

Learning by looking

For example, at Peoples of all Nations; European education and serial encyclopaedia

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Abstract: Photographically illustrated serial encyclopaedia, a boom publishing phenomenon in the early 1900s, had a huge impact of readers and viewers understanding of the world. These monthly instalments, later bound into volumes, were prolifically illustrated and the epitome of learning-by-looking, self-education and modernity, and part of an expanding visual archive available to the European public wanting to know about distant lands and peoples, strange customs, travel and new colonies. As serial encyclopaedia and their barrage of photographs have been largely overlooked by scholars, this essay draws attention to the phenomenon for its role in visibility as well as the context of Imperial expansion, entertainment and European fascination with others.

Keywords: Photography, illustrated serial encyclopaedia, Empire, self-education, learning-by-looking

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A photographically illustrated, serial encyclopaedia was the most prominent pillar of visibility or learning-by-looking; equal to or surpassing postcards, International Exhibitions and photographically illustrated weekend editions of daily newspapers, lantern slide lectures, travelogues, advertisements and illustrated weekly, and monthly or quarterly magazines. The prodigious editor of serial encyclopaedia, JA Hammerton, called this onslaught of images a graphic geography. Photographers active in the Pacific Islands at the turn of the 20th century could dream of fame and fortune in Europe achieved by sending their photographs to newspapers and

magazines or selling them for use as postcards, book illustrations and advertisements. Another avenue was the boom print phenomenon of the early 20th century - pictorial, or photographically illustrated serial encyclopaedias. The popularity and availability of serial encyclopaedia meant European audiences could learn-by-looking without leaving their armchair or kitchen table as monthly issues arrived in the post, were available at bookshops or in doctors' and solicitors' waiting rooms. I have argued elsewhere that published photography had the power to shape opinion, inform audiences of events in distant colonies and to provide entertainment

and at the personal or social level were of topical interest in providing evidence and a focus for parlour-talk or dinner-party conversation. The photographers in the Pacific who supplied these tens of thousands of photographs sought fame as agents of Imperial expansion and experts on new colonies and protectorates, trade and investment, travel and for documenting 'others' through views of distant, tropical villages, savages, natives, and converts. Solicited or not, amateur and professional photographers were sending photographs to editors conscious of public interest in world's faraway, indigenous peoples and new colonies.

Figure 1: Tūfalele or professional orator", Photogravure.



By 1900, as much of the Pacific was already colonised and annexed as protectorates, territories, colonies or Crown Colonies, starting with the French in the Society Islands and Marquesas Islands in 1842, there were still discoveries to be made and colonies to be annexed. Photography was a pathway to respect as an expert on 'the Islands' and to membership of the club in Europe known as the Imperialists - the ex-colonists and boosters of Empire who promoted colonial expansion. By sending photographs with scribbled captions often accompanied by short anecdotal articles and pseudo-scientific articles, ambitious photographers hoped by being published, to win the much-desired labels of FRGS, FRAI or FRS. (Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society; Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute; Fellow of the Royal Society) Editors were searching constantly for new material; for example, in 1899, *Our islands and their people as seen with camera and pencil*, edited by William S Bryan, contained 1200 photographs and sold 400,000 copies in the USA in the three years after its release. In 1908, *Women of all nations: a record of their characteristics, habits, manners, customs, and influence* contained 772 pages and 700 illustrations. There was a three-volume release in 1915, with further editions continuing through to 1942. From 1913 to 1920, *Customs of the world: a popular account of manners, rites and ceremonies of men and women in all countries* appeared with 1443 black & white and 31 colour photographs. From 1920 to 1922, *Harmsworth's Universal Encyclopaedia*, was published as a fortnightly series and sold twelve million copies throughout the English-speaking world. From 1922 to 1937 *Countries of the world* appeared in 56 issues with 3,000 black and white and 350 colour photographs, and from 1922 to 1926, *Peoples of all nations* appeared with 49 monthly issues, containing 5,000 photographs. This was indeed a visual onslaught and being couched in educational language, suggested to European readers they were learning about the wider world at the same time as being entertained and by association that this visual experience was nurturing them as a well-informed world citizen and supporter of Empire.

The editor of *Countries of the world*, Sir John Alexander Hammerton, no-

ted in Instalment 37 that readers after 3,836 pages had been provided at their fingertips with access to the entire world. Hammerton was an editor, author and compiler of many illustrated encyclopaedia and probably the most successful creator of large-scale works of reference that Britain has known. He claimed, «*Countries* has more than covered all the ground there laid out and that from within the confines of an easy chair» and declared that *Countries* served three purposes, being a «complete encyclopaedia of graphic geography», an «educational work» and a «work of reference» (Hammerton, *Countries of the World* Issue 37, 1926, n.p., inside cover). He overlooked its main audience, supporters of Empire, and its role as propaganda for Imperialism and the global expansion of Western European powers. His description suggests that for editors and readers, illustrated encyclopaedia like *Countries of the World*, were not a single-purpose publication nor motivated by a single ideological viewpoint. They were as Hammerton noted, partly educative and a work of reference and that flipping the pages of serial encyclopaedia and gazing at strange sights was also a modern pastime and form of entertainment. This was education and learning defined by vicarious transfer of self and thought, momentarily, to other worlds. With weekly or monthly editions covering a wide range of themes, countries, nations and peoples, readers were educated, informed and entertained and their existing perceptions, interests and opinions were reinforced or challenged. Subscribing, showing off the latest edition, telling friends about wonderful and amazing sites and sights, and having a complete set leather bound, or cheaper options, was widespread and popular.

People of all nations

A typical instalment of *Peoples of all nations* contained half-page or full-page black and white photographs, full-page colour plates, and sepia plates. A typical instalment, for example, covering Palestine, Panama and Paraguay, had 96 photographs including sepia plates, colour and black and white scenes and portraits. Chapters on South Africa and Spain typically included 32 and 53 photographs respectively. The introductory arrangement of photographs in the Samoa instalment included eight

individual and group portraits, with several doubling to provide a view of a fale, the braiding of 'ufa (coconut fibre or sennit) or siapo (beaten bark cloth or tapa) making (see Fig. 1). Two portraits doubled as voyeuristic poses and in three portraits, men and women were shown holding weapons. For European audiences, canoes and two photographs of dancing completed a typical gallery, widespread and already familiar to audiences, of 'othering' a country on the far side of the world. This repetition of a 'core collection of standard images', or an 'iconographic imperative' to construct a gallery immediately recognizable by viewers, was well-established by the time serial encyclopaedia became popular as a learning tool. (Quanchi, 2007, 14, 125, 239, 306) In the Samoa chapter, following the opening, location-setting gallery were ten pages of colour plates and photogravure in which content and message was more pronounced because of the use of special paper, processes and colour (see Fig. 2). To viewers in the 1920s, the introductory gallery and then the sepia insert might have suggested an unchanged archaic Samoa, but in the following set of photographs, western shirts, trousers, leather belts, trucks, steel shovels, umbrellas and cotton print 'ie lavalava (wrap around) were also visible to remind readers that Samoa was now in the 20th century and not a land where time stood still, frozen in the past, or excluded from the modern world. When gazing at a Samoan *tulafale*, (orator) copra industry labourers and the use of motor trucks (see Fig. 3), the reader's understanding moved easily from self-education to pride in Empire, humour, admiration, travel and adventure. European readers may have been fascinated with the old ways, ancient and strange traditions and customs of distant lands, but *People of all Nations* also had a civilising message, that change was underway and that the colonies were albeit well behind, but making progress towards modernisation. The visual content on Samoa and on all colonies, countries and regions in *People of all nations* conformed to an editorial formula that had rapidly evolved after the halftone process revolutionised photography's use in printing. Each site was depicted using the same composition -- studio portraits in traditional costume, exterior group portraits that doubled as scenic

views by positioning the group in the foreground of a townscape, topographical features, dwellings or villages juxtaposed against symbolic aspects of European colonialism including roads, plantations, public buildings and wharves. In *People of All Nation's* illustrated essays, with emphasis varying on these categories, readers must also have noticed the emphasis on partially clothed women. A third of the twenty-nine illustrations on Samoa depicted partially clothed females and this was typical of the imaging found in most serial encyclopaedia of this period.

Readers' understanding of world geography and politics was challenged by numerous errors such as using outdated names (Savage Island for Niue and Ladronnes for the Mariana Islands), by using the label 'South Seas' for the whole Pacific, publishing photographs taken decades before but presented as contemporary vision and misspellings such as Marianne for Mariana Islands, Mohari for *Maohi* and Adi Cakahan for Adi Cakobau (see Fig. 4). The citing of incorrect dates meant the formation of the *Établissements Français d'Océanie* in 1903 was listed as 1901, the joint Franco-British condominium agreement of 1906 in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) was mistakenly listed for 1907 and the publication date of Herman Melville's best-selling novel *Typee* in 1846 was listed as 'about 1840'.

Viewers of *People of all nations* probably did not realise the content was selective and that it excluded most of the north Pacific, the Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Kiribati and Tuvalu, Tokelau, West Papua and Niue. The North Pacific, then under German control or after World War I under Japanese control as a Mandate, was noticeably missing with Micronesia having only one index entry, compared to many entries and sections for the British Pacific in Melanesia and Polynesia. French territories were similarly marginalised, and treated derogatively in the text, with New Caledonia being described as «the most striking example of the French way of doing the wrong thing in colony making» (*People of all nations*, 1926, 2340). A section on the «South Seas» by Sir Basil Thompson (1861-1939), a British official in the Pacific who had written books on Tonga and Fiji in 1894, on Niue in 1902, and The Fijians: A study in de-



Source: *People of all nations* 4407.

Figure 2: "Girl of princely origin", Photogravure.

cay of custom in 1908. Thompson typically focussed on the British Pacific with twenty-eight photographs, mostly attributed to the Australian photographer, Thomas J McMahon. There was no equivalent essay on the north Pacific. For readers and viewers of Thompson's 'South Seas', the gallery confirmed the imaging of past eras, when the Pacific had been defined by a narrow set of myths highlighting idyllic coastal vistas (pages 3768, 3771), strange 'native' customs (pages 3774, 3775, 3777, 3780, 3781, 3782) and bustling European enterprise and empire building (pages 3772, 3773, 3783,

3784), presenting exactly the 'graphic geography' that editor JA Hammerton extolled for the series.

Women of all nations

Women of all Nations was published in 1908, with two recognized scholars, Athol Joyce and Northcote Thomas, as editors, both citing their Masters Degrees and membership of the Royal Anthropological Institute. The opening three images in *Women of all nations* were a watercolour based on a photograph of a 'Chinese lady' by Norman Hardy, and an unattributed photograph of two Fijian women



Figure 3: "Collecting nuts for copra-making".

weaving a pandanus mat. This photograph had appeared first as a postcard sold by the postcard proprietor, JW Waters of Suva, titled «making baskets». It was later sold as a postcard by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and re-captioned «Making fans and mats» and the females exposed breasts were removed by airbrushing (Stephenson, 1997, 85-90). The third was a photograph of a basket-carrying, grass-skirted Bangala woman from the Upper Congo. The text of *Women of all nations* opened with a chapter on Polynesia by the anthropologist, Alison Hingston, which included 38 photographs. A similar length chapter on Melanesia followed, with thirty-five photographs and full-page plates. A short chapter on the Torres Strait and New Guinea by the famous anthropologist CG Seligman included seven photographs and a full page colour watercolour by Norman Hardy. Half the photographs in Seligman's essay were portraits of partially clothed women. The portrait was the primary means of instruction with a third of all photographs in *Women of all nations* depicting the fully or partially exposed upper bodies of females. A short chapter of nine pages on Micronesia included ten photographs and one full page-plate, with nine showing partially clothed women. All the photographs on Micronesia were attributed to WH Furness, an American who visited Micronesia in 1895-1901 and 1903. Furness's photographs demonstrate a common aspect of image-mobility and cross-over from popular literature to scholarly publication as his

photographs in *Women of all nations* appeared later in a serious anthropological work, *Man: past and present* in 1920. *Women of all nations*, despite its pretensions of scholarly research and ethnography was primarily voyeuristic and a visual parade of female bodies, partially clothed and posed to depict stature, form and demeanour, clothing or adornment.

The Photographers

A pretence as educational learning or as a scientific reference work is obvious in illustrated serial encyclopaedia with essays being contributed by leading scholars or self-styled experts. The acknowledgement of photographers was rare, with most photographs not being attributed at all, and some identified only as being supplied by postcard companies, studios or image libraries. This contradicted the editorial policy of *People of all nations* which had stated it had gathered 'an entirely new collection of photographs' and that 'photographers in all parts of the world have been at work expressly to enrich our pages' (Hammerton, 1926, iii). In an editorial promoting instalment 38 of *Peoples of all nations*, Hammerton named only the seven authors, describing them as 'an authoritative band' (Hammerton, *Countries of the World*, Issue 37, 1926, n.p., inside cover). Naming the photographers was clearly not an editorial priority. However, the published photographs of for example, Thomas McMahon, EL Mitchell, T Edgeworth David, Baldwin Spencer, and FJ Gillen in Australia, and AJ Tattersall in Samoa, do demonstrate the attempt

to achieve fame in Europe by using serial encyclopaedia to present the South Pacific to European audiences. But fame was minimal and marginal and photographers doubly suffered by being ignored, or if mentioned, often incorrectly. The many thousands of photographs in serial encyclopaedia are therefore mostly an anonymous archive, only identifiable today by laborious cross-checking the visual archive for a photographer's work in private collections, postcards, illustrated newspapers, magazines and illustrated books.

Repetition and Longevity

Many photographs used in serial encyclopaedia in the 1920s and 1930s had been taken well prior to publication. For example, Thomas McMahon's photographs of a decorated Solomon Island canoe appearing on the cover of the 37th issue of *Countries of the World*, and again in the text, along with all others in the chapter on the «South Seas», had been taken a decade earlier, in 1917 (see Fig. 5). Although there was only a gap of a decade, by the late 1920s the copra industry in the Solomon Islands had much less potential and the Solomon Islands was no longer a 'jewel of the Pacific and planter's paradise' (Quanchi, 2004, 43-58). In another example, in the Samoa entry in *People of all Nations* in 1926, a full plate showed a 30 metre 'alia (double hulled Samoan canoe) that had been photographed by AJ Tattersall after it was constructed in 1900 as a gift for the German Kaiser to celebrate Germany's annexation of Western Samoa at the turn of the century. Samoans had stopped building these canoes early in the 19th century. After being considered too big to ship to Germany it was subsequently left to rot on a Samoan beach. On the basis of the visual evidence, readers in 1926 could have justifiably assumed that Samoans were still building these magnificent canoes. The use of late 19th century photographs to illustrate 1920s publications demonstrates the longevity of some photographs and their enduring influence on readers long after they were taken.

Modernity

There was a sense of nostalgia in the depiction of ancient, allegedly lost customs and material culture with

links to bygone eras. Readers of serial encyclopaedia were not only looking for titillation, tourist escapades or evangelical motivation in these images. European readers by purchasing or by flicking through copies in waiting rooms were also expressing their desire to know about the «new» Pacific, which by this time included banking, shipping lines, schools, imports and export factories and warehouses, extractive industries and colonial responsibilities, all couched in terms of future colonial progress and prosperity. This was learning-by looking in its most persuasive form - educative, exotic, tropical, voyeuristic and preaching about colonialism and new statehood, and by the act of owning or reading an illustrated serial encyclopaedia, espousing a sense of modernity. As an act of self-education and self-improvement achieved through readily accessible images, European reader's knowledge of the Pacific should be measured not so much by what was read, as by what was seen when the weekly or monthly editions of serial encyclopaedia arrived in the post.

Hammerton, the editor of several illustrated serial encyclopaedias, noted there was considerable discipline demanded of readers as they switched in each instalment, for example, from Samoa to Spain, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland and Syria. He wondered if readers «ever had some slight sense of discomfort in leaping in the turn of a page from one end of the earth to another ... a certain cogitation is desirable and possible between items in a work of this kind» and suggested to readers the «technical advantage conferred by alphabetisation» meant worrying incongruities would be obscured or mentally set aside (Hammerton, *Countries of the World*, Issue 37, 1926, n.p. inside cover). Hammerton's commentary raises the unresolved question - did readers see an undifferentiated global mass of indigenous peoples, thatched houses and exotic views or did they label and memorise unique characteristics of each geographic region, territory, culture, tribe or clan? By replicating composition and setting, the photographers and then later the editors through captioning, added to the creation of a global stereotype. For example, in instalment 37 of *Countries of the World* both South Africans and the South Sea Islanders were shown sitting in groups in front of natural



Figure 4: "Adi Cakahan; A Fijian woman of high rank".

Source: Photograph by JW Waters, n.d., *Women of all Nations*, 117.

material dwellings (p. 3739 for South Africa and p. 3777 for Tonga), posing in a coastal vista (p. 3768 and 3771 for South Seas, and p.3735 for South Africa) or carrying out domestic duties and labouring in European enterprises (p. 3744, 3745 and 23758 in South Africa and p. 3784 in the South Seas). Hammerton's request for 'cogitation' suggests viewers could reflect on and ponder difference and similarity as they leapt between nations and countries. But the similarity of photographic representations, the standardisation of composition and framing and the repetition of stereotypes, supports the claim by Edward Said and others that viewing photographs from the

colonies was evidence of 'othering', or the creation of an 'other' different to oneself. Across the 5000 photographs in *Peoples of all nations*, for example, photographs on Asia, South America, and Africa were similar to photographs published from the Pacific, and could easily promote a stereotyping, or conflated understanding of the distant colonial world. Was it, for example, Samoa specifically that the readers learnt about or «natives» generally? This uncertainty suggests historians of photography and historians generally, noting Hammerton's concerns, should analyse photography taking note of a globalising context that pre-empted a photographic and homogenised other.

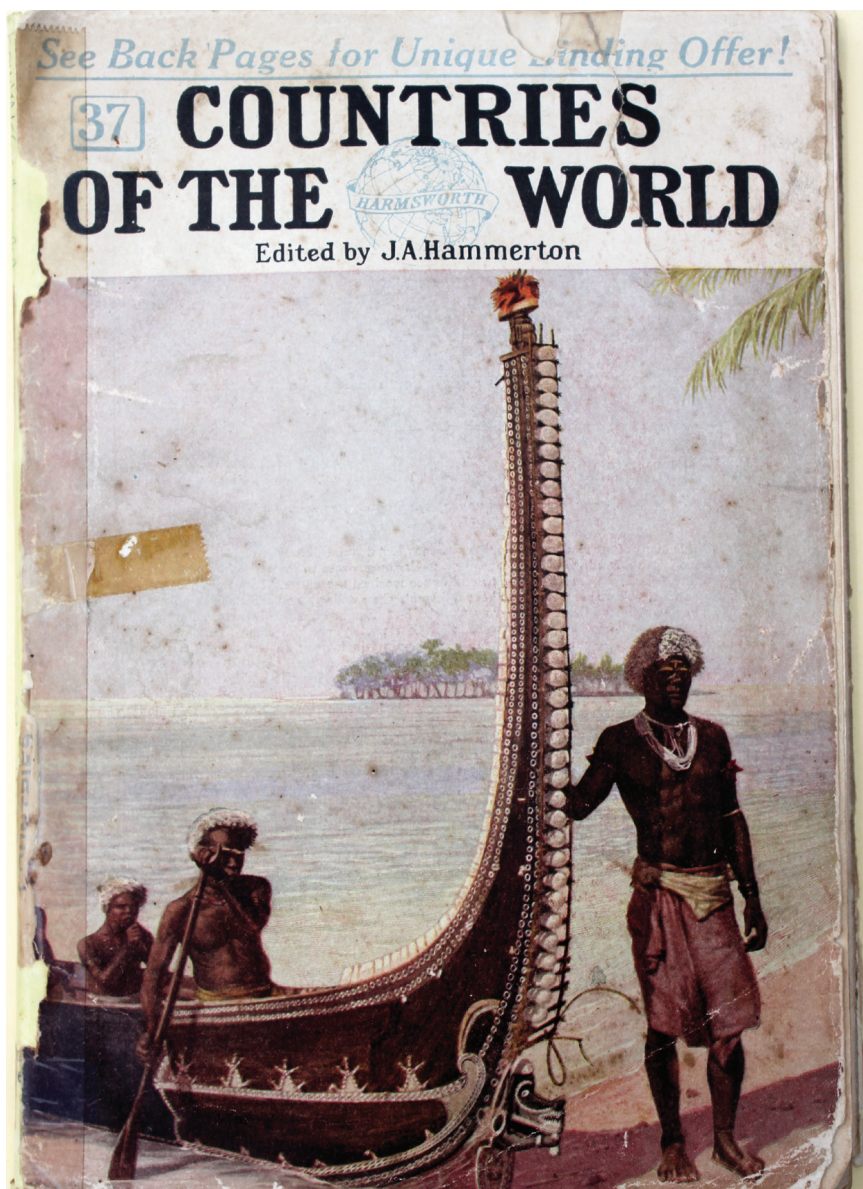


Figure 5: Cover, *Countries of the world*

James Clifford argued that «to talk about travel is to enter into a terrain redolent with markers of imperialism» and listed these markers as «gendered racial bodies, class privilege, and specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, and documents» (in Gilbert and Johnson, 201, 1). Clifford omitted to mention photographers and photography. A huge archive of published images in photographically illustrated serial encyclopaedia suggests that photography was indeed a preeminent 'marker of imperialism' and motivated the popu-

lar interest and visual fascination of readers with Empire. This published, constructed and repetitive gallery of photography allowed sedentary viewers, without leaving their home or suburb, to roam across Oceania sharing the adventure of missionaries, gold-seekers and scientists undertaking the intrepid penetration of the tropical interior, the Imperial possession of new territories, and the awe and wonder captured by travellers, armed with cameras, confronting the sublime and the picturesque of distant islands and atolls. Photographically illustrated

serial encyclopaedia like *People of all nations* offered readers thousands of photographs of the world. These galleries of portraits, street life, port towns, export industries, agriculture, villages, indigenous customs and rituals, and rural panorama, picturesque scenes and vistas guided a reader's understanding, leading them to move easily from self-education to pride in Empire, to a donation to an evangelical movement or to capitalist opportunity for investment or migration, or in some cases to travel to the islands.

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