

## Editorial Note



IN THIS ISSUE of the *New Zealand Journal of History* five contributors reflect critically on aspects on colonial visual and material culture in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. We open the issue with Andrea Low's challenge to scholars working in visual culture to pay greater attention to photography's 'shadow archive' and its potential to produce counter-narratives that centre indigenous perspectives and experiences. Low's focus are three personal albums created by Wehi Corbett that document her time performing in the Hilo Duo, who travelled through British and Dutch territories performing with the Hawaiian Troubadours from 1926 to 1930. Low argues that Wehi's albums act as a counter-narrative to the prominence of ethnographic depictions of indigenous peoples common in institutional collections. These much-loved material objects instead reveal a history of indigenous modernity and global travel. Wehi's photographic experimentation, her collecting and display practices, as well as her annotations, foreground her as narrator, author and photographer, rather than as a subject of the ethnographic gaze.

Jill Haley's focus is also on albums. Drawing from a collection of 54 albums held at Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, Haley examines them as a form of visual autobiography, arguing that Otago's immigrants used albums to express personal and familial identity, and to articulate community networks and bonds. Haley draws evidence for these practices by considering the materiality of the albums: their compilation, annotation and display. Affordable objects, and widely available for purchase, albums were accessible to those of all socio-economic backgrounds, although they were particularly popular among young people and women. As everyday objects, albums are an overlooked entry point into colonial visual and material practices. As private objects they also offer evidence of self-expression and emotional ties.

In her examination of William Francis Gordon's collecting practices, Rebecca Rice puts settler colonial memorialization practices under the microscope. Gordon collated an immense archive of photographic portraits of individuals who participated in the New Zealand Wars, producing what Rice describes as 'one of the most comprehensive photographic records' of the wars. Gordon's collection was not a documentary record of the wars, but rather a personal commemorative project that he regarded as being of national significance. Comprising mainly studio portraits of the men who participated in the wars, both Pākehā and Māori, these images originated as private family photographs, but took on different meanings and significance in the context

of a collection. Gordon's practice of identifying individuals and recording their ultimate fate, argues Rice, transforms the portraits from 'private aides-memoires into something that would serve the needs of collective memory-making'.

Kate Stevens examines images depicting colonial violence and the rule of law in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) in the form of several postcards depicting a French warship engaged in exerting punitive justice against the indigenous ni-Vanuatu in 1913. Images of arrest and transportation form part of a commercial postcard series that visually documented and celebrated imperial endeavour and colonial progress. Stevens's essay is a reminder that much of the power of the photographic image lies in its reproducibility and mobility. Depictions of subjugation and violence against colonial subjects are more than symbols of colonial injustice; Stevens regards them as part of a repertoire of performances — along with the naval vessel and the courtroom — that underscore how punitive violence underpinned imperial governance in the region, and thus materially shaped the lives of ni-Vanuatu people.

Chanel Clarke's essay returns to a core theme of several essays: the limits and opportunities of the visual record for the examination of material culture. Taking the visit of 13 Māori to England in 1863 as her subject, Clarke uses the visual record produced out of the visit — sketches, paintings and photographs — to illuminate Māori sartorial practices, particularly the role of dress in political diplomacy and in self-fashioning identity in the mid-nineteenth century. For Clarke, dress is a 'site of cross-cultural encounter, negotiation and manipulation', and visual depictions, despite their constructed nature, can help illuminate Māori innovations and responses to the introduction of European dress.

The essays collected here offer fresh approaches to the interconnected threads of visual and material cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. They work across different photographic genres, visual materials and collecting practices, highlighting the potential of the visual to provide fresh angles of vision on well-known events or people. Importantly, the contributors draw attention to the diversity of the visual record, both public and private, and chart ways that photography can be deployed to explore the textures of the colonial past.

ANGELA WANHALLA

*University of Otago*