

Against the Grain

READING PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE SHADOW ARCHIVE



IN 1989, at the funeral of my grandmother, Tuavivi Greig Kaai,¹ I was given three very old photograph albums by her nieces Pat, Gabriel and Tuavivi Briggs. I was grateful for the gift at the time, but the albums have become increasingly precious to me as I have come to realize what an incredible time period and what extraordinary lives they document. The albums are now close to 90 years old and originally belonged to Wehi Corbett Greig (Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue), who was half of the Hilo Duo, the other half being her husband, Keoki/George Greig, who was my great uncle and my grandmother's brother. Multi-instrumentalists, the Hilo Duo² travelled through British and Dutch colonial territories with Kaai's Hawaiian Troubadours from c.1926 to 1930, led by musical director Ernest Kaleihoku Kaai (Kanaka Maoli), who was my grandfather.

Wehi recorded her and her fellow performers' cosmopolitan experiences with the most up-to-date photographic technology of the time. The collection of images reveals a chronicle at odds with dominant settler narratives about indigenous peoples of Oceania and, more specifically, indigenous women. The albums constitute a hidden history that reveals a group of Oceanic performers participating in modernity. Wehi's albums also challenge the reification of dominant narratives in official archives from which these photographic collections and others like them are absent.

From the outset Wehi's warmth and humour were apparent in her albums, not only in the images of her smiling directly into the camera but also in the titles, the thoughtful compilation and annotation, and the generosity with which her friends and family are depicted. Her enthusiasm is apparent in the experimental images and her keen documentation of events, from flat tyres to moody rock pools to backyard card games and roadside recitals. An able photographer, she would often stage events, and the cooperation of her subjects confirms her ability to marshal and enrol others. But she was also able to take candid images, which suggests an easy familiarity with her travelling companions and that they were accustomed to her picture-taking (Figure 1).³



Figure 1: Wehi Corbett Greig with her Kodak Autographic camera c1927, Tocomwal, NSW, Australia.

Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

In all there are 535 photographs contained in three albums that have remained in the private domain until now.⁴ Borrowing from Allan Sekula's work on photography and anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing Against Culture*, I read Wehi's collection 'against the grain' because, while the photographs are enmeshed in many different scopic regimes, they simultaneously resist simplistic genre coding as a travel or family album, nor are they easily defined as snapshot, portrait, documentary, tourist or vintage photography.⁵ Created by an indigenous woman, Wehi's albums also contest photography's 'characteristically [white] petit-bourgeois' subject-matter.⁶ In photographic theory, such images have been regarded as part of what Sekula has called 'the shadow archive'.⁷ In essence, they counter generalization, situating the subjects in historically specific locations but also offering multiple narratives that do not fit the expectations of indigenous peoples represented in the institutional archive.⁸ Private collections such as Wehi's demonstrate that 'One doesn't have to scratch the surface very deeply to find that class, race, and gender have a lot to do with whose experiences are on top — that is, with whose lives traditionally have gotten written and read, with whose experiences have been seen as "real."⁹ While she leaves only the faintest trace in official archives, Wehi's life as documented in her snapshots and in her annotated collection offers a counter-narrative. She was part of a travelling musical culture that came together in the context of a modern, globalizing system, and her photographs tell the story.

Wehi and the Hilo Duo

Born in Whakarewarewa in 1903, Wehi's full name was Te Paea Te Wehi O Te Rangi Corbett.¹⁰ She was the daughter of Kahoki Piatarahi Kaha¹¹ (elsewhere referred to as Mahoki Kaka Te Ngaherehere¹²) and Levuka Corbett.¹³ Her father, born in Newton, Auckland, was more commonly known by his nickname 'Buka'. He was the son of English immigrants who had spent time in Fiji, and his first name comes from the Fijian capital at the time. On her mother's side, Wehi was also a descendent of Paora Te Amohau, a rangatira of the Te Arawa tribe with links to an extraordinary whānau that 'produced a large percentage of all the guides and concert performers [in Whakarewarewa]. This family is known as Te Whānau-o-Te Rangi'.¹⁴ Whakarewarewa was, and still is, a small settlement 3 kilometres from the urban centre of Rotorua in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. The settlement, built on a volcanic plateau with geysers, mud pools and hot springs, was marketed in the 1920s as a 'Māori Wonderland'. 'Geothermal tourism' had been a major economic contributor to Rotorua and New Zealand since the mid-nineteenth century, and 'the village experience' offered by Whakarewarewa was where visitors could participate in a 'living' culture and tradition.¹⁵

As well as the depth of relationship Wehi had for her tūrangawaewae, her environment was also shaped by her father's social and business acumen. A local identity in the Rotorua district, Buka owned a store in Whakarewarewa where he and his family lived in rooms out the back. As well as a bakery, taxi service and billiard room, he and his sons ran a fishing boat, *The Selma*, out of Maketu and another boat, *Kia Ora*, which took tourists to Mokoia Island.¹⁶ A good dancer, Buka also operated a school where locals and tourists could learn contemporary dance steps. Wehi had four brothers, all of whom were involved in their father's enterprises, plus one sister, Minnie Waitohi Hurahia Eparaima née Corbett, who, as Guide Minnie, worked at Whakarewarewa and was a contemporary of the well-known cultural ambassador Rangitiriara Dennan, better known as Guide Rangi. Minnie was well known in Whakarewarewa for more than her work as a guide:

Many guides became renowned as 'characters', either because of their sense of humour or for their eccentricity. The greatest of these was undoubtedly Minnie Waitohi Eparaima [née Corbett]. For more than half a century she was engaged in guiding, souvenir selling and tickets. Her particular forte was the organisation of concerts and in this she was Rangi's chief aide. Before World War II she had her own concert party which performed not only for tourists in Rotorua, but also in the competitions at the Ngaruwahia Regatta.¹⁷

Wehi was a dancer and undoubtedly assisted at her father's dance school. She was also a musician, and is pictured in several images in her photograph albums playing various instruments: saxophone, guitar and 'ukulele. In addition, she was a contralto, and many reviewers also admired the comedic ability she brought to her stage partnership with Keoki Greig.

The known fragments of Wehi's early life in Rotorua offer a picture of someone who grew up in an entrepreneurial family environment exposed to a cosmopolitan life in Rotorua fostered by the increasing numbers of tourists visiting the district's cultural developments in which the Corbett whānau was integrally involved. Her life moved seamlessly between indigenous and settler-colonial worlds, and her whakapapa extended in many directions — to her Ngāti Whakaue iwi at Ōhinemutu, connecting her with many Te Arawa tribal affiliations, and to the Pākehā world and connections of her father.¹⁸ She was aware of travel through the family business, but she also had extended family in England and Sydney, and not just through her paternal connection. In 1910 a cultural group led by Makereti Papakura (Guide Maggie) had travelled from Whakarewarewa to England for the Festival of Empire celebrations. Several members of the group had chosen to stay on in England, and Papakura returned to live there in 1911, studying anthropology at Oxford. Another local group, led by the Reverend F.A. Bennett, who were known as the Maori Entertainers, performed at Ōhinemutu in 1909 before they left for a long engagement at the New York Hippodrome and a homeward season in San Francisco. With such examples and family performance networks that extended across the world, and given her own musical and performing background, it is not surprising that Wehi herself would one day travel as an entertainer.

At the age of 18 in 1921, Wehi was performing and touring New Zealand with the Waikiki Hawaiians on the Fuller's Vaudeville circuit.¹⁹ The group was led by her future husband, Keoki Greig, and alongside his sisters, Tuavivi and Annie, they performed 'island melodies and up to date ragtime'.²⁰ Her stage name at that time was Wehi Suila (sometimes misspelled as Siula). Her first child, Leitu (the eldest of five), was born in 1923, and accompanied her parents on the road, travelling many thousands of kilometres through Australasia, South East Asia and India.

The fact that neither Wehi nor Keoki was Hawaiian seems to have been no impediment to the success of their act, the Hilo Duo, who advertised as 'Hawaiian specialists'. The pair appeared with Sir Harry Lauder's Australasian variety tour for three years, and a reviewer in New Zealand had this to say:

The graceful Hilo Duo gave a dainty guitar entertainment. The aid of the stage electrician produced sympathetic effects. The lady, besides being equally as expert as her partner, is a fascinating exponent of the quaint hulu [sic] dances and peculiar melodies usually associated with her island home. In what he describes as a 'double syncopation' piece, the male member shows that the ukeleli [sic] is as useful and attractive in solo work as in accompaniment.²¹

The pair travelled on the Eastern Circuit (E.J. Carroll & Madan Theatres Ltd) with Lauder on his 'Farewell Tour' of India and the Far East, appearing in Bombay (Mumbai) in November 1924 at the Excelsior Theatre as part of Lauder's 'Vaudeville Stars' line-up.²² Lauder was one of the world's highest-paid performers at the time and toured as 'The World's Greatest Entertainer'. The invitation to tour with his company was a great accolade for the Hilo Duo and a big step onto the international stage from parochial New Zealand. Writing from Rangoon (now Yangon, Burma), another New Zealander travelling with Lauder described their departure from Calcutta:

Our send-off from Calcutta was the most brilliant and enthusiastic function I have ever seen. Present — The Viceroy and party, Prince and Princess Arthur of Connaught, the Rear-Admiral of the Eastern fleet, and officers from the Chatham, besides all the most important citizens of Calcutta and representative visitors from all over India, including Rajahs, [and] Maharajahs.²³

The writer goes on to say: 'We leave here (Rangoon) for the Penang and other Straits Settlements towns en route to Singapore, then up to China, and then down to dear old New Zealand.' The Hilo Duo had opened with Lauder in Bombay at the Excelsior Theatre on 1 November 1924, and by January 1925 they were in Singapore at the Victoria Theatre. Later that year the New Zealand tour commenced in Invercargill, travelling north to Auckland and then on to Brisbane in July. After Lauder's tour finished in Australia the pair continued to perform in vaudeville revues in and around Melbourne until they joined Kaai's Hawaiian Troubadours in July 1926.



Figure 2: Hilo Duo billboard, Melbourne, Australia, c1925.

Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

Along with George’s siblings, Tuavivi and Annie, who performed as the Greig Sisters, the Hilo Duo (Figure 2) travelled with Kaai for four years through colonial Australasia, the Straits Settlements, Dutch East Indies, Burma, India and Shanghai. Although integral to the Troubadours at this time, they also continued to perform and record separately as the Hilo Duo. After the Troubadours disbanded in 1930 the duo went on to guest with vaudeville companies such as Stanley Mackay’s Gaieties Vaudeville Company in the late 1930s.²⁴ The pair were described as ‘magnetic’, and it was said that ‘rhythm exudes from them as naturally as “breath” from their nostrils.’²⁵ The Hilo Duo made phonograph recordings, toured in the stage revues *Fantasy in Gold* with the ABC Radio Serenaders and *The Frolics of 1940*, as well as many others, and appeared regularly in New Zealand up until 1938 in vaudeville revues but focused solely on Australian opportunities after that.²⁶ Along the way Wehi, an enthusiastic and creative photographer, kept a unique photographic and written record of the world that she encountered.



Figure 3: Wehi's jokey annotation for this image reads 'The Ingleburn Trio'. Keoki Greig (left) playing a 'Hilo' brand Hawaiian steel guitar. Wehi Greig (standing) and Jack Phillips, c.1925, at Ingleburn, Jack's parents' home, Auburn, NSW, Australia.
Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

'With Kaai's Hawaiian Troubadours'

Of the three albums in my possession, the one that is most intact is a chronicle of the Hawaiian Troubadours on tour in New Zealand and Australia. Wehi's front-page, handwritten title reads 'WITH KAAI'S HAWAIIAN TROUBADOURS 1927 1928'. The spine of the album is laced, allowing pages to be added, and her name 'Wehi Greig' is pencilled on the inside front cover. For the most part, the photographs are doubly anchored with corner mounts and glue or occasionally just glued, with the edges of the snapshots cut to make more room for text and inventive displays. Photographs in this album are not chronological and jump between Australian and New Zealand locations, but the album gives the suggestion of a narrative arc firstly by the title page and then by the two final pages, in which some of the Hawaiian Troubadours are pictured boarding the SS *Gascoyne*, which sailed a regular route from Fremantle to Singapore. The last page features at its centre a snapshot of the entertainers outside the Oranje Hotel in Soerebaia.

Missing the front cover and an unknown number of pages, the second album is in a style similar to that of a *carte de visite* album in that it has pre-cut frames, some oval or round, that glue down over arrangements of photographs, and one peeled page of frames reveals the combination of guesswork and design that fits the snapshots to the template. As with the first album, Wehi's handwriting is on every page, a *paratext*, in white ink, all caps and underlined. People, dates and places are named, and the frequent use of quotation marks emphasizes her often-humorous commentary, although at times the ruled line is all that remains of her narrative. The partial album contains many photographs of Wehi and Keoki's daughter Leitu as a small child. (Leitu travelled with the Troubadours along with the young children of troupe members Frances and Frank Luiz and Eddie and Gertila Kinilau.) Like the first album, it combines snapshots of New Zealand and Australia and occasionally postcards collaged and framed to resemble photographs.

The third and largest album is in the worst condition — the spine is perforated with silverfish damage and the heavy card pages have come away from the binding. Contained within it are images of the Hawaiian Troubadours in colonial India, Jakarta and Malacca and on board the SS *Glasgow* and the SS *Nam Sang*. Wehi chose not to consistently double-fix the snapshots, so there are many empty photo mounts where photographs have perhaps fallen out or were easily removed. All of the images are sepia-toned, standard-size contact prints measuring 2 ½ x 4 ¼ inches.²⁷ A copper-based metallic compound in the photo corners has caused damage where the photo corners have come into contact with images on facing pages and burnt bluish triangular silhouettes into the surface of many of the photographs. Accompanying this album inside the front cover is a loose collection of images, some of which have handwritten place names on the back — Agra, Madras, Poona — using the colonial-era spellings. Inside the album two snapshots have place names written in pencil on the front (Madras Arts and Culture, Madras Museum), but Wehi's buoyant narrative, so much a feature of the other two albums, is absent. Covered with faux leather, the album is fragile. Pages are stiff with hardened glue and ageing sepia snapshots that bulk out the thick paper leaves. Gaps, left where photographs have either fallen out or been removed, disrupt the surface of the pages, leaving ghostly tears and empty photo corners.

In describing the albums my intention is to evoke something of the materiality of the collection and that the means of display, including the worsening condition of the albums, sets up cognitive approaches to the collection of images because the state of the albums is always coming between me and what I am trying to see. It is as though the deteriorating snapshots and fading text underscore the fragmentation of the lives they represent

and emphasize the time that has passed. The collection of albums and loose images is a haptic as well as visual experience because in opening and closing the albums or looking for a particular image I am always reminded of their age and object-ness through their fragility and unwieldiness. There are gaps where photographs have either fallen out or been removed, neatly cut out from one side of the page with no thought at all for the mayhem that causes on the other side of the page. The missing and torn pages accentuate the narrative structure of albums as types of books, while their musty smell is a further sign of their age and deterioration.

In spite of these cognitive interventions the albums radiate Wehi's personality. Idiosyncrasies, such as photographs placed at angles around a central image or collaged figures from postcards or programmes, as well as a unique pair of images taken from the centre of an 'aha'aina²⁸ (Figure 4) on the floor of a grand home in Victoria, Australia, are an indication of Wehi's creativity and a prompt that the albums are part of a history of highly gendered collecting practices. Narrated images that make jokes or assume a familiarity between the viewer and the figures depicted are reminders of Wehi's authorship and subjectivity and implicate her in the chronicled events.



Figure 4: Kaai's Hawaiian Troubadours and their hosts, seated at an 'aha'aina in Victoria, Australia c 1927. Photographs by Wehi Corbett Greig.

Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

Photography lives in many cultural contexts, but in photographic writing, as Christopher Pinney states, ‘a unitary subject is assumed rather than demonstrated, and this subject is then overlain with artefact-mobilised identities’.²⁹ As a counter to this, Pinney examines heterodox photographic practices in Mombasa, Cusco and India, which he frames as resisting photography’s ‘totalizing schemata and imprisoning referentiality’.³⁰ What he defines as vernacular modernism ‘relocates the historical agency and centrality of Western representational practice’ in which the typical subject is presupposed.³¹ Wehi’s albums are locatable within this arena, but they occupy an interstitial space in that they operate within some Western representational practices but simultaneously open up a space that unsettles and critiques Western models not only of selfhood but also of modernity and travel, and inevitably the colonial archive itself.

At one level, Wehi’s albums contain images that are familial and intimate. Family photographs are not a privileged mode of photography, and family photographs by indigenous and subaltern social groups are even less so. Michael Aird’s comparison of Australian institutional archival photographs of Aboriginality with his own family photographs reveals a huge disparity between self-fashioning and the institutional construction of Aboriginality.³² Depictions of unnamed indigenous subjects as poverty-stricken, savage, exotic,³³ or as the last of a dying race, are routine representations in colonial archives, as are those images characterized by ‘enumeration and humiliation’³⁴ produced in contexts of ethnographic and scientific assessment. As Sekula says, photography is a ‘double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*’: it came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define both the *generalized look* — the typology — and the *contingent instance* of deviance.³⁵ Colonial archives are composed of an immense number of images that document inequalities on an extraordinary scale.³⁶

Notwithstanding the immense inequalities of power in colonial photography, agency was also possible.³⁷ A small number of writers and artists, indigenous or otherwise, have examined the particularities of indigenous people’s experience with photography not as the objectified other but as both photographer and collector.³⁸ Christopher Wright’s *The Echo of Things* examines the ways in which the Roviana people of the Solomon Islands ‘have been, and are, entangled with photography in various ways: through being the subjects of colonial photography’, but also, since the 1950s, through their own uses of photographic technology and collecting practices.³⁹ *Calling the Shots*, edited by Jane Lydon, unpacks institutional photographs partly as a recuperative practice but also as a re-coding of the archive from the perspective

of indigenous Australians rather than ‘what the white photographer saw’.⁴⁰ This is one of very few works that theorises photographic practice in this arena. Like Lydon, Gaynor Macdonald’s interest in domestic photography by Wiradjuri people attests to the ways in which family photographs are cherished and integrated into a world of ‘meaning, relatedness and history’.⁴¹ While Macdonald acknowledges that there is far more scholarship dedicated to photographs taken ‘of’ indigenous peoples compared to the ways in which they are valued and collected in indigenous contexts, she argues the ‘fact that valued photos are usually simple “snapshots”, of the family album type’ is one reason for their underestimation, by anthropology (I assume she means) in cultural terms.⁴²

In contrast to Macdonald, I assert that such collections have largely been ignored by archives because they have not been imagined in an institutional sense. The absence of ‘other’ domestic photographs from archives is a widespread phenomenon, even though from the late 1920s the Kodak Box Brownie was specifically marketed to black men, for example in colonial Rhodesia,⁴³ and there was a ‘Kodak stage’ amongst young Aboriginal men in Queensland in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴ Absence is not an indication that there were no indigenous domestic photographers or photographs. For instance, families ‘living in the black townships of Namibia have kept their own photographic collections: studio portraits, townscapes, and informal family shots.... No such images have ever found their way into the National Archives of Namibia, but from their unofficial sites they begin to challenge the assumption of a colonial monopoly of photography.’⁴⁵

The absence is, rather, a signifier of institutional archival collecting practices. This phenomenon is repeated in other colonial locations, New Zealand included. Photography can be understood as a ‘globally disseminated and locally appropriated medium’.⁴⁶ In the following comments Rachel Snow is referring to the white American middle class, but reading against the grain of the text makes it meaningful for domestic photographers and subjects such as Wehi:

Inexpensive cameras made available to ... consumers the possibility of controlling their own images, providing them with the means to construct their own stories and craft their own identities. Camera wielding consumers could now control their own images in two ways: in the manner in which they recorded their own likeness and through their ability to document whatever they wished. The technology allowing them to do so was mass-produced, but its power resided in its capacity to itself produce individualized and personalized products: the photographs themselves.⁴⁷

The non-white subordinates of Sekula's shadow archive are not presumed to have owned or had access to cameras. According to a senior curator of photography who has a special interest in the Pacific and snapshot photography, as a young Māori woman Wehi's's authorship of the photographs is atypical in that Māori, it was assumed, especially Māori women, as with indigenous Australians or black township families, did not commonly own cameras in the early 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁸ I was also told that Māori did not travel, ergo the category 'travel photographs by Māori' in the early twentieth century could not exist. The image of the Hawaiian Troubadours at the Lahore Fort (Figure 5) shows at least four members of the Hawaiian Troubadours carrying cameras, two are Māori and three are women. Race and gender issues arising from camera ownership and the photographs that may have resulted from it are clearly an under-researched field of study.

Instances of archival inclusion of indigenous domestic photographs do exist, and of the three examples here, two, both from Hawai'i, are in some ways accidental: the personal albums of hula performer Kini Kapahukulaokamāmalu (1872–1962) are in the Hawai'i State Archives, but the collection was not meant to be public, according to cultural historian Adria Imada. Similar to the Corbett Greig collection, Kapahukulaokamāmalu's 'counterarchive' is composed of photographic souvenirs of her and her fellow performers' off-stage lives while on tour in the US and Europe.⁴⁹ They found their way into the public domain because Kapahukulaokamāmalu was married to John 'Johnny Wilson' Henry Wilson (1871–1956), who was elected three times as mayor of Honolulu, and so the albums entered the Hawai'i State Archives as part of the Wilson family papers. Similarly, an album belonging to Queenie Kaili, who toured for many years with Kaai's Troubadours alongside her husband David Kaili, found its way into the Bishop Museum collection through a rare-book appraiser. The album contains many images of Kaai's Hawaiian Troubadours that are not yet identified and so are not searchable. Neither of these collections was intended to be in the public domain, but their presence, like the Namibian example cited earlier, challenges the assumption of imperial and colonial monopolies of photography.

The third example is a case of collaboration where an indigenous institution supports and hosts research materials by an indigenous researcher. In 2017, historian Tony Brunt curated both an online exhibition and e-publication for Falemata'aga, The Museum of Samoa.⁵⁰ Drawing on images from many family collections that were made available to him as well as from public domain and archive collections, Brunt crafted a narrative history of German colonization of Samoa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the photograph albums of families of mixed Samoan and German heritage. It

is an intimate view of life that reveals, through formal and informal modes of photography, a counter-discourse to the emerging anthropological gaze in Samoa in the early twentieth century and accompanying hegemonic historicization. It offers one template for the ways in which photographs from indigenous, domestic contexts can transmit their ‘meaning, relatedness and history’ and asserts a narrative that would otherwise be overwritten. Access to the images is via a free online e-book (over 250 pages) that makes information and imagery accessible to descendants (as the Facebook page for the Museum of Samoa demonstrates) and interested audiences, and Brunt’s fine-grained research ensures a wide-ranging and lively, unfolding conversation around the text and imagery. Social media plays an important part in the wide dissemination of individual images and accompanying narratives, and reveals an engagement with descendants and crowd-sourcing of narratives that should be the envy of other archival institutions.

Seeing Machine

Photographs provide specific and concrete instances of interpretive material and can offer a counter-discourse to the ‘seeing machine’⁵¹ of empire that racialized and controlled subjects in colonial contexts.⁵² The effacement of marginalized subjects from historical narratives has been described as an amnesia that truncates the already contested and unfinished stories of empire.⁵³ Rejections of this ‘historylessness’ can be found in archives of personal photographs.⁵⁴ Wehi’s photographs comprise such an archive, one that provides, amongst many other qualities, ‘evidentiary value’.⁵⁵ Her photographs documenting Kaai, his musicians and their travels, signal *presence* in geographically and socially diverse locales and are a simultaneous signifier of the *absence* of indigenous Oceanic subjects from the colonial canon, except in the most narrow of interpretations that rely on the perception of such peoples as solely autochthonous.

Wehi Corbett Greig’s collection of photographs constitutes an alternative discourse in relation to the colonial archive. The ‘self-fashioning’ of the musicians in the Corbett Greig collection, for instance, is shaped by the photographers who were part of the troupes and also subjects within the images.⁵⁶ The intimacy and equivalency between the main subjects and the photographers are a departure from the encodings of ethnographic collections with their catalogue of inequality.⁵⁷ The accompanying annotations narrate the images sometimes just with brief details of names, dates and places, but there are also jokes, puns and nicknames of subjects within the photographs. Within the album framework Wehi is not just narrating — she is producing, organizing, naming and interiorizing the experiences represented by the

images through her text. Wehi's photographs offer many entry points for dialogic engagement, transforming them into a 'complexly textured artefact (concealing many different depths) inviting the viewer to assume many possible different standpoints — both spatial and temporal — in respect to it'.⁵⁸ Her images offer a parallel with Vicente Rafael's comments on photographic portraits of bourgeois Filipinos under US rule, which he describes as compelling because 'they seem to escape instrumentalisation and reduction into either colonialist or anti-colonial narratives.... The richness of their details, the expressiveness of their faces, and the intricate precision of their surfaces give each photograph a particularity that exceeds generalisation.'⁵⁹



Figure 5: The Hawaiian Troubadours at the Dewan-e-khas, a pavilion within the Lahore Fort, Lahore, India, circa 1928. From left to right: Keoki Greig, George Leywood (Manager), unknown, Wehi Greig, Eddie Kinilau, Gertila Byrnes, Tuavivi Kaai, Sid Kamau, Thelma Kaai. Photographer: Ernest Kaai.
Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

In Figure 5, eight members of the Hawaiian Troubadours stand in archways of the Dewan-e-khas, a pavilion within the Lahore Fort, Lahore, India, circa 1928.⁶⁰ Several members, besides the photographer, are carrying cameras that look to be versions of the Kodak folding pocket camera. Other photographs taken of the group on the same day suggest there was an exchange of cameras between members of the party where they took turns photographing each other; with so many cameras there is also the prospect of many more photographs in

existence documenting the same event, perhaps in other family collections. All the photographs at the Lahore Fort and many other locations show the entertainers at ease with one another and in front of the camera. The poses are not stiff and faces unsmiling or overly formal; they show a range of expressions and at times playful poses. A process of elimination means the camera operator in the above photograph is my grandfather, Ernest Kaai. He enjoyed filmmaking and was known to have made moving images documenting his travels in many different locations.⁶¹ The photograph is well composed on a diagonal line with no feet or heads cut off. There is a sense that the performers are used to having their photographs taken as they appear relaxed, and there is no expectation that everyone should be looking at the photographer.

The Lahore Fort provides a backdrop. The figures in the background are not wearing Western dress and appear to be occupied but not in a touristic way. They seem to be part of the backdrop, which extends beyond the frame and surrounds the subjects, establishing a scene that is allegorical because it is at once localizing, highly stylized and partial. The photograph was taken sometime between 1926 to 1930, when Kaai and the Hawaiian Troubadours were most active in the Asia-Pacific region, and as such, the image offers a unique insight into life on the road for a professional company of performers who also happen to be from diverse Oceanic and European heritages. Wehi's collection thus offers a necessary expansion of the field of representations of Oceanic peoples in this period.

Conclusion

I was encouraged in the conceptualizing of this piece by the writing of Lila Abu-Lughod and her advocacy of finding 'ways to write that work against the typifications of communities'.⁶² Her emphasis in ethnography is on 'individual differences and the contestatory nature of discourses and social life within all communities'.⁶³ This resonated for me because one of the elements I wanted to bring to the narrative of Wehi's photographic collection was, in a sense, the ordinariness of it, that the travels and adventures she participated in and documented so engagingly were not anomalous but were indicative of the multiple subjectivities of her and her fellow Troubadours. The musicians and entertainers are unfamiliar figures — I know these stories but I have never read about peoples from Oceania who have lived the lives that they have, and I believe that many people of Oceania would conceptualize themselves in other ways if the particularities of these and many more stories were available and familiar. My own listening to how people of Oceanic heritage such as myself are routinely described in New Zealand is as a people who are all lumped together as 'Pacific Islanders' and whose learning, achievements and

health are continually pathologized. We are to be feared and are celebrated only in the narrowest of contexts — all in ways that sometimes circuitously but mostly blatantly connect to our biology. I am resigned to descriptions on the radio, in the newspapers, on television, on academic networking sites and at academic conferences that function on the basis that no ‘Pacific Islander’ is reading, watching or listening to the exchanges about Oceania that are delivered with such certitude.

The narratives of the Troubadours as depicted in Wehi’s albums are in tension with these limitations that are characterized by ‘object-like, coherent, whole and separate’ understandings of ‘alien cultures’ that have underpinned ethnography and which still confront Oceanic peoples in the wake of colonialism.⁶⁴ Photograph albums like Wehi’s help to bridge discontinuities that have had profoundly damaging effects on social identity, on material culture, language, sovereignty and habitus. Partly in response to the power that dominant narratives still have in the framing of indigenous lives and aspirations, I choose to frame my narrative in terms identified by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who says that indigenous stories are ‘ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass them down further’, and that the storyteller functions ‘to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story’.⁶⁵

While Abu-Lughod frames her discussion in relation to ethnographies of ‘distant communities’, the community I am telling a story about is distant in another way, in that the past and the community that I am writing about is my family. The photographs bring those pasts into the present. I see the people that I know and love pictured in the pages of the albums enjoying their lives and looking young and healthy when I knew them as elderly and increasingly frail. I am able to piece together the oral histories I remember with the images and try to reconstruct the events and search for evidence (of anything). Family likenesses seem to jump out of the pages and, as once unknown faces and identities become familiar, more and more fragments seem to coalesce. What emerges most powerfully, however, is the sense of agency not just in the depictions but also in the construction of the images. Wehi’s sense of humour and play emerge in the narration of events, and her affinity with her fellow performers is evident in the subjects’ poses and the directness of their engagement with the camera. Each time I introduce the albums to another family member, I am aware that by looking through them a slightly different version of a continuously unfolding oral history is told.

ANDREA LOW

Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira



Figure 6: The Hawaiian Troubadours at the wedding celebration for Sid David (Ngāti Kahungunu) and Thelma Kaai (Kanaka Maoli).
Standing left to right: Thelma Kaai, Sid David, Lucy Parker, George Leywood, Tuavivi Kaai, Palmer Parker, Wehi Greig (Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue), Keoki Greig.
Foreground left to right: Ernest Kaai, Trudy Kinilau, Eddie Kinilau, and Gertrude Kinilau:
11 November 1928, Bangalore, India.
Source: Collection of Wehi Greig.

NOTES

1 My grandmother and her siblings, Annie and Agnes Greig, were born on Fanning Island, and their older brother, Keoki Greig, was born on Washington Island. The two islands were part of a chain of atolls called the Line Islands. Once a British protectorate, today Fanning and Washington along with Christmas Island are part of Kiribati territory.

2 The duo probably took their name from the Hilo brand Hawaiian steel guitar that Keoki played. Hilo is also a place name on the island of Hawai'i.

3 There is only one close-up image of Corbett Greig with a camera, and it appears to be a Kodak Autographic (a folding pocket), a model that was in production from 1914 to 1934.

4 Album 1=190, 2=120, 3=205 (+19 loose images) = 535 images.

5 Quote from Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1984, p.ix; Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Writing Against Culture', in R.G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1991, pp.137–62.

6 Allan Sekula, 'The body and the archive', *October*, 39 (Winter), (1986), p.10.

7 Sekula, 'The body and the archive', p.10.

8 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p.12.

9 Elspeth Probyn, 'Travels in the Postmodern: Making sense of the local', in L.J. Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p.184.

10 Birth registration number: 1915/12873 <https://bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz> (accessed 1 August 2014).

11 Marriage registration number 1909/6417, <https://bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz> (accessed 1 August 2014).

12 Mark Takarangi, 'Kakaranga Te Tui': www.rotorualibrary.govt.nz/about-your-library/news/Documents/Kakaranga%20te%20Tui%20by%20Mark%20Takarangi.pdf (accessed 30 June 2014).

13 Probate of Levuka Corbett, 1873–1952, DCDG 396/9296, Archives New Zealand, Auckland.

14 J.C.M. Cresswell, *The Hot Lakes Guides: A Short History of Guiding in the Rotorua Area from Pre-Eruption Te Wairoa to Whakarewarewa Until the Nineteen Eighties*, Lois Ion, Rotorua, 2008, p.161.

15 G. Neilson, G. Bignall and D. Bradshaw, 'Whakarewarewa, a living thermal village–Rotorua, New Zealand', *Proceedings of the World Geothermal Congress 2010*, Bali, Indonesia, April 2010, p.1: [www.gns.cri.nz/index.php/gns/content/download/6899/37705/file/Whakarewarewa – A living thermal village, Rotorua.pdf](http://www.gns.cri.nz/index.php/gns/content/download/6899/37705/file/Whakarewarewa-A%20living%20thermal%20village,%20Rotorua.pdf) (accessed 1 June 2016).

16 Family correspondence, 2011.

17 Cresswell, *The Hot Lakes Guides*, p.161.

18 Although family conversations reveal tensions between Levuka and his parents and that he and Kahoki may have been ostracized because she was Māori.

19 *Rodney and Otamatea Times, Waitemata and Kaipara Gazette*, 1 November 1922, p.4.

20 *Hawera and Normanby Star*, 17 June 1922, p.6.

21 *The Press* (Christchurch), 21 May 1925, p.14.

22 *The Times of India* (Bombay), 21 October 1924, p.3.

23 *NZ Truth*, 21 March 1925, p.15.

24 *Cairns Post*, 22 July 1937, p.3.

25 *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld), 16 June 1937, p.14.

26 *Cairns Post*, 22 October 1938, p.3.

27 From Kodak 116 roll film. Most of the images are printed on Velox paper, a thin contact paper.

- 28 More commonly and contentiously referred to today as a 'luau'.
- 29 Christopher Pinney, 'How the other half', in C. Pinney and N. Peterson, eds, *Photography's Other Histories*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, p.12.
- 30 Pinney, 'How the other half', p.13.
- 31 Pinney, 'How the other half', p.12.
- 32 Michael Aird, 'Growing up with Aborigines', in Pinney and Peterson, eds, *Photography's Other Histories*, pp.23–39.
- 33 Aird, 'Growing up', p.25.
- 34 Pinney, 'How the other half', p.5.
- 35 Sekula, 'The body and the archive', p.6. (Emphasis in original.)
- 36 Pinney, 'How the other half', p.8.
- 37 Pinney, 'How the other half', p.7.
- 38 See the contributions by Driessens, Tsinhnahjinnie, Pinney, Wright, Behrend, Poole, and Aird in Pinney and Peterson, eds, *Photography's Other Histories*, but also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, London, 2004 (paperback 1st edition); Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the US Empire*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2012; Jane Lydon, ed., *Calling the Shots: Indigenous Photographies*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2014.
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- 54 Gilroy, *Black Britain*, p.23.
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- 63 Abu-Lughod, 'Locating Ethnography', p.263.
- 64 Abu-Lughod, 'Locating Ethnography', p.262.
- 65 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, pp.144–5.