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“Fijian Islanders preparing for a feast” (1959): The Influence of Photography on Popular Opinions of the Pacific

Abstract

In 1959, a serialised, illustrated encyclopaedia, The Book of Knowledge, published a photograph captioned “Fijian islanders preparing for a feast,” suggesting to readers that butchering a turtle prior to cooking was a common sight in the 1950s and a cultural practice among modern-day Fijians. However, the photograph had been taken around the turn of the century by a British colonial official, Basil Thomson, and published elsewhere by him and others in the intervening fifty years. How much post–World War II illustrative photography of Pacific Islanders in encyclopaedias was misleading in this manner? How much illustrative (particularly photographic) material from an era long past was presented mid-century as being evidence of contemporary life in the Pacific? Or, was preparing a turtle for a feast a long-standing tradition and, therefore, the date of the photograph immaterial? This paper investigates these questions within the context of the creation of The Book of Knowledge and other such compendia, as well as Euro-American stereotypes of Fiji and the Pacific.

Keywords: *Fiji, photography, representation, encyclopaedia, encyclopedia, stereotypes*

In 1959, a photograph with the caption “Fijian Islanders preparing for a feast” was published in the serialised, illustrated, multi-volume, British encyclopaedia *The Book of Knowledge* (Fig. 1). In the photograph are three Fijian men—two of them holding knives—about to prepare three sea turtles for cooking. Two other Fijians peek out at the scene from a *bure*, a thatched Fijian kitchen, a composition ploy often used in photographs. From the caption, readers at the time would have likely assumed the turtles in the photograph were to be food for a wedding, a funeral, the installation of a chief, a chiefly visit to a village, or some other gathering or ceremony. The photograph had been provided to the encyclopaedia by a well-known British colonial official and author, Sir Basil Thomson. The accompanying one-page entry on Fiji had this photograph as its only supporting illustration. Presumably, editors chose this photograph as being representative of Fiji in the 1950s and believed that it exemplified the customs, appearance, housing, and everyday lifestyle of Fijians. The editors and publishers expected



Figure 1. “Slaughtering the Turtle,” photograph in Basil Thomson’s *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 326

that the pairing of text and image across the encyclopaedia’s eight volumes would inform young and old readers about the modern world, both near and far.

The pairing of text and image was, by the 1950s, the standard presentation style for encyclopaedias, which had been available worldwide since 1900. These reference series were amazingly prolific despite periodic downturns in sales caused by the Great Depression, World War I, and World War II. *The Book of Knowledge* first appeared in 1922, and there had been several editions since, edited by Harold B. Wheeler, John A. Hammerton, and others. In the United States, Grolier had published an encyclopaedia of the same name beginning in 1912, edited by Holland Thomson, which was also followed by many subsequent editions.

In 1959, *The Book of Knowledge: A Pictorial Treasury of Reading and Reference for Young and Old*, edited by Gordon Stowell, included 6,000 illustrations and was a typical example of this long-standing genre. Stowell was the author of ninety-eight books, a designer, an encyclopaedia editor, and the illustrator of children’s books including *A-Mazing Escape: A Bible Story*, *Kiku of Japan (How They Live Now)*, and *The Wise Men Find Jesus*. He also edited *The*

Waverley Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Volume of Facts (1958), with 867 illustrations, and *The New Universal Encyclopaedia* (1959), with fifteen volumes. General-knowledge, serialised, pictorial encyclopaedias were aimed at encouraging the interest of young and adult readers in the contemporary world. Their summaries of near and distant countries and peoples were presented alphabetically and supported by photographs, maps, and statistics. However, in the instance of Fiji, readers were being misled, as the illustration accompanying the entry on Fiji was not a contemporary one, but a scene from seventy years earlier.

The man who took the photograph, Basil Thomson, did so either sometime between 1883 and 1889 in Nadroga—on the south coast of Viti Levu Island, Fiji, where he served as a magistrate—or elsewhere during his brief second visit to Fiji in 1903. The photograph was reproduced and sold as a postcard in the early 1900s and appeared with a range of captions, sometimes accurately and sometimes inaccurately describing alleged events, Fijian rituals, or customs.¹ For example, it was labelled and sold by J.W. Waters as “Preparation for a feast Fiji.” Waters had operated as a photographer and postcard proprietor in Fiji since 1886 and Thomson noted in 1897 that Waters was the “cheapest and best.”² In 1913, Waters passed his business to Frederick William Caine, who republished the same postcard—reversing the image—as “Killing turtles for a feast, Fiji.”³ The original photographic print was later given or sold to postcard proprietors and publishers of books and serial encyclopaedia. Such plagiarising of Thomson’s image was a common practice in the postcard and publishing industry.

Thomson included this photograph in his 1908 book, *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*, with the caption “Slaughtering the Turtle.”⁴ The same image appeared with his 1922 essay “British Empire in Australasia: Island Life in the Strange South Seas,” published in the serial, pictorial encyclopaedia *People of All Nations*. Here the photograph was attributed to Thomson, appearing with the caption “There is no mock turtle at a banquet in Fiji. The mouth of a city alderman might water at this prospect of real calipash and calipee.”⁵ The photograph appeared again, twenty-five years later, in another serialised encyclopaedia, *Lands and Peoples*, with Thomson again acknowledged as the photographer, but the image re-captioned “Turtles for the table outside a Fijian Grass house.”⁶ In 1959, it was again re-captioned in *The Book of Knowledge* as “Fijian Islanders preparing a feast.”

Sir Basil Thomson served as a British colonial official in Fiji, Tonga, and British New Guinea between 1884 and 1893, after which he returned to England.⁷ He lived among Fijians for short intervals for ten years, first as a stipendiary magistrate in various parts of the archipelago, then as commissioner of the Native Lands Court, and finally as acting head of colonial Fiji’s Native Department. Some of his anthropological information and photography was collected when he returned to Fiji in 1903 to serve on a commission appointed to investigate the causes of a decrease in the Indigenous Fijian population. Thomson was the author of several books on the Pacific, including *Diversions of a Prime Minister* (1894); *South*

Sea Yarns (1894); *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands* (1901);⁸ and *Savage Island: An Account of a Sojourn on Niue and Tonga* (1902).

Thomson, or his editors, were alert to the potential power of photographs to bring to life tales from the “South Seas,” as evident in the prolifically illustrated essays he published in magazines including *Lands and Peoples*, *Wide World Magazine*, *People of All Nations*, and *Countries of the World*.⁹ This awareness was evident as early as his two-part illustrated article “Curiosities of the South Seas” from 1899. His seventy-five-page essay in the 1922 encyclopaedia *People of All Nations* was illustrated with ninety-one photographs. In 1926, his essay on “South Sea Islands: Palm-Fringed Edens of Oceania” in *Countries of the World* was illustrated with twenty-three black-and-white photographs, one full-page photogravure, and five full-colour plates. To this volume he also contributed an essay on the “Fiji Islands,” illustrated with ten photographs.¹⁰ This instalment of *Countries of the World* was typical of the serial encyclopaedia format, with 103 pages, four maps, and 112 photographs. In addition to thirty-nine Pacific images, there were eighty-three photographs of South Africa, Spain, Stockholm, and South America. The 130 photographs published by Thomson in these few examples in the 1920s is a clear statement on how photography of the Pacific had spread thickly across the publishing world during the colonial era.¹¹

Thomson noted the importance of turtles in Fijian customs in a 1908 book, declaring,

In Fiji the royal fish is the turtle. Every considerable chief had turtle fishers attached to his establishment. He would allow them to take service with other chiefs for ten expeditions. The hiring chief paid them by results; for blank days they received nothing, but food and property were given to them for every catch, and a considerable present was made to them at the end of their engagement. . . The catch is announced by loud blasts on the conch, and the canoes are received with the same noise of triumph as when they brought back bodies for the cannibal ovens. The women meet them with songs and dances, and sometimes they pelt the crew with oranges and are chased from the beach with loud laughter.¹²

Thomson’s choice for a frontispiece for this book, “Breadfruit,” also appeared the previous year in the *Cyclopedia of Fiji* with the caption “Fijian breadfruit carrier” (Fig. 2). It was later sold as a postcard by others including F. W. Caine, who re-captioned as “A breadfruit seller.”¹³

The visual content in Thomson’s published photography conformed to an editorial formula that had rapidly evolved after the halftone process revolutionized photography’s use in newspaper and magazine printing. Each distant colony, country, or region was depicted in a formulaic manner. This included studio portraits of Indigenous people dressed in traditional costume, or exterior group portraits that doubled as scenic views by positioning the group in the foreground of a topographical feature, dwelling, or village. The photograph illustrations



Figure 2. “Breadfruit,” photograph in Basil Thomson, *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), frontispiece

usually included static displays of material culture and symbolic aspects of European colonial infrastructure, such as roads, plantations, public buildings, and wharves. For example, under “Abyssinia,” the first non-European country featured in *The Book of Knowledge* in 1959, a photograph of produce markets and “natives” pounding grain set against a barren mountain panorama—with a wireless station included to depict modernity—followed this formula.¹⁴ This type of photographic composition, with varying emphasis on one or another of these elements, can be found in published photographs taken in European colonies in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

For readers of illustrated encyclopaedia in the 1950s, entries on the “South Seas” confirmed the mental images of past eras, when the Pacific had been defined by a narrow set of myths highlighting idyllic coastal vistas, strange customs, and bustling European enterprise and empire building. This was the format for presenting the “graphic geography” that the

well-known editor of a multi-volume encyclopaedia, John A. Hammerton, extolled for this type of publication. Hammerton was Britain's most successful creator of large-scale works of reference. He claimed that such works served three purposes, being a "complete encyclopaedia of graphic geography . . . an educational work . . . and a work of reference."¹⁵ Readers looking at the South Seas illustrations of *The Book of Knowledge* probably did not realize that the editor's choice of illustration was often very outdated. British publications mostly excluded entries about Micronesia, as well as the areas of the Pacific inhabited and/or colonized by the French, the Japanese, and the Germans. For example, Micronesia—under German, then Japanese, control as a mandate after World War I—was not included in *People of All Nations* in 1926. French territories were similarly marginalized and treated derogatively, with New Caledonia described as "the most striking example of the French way of doing the wrong thing in colony making."¹⁶ The smaller nations and island groups such as the Cook Islands, Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tokelau, West Papua, and Niue were often ignored. In 1959, in *The Book of Knowledge*, only Sāmoa, Hawai'i, New Guinea, and Fiji were allocated separate entries. Sāmoa has a one-page entry with only two photographs: a photograph of smiling copra workers husking coconuts and a scene with three Europeans outside a plantation owner's substantial house. Sāmoans are said to be "very intelligent and appreciative of education."¹⁷ There is no indication that Sāmoa, three years later, would be the first Pacific nation to gain independence.

Thomson's image of preparing turtles for a feast depicts an earlier time, perhaps seventy-five years prior to being viewed in *The Book of Knowledge*. It was, therefore, a misleading representation of what the British Crown Colony of Fiji was like in the 1950s. Editors of encyclopaedia apparently were not concerned that images from earlier periods were inaccurately representing the countries and peoples they so proudly proclaimed their encyclopaedia was able to present to readers. Gordon Stowell, as editor of the 1959 *Book of Knowledge*, declared that the encyclopaedia had been "constantly reconsidered and rearranged" and "brought up to date in the fullest sense of that phrase." Photographs, he declared, were "chosen to illustrate articles" but also "to supplement in the most vivid way the information."¹⁸ The choice of older photographs also may have been deliberate, deeming it appropriate to include images that carried a timelessness and nostalgic romantic view of other cultures on the far side of the world. It might also have been argued by editors that Euro-American readers of *The Book of Knowledge* or similar types of illustrated compendia preferred this type of imagery, being trapped in an Orientalist manner of thinking about other cultures. If challenged, the editors might have argued that this version of island life was what post-World War II readers expected to see in an encyclopaedia entry on Fiji. The older photographs may also have been less expensive or easier to obtain for publication.

A contrary analysis might argue that the seventy-year lapse of time between when the photograph of the Fijian men with the turtles was taken and when it was published is

immaterial. In rural Fiji in the 1950s, the clothing, demeanor, and tribute practices depicted in the image were, in fact, unchanged from the early 1900s. Thatched *bure* were still visible across most of rural Fiji in the 1950s, and the customary practices related to turtles, such as ritual preparation and feasting, were also unchanged. Most Fijians in the 1950s still lived in villages and followed long-standing customs of marriage, tribute and association, housing, and food practices.¹⁹ Thus, choosing this village scene can be seen as an appropriate choice for a single illustration to represent a Fijian way of life that had been protected under a benevolent British administration since 1874.

Why did *The Book of Knowledge* choose a tribute of turtles, a *bure*, and Fijians if only one illustration was to be included in the Fiji entry? This choice was remarkable because by the 1950s there were 6,000 or more existing postcards of Fiji produced between 1900 to 1930, and thousands of other, already published photographs of Fiji from which to choose. There was also material available from stock photograph companies such as Exclusive News Agency (ENA), which had provided five of the images accompanying *The Book of Knowledge's* "Pacific Islands" entry, and from retired colonial officials, travelers, and professional photographers in England. And there were recently-taken photographs from professional photographers, travel companies, government agencies, and the military available for use. In the 1950s, the popular illustrated magazine *Walkabout*, covering Australia and the nearby Pacific Islands, was not using old photographs but was instead relying on contemporary photographs to fill its pages. Why, then, was *The Book of Knowledge* using a seventy-year-old photograph when there were images of the recently inaugurated Miss Hibiscus beauty contest that would have given a contemporary, modern understanding of what was happening in Fiji in the 1950s?

By the 1950s, numerous contemporary images of Fiji were available. Fiji's colonial government also had an official photographer, Rob Wright, who was taking photographs for travel promotion and other official purposes.²⁰ In 1963, *Pacific Islands Monthly* called Wright the South Pacific's best-known photographer, and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* selected two of his pictures to appear among the "Best Two Hundred Press Pictures of the Decade."²¹ Four years after *The Book of Knowledge*, using an outdated Fijian image, was published, twenty-six contemporary photographs by Wright were used by Alan Burns in the book *Fiji*, in the Corona Library series on British colonies. Burns's book was based on his 1959 visit to Fiji for a British commission of enquiry into the natural resources and population trends of the colony, and is evidence that some publishers were alert to the need to provide updated, current images. Even the 1922 edition of *New World of Today*, with fifty-nine photographs in its Pacific entries, had used forty-six newly chosen and recent images, repeating only thirteen photographs from the 1904 edition. With all the available imagery, the choice of potentially outdated photographs was problematic at best.

By the late 1950s, half the population of Fiji was of Indian descent, a fact not reflected in photographs of Fiji appearing in British publications. Thus, the post-*girmmit* (indentured

labor) Indian population was excluded from the reporting on Fiji. Hypothetically, it was probably a racist editorial decision, that a photograph of an Indian policeman, an Indian shop owner, or an Indian farming family near Labasa was not considered an appropriate editorial choice as an image to represent Fiji. Racism, marginalization, and disenfranchisement likely influenced editorial choices, but in the absence of editors' diaries or notes, this is conjecture based solely on the images themselves. It also was misleading for the editors to suggest to readers that a nostalgic, bucolic, rustic lifestyle prevailed when already many Fijians were living and working in towns. Indeed, by the 1950s, Fijians were squatting on the suburban margins and there was a sizable immigrant population from Rotuma, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Banaba (on Rabi), Tuvalu (on Koia), and Wallis and Futuna. Choosing a village setting ignored the fact that Suva and Lautoka were busy port cities in the 1950s and Ba, Labasa, Sigatoka, and Savusavu were growing into small towns. Fiji in the 1950s had an airport, major wharves, colonnaded public buildings and hotels, railways, and streets lit with electric lights. But perhaps this was not the "Fiji" editors thought readers wanted to see in 1959. The post-war British Empire was being transformed, so perhaps there was, in the selection, a political message that the British population needed colonial stability. A year later, Britain declared that they were leaving Fiji, setting in place a decade of turmoil and unrest as Fijians and Indians struggled to form political parties, decide on a voting process, and write a constitution. The editorial decision to use "Fijian Islanders preparing a feast" had probably taken place several years earlier, prior to the political upheaval of decolonization. However, an alert editor might have chosen a more pertinent image such as a portrait of an Indigenous or Indo-Fijian community or political leader, such as A.D. Patel, Ratu Lala Sukuna, or Ratu Kamisese Mara, to educate readers that there was a next generation ready to take over once the British departed.

There also may have been an editorial post-war reaction identifying a need to return to normality after the disruptions of the 1930s and World War II. Scenes of happy "natives" in a nostalgic, pastoral scene suggesting timelessness and tradition were something that young British readers and war-weary adults could smile and nod appreciatively at, as they conveyed the idea that the world, largely under British rule, was still a safe and predictable place. As an instrument of propaganda, promoting successful colonies in a wide empire, a photograph of "happy natives" suggested stability and that the world was returning to a pre-war agenda and policies. Specifically choosing images of Indigenous Fijians, who appeared to be engaged in ostensibly traditional actions, for the encyclopaedia would signify to readers how benevolent, paternal, and protective the British colonial regime had been in preserving a traditional Fijian way of life, and how normality had now returned after the disruptions of war. Fiji had been a British colony since 1874, sometimes promoted as the epitome of progress and an ideal colony.²² It was described by Fijian leader Ratu Sukuna as a three-legged stool: Fijians on the land, Indians providing the labor, and Europeans providing the capital and managing the

government.²³ An alternative reading of the three-legged-stool analogy is that the three legs were the agents that protected Fiji from the unwanted consequences of joining the modern world: chiefs, *Vanua* (the land,) and the British. This idealized but non-existent colony was therefore depicted through an image of happy islanders preparing turtles for a feast. All these motivations, and others, may have been in place when the editor or sub-editors of *The Book of Knowledge* chose Thomson's turtle photograph.



Figure 3. John William Lindt, Koiari tree house, photograph in *Picturesque New Guinea* (London: Longmans Green, 1887), plate XIV

The 1959 *Book of Knowledge* also included an entry on New Guinea, with two representative illustrations similarly reinforcing stereotypes.²⁴ One is a classic and often-reproduced photograph showing one of a cluster of Koiari tree houses in the hinterland of Port Moresby (Fig. 3). It was taken by John William Lindt in 1885, and seventy-four years later, readers were being led to believe that Papuans still built tree houses for defensive purposes or, in a more grossly generalizing manner, that many or all Papuans and New Guineans lived in tree houses.²⁵ The second photograph in the entry on New Guinea depicts three small boys fishing with miniature bows and arrows in rock pools on a reef in Mailu, a site on the southeast coast of Papua that was frequently photographed beginning in the 1880s. This photograph suggested to readers that in 1959 these Indigenous practices were unchanged and prevalent.

Choosing illustrations for an encyclopaedia was a mid-twentieth-century editor's predicament: how to visually summarize a whole territory or colony using one or two images, and how to convey a sense of the present without using outdated images from decades earlier. This task was achieved in *The Book of Knowledge* in the much longer, eight-page entry on the "Pacific Islands" by including a pull-out map of the Pacific showing the most recently determined boundary and name changes. This entry also relied on a page of reproductions of recent postage stamps depicting a variety of Pacific people, fauna, and places. It applied a collage effect, with six photographs including a half-length portrait of a Marquesan male, a harbor scene in the Bismarck Archipelago, a harbor scene in Tahiti, a group portrait of Solomon Islanders, a village setting in Kusaie (Kosrae), and a beach scene with two outrigger canoes.²⁶ Only the Tahitian scene had been photographed pre-1900. This gallery of portraits, body ornamentation, villages, canoes, and coastal scenery presented a fair representation of what the archipelagic island Pacific was like in the 1950s.

The images for the entry on the "Pacific Islands" included the North Pacific, then a United States Strategic Trust Territory and an area often overlooked in British publications. The text also suggested quite correctly that the widespread and predominantly coastal village life of islanders and their reliance on the sea, fishing, and canoes was continuing. The island images had been provided by a stock photograph company, ENA, and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). The scene in the Bismarck Archipelago in the Pacific Islands entry, provided by the RAAF, can be dated as post-World War II, but the origins of the other images are harder to determine and are possibly from the pre-war period. The photographers are not identified. Larger and more populous, New Guinea had a its own entry in Volume 5, though a photograph of a New Zealand radio station was incongruously included. Readers flipping the pages of the 1959 *Book of Knowledge* would have recognized a sense of timelessness, a hint of the long-standing fatal impact theory, and an inference that islanders who were changing or allegedly disappearing "used to look like this."

Readers may have been aware that the photographs were not all from the 1950s; however, casual readers flipping through the heavily illustrated pages of places, countries,

and sites in a pictorial encyclopaedia probably did not query the dates of the images. The images' truthfulness and reliability came from their being published in an encyclopaedia, with the medium's imprimatur of officialdom and the generalized acceptance that the contents represented fact and truth. A survey of photography used in the boom period of serialised illustrated encyclopaedia (1900–30) suggests that the editors of *The Book of Knowledge* were aware of a need to provide up-to-date images and, consequently, mostly chose current material.²⁷ Re-publishing Thomson's turtle scene can, therefore, be judged as either the result of editorial laziness or as an aberration. The inclusion of Thomson's turtle scene was meant to be educational and informative, but alternatively was outdated and not appropriate for publication. Its use suggests a range of contextual situations and priorities, primarily about European preoccupation with reasserting empire after World War II. The choice of images also repeated the long history of visual misrepresentation of the islands that stretches into the modern era. Although encyclopaedias were still influential in the 1950s, their market was declining. Therefore, the choice to not publish contemporary photographs in the 1959 *Book of Knowledge* may also be reflective of its publisher's cost-cutting measures, or a reliance on a few trusted suppliers of images, which was limited to available options.



Figure 4. T. G. Palmer & Son, Fijian Ruby Tourism Team – N.Z. Tour, 1957. Photograph, 1957, Whangarei, New Zealand. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Consider how an alternative image, such as “Fijian Rugby Touring Team–NZ Tour 1957” (Fig. 4) might have conveyed very different message about Fijians to readers of *The Book of Knowledge*.²⁸ This photograph would have shown readers that Fiji was part of the wider world of modern sport in the 1950s, far removed from the stereotypes of Fijians being ancient cannibals living in tribal villages. It would have shown that wearing ties was common, at least when Fijians went on to the world stage, not just for church as was the practice at home in Fiji. While more acceptable because it was current, the photograph does not include any Indo-Fijians or other minorities, women, or non-*iTaukei* (Fijian landowners,) and ignores the popularity of other sports, such as soccer, or events, such as the Miss Hibiscus Festival. As historians have noted, Fiji also faced race riots and oil strikes in 1959, and diplomatic events a year later would see the United Kingdom announce it was leaving Fiji.²⁹ The image also misrepresents the Fiji of the time by suggesting that Fiji was secure in the British Empire, and that when back at home the young men were modern in their fashion, dress, and deportment.

Compared to *The Book of Knowledge*, *Walkabout* magazine’s choice of photographs representing Fiji was far more contemporary and reflective of current trends. In 1957, *Walkabout* published three articles on Fiji with seven photographs including images of cane trains, traffic policemen, *sulu*-wearing constabulary, a large *meke* (dance) in a village, and a ceremonial arrival of the Governor being carried on a litter across a beach in Kadavu.³⁰ These were contemporary events that depicted the Fiji of the 1950s. Although Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston argue that in *Walkabout* the Pacific was “a utopian space of fantasy and projection and simultaneously a site where Australians could explore other primitive cultures,” the problem is that we have few archival traces of how readers and viewers reacted to specific images in publications.³¹

It is difficult to decide whether Thomson’s 1880s scene of preparing turtles for a feast was an appropriate representation of Fiji in the 1950s. The use of “Fijian islanders preparing a feast” does depict a Fijian custom regarding turtles, but it also misled readers by not acknowledging the political, social, and demographic changes in post–World War II Fiji. *The Book of Knowledge*’s brief post–World War II summary for the entire Pacific mentioned only that United Nations trusteeships had been declared over some islands and that some islanders were serving on legislative advisory councils. The year in which *The Book of Knowledge* was published with Thomson’s photograph was a year on the cusp of global change. The twentieth-century colonial world was taking on a new shape as emerging nations accepted or unilaterally declared their independence. France was about to leave most of its African colonies, Britain was about to declare its lack of interest in colonies east of Suez, and in 1960 the United Nations declared in the often-cited General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), that all colonized subject peoples had the right to be free from foreign rule.³² Readers in 1959 would have noticed the disparity between *The Book of Knowledge*’s romantic story of Fiji’s origins, European exploration, and promising export crops and what they read in newspapers

of the day, which presented another Fiji—one worried about race riots, lightning sugar strikes, and two major commissions of inquiry into economic and social problems, natural resources, and population decline. Fiji was on edge with unresolved electoral and constitutional proposals, and indigenous Fijians were despairingly watching Indo-Fijians fill professional ranks as public servants, lawyers, doctors, nurses, and accountants. Despite being published in a rapidly modernizing, post-war era when old empires were crumbling, *The Book of Knowledge* in 1959 relied on obsolete tropes of Indigenous Fijians as treacherous cannibals instead of portraying them as law-abiding people who served Britain loyally in World War II. The Fiji entry was clearly about a time before, not the present.

Readers in 1959 would have been familiar with *The Book of Knowledge's* conventional format, used by pictorial, serialised, encyclopaedia stretching back fifty years. The fortnightly or monthly arrival of the next issue of an illustrated serial encyclopaedia had been an amazingly influential publishing venture affecting popular opinion in the first half of the twentieth century. It had educated several generations of Euro-American readers about distant worlds such as the Pacific Islands, but by 1959 the format had become an anachronism, harking back to old times and former imperial glories. A portrait of Ratu Lala Sukuna debating the fate of Fiji, looking decidedly modern and dressed in his pocketed sulu and tie, rather than a preparation for a turtle feast, would have been a better choice of illustration.

Max Quanchi has taught Pacific history at Queensland University of Technology, University of Papua New Guinea, and University of the South Pacific. His research is on the history of photography in the Pacific. He has guest-edited special issues on photography for Pacific Studies, the Journal of Pacific History, and the Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies. Since 1996 Dr. Quanchi has convened panels on photography at the semiannual Pacific History Association conferences. He has published several books, including the monograph Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imagining in the Public Domain (2007), which focuses on the colonial frontier in Papua New Guinea. His most recent publication is An Ideal Colony and Epitome of Progress: Colonial Fiji in Picture Postcards, coauthored with Max Shekleton (2019).

Notes

¹ Elsie Stephenson, *Fiji's Past on Picture Postcards* (Suva: Caines Janiff, 1997), 253; Max Quanchi and Max Shekleton, *An Ideal Colony and Epitome of Progress: Colonial Fiji in Picture Postcards* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2019), 128.

² Basil Thomson, "Curiosities of the South Seas," *The Wide World Magazine* 3 (May–October 1899), 376–83, 509–16, <https://archive.org/details/wideworldmagazino3londuft/mode/2up>; Stephenson, *Fiji's Past*, 86.

³ Publishing a previously released postcard in reverse was a common tactic. Stephenson, *Fiji's Past*, 253, 325, 338; John Dear, *The Picture Postcards of Fiji* (London: Pacific Islands Study Circle, 2004), 16.

⁴ Basil Thomson, *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 326. He also included twelve other photographs, many later also made into postcards.

⁵ Basil Thomson, "British Empire in Australasia: Island Life in the Strange South Seas," *Peoples of All Nations* 2 (1922): 897–972.

"Calipee and Calipash—The first is the name given to the meat attached to the lower, and the last to the meat attached to upper shells of a turtle.

"Calipash is a corruption of carapace, the upper shell of the turtle; but it is used to signify only the green fat or gelatinous matter which adheres to the upper shell, while calipee is the name given to the yellow fat or gelatin which is attached to the under shell." Definitions from "Calipee and Calipash—Defined," Gjenvick-Gjenvik Archives, accessed Sept. 23, 2021, <https://www.gjenvick.com/Epicurean/CookingTerms/CalipeeAndCalipash.html>.

⁶ "Sunshine Islands and Savages: The Untamed Life of the South Seas," *Lands and Peoples: The World in Color*, vol. 5, ed. Gladys D. Clewell and Holland Thomson, (New York: The Grolier Society, 1947), 305–21, 319.

⁷ After returning to England, Thomson worked as a writer, prison warden, World War I spy, and director of a post-war security agency. He was knighted in 1926. Noel Rutherford, "Thomson, Sir Basil Home (1861–1939)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36499>.

⁸ This publication used seventeen photographs provided by Charles V. Lucas and James Edge-Partington.

⁹ Thomson, "Curiosities," 509–16; Thomson, "British Empire in Australasia," 253, 897–972; Basil Thomson, "South Sea Islands: Palm Fringed Edens of Oceania," *Countries of the World* 37 (London: Waverley Book Company, 1925): 2925, 3753–6, 3768, 3789, and the cover; Basil Thomson, "Fiji Islands: Archipelago Born of Coral and Volcano," *Countries of the World* 38 (London: Waverley Book Company, 1926): 1869–80.

¹⁰ Eight of these photographs were listed as having been supplied by the "Fiji Government." His "turtle" photograph was not included.

¹¹ Thomson used his own photographs in his articles, but also acknowledged others who had provided additional images, either knowingly or plagiarized by those sources, including Reverend George Brown, W.N. Beaver, Thomas McMahon, C.W. Collison, J.W. Beattie, H.A. Markham, J.F. Goldie, Douglas Rannie, Reverend W Gunn, R.M. Clutterbuck, W.S. Knox, Osmonde Pope, a picture library (ENA), York and Son, and the Field Museum, Chicago.

¹² Thomson, *The Fijians*, 322. The Fijian government placed a one-year ban on the harvest of marine turtles in 1995, followed by a three-year ban from May 1997 to December 2000, and a moratorium from February 2004 until December 2008. In 2014, a full ban was enacted and remains in place.

¹³ Thomson, *The Fijians*, 3; *Cyclopedia of Fiji* (Sydney: The Cyclopedia Company of Fiji, 1907): 3; Stephenson, *Fiji's Past*, 324.

¹⁴ Gordon Stowell, ed., *The Book of Knowledge: A Pictorial Treasury of Reading and Reference for Young and Old* (London: The Amalgamated Press, The Waverley Book Company, 1959), 1:5–8.

- ¹⁵ John A. Hammerton, “From the editor,” *Countries of the World* 37 (London: Waverley Book Company, 1926): inside cover.
- ¹⁶ J. A. Hammerton, ed., *People of All Nations: Their Life Today and the Story of Their Past* (London: Fleetway House, 1922), 2340.
- ¹⁷ Stowell, *The Book of Knowledge*, 6: 494.
- ¹⁸ Stowell, *The Book of Knowledge*, 1: vii, viii.
- ¹⁹ Marshall D. Sahlins, *Moala: Culture and Nature on a Fijian Island* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).
- ²⁰ Wright filled this role from 1940 to 1969. Sir Ian Thompson, *Fiji in the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Peter Thompson (Auckland: Thomson Pacific, 1994); “Rob Wright Fiji Photographs, 3. Fiji’s Scenery,” Just Pacific (website), accessed September 25, 2021, <http://www.justpacific.com/fiji/fijiphotos/wrightpics/scenery/index.html>.
- ²¹ See Rob Ewins, “Rob Wright Fiji Photographs,” accessed Sept. 25, 2021, <https://www.justpacific.com/fiji/fijiphotos/wrightpics/index.html> and post on Robertson Ramsay Wright, Fiji Museum Facebook page, June 13, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/fijimuseum/photos/robertson-ramsay-wright-mbe-known-to-one-and-all-as-rob-wright-was-born-in-sigat/539340589459462/>.
- ²² Quanchi and Shekleton, *An Ideal Colony*, 128–29.
- ²³ Lala Sukuna, *Fiji: The Three-legged Stool: Selected Writings of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna*, edited by Deryck Scarr (Sydney: Macmillan 1983).
- ²⁴ Stowell, *The Book of Knowledge*, 5: 395–97.
- ²⁵ Rupert Stacsh, “Korowai Tree Houses and the Everyday Representation of Time, Belonging, and Death”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 12 (no. 4, 2011): 327–47; Max Quanchi, “Tree Houses, Representation and Photography on the Papuan Coast 1880–1930,” in *Art and Performance in Oceania*, ed. Barry Craig, Bernard Kernot, and Christopher Anderson (Bathurst: Crawford House Press, 1999): 218–30.
- ²⁶ Stowell, *The Book of Knowledge*, 6: 24–31.
- ²⁷ Max Quanchi, “Learning by Looking: For example, at *Peoples of all Nations*; European Education and Serial Encyclopedia,” *Pacific Geographies* 45 (January/February 2016): 11–16, <https://doi.org/10.23791/451116>.
- ²⁸ Wikimedia Commons contributors, “File: 1957 Fiji rugby union team.jpg,” Wikimedia Commons, The Free Media Repository, accessed September 20, 2021, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1957_Fiji_rugby_union_team.jpg&oldid=490121399.
- ²⁹ James Heartfield, “The Dark Races Against the Light: Official Reaction to the 1959 Fiji Riots”, *Journal of Pacific History* 37 (no. 1, 2002): 75–86; Brij V. Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991); Brij V. Lal, *Levelling Wind; Remembering Fiji* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019).
- ³⁰ Richard Harrington, “Where the Rails are Free (Viti Levu, Fiji Island)”, *Walkabout* 23 (no. 1, January 1957): 41–2; Richard Harrington, “Fiji’s Famous Constabulary”, *Walkabout* 23 (no. 4, April 1957): 36–8; Sarah F. T. Hanna, “Life on a Fijian Island”, *Walkabout* 23 (no. 9, September 1957): 14–5.
- ³¹ Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston, *Travelling Home: Walkabout Magazine and Mid-Twentieth Century Australia* (London: Anthem, 2016): 183–6.

³² “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” Resolutions adopted without reference to a Committee, 1514 (XV), General Assembly–Fifteenth Session, accessed Sept. 23, 2021, [https://undocs.org/A/Res/1514\(XV\)](https://undocs.org/A/Res/1514(XV)).