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Title: John William Lindt's Curious Engagement with New Guinea

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Abstract:

This paper aims to assess the multiple discourses that John William Lindt's photographic interest in New Guinea encompassed, connecting the picturesque, commercial and anthropological interests evident in his images. Lindt travelled to New Guinea in 1885 with Sir Peter Scratchley to photograph the indigenous inhabitants of New Guinea when New Guinea's status as a British Protectorate was finally established. Lindt's resulting photographs circulated in a number of forms, including photograph albums, large exhibition prints and postcards as well as in the book *Picturesque New Guinea* (1887). Lindt was a supreme promoter and it is likely that he had promotional interests in mind, encouraging acceptance and interest in New Guinea as a commercial enterprise and as a site of scholarly and anthropological study.

This paper will explore the discourses that Lindt's photographs and writings intersected with, examining notions of indigenous subjectivity. This will also be put in the context of Lindt's papers for the Australasian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society (Victoria), which promoted New Guinea as a site for investment and agricultural development. Lindt's images will be assessed in the light of his extensive written statements but will be placed alongside potential signs of indigenous subjectivity.

The Paper

In this paper I would like to propose that the photographs and publications made by John William Lindt on New Guinea between 1885 and 1888 reveal a contradictory set of discourses and narratives resulting from a conflict between his curiosity about New Guinea and his engagement with institutions which required a level of scientific rigor. There is a tension between Lindt's personal ambitions to be seen as an adventurer and as a scientist at a time when these two positions were beginning to be seen as mutually exclusive. Overall, a majority of the conflicting positions in Lindt's cultural productions are predominantly illustrative of different imperial interests but their internal conflicts provide an opportunity to reflect on the limits to which photographs can be reduced to being seen as agents of imperialism.

Lindt, a German-born naturalised British subject, started photography sometime between 1862 and 1867 with the photographer Conrad Wagner in Grafton in northern New South Wales. Lindt had a very long and prestigious photographic career, ending with his death in 1926. He expressed an interest in photography of ethnographic

subjects in 1872 with the publication of the much discussed *Australian Aborigines*, which was possibly influenced by Wagner's significant photographs of Australian Aborigines in 1865 (<http://libapp.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/spydus/FULL/PM/BSEARCH/2836/439934,3>). Lindt's photographs of Aboriginal subjects severed them from their context and landscape, instead positioning them in the studio with various cultural artefacts, denying cultural change and adaptability. This work was widely appreciated and circulated but Lindt did not pursue it as a subject, possibly because he was not interested in ethnographic subjects who were "degraded" by European contact. A majority of Lindt's photographs, however, were of the landscapes surrounding Melbourne (where he settled in 1876) but he made several journeys through the Pacific including the New Hebrides in 1890 and Fiji in 1892.

Lindt accompanied the expedition of Sir Peter Scratchley, the first and last visit that Scratchley made in 1885 as the appointed British Special Commissioner for New Guinea. The official annexation had been proclaimed in 1884 and Scratchley was sent to organise funding for the provision of his post and the presence of a steamship to enable effective policing. The political position of New Guinea in relation to the Australian colonies was complex and this made funding Sir Peter's post equally so. Queensland desired the territory strategically and for labour, whilst the Foreign Office felt that it was imprudent to claim a colony that was unlikely to be profit making and was outspoken in its refusal to foot the bill for a commission and the policing of the waters. There were also serious concerns regarding Queensland's racial policies, which had been arousing concern not just within political circles but also in the press in Britain. Resolving New Guinea's relationship with Britain and Australia was complex and involved all the Australian colonies; this was considered to be a safety measure so that Queensland's racial policies would be held in check. However, Queensland was the motivating colony and it was hard to reach agreement on how power and finance would be shared and distributed and was complicated by wider debates on the federation of the Australian colonies. This resulted in a year-by-year situation regarding funding until the final agreement was reached in 1888 and New Guinea was officially proclaimed a British colony.

Scratchley's first voyage was an opportunity to select a site for the capital of the Protectorate and acquaint himself with the territory before forming regulations governing settlement. Scratchley, apart from being liked and respected by Lindt, was apparently widely respected in the Australian colonies and was seen as facilitating a joint Anglo-Australian endeavour in the Pacific and a form of sub-imperialism (Trainor, 1994). Lindt's acceptance into Scratchley's party, as an unofficial member, was through a personal introduction by F.T. Sargood (Lindt, 1887, p. ix). He was provided with on-ship facilities for his photography and according to his own account was fully integrated into the social and intellectual life of the expedition. Lindt's interest and curiosity, therefore, reached a practical level when New Guinea's status was still uncertain and it is therefore possible to see his albums and book, especially as they were presented in Britain, as attempts to foster interest in New Guinea as a place, for education and knowledge and for resource exploitation. His presentations of gifts of photographs to Queen Victoria and the Parliamentary Library, whilst creating prestige for himself, also sell New Guinea's credentials as a colony. This is explicitly addressed in his chapter *Historical Account of New Guinea* (Lindt, 1887, pp. 1-10). He is unmistakably pro-empire in that he sees New Guinea as being an acquisition which adds value to the empire for the sake of empire itself (p. 1), but is also openly critical of the dallying of Lord Derby, the then head of the Colonial Office, for not ratifying Queensland's annexation of New Guinea in 1883.

Lindt's photographs of New Guinea circulated widely and include lantern slides for illustrated lectures, especially papers presented to the Australasian Branch of the Royal Geographic Society, multiple copies of a 5-volume album of photographs complete with captions, the book *Picturesque New Guinea*, published in Britain in 1887 with fifty autotype plates (which actually reproduce a total of 55 photographs), enlargements of the photographs presented at exhibition and used in Lindt's studio in Ethelred and in the Hermitage, and a leaflet which accompanied the New Guinea exhibit at the 1888 Centennial International Exhibition Melbourne. This paper focuses on differences between the photographic albums and the book production. The National Archive in Britain and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge hold the albums examined for this paper. The sets of albums are not identical and the small variations between the two are significant [show slide]. [These albums are not the only two sets in existence and there are several copies of the

complete 5-album set in Australia.] The differences between the photographic albums and the book production, however, are greater still.

The contradictory and unresolved nature of Lindt's projects is partly due to the fact that the photographs circulated in these varying formats and different emphases emerge from each cultural production. This is complicated in the book *Picturesque New Guinea*, which had the widest readership, by the differing authorial voices that it contains including that of Sir Peter Scratchley and his private secretary Mr. G. Seymour Fort, the missionary Reverend James Chalmers (F.R.G.S.), Mr. Edelfeld (M.R.G.S.), a naturalist, and the report from an alternative but contemporary expedition conducted to New Guinea in 1885 by Sir Edward Strickland, also F.R.G.S. No wonder *Picturesque New Guinea*, the book, contains such a plethora of discourses. Represented through this list of names we have biology, botany, religion, civilisation, ethnography, trade, commerce, exploitation of materials and labour, in short: imperialism in its material, cultural and political forms. Lindt also adds the dimension of adventure, intrigue, daring and danger to the narrative, undermining in places the new scientific claims and geographical information on places visited or "discovered".

Lindt's interest in New Guinea was self-proclaimed curiosity and started several years prior to his own journey there. [show slide] He says:

Ever since I first passed through Torres Straits in September, 1868, I conceived an ardent desire to become personally acquainted with those mysterious shores of Papua and their savage inhabitants. I travelled this route on board a Dutch sailing vessel, and weird indeed were the tales that circulated amongst the crew concerning the land whose towering mountain ranges were dimly visible on our northern horizon. (Lindt, 1887, p. viii)

It is here in Lindt's narrative that he clearly expresses a yearning for the other and exotic subject, a desire for mystery and travel, for adventure and intrigue. Yet as I hope to show in this paper, his photographs fail to produce visual evidence of savagery and instead depict a largely peaceful and industrious society which Lindt acknowledges would be fit for tourism. The question of resource exploitation is

unresolved; Lindt believes the land would be suitable for cultivation but Scratchley is more aware of the limitations of transportation and communication links. However, the messages emerging from the albums are more subtle and although they also stress tranquillity, picturesqueness, botany, potential richness and fertility of land the presence of the Papuans in the context of their surroundings emerges as a strong and persistent subject and seems to be the primary content of the photographs. Indeed, one of the prominent messages which emerges from the sequence of photographs is that the Papuans live there and the land belongs to them. The picturesque qualities of the photographs remain the most significant aspect, not only for the implied resource exploitation but also for the proposed tourism. There is a tension then, between the photographs as presented in their scientific form, the photographs in the book and the narrative generated through Lindt's writing.

Lindt clearly had an interest in science and botany, but his work was largely conducted under the auspices of the Australasian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society and as Paul Carter (1988) has argued, the RGS was experiencing something of a crisis in their approach to travel and science. As an organisation they were increasingly aware of the need to create information that conformed to the newly emerging scientific standards yet were still rewarding, through medals and prizes, more adventurous and daring expeditions that yielded little in the way of scientific information. With this in mind, I would argue that Lindt's approach to science is influenced by the RGS's grandeur of travel rather than the rigorous and increasingly professionalised approach to science and anthropology emerging at the end of the nineteenth century. The Australasian Branch of the RGS, however, gave Lindt credibility and social mobility and his photographs, and papers that he presented, also enabled him to position himself as an authority on the cultural life, customs, geography and resource exploitation in the Pacific. His photographs were accepted as evidence by the Australasian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society and their scientific and documentary intent, therefore, should not be forgotten. This is complicated, however, by the explicitly commercial endeavour undertaken by the Australasian branch of the RGS, expressed in their published aims, which were broadly scientific, commercial, educational and historical: [show slide]

2. COMMERCIAL – The dissemination of Physical, Commercial and Political Geography among all classes, by means of lectures and publications illustrated by maps, sketches, photographic views etc.

Although the aims of the Australasian Branch of the RGS closely corresponds to the aims of the RGS in Britain, in Britain there is no such explicit attention to the potential commercial outcomes of travel and knowledge gathering.¹ (One could argue, of course, that the distinction is purely academic because the generation and collation of knowledge in Britain did, of course, lead to resource and labour exploitation! But in Britain this was usually through diffuse rather than direct means.) The significance of the commercial enterprise of the Australasian Branch of the RGS, which was established in 1883, coincides with Melbourne's most prosperous years when many wealthy Victorian residents were looking outside of the state to make financial investments (Trainor, 1994). It has been proposed that it was this need to find markets outside of the colony of Victoria which made Queensland's intervention in New Guinea of interest because it potentially created a new market for overseas investment. That Lindt had an interest in plantations, labour and capital investment was demonstrated in his papers from the New Hebrides group but was not so insistently addressed in his writings on New Guinea. (Lindt, 1891). James Ryan (1997) and Simon Ryan (1996), however, have argued that the purpose of the picturesque, especially in a colonial context, was to demonstrate the potential productiveness of the landscape, and in places, Lindt's photographs reveal precisely that but deny the visualisation of the plantations that the Motu and Koitapuan have created for themselves, even though they are reported on in the narrative [show slide]. The exclusion of the plantations happens in both the book and the album formats and instead photographs are chosen which reinforce the idea that New Guinea is naturally plentiful (however, this image shown here was not used in the book at all). Hiding the plantations made by the Motu and Koitapu also allows their industry to be elided.

Taking a closer look at the albums, it is possible to see that Lindt was not systematically mapping place or setting the scene (in comparison with other travel albums there is no sense of arrival, disembarkation, first meetings etc.) However, what I want to argue is that the albums, which contain no commentary beyond the individual captions of photographs, are more scientific than the book *Picturesque*

New Guinea, but there are still references to the broader project of imperialism. The scientific character of the photographs is created through the clear captioning and lack of accompanying narrative and the photographs have the impression of being left to speak for themselves rather than being influenced by politics or self-aggrandisement. This is actually something of an illusion as the captions point to several different agendas and the picturesque itself is also a highly influential structuring device. There is still a clear difference between the political, commercial, religious and humanitarian interests in the text and the quieter rhetoric of the photographs.

The first photograph in the albums reveals an extraordinary conglomeration of subjects [show slide], “exotic” female Pacific islanders, a view of the harbour, and the settlement of Elevala Island. Elevala Island is later explored by Lindt, and he marvels at the buildings in the water. A reference to the Mission Station is made through the title but we are never actually shown it, although there are a number of views that Lindt created from the grounds of the station. The photograph depicts a cleared and tended area, much in the way that a garden would be tended but the sense of the imperial view and controlling space and the subjects should also not go unmentioned. This particular photograph is demonstrative of a specific trend in Lindt’s work, which is that it is sometimes not clear what the purpose and primary subject of the photograph is. This is not an inadequacy of his photographic style or technique but a desire to include or reconcile too many items, or contradict the pictorial purpose of the photograph with a factual caption. Here I’m borrowing a reading of Eugene Atget’s work proposed by Molly Nesbit where she claims that Atget’s photographs suffer from an excess of signs. In Atget’s case it was because he could imagine satisfying more than one client with a single photograph, and in a sense I propose that we can see the same thing happening here, more than one subject for more than one purpose.

Taking another example of this trend [show slide] the caption tells us that the primary interest in this photograph is the Sago palm, which produces a crop. However, it is not clear how many types of palms are included in the photograph, and the overall emphasis on landscape rather diminishes the importance of any particular subject. The water carriers, however, are what most disturb us from the practical appreciation of the palms; their posed stance and turned backs demonstrating the position of the pots

on the back and shoulder. Lindt made several images of this activity, apparently being hypnotised by the naked upper torsos and this specific cultural and practical activity. This is the only photograph to apparently address the specific subject of the sago palm directly, even though they are likely to be depicted in other photographs. The caption makes no mention of the water carriers, even though they are clearly significant within this photograph and probably illustrate a journey undertaken for water [mention the path]. The water carrier, as an activity of importance indicated through the caption is only mentioned in this photograph [show slide], but here we are confronted again with the setting, the inclusion of a banana tree which at the very least tells us that we are somewhere exotic, and the desirability of the young woman in question. This is not only a photograph of water carrying, but also tells us about her clothing, her adornment (the necklace) and a regular path worn through the landscape. Lindt's photographic activity therefore has a tendency to include many signifiers, but in the presentation and distribution of information, his captions point towards and create emphasis not expressed in the photograph itself. It might also be suggested that he created photographs which conformed to the aesthetic logic of the picturesque, but for scientific and scholarly purposes a specificity of subject was required and was posthumously created in the editing and labelling of images.

[Show slide] There are several photographs that are significant for comprehending the movement of indigenous people through the Pacific and the hierarchy which was established between different races. H.O. Forbes, photographed here with his Malay servants, claimed that they were "faithful and trustworthy" but we do not know what became of them on this particular journey nor how they interacted with the Papuans; they exist only in relation to the main members of the expedition and not in relation to the indigenous inhabitants.

The mixture of ethnicities in New Guinea was already complex, not least because of missionary influence, which had been established in 1870. Although there were four British missionaries stationed on New Guinea, a majority of the missionary work was conducted by Christians from the Hervey Group and their separate status and standing in the community is clear in the photographs that Lindt made. Lindt is approving of the missionary work being conducted in New Guinea and sees a positive benefit to the various indigenous groups that he meets. However, there is an odd slippage of

language when referring to the teachers as he refers to them as ‘Native Teachers’ [show slide]. Lindt probably means ‘Teachers of Natives’ yet his shortened title reveals an ambiguity that indicates a difficulty in enunciating the changes of populations and their geographical specificity. This particular photograph, which belongs to a set of photographs confirming the respectability of the teachers in question, has an ambiguous background. The position of the flag (which proclaims New Guinea as British territory) emphasises the geographical position of this landscape and these inhabitants, but there seems to be an uncomfortable undertone here provided by the man with the axe. It is almost as though the native teachers are being supervised. There may well be an alternative explanation of the work as the preceding image also reveals Scratchley and his party at rest, and one wonders if this was the other half of the image [show image]. The native teachers and the crew of the boat, while part of this party, are socially segregated from the “official” party.

There is a lot about these images which escape the boundaries and conventions of scientific photography. Lindt did express reservations about his text and indicated that he saw the photographs as the primary content of *Picturesque New Guinea*, but this is not sustained in the presentation; there is so much text in comparison to the images that this particular book is a far cry from “a book of photographs with letterpress” which indicates that the visual material takes precedence and that the letterpress is less substantial. Lindt’s book is dominated by his own account of the voyage and by the appended reports, including that of Sir Peter. There was no doubt in his mind about the strategic importance of New Guinea to Australia and that New Guinea should be governed for the benefit of the Papuans, not for the settlers. This latter remark was probably an attack on Queensland’s interest in the labour trade but he felt strongly that new labour from surrounding islands should not be brought into New Guinea, quite possibly as he had already some experience of intervening in the disputes between communities. Lindt, however, saw New Guinea as a valuable resource and developed this specific aspect for the International Centennial Exhibition Melbourne where crops and timber are listed for potential economic exploitation.

The photographs selected for the book avoid any duplication of subject unless it enabled comparison of different building types. (The avoidance of duplication of subject was probably connected to the economic constraints of autotype printing.)

Although the book opens with the Motu Water Carrier none of the other photographs of young women appear in the book unless there is a significant point of departure in interest in cultural activity or building style. This may also be connected to a desire to be more demure in photographs shown in a public context. The emphasis on the buildings makes the book a useful tool for tracing types of buildings and the places that they could be found. Other significant subjects for the book include cultural practices such as overground burial in wooden structures and trade. Trade, as a theme for the photographs is not developed, however, and trading places are photographed in a way that creates doubt about the nature of markets and the exchange of goods.

[Show slide]

The boats (lakatois) built by the Motu, however, are given significant visual presence in the book and their relationship with trade is developed in the text. The photographs, however, do not really do justice to the dynamic situation, and although they attempt to show loading, boat racing and departure for trading, the boats and activities still look static. [Show slide] They do provide considerable visual spectacle whilst also demonstrating able building and sailing skills which were appreciated not only by Lindt but also by Rev. James Chalmers. The purpose of the boats were to transport pots made by the Motu women to the north where they would be exchanged for crops. Trading stops would be made on the way back where the Motu would sell or exchange the crops giving the Motu a significant role in communications and social relationships. There is an attempt in the albums to show all the aspects of this pattern of trade but this is not revealed in the photographs in the book and instead the emphasis becomes one of visual pleasure; the economic and social importance of the trading vessels is not visualised although it can be ascertained by a careful reader.

It is perhaps the failure of Lindt to produce a “savage” indigenous subject that provides at least one opportunity to discuss subjectivity. None of the images in the book or the albums reveal the tensions between different indigenous groups. Mention is made of cannibalism, but death by warfare and disease are reported as being more likely. Sir Peter is also called upon to hear disputes between white traders and indigenous subjects but these two events are not imaged. In each instance it is the white trader that is perceived as being the antagonising problem. There is one incident where chiefs of Garia and Saroa are called on board to discuss their grievances

against the Kaele, whom they have been attacking [show slide]. Lindt describes the scene at length, but regards the chiefs as children who are effectively led by Sir Peter in his negotiations. The photograph, however, reveals a dynamic interplay between the chiefs. Peaceful they may be on ship but the poop hardly contains them and their energy: they appear far more spirited than Lindt's narrative would allow. This image also stimulates the impression that instead of the subjects in the album being merely passive and accepting of their new protected status that they are watching us looking at them. Although the exchange of gazes is not equal and the indigenous voice has been lost they show us how many events, including that of taking the photograph, were negotiated.

The albums, I would argue, offer a great opportunity for the development of indigenous subjectivity than the books. The meanings of the photographs are less prescribed and fixed by the weight of Lindt's text. Their institutional status also facilitates different kinds of reflection upon the photograph as mediator. The album that these photographs have been taken from is housed in the National Archive, having been recently removed from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library. The National Archive has become a site where people not only explore Britain's imperial activities but also trace their own family history. It is anticipated that these photographs, which are soon to become accessible to the public, will become part of the material used for tracing individual and social history. The albums at the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology retain more of their ethnographic history and context, but as Elizabeth Edwards has demonstrated at the Pitt Rivers Museum there are ways of opening up the anthropological archive to facilitate the exploration of indigenous subjectivity.

ⁱ Collection, digestion and dissemination of facts for the benefit of members and the public at large. To accumulate a library, to procure specimens of instruments useful for travel, preparing brief instructions for those about to travel, to correspond with other societies and with those in the colonies, and to openly communicate with other societies with which geography is connected.