feather plumes which he waggles cheekily on his head. He and a man with an infant on his shoulders dance past each other in the centre of the circle. In a gesture that every mother will recognise, a woman approaches the lad and firmly retrieves the headdress, rescuing it from the fray. Unchastened, the excited boy escapes and continues to clap and stamp as he skitters back into the circle.

Even more dramatic ethnographic footage – most definitely not a family affair – appears later in Wade’s film. This, I suspect, was not shot by McHardy.⁷³ With a heading described in abbreviated form on the scene list as ‘No white man has ever witnessed ...’ we get to observe an extended sequence depicting a mass gathering that is almost certainly an initiation ceremony for young men. Hundreds of decorated warriors pour out of the bush into a clearing, flourishing tassled spears and dancing. There are many young lads among them. Thrillingly, extremely tall dance figures appear – at least three metres high – topped with remarkable bottle-shaped head-dresses known as *upeï*. The figures are constructed from furry-looking fibrous material woven over a framework. These are worn by dancers – their legs just visible beneath the structure – who weave and bob amongst the crowd. A mock battle is then staged between two large and enthusiastic groups of men

⁷² McHardy album.

⁷³ McHardy was an assiduous letter-writer but there is no mention of this episode in his correspondence. This suggests that Wade himself shot more of this film than he lets on.

who rush towards each other brandishing their spears. The tall figures re-appear. These scenes are clearly unstaged; the cameraman – filming from the edge of the clearing and apparently from a small elevation – is ignored in the tumult; our voyeurism is secure. Travelogue-adventurers like Hurley, Johnson or Salisbury would have been delighted to have captured such images. That these ‘strange pagan customs’ were something ‘never seen before by whites’ was an important marketing hook, one that Wade deployed in several newspaper reports promoting the film.⁷⁴ The difficulty of obtaining them was likewise emphasised:

Even Bishop Wade had great trouble getting permission to witness the ceremonies. Time and time again some chiefs insisted his party be sent away so as to maintain the rigid secrecy of the ceremonies.⁷⁵

In exploiting these images of otherness to spice up his film, Wade is emulating the sensationalist aspects of the adventure-travelogue genre for commercial reasons. However there remains a significant difference in how these are presented to the viewing public: indigenous chiefs retain their agency; permission was sought and eventually given; no personal danger is claimed. Hence the notion that filming ‘savages’ is a potentially perilous activity – undertaken ‘at risk of life’ as Martin Johnson proclaimed⁷⁶ – is absent here. While we don’t know the extent to which these scenes were presented as evidence of deplorable activities that Christianity sought to rectify, as opposed to simply a display of fascinating cultural diversity, the tenor of the *Catholic Press* coverage suggests something closer to the latter. The ‘pagan customs’ are ‘strange’ rather than horrifying and they are further glamourised by the ‘rigid secrecy’ surrounding them. That such events, from which women were reputedly excluded on pain of death, ended up on display to bemused mixed-gender audiences thousands of miles away, is just one more of the ironies of colonial modernity.

A quintessential colonial moment

Even though the footage of the initiation ceremony would have been of absorbing interest to anthropologists and adventurers, the missionary camera records valuable details of

⁷⁴ See for example *The Catholic Press*, 20 December 1934, 20 and 15 November 1934, 16; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 8 January 1935, 7.

⁷⁵ *The Catholic Press*, 15 November 1934, 16.

⁷⁶ Chapter One, 31

modern ‘contamination’ that might have been avoided or censored in other hands. During what appears to be the preparations for the initiation event, the camera scans a group of older indigenous men who sit on the ground, chatting and eating lap-lap pudding as they wait for the celebrations to begin. In the background, however, the camera’s indiscriminate prosthetic eye captures a quintessential colonial moment. A bare-chested young man has just been given a white singlet. It looks clean, new, unworn. He wants to put it on but hesitates, unsure how to proceed with that operation. Is this, perhaps, the very first time he has donned such a garment, the ubiquitous badge of the colonised indigene? There always must be a first time, after all. A friend steps forward to assist, helping to hold it and indicating with a gesture where to place his head. Unfortunately this sequence is so brief and occluded that it provides only a fleeting glimpse and we do not see the outcome. The cinematographer may not even have noticed – his attention is on the seated elders. Would such a scene have survived if it had been caught in the viewfinder of a commercial travelogue-adventurer? As we have noted elsewhere, they preferred their ‘savages’ to be uncontaminated, ‘fierce and naked’.⁷⁷ Again, we have missionaries to thank for recording, albeit inadvertently, a transitional moment in which indigenous people are seen to inhabit neither a ‘savage’ stereotype nor a Christian one, but are simply ordinary puzzled humans coping with inexorable change. It adds to the rich visual archive compiled through missionary presence, and is another example of the stereotype resistance or escape that, as I have suggested, sometimes slips under the colonial gaze, and which, I argue, may occur more frequently within the slippery confines of the moving image than with more static media.

Our camera catches Solomon Islanders at work and play

An intertitle / chapter heading from the scene list states: ‘Our camera catches Solomon Islanders at work and play.’ Other than one scene of women carrying bundles of firewood and another of bamboo roasting tubes on a cooking fire, however, the ‘work’ visible on screen does not comprise the core indigenous tasks of gardening, fishing and food preparation, even though these were activities noted by McHardy in his open letter to ‘Anne’s Little People’ quoted above. Rather, these filmed work scenes are of ‘mission boy’ labour: trees are felled, fields are cleared of stones, fences and buildings erected, furniture made and ships repaired. ‘Work’ is, by this definition, something masculine, to

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Cannibal-Land*, 6.

do with modern infrastructure and brought in by white men, rather than feminine, to do with customary nurture and arising naturally from indigenous life. These work scenes are mostly conventional, in that brown bodies do the heavy lifting while pith-helmeted white men supervise.

However there is an exception to this racial separation that is worthy of closer consideration in support of my argument that missionary imagery conveyed representations of Melanesian people to white audiences that not only subvert Western sensationalist stereotypes but even, at times, their own Christian variety. This is a later sequence in which the damaged mission schooner, *Raphael*, is hauled from the water by young indigenous men straining at a huge windlass. A large group of brown helpers, white Marist Brothers and one small black-and-white dog attend the operation.⁷⁸ With the *Raphael* now fully up on the beach on a ramp, it needs to be jacked up. There follows an extended scene, filmed in relative close-up, of an indigenous man and a white Marist Brother working together beneath the hull to operate the jack. Brown hand over white hand, white hand over brown, back and forth they pass the long crank-handle. It is visibly strenuous work. Props are stacked under the hull and the cranking continues. An anxious, on-screen audience crowds the workers. The proximity of the camera lends a certain sweaty intimacy to the scene. The cinematographer has tried a couple of different angles, each involving squatting in an awkward position: his own interest in the mechanics of the operation is obvious. The effect on the viewer – this viewer, anyway – is to position physical work as an inter-racial contact zone that has the potential to transcend conventional assumptions. Whereas the other ‘work’ scenes of fence-building and field-clearing would merely confirm colonial prejudices, the repair of the *Raphael* briefly offered to Western audiences an alternative co-operative vision that was arguably closer to the personal daily experiences of the men involved.

Racial hierarchies quickly reassert themselves, however. After the repaired *Raphael* is rolled back down the ramp and re-launched, there is a scene showing the two dozen or so brown helpers and one small dog running into the sea to cool off and celebrate. There is much ‘child-like’ splashing and playing, while the more ‘adult’ whites remain apart. In fact, in Wade’s version (as derived from the scene list) this particular scene has been separated from the ‘work’ section and cut into the ‘play’ section of ‘Our camera catches

⁷⁸ Marist Brothers are lay members of the order, not ordained priests, who provide practical support to the mission.

Solomon Islanders at work and play'. Other 'play' scenes include boys swimming underwater and a young man deftly launching his canoe by standing on its end and propelling it, scooter-style: normal activities of indigenous 'salt-water' youths, oft recorded in both adventure-travelogue and missionary films.

Missionary modernity is nevertheless represented by a 'play' scene referred to on the scene list – and hence probably also on a lost intertitle – as 'bicycle escapades'. Boys of around eight or ten years take turns learning to ride an adult bike that is far too big for them. There is a great deal of falling off. One of McHardy's photos and captions records that the southern end of Bougainville was reasonably flat and had tracks through the bush suited to cycling. Despite their apparent innocence, these 'bicycle escapades', too, had a thicker history. The breakdown in the 1920s of the earlier system of relative geographic separation had led to intense rivalry between Methodists, Roman Catholics and Adventists. Poaching each other's villages was now common practice. To combat encroachment, 'Boch had equipped a squad of catechists in south Bougainville with bicycles in order that they might more quickly visit threatened villages, challenge Protestant emissaries, and report back to their priest.'⁷⁹ It is unlikely that film audiences at the time would be privy to this unusual use for bicycles. Inter-denominational fracas were generally kept out of public propaganda. Nonetheless, like the Adventist image of Maluan Vavau with Andrew Stewart (Fig. 4.2) or the Martin Johnson image of Nihapat on an Atchin dance-ground (Fig. 1.2), Geertzian 'thick description' enriches our contemporary response to this imagery, allowing the recovery of a history occluded by flat celluloid and a facile caption. An important thread of my thesis is that these relatively untapped visual and textual resources are imbricated in the discourses of modernity and deepen our grasp of colonial histories.

Other than the portrait insert, McHardy appears in the film only as a brief glimpse. The mission launch *Gabriel* is filmed from a pier as it approaches and docks. There is much hand-shaking between indigenous crew and European priests as Fathers Boch and McConville, dressed formally in tropical whites, clamber aboard.⁸⁰ McHardy appears momentarily, dressed in a work-shirt. If he was filming, then he has temporarily handed

⁷⁹ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 63.

⁸⁰ *Saints and Savages* at approx. (34:40). This appears to be one of the trips required for the gathering at Kieta of all the Marist missionaries of the Northern Solomons in order to greet their new bishop, Thomas Wade, recently returned from his Sydney consecration. If so it fixes the moment as March 1931.

over to someone else as he too shakes hands all round. But a distinct glance back at the camera – perhaps to confirm it is running – shows his awareness of its presence. Then he quickly disappears again.

If that is McHardy's only visible appearance in the film, there is nevertheless, as with his photographs, a palpable presence behind the lens of a charismatic person skilled in putting folk at their ease. There are repeated scenes where solemnly self-conscious people spontaneously relax as they interact with the man behind the camera. An elder carrying an axe on his shoulder roars with laughter as his young son juts his pipe at the photographer; youthful crew-members grin bashfully as the camera pans across them; a lad posing staunchly to attention collapses into giggles; five Marist Sisters lined up stiffly for the camera suddenly begin to simper. Qualitatively different to the sullen constraint of a formal 'type' shot, the effect of these little scenes is to place the audience in the position of a participant in warm social interactions. As with the footage shot by Pastor Stewart of the Big Nambas men on Malakula,⁸¹ these easily trump both adventure-travelogue 'cannibal' tropes and missionary ones of righteous transformation. Although, as discussed above, Emmet McHardy's photographs share with the film this lively charm, nevertheless I contend that the vitality of these vignettes is augmented by the moving-image medium that projects these representations as literally larger-than-life to a group audience.

Western consumers of Melanesian representations from a pre-movie age would not have been exposed to this normalised, animated, shared humanity to the same extent. I return to this in my Conclusion.

These scenes of confident indigenous affability were considered acceptable for the Marist propaganda film, and form a contrast both to Protestant preoccupation with outward signs of conversion (miserable naked heathens v happy clothed converts) and to adventurer preoccupation with 'authentic' savagery. Under McHardy's lens, 'Christian' and 'heathen' are treated with much the same degree of universal amiability that seems to fit comfortably with a more general Catholic tolerance. It is, for instance, a moot point whether the guffawing chief with the axe, mentioned above, is baptized, and, as we have seen, neither indigenous sing-sings nor episcopal ring-kissing were off-limits to either side. Codes of self-adornment, too, are relaxed. Unlike Vella Lavella, say, where Methodist converts could be identified by the forlorn loop of distended earlobe marking

⁸¹ See Chapter Four, Section Two, 183ff.

the absence of the decorative disc that would once have embellished it, on Bougainville in 1931, nose-sticks and crucifixes can be seen to cohabit comfortably on the bare-breasted bodies of female church-goers. The wearing of holy medals, after all, fits well with both Catholic and Melanesian ideas of suitable personal adornment, and was yet another bone of contention between the churches.⁸² Perhaps in keeping with this relative lack of Foucauldian body regulation as a marker of conversion, another distinction to Protestant film is the relative absence of both medical treatment and formal drill-marching. Medical treatment did occur and was, in fact, being extended and systematised in another of Wade's modern innovations. However it was not considered core business but rather a means to an end.⁸³ Although there are far more references to medical treatment in the textual form of McHardy's published letters, its near absence from the visual propaganda has the opposite effect to that engendered, for instance, by the Adventists' heavy visual emphasis on the brown body as almost inherently diseased. Marching, likewise, may well have featured in Catholic mission school life, but if so it was not filmed, and McHardy references it neither in correspondence nor in his still photographs. This is not to say that uniformity did not have its attractions: McHardy was proud of the uniform he devised for his mission school 'boys', but its appeal for him is aesthetic rather than an exercise of regulatory power.⁸⁴ Filmed references to commercial copra processing are also minimal: two young men are shown rather desultorily chopping and bagging a meagre pile of coconuts. This is partly attributable to the fact that the copra market had collapsed with the Depression, so that dreams of commercial self-sufficiency had been dashed for all the missions in Melanesia, and partly to the fact that, unlike Methodism, Marists, with their vow of poverty, were in any case at pains to distance themselves from accusations of commercial interests.

Liberally interspersed are the usual scenes of palm-trees and beaches, villages and mountains, launches and elegant canoes, many equipped with outriggers or sails. This is

⁸² Snatching holy medals from indigenous necks features in several episodes of clerical conflict. See Laracy, *op.cit.*, 47, 48 and 58. Contrariwise, lavish distribution of medals by Marists was recognised by their recipients as only a sign of informal support rather than formal conversion. Laracy, 73.

⁸³ In a letter to his former seminary, McHardy, writing about learning to give NAB injections, says 'It seems a queer job for a priest ...' – but justifies it on the basis of it being necessary to attract souls. Letter to Mount St Mary's, Greenmeadows, 12 August 1929, Marist Archives, Wellington.

⁸⁴ 'Tunuru has a school uniform! A BLUE lava-lava with a WHITE stripe near the lower edge ... the Sisters down in Kieta fixed up the White stripe part of it for me. When all the lads are tricked out with flowers in their hair (for it is the boys who are vain up here) and their nice lava-lavas on they look A1. Their very uniformity is pleasing, and the Blue harmonises well with their shiny black skins.' McHardy, letter to Mount St Mary's, Greenmeadows, 25 May 1930, Marist Archives, Wellington.

the standard library of images for the South Seas, whether in the missionary or the adventure-travelogue genre. The film has some ambitious modernist aesthetic aspirations, however, as is evident from a poetic sequence of puddles spattering in a tropical downpour, another of a close-up of bare brown feet toiling along a path, and a rather daring shot of a tree-trunk being carried on an open stretcher, filmed from *beneath* as the carriers file past and the vast trunk passes over the photographer's head! These scenes have the flavour of the youthful, inventive McHardy about them, but, more than that, their presence in the film give it a contemporary edge, an intimate and immersive engagement with place, in comparison to adventure-travelogues that focus merely on scenery and the indigene as a source of the outré.

Saints and Savages: Reception

‘Unlike so many faked Hollywood productions, it gives a true impression of native life...’

The Catholic Press, New South Wales, 10 January 1935

The film received glowing reviews in Australia, albeit mostly from the Catholic Press, which gushingly headlined it as ‘The Wonder-Film’:⁸⁵

No Catholic or well-wisher of the missions of Oceania should miss this opportunity of witnessing the screening of a film that is of great educational value, and at the same time possesses action and colour to a marked degree.⁸⁶

Its authenticity was upheld against commercial adventure films, demonstrating awareness that there was competition for discerning audiences but confident that the missionary genre held the moral high ground: ‘Unlike so many faked Hollywood productions, [the film] gives a true impression of native life ...’⁸⁷

The presence of Bishop Wade himself – his ecclesiastical credentials trumpeted in full – provided a guarantee of its truthfulness:

⁸⁵ *The Catholic Press*, Sydney, 24 January 1935, 15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1935, 19.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The fact that “Saints and Savages” was produced by the Right Rev. T. Wade, D.D., S.M., Titular Bishop of Barbalissus, and Vicar-Apostolic of the Northern Solomon Islands, was in itself an added attraction, bearing the seal of authenticity.⁸⁸

Wade’s lively personal commentary, indeed, supplied a welcome extra layer of information and entertainment:

... though in reality it is a silent picture, it immediately became a “Talkie,” as his Lordship’s voice was heard in clear interpretation of every scene. ... The picture is amusing, as the sparkling humour of the Bishop reveals the comedy of various scenes.⁸⁹

Interest was high: the Manresa Hall in North Sydney ‘was fairly besieged ... so crowded that no standing-room was available in any part of it ... a large number of people were disappointed when they had to be turned away.’⁹⁰ Similar scenes took place in St Joseph’s Hall in Burwood Heights and St Patrick’s, Church Hill.⁹¹

Tickets cost one or two shillings;⁹² but a donation was also invited:

The stirring address and the surging zeal of his Lordship captivated the audience who, at the conclusion of the screening, showed their appreciation of the work of the missionaries in a practical manner.⁹³

Even other denominations were forced into admiration. *The Southern Cross Log*, journal of the Anglican Melanesian Mission, acknowledged that Wade ‘has been responsible for the display in Australia of a cinema film which has aroused much interest ...’

... It is aptly called “Saints and Savages,” and no more effective propaganda could be devised to show the value of the work of the missionaries. The film, in a technical sense, is quite an excellent production.⁹⁴

Thanks to the energetic Wade, the film also gained overseas exposure. On a trip to the United States during 1935, ‘Dr. Wade hope[d] to exhibit his mission picture, “Saints and

⁸⁸ Ibid., 24 January 1935, 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 31 January 1935, 17.

⁹² Ibid., 18 April 1935, 25.

⁹³ Ibid., 31 January 1935, 17.

⁹⁴ *Southern Cross Log*, April 1935, reprinted in *Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1935, 10. Noticeable here is the sudden upsurge of ecumenical feeling: ‘the’ missionaries in general, rather than ‘Marist’ missionaries.

Savages,” at many American centres’.⁹⁵ We saw earlier that on the European leg of the same trip, he also hoped to interest the Pope in viewing it.⁹⁶ I have been unable to find advertisements or reviews in the American press, but before leaving the USA for Rome, Wade published a letter in the *Marist Messenger* that suggests it was indeed publically screened there. ‘You will be happy to learn,’ he wrote, ‘that the picture of Mission life ‘Saints and Savages’ has received favourable criticisms from Catholic and secular journals’.⁹⁷ In another letter to the *Messenger* he encourages readers to ‘ask God to bless our picture ‘Saints and Savages,’ which I think will be a revelation to all and do much good’.⁹⁸

Blazing the Trail

‘The Making of a Saint in the Pacific’

Catholic Press, 11 July 1935

Just at this moment, also, the publication of *Blazing the Trail in the Solomons* – Father McHardy’s edited letters printed in both Australia and the USA under the imprimatur of Bishop Wade – was imminent, and it becomes apparent that publicity for one is being closely harnessed to publicity for the other as a propaganda package deal.

⁹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1935, 14.

⁹⁶ See 227.

⁹⁷ *Marist Messenger*, 1 April 1935, 45.

⁹⁸ *Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1935, 9. It is significant that another film was made on Bougainville in 1934 by a Marist priest. This was renowned ethnographer Patrick O’Reilly, who, despite his name, was French. O’Reilly was a founding member of the *Société des Océanistes*, and his film *Bougainville* (1934) was a record of customary activities. It featured, for example, anthropological staples such as pottery-making, bonito hunting, cremation and initiation. See <http://masalai.wordpress.com/2012/02/29/screening-of-bougainville-upng-a-rare-historical-1930s-film>. O’Reilly was not engaged in missionary activity while on Bougainville – he had in fact been commissioned by the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography – but he would undoubtedly have enjoyed the Bishop’s hospitality at Kieta and relied on the mission’s networks of indigenous contacts. See Hugh Laracy, ‘Patrick O’Reilly: Bibliographer of the Pacific’, in *Pacific Journeys: Essays in Honour of John Dunmore*, ed. Glynnis Cropp, (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 97–106, 101. This raises the intriguing question of whether any of O’Reilly’s footage – one thinks of those striking initiation scenes – found its way into Wade’s film. As an ethnographic film made for an emerging scientific community, *Bougainville*, was not intended for a wide popular audience and so has been excluded from consideration here. However this too, according to Jean Rouch, was soon renamed and doctored for commercial purposes through ‘insensitive editing, Orientalist music, and a newsreel-style commentary more befitting of a sportscast.’ See Jean Rouch, ‘The Camera and Man’, in *Ciné-Ethnography*, ed. and trans. Steven Feld, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 29–46, 34.

May 17 was the second anniversary of the death of our zealous and much loved New Zealand Foreign Missionary. ... Father McHardy's wonderful letters will shortly be available in book form and readers would do well to order this original and inspiring compilation.⁹⁹

Moreover, both are aligned to the first intimations of prospective sainthood. On the same page of the *Marist Messenger* a letter from McHardy's successor at the Tunuru mission station is printed. 'This station of Tunuru should be of great interest to you,' writes Father Desjardins S.M:

... for it was founded by the late saintly apostle from New Zealand whom no doubt you also revere. ... The natives here, but lately brought out of paganism, remember, love, *and even pray to* their first missionary. His influence cannot be lost. ... I am to carry on the work of Father McHardy – would that I could follow in his saintly footsteps!¹⁰⁰ [my emphasis]

Thereafter, the book and the film are often mentioned in the same breath. An article describing Bishop Wade's US and European trip reminds readers of the link.

About 18 months ago Sydney was presented with further knowledge of the Northern Solomons mission ... by the screening of a 4000ft. film, "Saints and Savages," which the Bishop and the later Father Emmet McHardy S.M. had made in the course of their work. The proceeds obtained from the various screenings of the picture were a very welcome income for the promotion of the mission's activities. About this time, too, the book, "Blazing the Trail in the Solomons" (the collected letters of that saintly young priest, Father McHardy) came to stimulate the public.¹⁰¹

Thus, all three media – lantern slides, film and collected letters – became an inter-related package, promoted as a synergistic whole in which McHardy's personal charisma and tragic early death were key components. If anything, the book may have had more widespread impact than the film. Shortly after publication a fellow priest wrote to Father John McHardy about organising an appeal for a memorial chapel at Tunuru. 'Could you obtain for me 100 copies of Fr McHardy's letters at a special price?' asks Father Lebel,

I would like to send them to my friends in America with an appeal for the chapel inserted in the cover. They will be a wonderful means of propaganda for the station ...¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Marist Messenger*, 1 June 1935, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Catholic Press*, Sydney, 20 August 1936, 19.

¹⁰² Father Lebel, letter to Father John McHardy, 14 July 1935.

The resourceful Father Lebel also conceived an ‘adopt a Catechist’ fund-raising scheme involving yet more international traffic in photographic representations of Melaneseans:

I shall keep an exact account of the person adopting the Catechist. As soon as I can I shall send a picture to the interested person as was promised ...¹⁰³

The book itself was warmly received. The Apostolic Delegate to Australia wrote to Wade, ‘I am convinced that its cheerful sanctity and its ardent missionary spirit will appeal to all who read it ...’. The Bishop of Toowoomba confessed that ‘I have learned more about the Solomons than I ever knew before’, while a reviewer for the *Catholic Press* suggested that ‘a more appropriate title’ for the book ‘might have been “The Making of a Saint in the Pacific” ...’.¹⁰⁴

Most tellingly for the purposes of my thesis, the Archbishop of Adelaide, no less, exemplifies the intersection of missionary propaganda with a grand Western literary heritage of travel-adventure:

The eagerness with which I am reading it reminds me of the avidity that long ago, as boys, we read for the first time the story of Robinson Crusoe.¹⁰⁵

Thus, despite their differences, the Archbishop of Adelaide and, for instance, Frank Hurley share a common ancestor. As in all of the case studies considered in this thesis, we see the cultural legacy of this literary genealogy as discussed in the Introduction.

The support generated by the book helped maintain and expand the mission. A new chapel was indeed built with the proceeds, and two new recruits (neither, incidentally, from New Zealand) came forward and went on to ‘spen[d] their lives as Marist priests in the Pacific.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Father Philip Bernardini, letter to Bishop Wade, 1 March 1935; Bishop of Toowoomba, letter to Australian publisher, 14 May 1935. *Catholic Press*, 11 July 1935, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Archbishop of Adelaide, letter to E. Dwyer, Australian publisher, 13 May 1935.

¹⁰⁶ Durning, op.cit., 134.

Father Mulcahy's revision – the before-and-after effect

‘... each part could begin with a savage dour native & then a smiling one. ...’

Father Maurice Mulcahy S.M., manuscript notes, c.1954

The overview given above of the content of Bishop Wade's version of the film *Saints and Savages* – as based on the original scene list – shows that there was no particularly obvious visual narrative focussing on the before-and-after ‘transformation’ supposedly effected by Christianity: there is dancing and feasting, feathers and fans to welcome the new bishop, just as there is dancing and feasting, feathers and fans to mark other community events. This is not to say that the vocal commentary did not provide that semantic projection – the title suggests otherwise – only that the visual markers of conversion emphasised by other denominations are less marked and the cultural disapproval quotient is apparently lower.

It is significant, therefore, that pious reviewers at the time nevertheless sought out the transformation narrative. The writer of the glowing ‘Wonder-Film’ review, for instance, reads into the electrifying scenes of the boys’ initiation ceremony a lesson on the pre-conversion ‘paganism of the race’. He refers to the towering spirit figures as ‘devils’ and offers the eyebrow-raising comment that ‘[t]his performance is the outcome of sorcery’. He goes on: ‘The zealous missionaries are raising these natives from barbarism and the throes of sorcery to the level of civilisation ...’.¹⁰⁷ In fact, given the relatively relaxed approach to cultural autonomy operated by the Marists (in comparison to the firm break with customary practices encouraged by Protestant sects), it is entirely possible that many of the participants were engaged *both* in community rites *and* ‘making school’ (as mission attendance was called).

This journalist is also at pains to perceive the before-and-after effect:

To the observant eye, a change *immediately* takes place in the natives after they have been taught religious beliefs, and have been baptized. The countenance hitherto sullen and bearing expression of fear, engendered by sorcery, now becomes radiant and cheerful¹⁰⁸ [my emphasis]

¹⁰⁷ *Catholic Press*, 24 January 1935, 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

That this sorcery-obsessed writer has to rely on an ‘observant eye’ for his evidence, rather than citing anything more explicit, suggests that these hypothetical subjective changes were not much emphasised in the commentary for the film, which is far more interested in land-clearance, buildings, boats, school and church-attendance than in personal demeanour. As discussed above, there is no evidence to support the journalist’s ‘observant eye’ contention, either in Father McHardy’s photographs – for instance the ‘happy little folk away out in the Evo country’¹⁰⁹ are pagan – or in the film, in which chiefly elders of dubious baptismal standing are seen to orate and direct preparations for celebrations. Contrariwise, as we can see in relation to Father Boch’s more old-fashioned photographic style, the archives are awash with group photographs of sullen Christians. [Fig 5.4]

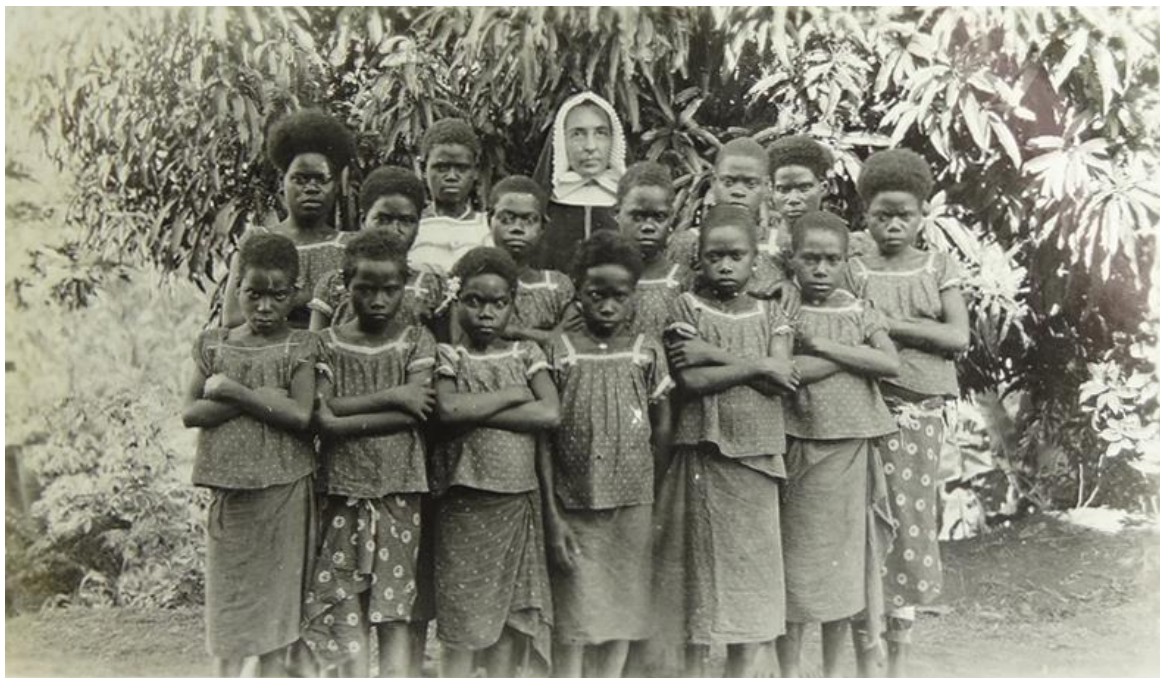


Fig. 5.4: Maurice Boch, Sister Claver and schoolgirls, Kieta, c.1929, www.delcampe.net.

Thus the impulse for a tidy, perceptible, binary ‘before-and-after’ conversion effect on indigenous people is, once again, a projection of Western desire. The advertisement that introduced this chapter showed smiling children who – being happy – must therefore be Christian. Hence they must be protected from relapse into misery and implied cannibalism. The messiness and ambiguity of real life and real faith are sidestepped. Just

¹⁰⁹ McHardy album, caption F2, 69.

as the travelogue-adventurer projects onto the indigenous body a nostalgic ideal of noble savagery, so does the mission supporter project a childlike ideal of a simple, sunny, Edenic faith. Both fantasies are, perhaps, reactions against the conditions of modern urban drudgery that render both masculinity and Christian ardour hard to maintain. They demonstrate the various roles to which the Melanesian body is co-opted within the Western imaginary, oblivious to the perplexities of colonised life that beset the real human beings involved.

At the level of propaganda effectiveness, ‘before-and-after’ provided an immediate framing device and reward for the whole expensive enterprise. Hence, when Father Mulcahy set about re-editing Wade’s version of the film in the mid-1950s to strengthen its propaganda impact, it is to that model that he refers. As mentioned earlier, Father Mulcahy’s notes contain a typed scene list that I take to refer to Wade’s version.¹¹⁰ Father Mulcahy has added handwritten annotations that indicate his assessment of the length and quality of various scenes, and his intentions as regards the re-edit. A scene with native boys sitting on the schooner with Father McConville is to be cut to exclude the priest; a spear dance is ‘far too long – cut to half’; a scene of leaf houses is ‘too long – no movement’. And so on. The intention is not only to increase momentum but also to reorganise the scenes into a narrative. For instance, a shot of ‘Native gods in shelter’ is to be ‘cut in for initiation’ – that is, a shot of one aspect of customary religion is to be inserted into another as a sort of all-purpose reference to generic paganism. Even more telling are the annotations in inverted commas that presumably indicate notes for inclusion in the taped commentary. The sequence with the axe-wielding chief with his two sons referenced earlier – called simply ‘Old man with axe and boys’ on the typescript scene list – has the handwritten annotation “‘Cannibal’”. The following sequence, of a group of men adorned with shell *kapkaps*, is similarly annotated “‘tough eggs’”. The intention is clear, and further borne out by the subsequent ‘Treatment Summary’ (a list of headings for the revised version). Immediately following the Introduction, which features Father McHardy’s film credit for the cinematography, ‘Sequence B’ launches firmly into ‘Contrast – Pagan-Christian’. The implication is that Father Mulcahy intends to insert into the ‘Pagan’ corner any people or scenes that might possibly fit that description.

¹¹⁰ MAW ACC 205/1. It is annotated “‘original’ outline of sequence’ – with inverted commas around ‘original’.

Father Mulcahy fleshes out this narrative structure in handwritten notes to himself. These confirm that scenes of ‘Pagan gods & initiation’ were indeed to be linked and moved to the opening section immediately after the introduction, where they were to be contrasted with contented converts: ‘Stress happy Xn [Christian] people,’ Mulcahy reminds himself. He also took a lively interest in montage theory:

Storm at sea & on land; quick cutting back & forth increases tension ... Tempo of whole is all important. There must be balance – action with action, etc.

In subsequent notes, Father Mulcahy warms to his task of contrast and compare.

Symbolism: each part could begin with a savage dour native & then a smiling one. ...

But this would raise the problem of what to do with the amiable axe-wielder whom Mulcahy had decided to designate a ‘Cannibal’. This is solved – not very successfully – with a work around: ‘In the Cannibal,’ he notes, ‘both are combined in the same person.’ He continues with the importance of a coherent argument at the expense of the picturesque:

There must be a theme – all, on it [sic]. There must not be any mere pretty pictures.

He appears to reference a text book on film editing techniques:

N.B. Brief shots should always be close-ups.

N.B. Re Tempo – cf Bach [?] p. 98 – sequences must balance each other ... When scene is exciting, cutting must be quick. Spectator expects it subconsciously. When scene is peaceful, quick cutting will be jerky & be a discomfort.

Finally, Father Mulcahy reminds himself to remind the audience that ‘[t]his is a factual film’, oblivious to the philosophical minefield behind such a statement, particularly when it concerns footage that had undergone at least two editing processes – firstly by Bishop Wade and subsequently by himself – that restructured a ragbag of visual material into two rather different narrative agendas.

There is additional irony in that Mulcahy’s ‘theme’ of dour pagans versus happy converts sits uncomfortably with McHardy’s own Christian inclusiveness. Indeed, the immediate rationale for revamping the film seems to have been the growing veneration for Father Emmet McHardy within New Zealand’s Roman Catholic circles. This indicates a tension between the co-opting of this material to frame McHardy’s martyrdom, and McHardy’s

own relationship to these Melanesian people. Mulcahy includes in his notes a handwritten draft of an introductory commentary that explicitly places Father McHardy at the heart of the film: ‘Begin with narration of taking of the film,’ writes Mulcahy to himself, ‘backed by the first shots. Then [still of] Fr. E. C. McHardy [with this narration]:’

25 years ago a young priest left N.Z. for Sol. He was there only 3 yrs. They brought him back here to die. In that time he had converted ~~100s of~~ 600 savages, built up a complete station, left behind fervent capable lay apostles. Here is some of his story seen by the eyes of his camera.¹¹¹

The replacement of the flabby ‘100s of’ with the crisp alliteration of ‘600 savages’ adds a delightfully precise rhetorical touch. Unfortunately recordings of Father Mulcahy’s spoken commentary do not appear to have survived, but apparently he used to run his version of the film at Seminarian and Third Order Marist meetings.¹¹²

Jokes and anxiety: the travelogue-adventure genre makes its mark.

‘No wonder the Solomons have a bad name!’

Father Emmet McHardy, 20 January 1930

Other than the ‘faked Hollywood productions’ scoffed at by the *Catholic Press* and the Bishop of Adelaide’s fond memories of *Robinson Crusoe*, travelogue-adventure entertainment has played little part so far in this chapter. Nevertheless, as we have seen, its presence in the popular Western imagination persists and forms the ground against which McHardy’s photographic and Wade’s filmic representations of Bougainville people take shape. Moreover, McHardy himself had to come to terms with it. This section provides some insight into how he did so.

In a long letter to his beloved ‘Uncle Willie’, McHardy describes in one passage an illustrated magazine cover that he has come across. While this letter was not included in the edited collection, and hence was not itself in the popular domain, I quote the passage because the publication to which McHardy refers certainly belongs in the travel-adventure genre, and hence will have played its part in shaping popular Western perceptions of Melanesians. Most of McHardy’s letter comprises a riveting description of

¹¹¹ Archive notes on *Saints and Savages*, Marist Archives Wellington, ACC 205/1.

¹¹² Ken Scadden and Brother Gerard Hogg S.M., notes on *Saints and Savages*, Marist Archives Wellington, ACC 205/1.

his real adventure into mountainous regions of the interior and his encounters with the Evo people who lived there. His trek took him close to the active volcano of Bagana. In describing the sublime view, McHardy also mentions the larger but less active volcano of Balbi, further to the north. He then engages in a remarkable digression. ‘In connection with [Balbi] a very funny paragraph recently came into my hands,’ he writes:

it was the front page of a cheap Austrian [sic] Pictorial, and it depicted – strikingly – the great steaming cavity of a mighty volcano; on one side of the crater was a crowd of yelling, dancing, spear-waving, fanatical savages, two of whom had just thrown one of their number into the abyss – the gentleman in question was shown upside down, and in no very elegant posture, descending into the lava! On the other side were three of the silent, strong-man type of American: one, apparently overcome by the sight, had turned away, and was shading his offended eyes; but the others were made of sterner stuff: one of them, probably with humanitarian motives, was taking pot shots at the descending figure with his revolver, and the other, of course, was turning his moving picture camera!!¹¹³

The illustration McHardy describes shows not only the pervasiveness of sensationalist white adventurism but also the centrality of film-making (‘of course’) to this genre. It also provides a glimpse of the intriguing reaction evoked in McHardy himself: he is resolved to treat it as a ‘very funny’ joke. On whom, is unclear. Nonetheless, McHardy has taken trouble to describe the illustration in detail. He wants to share it with his uncle, to discuss it in some way, even though he is in the midst of a lengthy letter about one of the most physically and spiritually demanding experiences of his life. Certainly the illustration, in McHardy’s ekphrasis, succinctly depicts several facets of the colonial imaginary from the white-man’s point of view: heart-of-darkness style horror; ‘humanitarianism’ deployed through the barrel of a gun; calm whites versus frenzied blacks; image-capture as a metaphor of imperial possession. I have been unable to trace the publication in question. Probably McHardy meant ‘Australian Pictorial’ – i.e. one of the plethora of popular illustrated magazines available at the time – but none with that particular name existed in the late 1920s so he may be using the term generically. His letter continues:

The legend underneath stated that a party of Americans had recently penetrated into the very centre of the wild, savage and cannibalistic (and what not!) Island of Bougainville in the notorious Solomons, and while making a scientific expedition up a great volcano they (unwillingly)

¹¹³ McHardy letter to Uncle Willie, 20 January 1930, 11. Marist Archives, Wellington.

witnessed the natives sacrificing human victims to what was presumably one of their Gods! My hat!¹¹⁴

His astonishment at these racist libels makes one wonder if his devout upbringing had shielded him from exposure to the travelogue-adventure genre. McHardy's own view on cannibalism is refreshingly empirical: another letter to a photography-related acquaintance – replying, I suspect, to a question – concedes it as a historical possibility but states '... some even maintain that cannibalism still exists in the uncontrolled territory in the centre of the Island, but they have little evidence in favour of their contention.'¹¹⁵

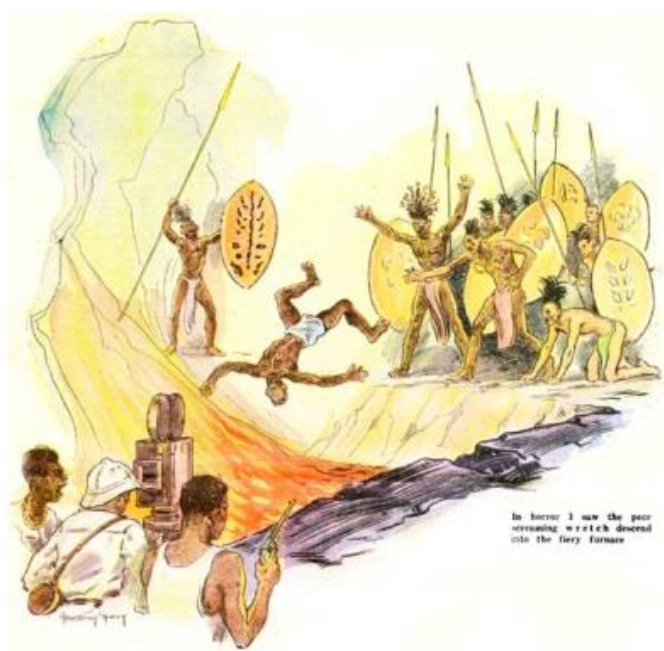


Fig. 5.5: Armstrong Sperry, *World Magazine*, 23 May 1926.

A crude coloured drawing closely resembling McHardy's description appears as an illustration to a 'true' adventure story that appeared in the U.S. travelogue-adventure journal, *The World Magazine*. Written and illustrated by one Armstrong Sperry, the tale recounts *An American Artist-Explorer's Hair-Raising Adventure With Cannibals of the Solomon Islands*.¹¹⁶ It is set on 'Boukai' – perhaps a hybrid of Buka and Bougainville – and is captioned 'In horror I saw the poor screaming wretch descend into the fiery furnace'. The image and storyline may have been plagiarized and adapted by the editors

¹¹⁴ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 20 January 1930, 11.

¹¹⁵ McHardy, letter to John E. Kennebeck, 8 October 1929.

¹¹⁶ *The World Magazine*, 23 May 1926, 8-9.

http://www.armstrongsperry.com/magazinework/world_mag_05-23-1926.shtml

of McHardy's pictorial journal, demonstrating further the self-perpetuating, incestuous fervour of this European obsession. McHardy's letter to his uncle goes on to explain that there had indeed been a recent American expedition up Balbi. This was part of the Whitney South Sea Expedition – a massive twelve-year ornithological collecting enterprise sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History. Thus McHardy's popular magazine was operating in the seepage zone between science and sensationalist fiction. The unease caused by the proximity of these discourses is further evident in the reaction of Hannibal Hamlin – the current leader of the Whitney Expedition who was still working in the area. McHardy continues jovially:

... I had the very great pleasure of showing the drawing to Mr. Hamlin, the leader of the said expedition (he is a fine chap), and asking him if he could not let me have one or two snaps of the proceedings. His astonishment was amazing, and his remarks were certainly not those fitting the presence of a reverend missionary Father – but under the circumstances I am sure you will forgive me for not being as severe as the language might have demanded!!!

Hamlin sounds not merely annoyed but embarrassed by the tabloid treatment, presumably because it undermines the dignity of scientific endeavour. It is unclear whether either man considers that it also undermines the dignity of the Bougainville people thus depicted. McHardy does not say whether he also shared the picture with any of his indigenous friends, but such tactlessness seems unlikely.

The long marriage between science and imperialism, evident from the earliest voyages of discovery, is seen to be alive and well: Hamlin, McHardy writes, thought that:

... the only joke about the whole affair was the international complication which nearly arose through his planting the Stars and Stripes on the highest volcano in the Territory of New Guinea, Mandated to Australia ...

That actually is quite funny, and certainly indicative of the network of arrogant Western nationalisms at play in the colonised worlds of the southern hemisphere. But McHardy returns to his own joke:

... but after calming down he [Hamlin] enjoyed the new joke to the full. No wonder the Solomons have a bad name!

The letter then returns to its primary focus and continues with further description of McHardy's journeys amongst the Evo people.

I have dwelt on this passage partly because it represents a nice conjunction between the three colonial discourses under consideration in this thesis: we hear the voices of the amused missionary, the exasperated scientist (in this case a naturalist rather than an anthropologist), and the overheated fictions of the travelogue-adventurer. But my interest is particularly piqued by McHardy's reaction to the magazine drawing, his determination that *his* voice should be one of amusement rather than dismay. 'No wonder the Solomons have a bad name!' he laughs. Yet surely all his propaganda efforts to encourage support of the mission are predicated, at least in theory, on the notion that the people of Bougainville are fellow humans who merit respect just as much as Europeans.

In deciding to frame the libel as hilarious he is, perhaps, touching on the ambivalent relationship between anxiety and jokes explored by Freud.¹¹⁷ As we have seen throughout these case studies, references to cannibalism, head-hunting and human sacrifice seep through into missionary propaganda discourse from the adventure-travelogue genre. While on one level these may serve as a marketing ploy to crank up the 'thrill' factor for Western consumption, such jibes may also provide a more private outlet for the relentless stress of immersion in an alien culture. In either case, the jovial Roman Catholics of this study seem to have applied a veneer of jocularly to mask anxiety to a greater extent than the relatively humourless Protestants. Bishop Wade's advertisement – 'We Do Not Eat Them Now' – discussed in the introduction to this chapter, is a case in point. But he deployed comic-book cannibal humour privately too: after a particularly gruelling journey across the island, McHardy and his 'boys' were alarmingly late for a west-coast rendezvous with Wade and colleagues on the mission launch *Raphael*. Wade's relief took characteristic form, as did McHardy's empiricist response. 'They were anxious,' McHardy related:

... the Bishop thought we might be adorning the inside of some saucepan. But that's another region in which I am now sure there is no cannibalism.¹¹⁸

Even McHardy himself, however, cannot resist making cannibal jokes when describing cultural stressors. The long letter to Uncle Willie includes a powerful evocation of a singing held in his honour by a highland chieftain, at which a pig was slaughtered and roasted as people danced and played panpipes:

¹¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, (New York: Norton, 1990 [1905]).

¹¹⁸ McHardy, letter to his father, 12 September 1931, *Blazing the Trail*, 158-166, 164.

But gradually the music became more shrill, the pace increased, yells and stamping of feet were added to the din, and those barbarous weapons flashed about as if seeking an invisible victim. And still the row increased, and still they whirled faster and faster, and it made one almost giddy to watch those naked bodies, streaming with perspiration, swinging round the firelight (and perhaps there was just a doubt, too, as whether or not it was really that pig that was going to be eaten after all!).¹¹⁹

While this particular letter was not posthumously published, the same incident was described by McHardy in a letter to his parents that *was* included in *Blazing the Trail*. The cannibalism reference there is toned down and negatively inverted, but still present as a marker of anxiety: ‘Had they been going to eat me, I doubt if they could have turned on a more ferocious display!’¹²⁰

Thus anxiety – resulting more from emotional exhaustion and cultural isolation than from facile racism – produces these nervously joking tropes. The nominal fear of cannibalism is revealed as a fear of loss of self, swallowed by an uncomprehending life-world. In her study of how colonial law deployed ‘cannibalism’ as a legalistic device to ‘differentiate the colonial citizen from savagery,’ Katherine Biber comments that ‘cannibal discourse discloses the enduring sensation of corporeal vulnerability that accompanied colonial encounters.’¹²¹ Colonialism’s inherent angst (even when perpetrated by someone as decent as McHardy) is intimately connected with the remarkable continued currency of the mythic ‘cannibal’ in the popular Western imagination. This is discussed further in the conclusion. That such projections ‘amount to nothing less than a grotesque inversion of the truth about race relations’ in the colonial world, as Robert Dixon observes, is the profound irony.¹²²

¹¹⁹ McHardy, letter to Uncle Willie, 20 January 1930, 10.

¹²⁰ Emmet McHardy, letter to his parents, 15 December 1929, *Blazing the Trail*, 77-87, 82.

¹²¹ Katherine Biber, ‘Cannibals and Colonialism’, *Sydney Law Review*, 27, 2005, 623-637, 625, 637.

¹²² Robert Dixon, ‘Cannibalising Indigenous Texts : Headhunting and Fantasy in Ion L. Idriess’s *Coral Sea Adventures*’, in *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism in the Pacific*, eds. Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 114. Dixon is here referring to fantasies of white people taken captive by Torres Strait ‘savages’, whereas in fact the latter were treated as ‘inmates’ with severely curtailed civil rights under the Australian administration. But it applies equally to the cannibalism inherent in absorbing indigenous land, resources and bodies into imperial expansionism.

Chapter Conclusion

ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo

Motto of the Society of Mary

This case study has focused on three sources of Melanesian imagery emerging from Father Emmet McHardy's work for the Roman Catholic mission on Bougainville in the years 1929-1932 and subsequently transmitted to popular audiences in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Britain. These comprise McHardy's photographs together with his carefully written captions; his lively letters home; and the film footage shot partly, though not exclusively, by him. The photographs, captions and letters began as a private record for friends and family, but we have traced how some of these were quickly absorbed into the publicity apparatus that was central to mission support. During his lifetime, McHardy collaborated with his brother John on a lantern slide presentation based on his photographs and captions, and his uncle published some of his descriptive letters in Catholic publications such as *The Tablet*. After his death, a selection of McHardy's letters was compiled into a popular book, illustrated by his photographs; the lantern slides continued to be toured for illustrated talks, with and without film footage; and his prints circulated widely in material such as the advertisement discussed in the introduction to this chapter. McHardy's moving images were posthumously edited into the film *Saints and Savages* (1935), promoted and toured by Bishop Thomas Wade and later re-edited by Father Mulcahy in the 1950s.

McHardy himself barely appears in this imagery: one famous portrait, grinning and dressed for work in singlet and pith helmet; one glimpse amidst a milling group in the film; a formal deathbed image. Even his 'innumerable Wodehousian letters', as his editor, Eileen Duggan, points out, are self-effacing: 'any publicity that he sought was for the mission, not for himself.'¹²³ Duggan suggests that he thus embodied the Marist motto: *ignoti et quasi occulti in hoc mundo* (unknown and as if hidden in this world). Nevertheless, his invisible presence behind the camera and the pen pervades his representations of the people of Bougainville, ensuring that their reception by Western audiences would have been imbued with something of his unpretentious courtesy and

¹²³ Eileen Duggan, Biographical Note, *Blazing the Trail*, 11.

‘debonair sanctity’.¹²⁴ Moreover, his relative freedom from the standard racist presumptions of his era makes his representational strategies antithetical to those of the self-aggrandising racial essentialism of the travelogue-adventurers. In his preface to *Blazing the Trail*, Bishop Wade quotes a colleague who referred to McHardy as an ‘international man’:

Have you noticed that it makes no difference to him what country you come from or who you are, white, black or brown?¹²⁵

In this chapter I have argued that the distinctive ‘voices’ of Father Emmet McHardy, Bishop Thomas Wade and Father Maurice Mulcahy each emerge from these representations of Melanesian people and that these must have coloured their reception by the New Zealand, Australian, American and British audiences. Each occupies a different place on a spectrum of missionary approaches to representing Bougainville people to white consumers. But, in addition, each also engages in his own way with the pervasive figure of the ‘savage/cannibal/head-hunter’. As with the other case studies of this thesis, none of them can wholly escape from the popular conventions of ‘cannibal talk’, even as each uses his religious faith to mediate and modify them.

As with the other case studies I further submit that missionary records – texts and images – of Melanesian people capture a wealth of incidental detail of value not only to contemporary historians of colonial modernity but also to the descendants of the individuals depicted.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁵ Thomas Wade, Preface, *ibid.*, 9.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has examined conflicting representational strategies used by Christian missionaries and secular travelogue-adventurers in displaying Melanesian people to white audiences between 1917 and 1935. This was a period of emerging global capitalism, when burgeoning technology, international trade and spectacular entertainment coexisted with colonial exploitation of Melanesia – lands and cultures relatively new to the ‘tread of a white man’s foot’.¹ The thesis structure has traced an arc of varying degrees of involvement between these two groups as they constructed narratives about, and disseminated images of, indigenous communities in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. While static media were important, and have been considered alongside film as part of the spectacle of commerce and church propaganda, moving images have taken centre stage in this analysis because their modernity, ubiquity and popularity with white urban audiences of this period made them the medium of choice for maximum impact. In following the mission trajectory from facilitation of other image-makers, through passive commissioning, then active collaboration, then making their own movies, I have explored how missionaries played a pivotal role in enabling, expanding and, potentially, subverting how Melanesian and Western peoples viewed themselves and each other as they contended with modernity.

Shared tropes and conflicted agendas

My research has shown that imagery intended for Christian propaganda between the First and Second World wars was both prevalent and popular, holding its own alongside commercial entertainments. It differed significantly from them even while it exploited, absorbed and reflected many of the latter’s sensationalist prejudices. Torn between the conflicting yet intersecting tropes of the ‘savage/cannibal/headhunter’ beloved of the travelogue-adventurers and the apparently docile Christian converts beloved of the missionaries, the eager traffic in the West of images of Melanesians rendered the indigenous body as a contested site of colonial modernity.

¹ This archetypally gendered and racialised colonial phrase was used by Jane Landman as the title of her book on the history of Australia’s filmic relationship with its Melanesian mandates: *The Tread of a White Man’s Foot: Australian Pacific Colonialism and the Cinema, 1925-62* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, ANU, 2006). It is a quote from the introductory voiceover of one of the films she discusses: *Walk into Paradise* (1956).

For all their racist ambivalence and paternalistic faults from a postcolonial perspective, Christian representations of Melanesian people nonetheless presented an alternative view of ethnic difference that embraced, at least in principle, (a) shared humanity, (b) coevalness and relative geographic neighbourliness and (c) optimism for survival and adaptation. This can be contrasted with the travelogue-adventure genre (which shared a significant visual and ethical overlap with the nascent discipline of anthropology) that tended to emphasise (a) Otherness, (b) allochronicity and relative geographic distance and (c) pessimism for inevitable loss of supposed cultural ‘authenticity’.² In short, the mission view was dynamic, forward-looking and, at least theoretically, inclusive, while the travelogue-adventure genre was static, backward-looking and definitively essentialist. Missionaries were, on the whole, keen to share modernity with the indigene as an intrinsic facet of universal Christianity; adventurers wanted to ring-fence modernity as a purely Western attribute. In both cases, however, I suggest that the uneasy relation of indigenes to modernity, as mediated via Western imagery, reflected the ambivalence of white viewers who were themselves caught up in inexorable technological and cultural change. As mission historian Ryan Dunch has noted, referencing the Comaroffs, if global modernity manifested as a sort of colonization of consciousness, then it was a colonization that affected everyone, the West as well as the Rest.³

My thesis has demonstrated sufficient evidence of the popularity of mission propaganda to suggest that it occupied a more significant role in the formation of conflicted white attitudes towards Melanesia than has commonly been allowed for. This emerged as particularly true of Australian and New Zealand, where a closer and more proprietorial relationship informed the view of neighboring Pacific countries. Moreover I argue that the conflict itself may have served to undermine *both* travelogue-adventure and missionary forms of stereotype. Missionary propagandists sought to resolve the tension through a temporal solution: the ‘cannibal/headhunter’ was a figure from the pagan past, transformed out of existence by Christian conversion. But this ‘before-and-after’ solution was undermined by the perpetual need to reference the ‘before’ in order to satisfy the expectations of white audiences. This necessarily led to repeated anxious assertions –

² The terms co-eval and allochronic are used by Johannes Fabian as antitheses, meaning ‘sharing the same time-world’ and ‘occupying a different time-world’ to that of Western anthropologists. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, op.cit.

³ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, xi; Dunch, ‘Beyond Cultural Imperialism’, op.cit., 2002, 301.

prevalent throughout these case studies – that one indigenous group or another had, until *very recently*, been ‘cannibals’ or ‘head-hunters’ or both. Thus the relegation to the past had to be a recent past, never allowed to slip too far away, and rarely questioned as to ethnological or historical accuracy. In this way missionaries could exploit the sensationalist Othering of the populist travelogue-adventure genre while simultaneously taking full credit for the absence of evidence for such practices. They could have their cannibal and convert him too.

Cannibal psychoanalysis

In considering the phenomenon in Chapter Five I noted that cannibal discourse tended to erupt even amongst sympathetic and knowledgeable missionaries at moments of stress, and proposed that terror, not just of being killed but *eaten*, may be a concretised version of the fear of losing self-identity through being consumed by Otherness. Obeyesekere agrees:

Cannibalism, one might say, constituted a projective field for the European outsider, an arena wherein his personal conflicts and anxieties and those anxieties attendant on living in an alien community could be expressed.⁴

The same is true of head-hunting. While in anthropological reality the one does not necessarily entail the other, both are so intimately connected in the discourse of European ‘savagism’ that the figure of the ‘cannibal/headhunter’ is effectively a conjoined twin. It is telling that both phenomena involve not merely death but *dismemberment* – a dissolution of self that suggests both castration and eradication of memory. It is hard to be a stranger in a strange land, but that is the role that missionaries and other long-term colonists undertook. Psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni also saw Freudian defense mechanisms in colonial relations. In a work inspired by Shakespeare’s *Tempest* that considered unconscious responses on both sides of the imperial divide, he wrote:

We do not want it said that, like children, we are frightened of the faces we have ourselves made terrifying, so we prefer to maintain that this unpleasant thing stirring to life in ourselves is due to something evil in the black man before us or to some quality inherent in his race or tribe.⁵

⁴ Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 152.

⁵ Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991 [1950]), 199. This work famously incurred the wrath of Frantz Fanon for its

Thus negative and essentialist racial stereotyping, Mannoni asserts, is a projection from the coloniser's own unconscious heart of darkness.

But while this psychoanalytic approach may account for the pervasive anxieties of on-the-ground colonising forces (Mannoni was writing from his experience as a white resident on Madagascar during a native uprising), the relentless fascination of safe-at-home Western consumers of cannibal tales is perhaps better explained by the long and obsessively self-replicating history of travel adventure stories that encompass 'fact', fiction and the extensive territory in-between. The significance of this literary heritage, outlined in the Introduction, arises time and again in advertisements and the responses of reviewers and commentators to these films. The armchair-safe consumers of these dramatic texts cannot, surely, have personally experienced the unconscious fears of dismemberment and absorption suffered more grittily by their cousin colonisers – the white missionaries, adventurers, traders, ethnographers and settlers – sweating in the field. But, like all adventure-stories, perhaps they provided a more indirect, vicarious, cathartic outlet for generalised anxieties and libidinous desires about masculinity in the modern Western world. The very repetitiveness of the genre suggests a core of unspoken vulnerability around which the stories orbit, nervously constructing the disgusting/desirable black Other as abject/object while simultaneously interpellating the intrepid white male Hero as subject.⁶

Indeed, masculinism seems to be an intrinsic characteristic of the adventure-travelogue genre. Even where a woman is included – as Osa Johnson is in Martin Johnson's work – she is deployed either as a focus of sexualised vulnerability or as an embodiment of the 'plucky gal' stereotype whose tomboy traits only serve to emphasise her femininity. Thus although Osa is remarkably central to many of Johnson's scenes – where she provides a fine contrast of gender, race and cultural values – her presence does not undermine the

supposed focus on the dependency mindsets of disempowered people, rather than on oppressive economics and politics. For Fanon's objections see *Black Skin, White Masks*, (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968 [1952]), Chapter Four. For a defence of Mannoni that reminds readers that Mannoni was postulating a psychoanalytic rather than a political reading, with much of the action occurring in the white subconscious rather than on the streets of Algiers, see Philip Chassler, 'Reading Mannoni's Prospero and Caliban Before Reading Black Skin, White Masks', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 5: 3 (2007), 71-81.

⁶ See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 191, for the close relationship between disgust and desire in defining the Other. For an overview of Althusser's interpellation of the subject see Chicago School of Media Theory at <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/interpellation/>.

masculinist discourse. Nor do the rare cases of women writers of the genre, most notably the intrepid and prolific Beatrice Grimshaw. From the missionary point of view, as we have seen, there were many non-indigenous women in Melanesia: missionary wives Alma Wiles, Myrtle Parker, Lilian Nicholson and Jean Stewart of the Vanuatu Adventists, plus other redoubtable female missionaries (including numerous Polynesians) of other periods and Christian denominations. Each had her own adventure to relate and, in the forum of missionary publications, many did so.

Moving Images and Radical Visibility

I have argued that moving images played a special role in the phenomenon of stereotype subversion. Not that it is necessarily absent from prints, still photography, magazine articles, stories or books – we have seen, for instance, how Emmet McHardy's rapport with his subjects, combined with sympathetic captions, can achieve it. But these older, static, literary media are smaller and (unless translated to lantern slides) experienced more privately. Their text and context are more directly under the control of their white authors and close reading – as in for example my approach to the Adventist newsletters – may be required to perceive it. (In this instance I include still photographs and print imagery under the rubric of 'literary' media because of their semantic dependence on context and caption. Photographs or prints deemed 'unsuccessful', besides, are unlikely to be published, whereas all sorts of unanticipated quirkiness can infiltrate at sixteen frames per second.)

In contrast to static media, the phenomenological experience of cinema uniquely shapes and structures emotional response. In the context of a darkened hall where a group audience watches, the visual dominance of the projection is an important factor in subtly re-aligning the power relations between viewer and viewee. The filmic people are larger than life; they are irradiated with light whereas the audience is in darkness; they move while the watchers sit still. Perhaps most significantly, moviegoers are required to literally look up to, rather than down on, the people they observe; they become to some extent in thrall. These factors help create the powerful psychological effect of cinema – a recognized effect that was a major reason for the moral panic attendant on its popularity

and which saw churchmen closely involved with the establishment of censorship regimes that still photography largely escaped.⁷

But in addition to its affective impact, I have argued that film offered a more unruly medium within and around which indigenous Melanesians could sometimes display a *radical visibility* that escaped and transcended the film-maker's intentions. Christopher Pinney has argued, regarding transcultural still photography, that profilmic capture is a contact zone (à la Pratt) in which indigenous agency is apparent despite the best efforts of photographers to stage-manage effects.⁸ Pinney maintains that photography is not just another screen on which to project Orientalism but that its 'surfeit of information' makes for uncontrolled contingencies not shared by writing or painting.⁹ He gives as examples the 'noise' caught at the edges of staged shots and the haphazard logistics of large-group photos.¹⁰ I suggest that what is true of still photography is doubly so with movies. People don't stay still; their slipperiness as subjects under the colonial gaze is manifest and literal; the movie camera interacts with animated persons rather than freeze-dried constructs.

The notion that motion picture cameras, wielded by pith-helmeted white men as weapons of colonial power and technological modernity, could inadvertently offer such a platform of visibility to colonised indigenes, emphasises the point made by Terry Smith and raised in Chapter Four, that the seeds of post-colonialism are generated in the very act of colonisation.¹¹

⁷ See Introduction, 13-14. Indeed it also seems that both mission and travelogue films – usually small scale and made independently of Hollywood – largely operated beneath the censorship radar, at least as far as exposed female breasts were concerned. Male genitalia were a different matter. Martin Johnson (Chapter One) reported problems, after his first trip to Vanuatu, with displaying images of Malakulan men whose penis sheaths modestly concealed the glans but exposed the testicles. '[T]he dress of the men of Malekula, if you can call it dress, draws attention to their sex rather than conceals it. On my first visit among them, I had taken motion-pictures of them as they were. When I returned to America, I found that naked savages shocked the public. Some of my best films were absolutely unsalable. On this second trip, accordingly, I managed, whenever possible, to persuade the savages to wear geestrings or loin-cloths or aprons of leaves.' *Cannibal-Land*, 181. Edward Salisbury, too, seems to have had a brush with the censor. See Chapter Three, 154, fn 93.

⁸ Christopher Pinney, 'What's Photography Got To Do With It?', in Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan (eds.), *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, (Los Angeles CA: Getty Publications, 2013), 33-52.

⁹ Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India*, (London: British Library, 2008), 58.

¹⁰ Pinney, 'What's Photography Got To Do With It?', 39.

¹¹ Terry Smith, 'Modernism, Modernity and Otherness', 147, 158.

Hungarian film theorist, Béla Balázs, writing in 1924 and hence contemporary with my case studies, was lyrical with the modernist notion that moving images allow radically new political and spiritual insights forgotten during the long hegemony of traditional text media.¹² He was applying a Marxist perspective to the European and American entertainment film industries, but I suggest that his argument is also salient for my thesis regarding indigenous representation. Balázs argued that the emergence of print culture in the fifteenth century coincided with the emergence of capitalism and was integral to its nature. ‘The invention of printing,’ he thought, ‘shifted the centre of gravity of culture from the visual to the conceptual.’ This in turn ‘accelerated the process of [Marxist] “reification”’ by which people become alienated not only from the immediacy of their environment¹³ but also from their embodied self, which ‘has been forgotten and has become invisible.’¹⁴ Leaving aside the fact that movable type was invented in feudal China centuries before Gutenberg, it is true that Western ‘print culture’ developed closely alongside – and indeed fed upon – the imperial voyages of exploration and conquest from the fifteenth century on. ‘Cannibal-land’ was always already their literary destination.

Silent film, on the other hand, Balázs maintained, offered a new kind of perception predicated on a return to an embodied human gestural language:

The whole of mankind is now busy relearning the long-forgotten language of gestures and facial expressions. ... the visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh. *Man will become visible once again.* (italics in original).¹⁵

It is film that will have the ability to raise up and make visible once more human beings who are now buried under mountains of words and concepts.¹⁶

In 1924, writing *Visible Man*, Balázs was still hampered by the white supremacism of his era. He expressed wince-making racism and sexism alongside a disturbing predilection for uniformity. For instance he celebrated cinema’s potential to develop a gestural language that would create a ‘standard white man who will one day emerge as the synthesis ... of different races’ and who rejoiced in ‘*the unique shared psyche of the*

¹² Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man*, 1-90.

¹³ Balázs, *Visible Man*, 84.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Ibid. 11.

white man’ (italics in original). Moreover, ‘[b]y suggesting a uniform ideal of beauty as the universal goal of selective breeding, the film will help to produce a uniform type of the white race.’¹⁷

By 1948, in his more fully developed *Theory of the Film*, this has softened and expanded into an inclusive ‘cinematic internationalism’.¹⁸

The silent film helped people to become physically accustomed to each other and was about to create an international human type. ... the film which makes visible man equally visible to everyone will greatly aid in levelling physical differences between the various races and nations and will thus be one of the most useful pioneers in the development towards an international universal humanity.¹⁹

Balázs was a Hungarian-German Jew, and the trauma of the Nazi Holocaust doubtless encouraged this revision from naive proto-Fascism in 1924 to explicit Marxism in 1948. Thus Balázs saw cinema as providing a powerful socialist medium of human radical visibility that subverts the alienation and reification inherent to capitalism. While it is unclear whether Balázs himself consciously included Melanesians or Africans in his ‘international universal humanity’, the technology of the moving image undoubtedly enabled their visibility in the contemporary world of modernity, rather than just phantasms of the European imagination seen through the literary smokescreen of ‘Cannibal-land’. Black and brown people could participate in cinematic modernity in ways that, I have argued, undermine stereotype *even when* stereotypes were thrust upon them. Again, as touched on several times in this thesis, we see a curious parallel between film and religion. The universalising impulse of Balázs’ ‘cinematic internationalism’ echoes the equally universalising impulse of Christian mission in this era – each operated within, and was energised by, technological modernity.

My own view is a qualified endorsement of Balázs’. As we saw with many of the racist intertitles and other framing devices deployed by white men in these case studies, those colonised by camera are still vulnerable to egregious manipulation. But I agree with Balázs that unruly moving images may be more *likely* to achieve this visibility than static

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸ Erica Carter, Introduction, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, xxxviii

¹⁹ Balázs, *Theory of the Film* (1948), 45, quoted in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, 15, fn 8.

media, simply by recording the vitality, engagement and humanity of the people captured on film.

This is particularly true, I believe, where people are recorded in situations where they are *not* ‘performing’ their culture for the benefit of cameras. At the level of the travelogue, indigenous difference is often reduced to only the externally visible tip of the iceberg – the theatrical performance of dance, ritual, adornment and custom that so often merely signifies ‘savage’ to European audiences. The more colourful the cultural performance the better the commercial travelogue-adventurer likes it in his quest to maximise Otherness at the expense of understanding. Hence, while not denigrating the truly spectacular cultural events and achievements that co-operative indigenes good-naturedly performed both for themselves and for Western cameras, at that period it was perhaps the *absence* of such theatricality that provided the best way to subvert Western prejudices about ‘savagery’. A baby pulls herself up to standing with a stick; a toddler leans casually against her uncles’ legs; a mother snatches a valuable head-dress from her cheeky son; a lad shows off his smoking skills; a brown engineer and a white one strain together to crank up a damaged boat; friends have a quiet conversation; people laugh.²⁰ Trans-cultural, instantly recognisable human activities may be more helpful in promoting an ‘international universal humanity’ (albeit still under a colonial yoke) than the ‘standardized’ cinematic gestural language envisaged by Balázs.²¹ Such scenes, I suggested, were more likely to appear in missionary films than adventure ones.

Besides recording such basic humanity, cinema provides the most powerful reality effect of any medium – the nearest *visual* experience we have, short of dreams and hallucinations, to fully realised alternate lives. As David Summers has argued, ‘it is not simply [discrete] images that are reanimated – the horse or the man – rather the whole framed world is ‘brought to life’’.²² This holistic reanimation of a ‘whole framed world’ – not just people but pigs and dogs, boats and baskets, the smoke from cooking fires weaving through wind-blown trees, rain-sploshed puddles, vertiginous mountains and neatly swept village squares – enables a direct imaginative engagement with an ‘elsewhere’ that is both inherently modern (because unavailable to Western armchair

²⁰ *Ten Thousand Miles* (21:00, 2:50); *Saints and Savages* (30:25); *Ten Thousand Miles* (13:50); *Saints and Savages* (22:20); *In Cannibal Isles*, NFS #14603, (5:25, 4:30).

²¹ Balázs, *Visible Man*, 14. ‘The language of gestures has become standardized in film.’

²² Summers, *Real Spaces*, 620.

travellers prior to the 1890s) and undeniably *here*, on this planet, not ‘Cannibal-land’. While conceding that a post-colonial global cosmopolitanism was a long time coming (and has patently not yet arrived for most), I suggest that these inhabited indigenous filmic worlds, as displayed to white audiences in the years between the Wars, contained an implicit challenge to ‘Cannibal-land’ as a literary colonial construct. Such scenes apply to both missionary and adventure-travelogue films.

Indigenous Agency

More than just a clash of Western-imposed stereotypes of Christian versus cannibal, my research has found, bubbling up again and again – particularly though not exclusively through the missionary archive – a rich reservoir of indigenous voices clamouring to be heard from ‘under mountains of [Western] words and concepts’. Melanesians suffered and died under the incursion of Europeans, but they also struggled with, adapted to, enjoyed and exploited it. They manifest their agency willy nilly, on screen or between the lines, despite labouring under grossly unequal power relations and the restrictive frameworks of preconceptions imposed from without. Presented to a Western audience, the effect of this, whether then or now, is to subvert and resist stereotype altogether, and to offer instead a cosmopolitan perception of shared humanity that transcends both Christian piety and cultural essentialism.

Thus a major methodological strand of my thesis is the significance of missionary archives and other forgotten corners of contemporary record in giving voice to the generations of indigenous people silenced under the onslaught of colonisation told only from a Western viewpoint. Close reading of such corners inevitably reveals individuals rather than ‘types’, vitality rather than passivity, human beings rather than Others. Brownwen Douglas has described these subtextual readings as ‘indigenous countersigns’, showing how ‘colonial texts can serve as ethnographic palimpsests, their language, content and silences registering inadvertent traces of indigenous actions, relationships and settings’.²³ Missionaries may have recorded ‘indigenous countersigns’ inadvertently, but without them there would be no record at all.

²³ Brownwen Douglas, ‘Art as Ethno-historical Text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Oceanic Voyage Literature’, in Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche (eds.), *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65-99, 68.

As regards conversion, Christianity was a platform – often literally – from which indigenous Melanesians were displayed or could display themselves to Western eyes as contemporary, coeval people and fellow humans without the intervening stereotype of the ‘cannibal head-hunter’. Arjun Appadurai has famously coined the phrase ‘some Others are more Other than Others’ to describe anthropology’s preference for focusing on small-scale exotic cultures rather than large-scale complex societies.²⁴ But this insight could equally be inverted to apply to how popular Western audiences were invited by missionary imagery to re-evaluate Christian Melanesians as people a little more like themselves – still distinctively Other, but less alarmingly so. Melanesians themselves – particularly second generation Christian converts educated in mission schools – found that the universality of their faith formed a route to establishing a more equal and active role for themselves in modern intercultural relations. It was these men who went on to establish their influence in the post-war era of independence.²⁵

Methodological challenges and critique

Specificity versus generalizability

These case studies following the missionary trajectory of relationship to travelogue-adventurer image-makers have, rather fortuitously, fallen into diverse denominations and geographical areas of Melanesia. While this diversity underlines the specificity of each case, it also raises the question of how far one can generalise about the issues raised. Not only was each area, each culture, each village and each mission caught up in a unique colonial nexus, but also the personnel around every mission station made their mark differently. These case studies are pervaded by distinctive personalities that helped shape their historical moment and its representational consequences.

Likewise, while I have argued that denominational differences in Melanesian representations can be discerned within the larger Christian stable, this has to be qualified by the proviso that many other situation-specific factors are in play. Nevertheless, I maintain that some differences filter through into the mission imagery deployed for

²⁴ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol 28, no. 2, 1986, 356–61, 357.

²⁵ For instance Ratu Lala Sukunu (1888-1958), Fijian Anglican; Gina Belshazzar (c.1908-1977), Solomon Islands Methodist; Albert Maori Kiki (1931-1993), Papua New Guinean educated at a London Missionary Society school; Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936-1989), New Caledonian Roman Catholic.

Western publicity. Roman Catholic and Anglican priests were more relaxed than Methodists and Adventists about the persistence of customary culture, dress and adornment; more concerned with providing the sacraments of baptism and last rites than with ministering to health; more comfortable around tobacco; less comfortable with commerce. The latter preferred Christianity to be visibly and physically manifested in covered bodies and capitalist work habits.

What is generalizable, however, across all denominations within the missionary group, and across the varied agendas of the missionary group and the travelogue-adventurers, was the centrality of photographic and filmic imagery of Melanesian people transmitted to popular audiences in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the rest of the Western world. Judging by the apparent popularity of these slide shows and films, many ordinary white people, not just specialists or prospective investors, were avid to gaze on brown bodies. Ironically, in this period between the Wars when home movies were an expensive hobby, working-class people were more likely to see Melanesian villagers animated on screen than themselves.

Critique of Christian universalism and defence of ‘exploitation’

My analysis of Christian imagery in contrast to commercial ‘savagism’ has been relatively kind to the mission enterprise and relatively harsh on travelogue-adventurers.

In showing the Church’s conflicted relationship to ‘Cannibal-land’ I’ve emphasised the Christian universalism that obliged white missionaries to embrace brown converts as brothers in Christ and to transmit that message back to their sponsoring communities. However I would not want a too-saccharine view to obscure the brutal realities of colonialism. A Marxist interpretation would, with justification, see Christianity as merely a pacifier of colonised peoples to render them fit imperial subjects.

Contrariwise, in emphasising the racism of commercial dealers in ‘cannibal’ imagery, I do not mean to demonise them for failing to achieve the liberal norms of another era. As individuals I have no doubt that travelogue-adventurers enjoyed companionable relationships with their subjects. Moreover – as we saw with the re-enactments in *Transformed Isle* and *Chez les Mangeurs d’Hommes* – by inviting indigenous participation in the construction of their products, they were offering active, adult engagement with modernity rather than passive, infantilised exploitation.

In both cases, the key to arriving at a balanced interpretation lies with respecting the agency of Melanesian people as they made intelligent choices within the limited scope available to them under colonial power.

Interdisciplinarity

A further challenge has been the interdisciplinary nature of this study. Does it come under the rubric of film studies, Pacific history, missionary history, literary genre studies, art history, visual culture or postcolonial studies? It certainly does *not* fit under anthropology, although I have had to learn enough of the Melanesian world of the period to have some sense of cultural specificity.

My background lies in art history, and my justification for undertaking this thesis from an art historical viewpoint is twofold. Firstly, recent decades have seen the discipline of art history globalised and blasted open to political and cultural critique. Anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler has defined ‘art’ as ‘any cultural form that results from creative processes that use or manipulate words, sounds, movements, materials or spaces in such a way that they formalize the informal’.²⁶ ‘The’ history of Western aesthetics – as exemplified by E. H. Gombrich’s canonical tome *The Story of Art*²⁷ – is now just one history in a world teeming with protean artistic expression, cultural diversity and political struggle. Art history – freed from museums and galleries – can now find valid topics within any field of human communication, including those that would not conventionally have been considered ‘art’ even by those who practiced it. As well as reconciling art and anthropology, art history has also embraced scientific, demotic and commercial forms of image making, including – in my case – sensationalist entertainments and missionary propaganda focussed on Melanesian bodies. Secondly, however, despite this liberation of gaze, art history retains its own discipline: a meticulous approach to close reading of visual and other texts, which has proved invaluable in deciphering the thicker histories behind paper and celluloid surfaces.

²⁶ Adrienne Kaeppler, ‘Art and Aesthetics’, in Alan Howard and Robert Borofsky (eds.), *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 213. I would expand this list to include live bodies, since personal adornment and body modification are also ‘art’ by this definition.

²⁷ E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1950)

The power of images?

This thesis has argued that missionaries were intimately involved with the production and dissemination of Melanesian imagery, in a way that intervened with and complicated popular ‘cannibal/headhunter’ discourse, as well as adding to it. While I have suggested that this intervention had a potentially humanising impact on how Western audiences of the colonial period regarded the Melanesian Other, this is not a directly measureable outcome. I have shown that missionary propaganda entertainments – particularly motion pictures – were popular: newspaper reports emphasise ‘standing room only’ turnouts; commentators wax lyrical on the educational qualities of the evening; financial support for the missions was measurably increased. But at no stage does anyone report an epiphany on the oneness of humanity!

Indeed, much of the evidence pulls in the opposite direction, supporting instead the view that Planet Cannibal exerted (and continues to exert) a relentless gravitational pull.²⁸ For instance, amongst the contemporary reviewing audience at the time, as reported in newspapers, not one suggests an inkling of perceiving the kind of stereotype-defying ‘radical visibility’ that Béla Balázs hoped might be film’s transcultural legacy. Many, indeed, such as the *Catholic Press* reviewer, insist on seeing binary before-and-after transformations invisible to anyone else, or, like ‘Pardy Gar’, immediately reconfigure McHardy’s dignified young individuals as homogeneous ‘little brownies’.²⁹ Likewise, amongst the missionary contingent, Andrew Stewart (Chapters One and Four) did not hesitate to describe his friend Nihapat as ‘king of the cannibals’ when it suited him, while Alma Wiles’s promotional pamphlet, decades after her residence on Malakula, was headlined ‘My Experiences among Cannibals’; George Tarr (Chapter Two) persistently nudged the title of the Melanesian Mission’s film towards ‘Cannibal-Land’; Reginald Nicholson (Chapter Three) had no compunction about announcing that his was ‘A Story of Fifteen Years among the Head Hunters of the island of Vella Lavella’; Father Mulcahy (Chapter Five) years afterwards re-edited *Saints and Savages* to unilaterally designate certain people as ‘Cannibals’ and certain scenes as reprehensibly pagan; Father Boch’s own slideshow commentary, too, was redolent with the discourse of ‘devils’, ‘man-killers’ and ‘cannibal banquets’.

²⁸ See Postscript, page 275 below.

²⁹ Pages 246 and 216 respectively.

This depressing failure of missionaries' own propaganda to shift entrenched attitudes, even amongst themselves let alone the wider public, raises much broader art historical questions about the power of images.

In his study of the 'lives and loves of images', visual theorist W.J.T. Mitchell makes a distinction between images in their individual material incarnation and imagery that circulates 'like a virus through human consciousness and behaviour'.³⁰ Our relationship to images manifests in the oscillation between what enters the retina and the 'cognitive template' of the beholder.³¹ Art critic and artist John Berger puts it simply: 'The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe'.³² Prior knowledge or belief inevitably structures our perceptions. Mitchell considers the nature of racial stereotype as an 'especially important case' of the way in which images straddle both their external manifestation and the internal belief systems of their perceivers. The stereotype, he writes, occupies an 'intimate zone in which'

the image is, as it were, painted or laminated directly onto the body of a living being, and inscribed into the perceptual apparatus of a beholder. It forms a mask, or what W.E.B. Du Bois called a "veil," that interposes itself between persons. ... [Stereotypes] typically conceal themselves as transparent, hyperlegible, inaudible, and invisible cognitive templates of prejudice.³³

But if imagery alone cannot make transparent stereotypes opaque, counter hegemonic ideologies, introduce new ideas, or redesign cognitive templates, then what can? How do cognitive templates change over time?

While acknowledging the effect of 'what we know', Berger also concedes that the 'relation between what we see and what we know is never settled'.³⁴ This, surely, allows a little nudge-space behind those *a priori* blinkers, within which incremental change is imaginable. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, in fact, proposes just such a nudge mechanism, whereby the effort of accommodating novel empirical perceptions to pre-existing categories has the side-effect of subjecting the latter to small pragmatic re-

³⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 294.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

³² John Berger, *Ways of seeing*, (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 8.

³³ Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 295-296. W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClurg, 1903), 7.

³⁴ Berger, *op.cit.*, 7.

evaluations and adjustments.³⁵ In his monumental tome, *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor employs a similar insight to meticulously trace cumulative shifts in religious sensibility from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century.³⁶ Changes in sensibility patently happen somehow, as Western social attitudes towards gender, ethnic ‘minorities’ and sexual orientation over just the last few decades attest. Wars, decolonisation, independence movements, global capitalism, politicised indigenous consciousness, feminism and a technological revolution in communication media have all played a part in incrementally altering the inside of people’s skulls as well as the outside world. But my art history background encourages me to maintain that *visibility* is the *sine qua non*, the ground zero, of any such slow and cumulative stalagmitic adjustments in sensibility. Visibility alone may not be enough to re-write perceptual templates overnight, but, without visibility, new accommodations cannot even begin to enter consciousness. Hence being visible – including featuring in and (eventually) making art, literature, photography, film, television, theatre and music – has been step one of every emancipation movement from slavery to gay rights and animal welfare.

Missionaries *made available* to European audiences of the period an alternative to the adventure-travelogue version of ‘savages’ which would not otherwise have been visible at all. While this alternative often took the primary form of another stereotype – the less alarming smiling ‘after’ to the dour pagan ‘before’ – this imagery occasionally provided glimpses of a deeper level of transcendent humanity and agency based on adult friendship, children, work, conversation and humour, regardless of faith or culture. It offered not only visible Melanesian bodies but visible Melanesian lives. Even if this insight was imperceptible to white people raised with colonial attitudes to racial difference, such imagery added to a public visual archive that nonetheless became part of the ‘assemblage of texts’ that constitute culture.³⁷ It was a start. Moreover this public visual archive was not only available to the original audience but is also of intrinsic value to postcolonial scholars and descendants of the people portrayed, who can regard with new eyes what was always already there. Walter Benjamin recognised that great artworks do not have a single meaning but are reinterpreted afresh in different eras and contexts.

³⁵ Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), esp. Chapter 5, ‘Structure and History’.

³⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Geertz, ‘Notes on the Balinese Cockfight’, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 448.

They have a 'potentially eternal afterlife in succeeding generations'.³⁸ These lowly scraps of missionary propaganda portraying long-dead Melanesians leave a similarly rich legacy.

³⁸ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' in *Illuminations*, op.cit., 71.

Young Rockefeller 'eaten by cannibals'

NEW GUINEA

THE disappearance of Michael Rockefeller, scion of one of America's wealthiest families, in New Guinea in 1961 prompted countless theories: he had been kidnapped, had been eaten by sharks or crocodiles or had gone native and was hiding in the jungle.

So intense was the public's obsession with the story that it spawned an off-Broadway play, a novel, a rock song and even a television programme in the 1970s hosted by Leonard Nimoy, best known for his role as Spock in *Star Trek*.

At last, it seems, the truth can be revealed. A new book confirms one of the more macabre theories about what happened to the 23-year-old Harvard graduate: he was killed and eaten by cannibals.

According to the official version, Rockefeller, son of Nelson Rockefeller, the former governor of New York, drowned off the coast of southern New Guinea, then a Dutch colony, in November 1961.

He was with the anthropologist Rene Wassing, who was rescued from the sea after their catamaran capsized.

Rockefeller had decided to swim for shore to get help but was never seen again. Ships and aircraft searched in vain for two weeks. His twin sister, Mary, and his father flew to the region to join in the search.

After a painstaking investigation, Carl Hoffman, a travel writer, claims that Rockefeller, who had travelled to the area to study the Stone Age culture of the Asmat people, was slaughtered and eaten by them in a ritual to inherit his power.

The slaughter was also intended to avenge a Dutch-led raid in which several tribesmen hostile to the colonial adminis-



Mysterious fate: The disappearance of Michael Rockefeller in New Guinea in 1961 prompted a host of theories about his demise. Photo: GETTY IMAGES

tration were killed, Hoffman believes.

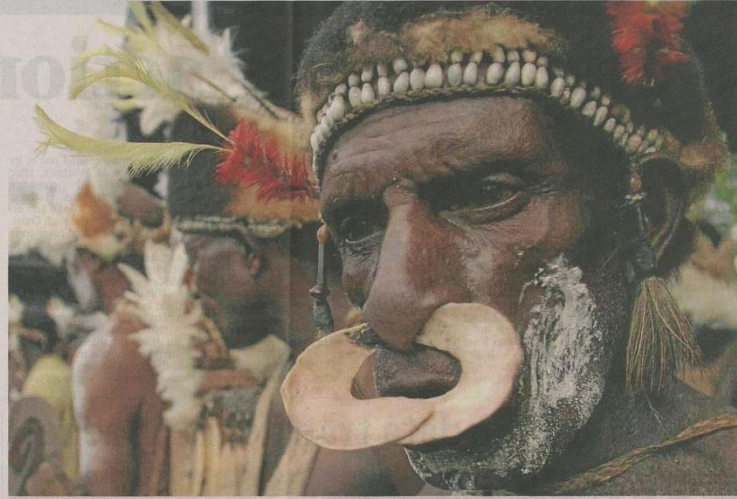
His book: *Savage Harvest: A Tale of Cannibals, Colonialism and Michael Rockefeller's Tragic Quest for Primitive Art*, draws on the testimony of Asmat tribesmen to describe in bloodthirsty detail the fate that befell the adventurer in one of the most remote regions on earth.

It is not for the faint-hearted. Hoffman writes that Rockefeller would have been speared in the chest before being killed by an axe blow to the back of the head.

A bamboo knife would then have been thrust into his throat and the head pulled back "until the vertebrae cracked".

Rockefeller would have been dismembered in what Hoffman describes as an act of "sacred violence".

In a sequence imagining the scene Hoffman writes: "Pieces of meat were placed in the fire to roast... they pulled the charred legs and arms out of the fire, tore the meat off the bones and mixed it with crumbly, whitish grey sago



Special food: A tribesman from Asmat district is seen during the Asmat festival in Indonesia's remote province of Papua. His relatives possibly killed and ate Michael Rockefeller, scion of one of America's wealthiest families, in a ritual to inherit his power. Photo: REUTERS

into long sticks for everyone to eat."

Following a time-honoured ritual, they then cooked the head while talking about their victim, saying things such as "he was swimming in the sea and now he is dead".

When the head was done, they made a hole in the skull with an

axe. "They shook the brains out onto the leaf of a palm", scraping the inside of the skull with a knife to get every last bit.

"This food was special," writes Hoffman, referring to the brain. "Only the most senior men there ate it."

According to Hoffman, the Dutch government knew what had

happened but covered it up after a priest wrote a letter to the authorities including the names of the murderers. When Hoffman visited the region, he heard firsthand what had happened from Asmat tribesmen.

Rockefeller swam for hours before meeting his grim fate, according to the book. Soon afterwards,

Indonesia annexed the territory, accelerating the end of cannibalism.

Rockefeller's father went on to become vice-president under Gerald Ford. His twin sister struggled with "the grief and loss and lack of closure". It may have been preferable to the truth.

Sunday Times

Fig. PS.1: *The Dominion Post*, March 17 2014, B5

Postscript

An article in Wellington's *Dominion Post* of 17 March 2014 is headlined 'Young Rockefeller 'eaten by cannibals''. Syndicated from Britain's *Sunday Times*, the text summarises a recently published book about the famous disappearance of Michael Rockefeller in the Asmat region of what is now West Papua in 1961.¹ The young collector went missing, presumed drowned, after his catamaran overturned on the Arafura Sea. The book's author, Carl Hoffman, justifies his assertions of a grislier fate through the discovery of documents of the then-Dutch administration that indicate a cover-up, corroborated by hearsay evidence ('it was common knowledge ...') from a Dutch missionary living in the area at the time. The book has a sensationalist and essentialist title: *Savage Harvest: a Tale of Cannibals, Colonialism and Michael Rockefeller's Tragic Quest for Primitive Art* in which we see, yet again and even now, the calculating deployment of those marketing hooks *savage* and *cannibal*. As regards its argument, I don't doubt the book has been well-researched. Rather, it is the manner in which the newspaper article is presented on the page that is striking. The article – indeed the whole page – is dominated by a close-up colour photograph of a male performer at the annual Asmat Cultural Festival – a major event in which thousands of indigenous artists, carvers, dancers and musicians gather to celebrate their arts, all dressed to the nines in customary costume. Thus the gentleman wears feathers in his hair, a headband of shells with beaded fibre tassels, pig tusks through his septum and white mud on his beard. He is not smiling and he looks away from the camera – a distancing pose for both him and us. Nor is he granted a name in the caption, which appears to be a stock Reuters publicity shot. Whoever he is in reality, this performer's image is exploited here as a signifier of the 'savage/cannibal/headhunter' of the popular Western imaginary, no different to the ethnographic 'types' of the nineteenth century, with no further evidence necessary than their non-Western appearance. The absence of evidence not only of the postulated killing but also of any link between the individual depicted and Rockefeller is delightfully fudged by the caption:

¹ Carl Hoffman, *Savage harvest: a tale of cannibals, colonialism, and Michael Rockefeller's tragic quest for primitive art*, (New York: William Morrow, 2014).

Special food: A tribesman from Asmat district is seen during the Asmat festival in Indonesia's remote province of Papua. *His relatives possibly killed and ate Michael Rockefeller*, scion of one of America's wealthiest families, in a ritual to inherit his power. [my emphasis]²

The question of whether 'possibly' refers to the killing itself or the anonymous man's putative family ties is moot. Any Asmat man will do, it appears, for the role of being literally 'framed' for man-eating, so long as he's wearing feathers and facepaint. Also noticeable is the use of the word 'relatives' rather than, say, 'forefathers', despite the fact that the alleged murder occurred over half a century ago. It serves to make this hypothetical family tie synchronic rather than diachronic. Again we see the impulse, even in 2014, to corral indigenous people into the allochronic bubble described by Fabian. Moreover, the denotation of West Papua as a 'remote province' of Indonesia plays into the trope of exotic distance from an imperial centre. This quietly colludes with Indonesian colonial oppression in what was in fact a blatant annexation.

In our supposedly postcolonial world, this caption exemplifies the continued sway of colonial-era thought patterns prevalent in the West's popular media, and demonstrates how these are still deeply entangled with the *idea* of the 'cannibal'. The key to post-colonial thinking – and hence the demise of Cannibal-land – lies in indigenous voices making themselves heard on the world stage (as indeed exiled West Papuans are trying to do by drawing attention to the plight of their silenced compatriots). This thesis has argued that representations of Melanesians – particularly though not exclusively through moving images, and particularly though not exclusively through missionary media – were sometimes able to reveal to Western viewers of the interwar years glimmers of the indigenous agencies that were always there behind the mask of stereotype. In doing so they offered a small but at least visible beginning to cosmopolitan post-colonialism. The contemporary *Dominion Post* photograph and caption shows that we have not yet arrived at the end of that journey.

² *Dominion Post*, 17 March 2014, B5.

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