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Joshua A. Bell

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# Sugar Plant Hunting by Airplane in New Guinea

*A Cinematic Narrative of Scientific Triumph and Discovery in the 'Remote Jungles'*

JOSHUA A. BELL

WRITING ABOUT INDIAN PRINT IMAGES, CHRIS PINNEY ASKS 'CAN ONE HAVE A HISTORY of images that treats pictures as more than simply a reflection of something else, something more important happening elsewhere?' Elaborating on this proposal, Pinney suggests that, instead of images supporting what we 'already know... What... if pictures have a different story to tell... one told, in part, in their own terms?'<sup>1</sup> While scholars have increasingly interrogated photographs to write more critical histories of the Pacific, film has been less significantly examined.<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions are found, however, in the work of Jane Landman and Jeff Geiger, who both use film to investigate Australian and United States colonialism and their accompanying imaginaries.<sup>3</sup> Contributing to this literature on Pacific history as articulated through film, I take up Pinney's challenge to consider film as a source for critical historical narratives, as well as an agent in shaping them. To do so, I discuss the 1929 silent 35-mm black and white film *Sugar Plant Hunting by Airplane in New Guinea*.<sup>4</sup>

Emerging out of an intriguing episode in the global history of sugar, the film chronicles the 1928 Sugar Expedition to the Territories of Papua and New Guinea organised by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: the printed image and political struggle in India* (London 2004), 8.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: photography, anthropology and museums* (Oxford 2001); C. Ballard, A. Ploeg and S. Vink, *Race to the Snow: photography and the exploration of Dutch New Guinea, 1907–1936* (Amsterdam 2001); J.A. Bell, 'Losing the forest but not the stories in the trees', *Journal of Pacific History*, 41:2 (2006), 191–206.

<sup>3</sup> J. Landman, *The Tread of a White Man's Foot: Australian Pacific colonialism and the cinema, 1925–62* (Canberra 2006); J. Geiger, *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the U.S. imperial imagination* (Honolulu 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The 64-minute film is in the Smithsonian Institution's Human Studies Film Archives, Suitland MD (82.7.1).

<sup>5</sup> The history of sugar involves a network of people, places and tastes, in which New Guinea plays an important role as a site of domestication of *S. officinarum* L. The USDA's expedition was one of four trips to New Guinea to collect parent stock for breeding (1928, 1935, 1951 and 1957), and was preceded by a series of Australian expeditions to develop varieties for the Queensland sugarcane industry (1875, 1892, 1893, 1895–96, 1908, 1912 and 1921). E.W. Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua by seaplane: seeking disease-resisting sugar cane, scientists find neolithic man in unmapped nooks of sorcery and cannibalism', *National Geographic* 56 (1929), 253–332; E.W. Brandes and G.B. Sartoris, *Sugar Cane: its origins and improvement* (Washington DC 1936); E.F. Artschwager and E.W. Brandes, *Sugarcane (Saccharum Officinarum L.): origin, classification, characteristics and descriptions of representative clones* (Washington DC 1958); J.H. Buzacott and C.G. Hughes, 'The 1951 cane collecting expedition to New Guinea', *The Cane Growers' Quarterly Bulletin (Queensland Bureau Sugar Experiment Stations)*

The Expedition's primary purpose was to collect sugarcane varieties from which to hybridise cane resistant to mosaic, a virus then ravaging the 'noble' sugarcane (*S. Officinarum* L.) of the Louisiana sugarcane industry.<sup>6</sup> Conceptually conflating 'noble' sugarcane's previously unknown wild progenitor (*S. robustum*) with the perceived primitive nature of the human communities encountered, the Expedition created distinct artefacts and networks, the narratives about which helped sustain colonial imaginaries about New Guinea as timeless and primitive.<sup>7</sup> Within the film, the scientific activities of the Expedition's members are quickly subsumed by the more visually arresting scenes of communities living 'just as primitively as [they] did uncounted thousands of years ago'.<sup>8</sup> While this denial of the coevalness of indigenous communities with 'modern' humankind is far from unique, the articulation through which science, exploration and colonial authority constructed these artefacts and their networks is worth exploring in an effort to understand the ways in which the film participated in the formation of a distinct 'visual economy' of racial difference.<sup>9</sup>

While focusing on *Sugar Plant Hunting*, I acknowledge that the film is part of an assemblage which includes sugarcane, an aeroplane, still and moving cameras, a virus transmitted by aphids, New Guinea communities and government agricultural and business interests. These entities interacted over the course of the Expedition, and the subsequent work in laboratories in Florida, Hawai'i and Java, and at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH).<sup>10</sup> Though an awkward film, *Sugar Plant Hunting* gives a visual presence to aspects of these networks, while also actively partaking in their interactions. Despite being saturated with stereotypes, the film's visual narrative illuminates how the Expedition's members wished to be seen and what the film-makers understood themselves to be doing.<sup>11</sup> Positioning film as an effective and

(footnote continued)

15:2 (1951), 35–72; J.N. Warner, 'Sugar cane: an indigenous Papuan cultigen', *Ethnology*, 1:4 (1962), 405–11; S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the place of sugar in modern history* (New York 1985); P. Ahluwadia, B. Ashcroft and R. Knight (eds), *White and Deadly: sugar and colonialism* (Cammack 1999); F.K. Errington and D.B. Gewertz, *Yali's question: sugar, culture, and history* (Chicago 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Appearing in 1912, by 1926 mosaic had drastically reduced US sugarcane production. J.L. Coontz, 'Sugar cane of New Guinea under inbreeding test here', *Washington Post*, 7 April 1929, 7; G.R. Conrad and R.F. Lucas, *White Gold: a brief history of the Louisiana sugar industry 1795–1995* (Lafayette 1995), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Of the clones collected, 141 of 164 belonged to the 'noble' sugarcane (*S. officinarum* L.), a name derived from its commercial value, thick stalks, colourful stems and high sugar content. Discovering *S. robustum* confirmed for the Expedition that New Guinea was a centre for sugarcane domestication. Newspaper accounts similarly conflated the 'primitive varieties of sugar cane', and the savageness of the communities encountered. Anonymous, 'Flew 10,000 miles in the East Indies. Brandes Expedition of Agriculture Department returning from New Guinea', *New York Times*, 18 September 1929, 20; Anonymous, 'Cannibals cheated of meal by roaring seaplane motor, and so Dr. E.W. Brandes government pathologist lived to tell the tale', *The Evening Star*, 19 October 1928, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 253.

<sup>9</sup> D. Poole *Vision, Race, and Modernity: a visual economy of the Andean image world* (Princeton 1997), 8–9; See also C. Ballard, 'The art of encounter: verisimilitude in the imaginary exploration of interior New Guinea, 1725–1876', in M. Jolly, S. Tcherkézoff and D. Tyron (eds), *Oceanic Encounter* (Canberra 2009), 221–58.

<sup>10</sup> D. Harraway, *Modest-Witness@Second-Millennium. FemaleMan-Meets-OncoMouse* (London 1997).

<sup>11</sup> S. Kracauer, 'The little shopgirls got to the movies', in T.Y. Levine (ed.), *The Mass Ornament: Weimar essays* (Cambridge 1995), 294.

affective technology through which visual images are turned into circulating artefacts, I examine the Expedition and its encounters as visually depicted, thereby contributing to the interrogation of colonialism's visual and material processes.<sup>12</sup>

*Sugar Plant Hunting* is a deceptive and partial source. While this partiality is inherent to all media, the film has particular omissions, which are a by-product of its makers' self-aggrandising intentions, as well as the needs and perceptions of the institutions which funded the project.<sup>13</sup> However, brought alongside the Expedition members' photographs, ethnographic collections and texts, one can begin to read the film (and indeed these other materials) 'against the grain', revealing their silences. This enables a more contextual understanding of the film and Expedition, and a more nuanced reading of its members' image- and knowledge-making practices.<sup>14</sup> Editing aside, film's indiscriminate documentation of what moves in front of its lens can yield footage containing details that circumvent the film-makers' intentions and allow for other histories to be told.<sup>15</sup> The film's images enliven the Expedition members' encounters, opening another means by which to consider possibilities not constrained by the film-makers' narrative.<sup>16</sup> *Sugar Plant Hunting* is therefore not only an important source of forensic information about the what, who and when, of the Expedition, but also a way to understand the how and why. Through this examination, I seek to unsettle the Expedition's triumphal visual and textual narratives and present the beginnings of a more multifaceted history of the entanglement of sugarcane, people, place and knowledge.

While space precludes a fuller discussion of their materiality, I turn to the assemblages that the Expedition and the film created and participated within. Following an overview of *Sugar Plant Hunting*, I focus on the Expedition's encounters in the Lake Murray–Middle Fly and the Upper Fly River regions. Here I explore the filmic imaginaries about these locales, together with their slippages, and thus how the film contains cues for other histories and possibilities.

### *Movements and Assemblages*

Although organised by the USDA, the 1928 Sugar Expedition resulted from the collaboration of agricultural, commercial and government interests manifest

<sup>12</sup>D. MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: film, ethnography, and the senses* (Princeton 2006); N. Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: anthropology, travel and government* (Carlton 1994); B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: essays on the reality of science studies* (Cambridge 1999); J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: reason and madness in the exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley 2000); H. Raffles, 'The uses of butterflies', *American Ethnologist*, 28:3 (2001), 513–48; E. Mueggler, 'The Lapponicum Sea: matter, sense, and affect in the botanical exploration of Southwest China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47:3 (2005), 442–79.

<sup>13</sup>It is unfortunately outside the boundaries of this paper to discuss the power dynamics between the Expedition's funders, members and current holding repositories.

<sup>14</sup>B. Douglas, *Across the Great Divide: journeys in history and anthropology* (Amsterdam 1998), 18; M.R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: power and the production of history* (Boston 1995); R.J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: the Denver African expedition of 1925* (Athens, OH, 1997).

<sup>15</sup>See a similar argument for photography in Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 107–26.

<sup>16</sup>G. Dening, 'Empowering imaginations', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19:2 (1997), 423.

in the Colonial Sugar Refining Company of Sydney, the Celotex Company of Chicago, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association and the Administration of the Territory of Papua.<sup>17</sup> Led by Dr E.W. Brandes, principal pathologist in charge of the USDA's Plant Industry's Office of Sugar Plants, the Expedition engaged two other scientists: Dr Jacob Jeswiet, a Dutch sugar scientist renowned for his pioneering work in Java, and Mr C.E. Pemberton, an entomologist who specialised in sugarcane insect pests and worked for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association. Mr Richard K. Peck, aeroplane pilot, cinematographer and photographer, accompanied these men.

Equipped with a Fairchild FC-2WI, in four months the Expedition travelled throughout eastern New Guinea collecting 164 clones of sugarcane, and discovered a new wild species (*S. robustum* Brandes & Jeswiet ex Grassl) from which 'noble' sugarcane was domesticated.<sup>18</sup> Mapping new geographic features, they helped to demonstrate further the capacities of air travel to the colonial government.<sup>19</sup> The Expedition acquired some 428 ethnographic objects, shot some 2,000 photographs, and exposed 4,000 feet of 35-mm film.<sup>20</sup> These materials are now dispersed between the Smithsonian's NMNH, the National Anthropological Archives, Human Film Studies Archive, the National Archives of the United States and the National Geographic Society Archives.<sup>21</sup> While each component of the total archive encapsulates interrelated moments, the only full narrative of the Expedition is found in Brandes' 1929 *National Geographic* article and the film itself.<sup>22</sup>

A decade known for its spectacular economic boom, new forms of technology in the 1920s — particularly the aeroplane, alongside smaller and more portable still and motion-picture cameras — helped to collapse time and space and remake distant places in the colonial imaginary. Enabling new modes of visibility and subjectivity, these technologies transformed travel and popular entertainment, leading to the perception that this was 'the era of the last flowering

<sup>17</sup> While the network's entirety is not yet discernable, Celotex, which made particle board from shredded sugarcane residue, gave the Expedition its plane and facilitated permission from the colonial authorities for the Expedition. The USDA appears to have funded the rest of the endeavour. Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 259; J.H. Galloway, 'The modernization of sugar production in Southeast Asia, 1880–1940', *Geographical Review*, 95:1 (2005), 1–23; Dr Brandes' Expedition to New Guinea (1927–1928), National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A458 AN118/8.

<sup>18</sup> Artschwager and Brandes, *Sugarcane*.

<sup>19</sup> The Expedition was able to clarify aspects of the cartography of the Fly and Strickland Rivers, and Lake Murray. No documents as to the Papua administration's views to the results of this mapping have yet been located. Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 259, 314–15; J. Sinclair, *Wings of Gold: how the aeroplane developed New Guinea* (Bathurst 1983), 279–80.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum from Mr Fisher to Mr LaGrace 25 October 1928, National Geographic Society Archives; Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 255; V.L. Webb, 'Photographs of Papua New Guinea: American expeditions 1928–29', *Pacific Arts*, 11 and 12 (1995), 72–81.

<sup>21</sup> Upon Brandes' death, his wife destroyed his personal papers. Jeswiet's, Peck's and Pemberton's papers have not yet been located. Elizabeth Brandes Goldfandon, pers. comm. 2000.

<sup>22</sup> *National Geographic's* editors helped to make this text more salacious, thus further obfuscating the Expedition's encounters. For a general discussion of editorial considerations in this period, see C.A. Lutz and J.L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago 1993), 27–31; for another narrative about the trip see J. Jeswiet, 'Met de vliegmaschine opzoeknaardenstam-vorm vanhet suikerriet op Nieuw Guinea', *Tijdschrift Nieuw Guinea*, III (1938), 425–7.

of travel-adventure before the globe became flooded by mass tourism'.<sup>23</sup> Steeped in the rhetoric of salvage and participating in the travelogue genre, *Sugar Plant Hunting's* narrative and 'visual witnessing' reinforced the notion that visual technology had redemptive power to preserve disappearing authentic cultural forms. Within this framework, the rhetoric of the film's inter-titles disavowed the agency of communities encountered, portraying them as either children or savages, upon whom the Expedition's members acted.<sup>24</sup>

By 1928, the Pacific held a particular place within this genre. Films such as Osa and Martin Johnson's *Among the Cannibal Isles of the South Seas* and Robert Flaherty's *Moana* capitalised on and helped to create the region's perceived blend of being remote, exotic and populated by savages.<sup>25</sup> While these films and other narratives undoubtedly influenced the Expedition's cinematographers (Peck and Brandes), two other films and their expeditions to New Guinea were particularly influential: *Pearls and Savages* and *By Aeroplane to Pygmy Land*. As has been discussed elsewhere, *Pearls and Savages* was part of an unprecedented world tour by the Australian entrepreneur, photographer and film-maker Captain Frank Hurley, who pioneered the use of an aeroplane in the region.<sup>26</sup> Besides reinvigorating imaginaries about New Guinea's inhabitants as paradoxically timeless yet imperilled by external forces, Hurley's model of expedition-film-publicity venture inspired others such as Mathew Stirling, who participated in the massive Dutch-American Expedition to Dutch New Guinea in 1926. Former assistant ethnology curator at the NMNH, Stirling also pioneered exploration by aeroplane and, while not publishing a major popular account, did a film-lecture tour, which fed popular perceptions about Pygmies.<sup>27</sup> These precedents undoubtedly played a role in the Sugarcane Expedition's narratives through Peck, who was a cinematographer and the assistant aeroplane mechanic in the Dutch-American Expedition. While no supporting materials have yet been located, I believe that Brandes consulted Stirling before undertaking his expedition and it was through his advice that Peck was hired, and that ethnographic materials were collected and given to the NMNH.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> R.J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, 95; see also R. Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: travel, representation, and colonial governance* (St Lucia Qld 2001); J. Ruoff (ed.), *Virtual Voyages: cinema and travel* (Durham 2006).

<sup>24</sup> E. Edwards, 'Performing science: still photography and the Torres Strait Expedition', in A. Herle and S. Rouse (eds), *Cambridge and the Torres Strait* (Cambridge 1998), 133; J. Clifford, 'On ethnographic allegory', in J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography* (Berkeley 1986), 98–121; R. Stella, *Imagining the Other: the representation of the Papua New Guinean subject* (Honolulu 2007).

<sup>25</sup> M. Johnston and O. Johnston, *Among the Cannibals of the South Seas* (1918); R. Flaherty, *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926); L. Lindstrom 'They sold adventure: Martin and Osa Johnson in the New Hebrides', in L.A. Vivanco and R.J. Gordon (eds), *Tarzan was an Eco-Tourist* (New York 2006), 93–110; Geiger, *Facing the Pacific*.

<sup>26</sup> F. Hurley, *Pearls and Savages* (New York 1924); J. Specht, *When the Cause of 'Science' Is Not Enough: Frank Hurley in Papua* (Armidale 2003). Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods*, 48–98.

<sup>27</sup> P.M. Taylor, *By Aeroplane to Pygmyland: revisiting the 1926 Dutch and American expedition to New Guinea* (Washington DC 2006) <http://www.sil.si.edu/expeditions/1926/>

<sup>28</sup> An examination of Peck's materials from both expeditions still needs to be completed.



Beyond the fashionable enthusiasm and various forms of impetus outlined above, one can only speculate about the motivations behind the making of *Sugar Plant Hunting*. This confusion stems from the film's convoluted path to the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archive (HSFA). Shot with an unknown 35-mm camera (both hand-held and on a tripod), *Sugar Plant Hunting* was edited in 1929 under Brandes' supervision in the now-defunct Motion Picture Division of the USDA (1929–76). In 1978, E. Richard Sorenson, a visual anthropologist who worked in Papua New Guinea, rescued the film, extra film reels, photographic prints and glass plates from the decommissioned Motion Picture Division, which he deposited into the National Anthropological Film Center, the HSFA's precursor.<sup>29</sup> The United States National Archives possess the only other extant segments of the film in 16-mm format. The first is 16 minutes of Hula village from *Sugar Plant Hunting*'s sixth reel. The other is an eight-minute educational film, entitled *Sago Making in Primitive New Guinea*, which consists of footage shot near Ambunti, Middle Sepik taken directly from *Sugar Plant Hunting*.<sup>30</sup> Although *Sugar Plant Hunting* appears to have been made for USDA research and promotional purposes, I believe that Brandes anticipated conducting a film-lecture tour, and may well have made the film with this in mind. While the collapse of the stock market shortly after the Expedition's return may have destroyed these aspirations, the National Geographic Society screened the film to illustrate a talk by Brandes entitled 'Where Dwells Neolithic Man'.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to this screening, Brandes showed the Expedition's footage to a National Geographic employee. An unsigned memorandum to Franklin F. Fisher, Chief of the National Geographic's Illustration Division, by the employee, provides the only response to the footage discovered to date. Noting some problems with exposure, views of scenery that 'generally were uninteresting and much too long', and sections where 'there was either no action or very stiff action', the employee comments that

I can see... the making of excellent entertainment... The parts to be preserved would reveal reasonably good lighting and acceptable posing, while the subject-matter would prove diverting and instructive. I have said that the views of scenery were uninteresting, but I must not overlook the fact that in one sense these views possess very real geographic interest. Until Dr. Brandes had visited certain lakes, for instance, many of them were unrecorded, at least by name.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Pam Wintle, pers. comm. 2008; see Sorenson, *The Edge of the Forest: land, childhood and change in New Guinea protoagricultural society* (Washington DC 1976).

<sup>30</sup> The first segment (NWDNM(m)-33.393) came to the National Archives (NA) from the NMNH before the founding of the HSFA, while the later (NWDNM(m)-16-P-119) came to the NA after the decommissioning of the USDA's film unit.

<sup>31</sup> It is unclear whether Brandes gave his lecture on more than one occasion or if his original lecture was postponed. Anon., 'Trips in far lands topics of lectures', *The Washington Post*, 10 November 1929, 12; Anon., 'Dr Brandes to tell adventures in Papua', *The Washington Post*, 28 February 1930, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Unsigned memorandum to Franklin F. Fisher, 11 November 1928. National Geographic Society Archives.



FIGURE 1: Still from *Sugar Plant Hunting* of Brandes taking a photograph, with a Graflex, of Ivan Champion holding sugarcane on the Upper Fly River (Courtesy of the Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institution).

The employee also notes, ‘Dr. Brandes mentions nervousness and imminent hostility of the natives, great humidity and high temperatures as serious obstacles’.<sup>33</sup> Though illuminating of National Geographic’s visual interests, these remarks also highlight Brandes’ perception of danger during the Expedition, which informed subsequent narratives.

Photography was another important means by which the Expedition collected data, particularly around sugarcane. In the same memorandum, the employee comments,

Dr. Brandes told me . . . that his still views had been taken with much greater care. These still views, by the way, treat fully . . . the work of the expedition in securing sugarcane cuttings. . . . The motion pictures touch the topic of sugarcane hardly at all.<sup>34</sup>

While the film’s omission of sugarcane is surprising given its title, it is understandable when one considers that photography was much better suited to document sugarcane *in situ*. Filming, by contrast, appears to have been directed principally at documenting the various encounters of the Expedition members. While it remains unclear what cameras the Expedition members used, within the film Brandes is shown using an unknown Graflex camera model to document sugarcane (Figure 1).

In addition to the Smithsonian’s prints and negatives, the National Geographic Society’s Archive (NGSA) contains images that Brandes sold as

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



part of his publishing deal.<sup>35</sup> Though both collections range from portrait shots of people encountered to images documenting the Expedition and sugarcane, the NGSA collection is more personal and provides intimate glimpses of the Expedition members' activities. While the reasons for these discrepancies are unclear, the NGSA collection demonstrates that photographs were taken for various purposes and that an unknown percentage of these images are now lost. Brandes and Peck took the majority of these images, and Jeswiet took a series of photographs of gardens.<sup>36</sup>

Ethnographic collection was another defining activity. As Brandes tellingly remarks, 'Primarily, of course, we came for cane; yet, important as that quest was, it was only natural that the strange tribes we bartered with were even more interesting than the plant life we found.'<sup>37</sup> 'Fishhooks, safety razor blades, empty cigarette tins and colourful cloth' were an essential means by which Expedition members established social relations with communities and thus negotiated access to gardens. Though the contents of the NMNH's four ethnographic collections vary, the material consists of objects (arrows, bows, feathers, rattan armbands) which were easily transported by aeroplane alongside sugarcane samples.<sup>38</sup> When unable themselves to visit villages and collect objects, Brandes and Peck relied on community members bringing them materials. As a result, the collections have embedded within them traces of indigenous selection and thus their agency. The survey quality of the trip and the perishable nature of cane cuttings also meant that the Expedition only stayed on foot within a locale for 'a few hours or a few days' before flying back to the base camp. These constraints limited what could be accomplished.<sup>39</sup>

*'A Party of Three Scientists and an Airplane Pilot View Vast, Rich Island Empire, Discover Rivers and Lake'*

With the above as its first inter-title, *Sugar Plant Hunting* introduces the Expedition. Deploying a well-known travelogue visual trope, Brandes' finger traces their steamer's route from New York to Samarai via Auckland and Sydney on a globe. Their arrival story follows the display of regional maps and consists of an eight-minute montage in which the aeroplane is loaded in New York, and

<sup>35</sup> The Smithsonian's NAA possess 149 mixed glass-plate negatives and positives, as well as numerous prints (91–8). The NGSA has 133 prints, 99 of which were published in Brandes' 1929 article. If his claims of taking 2,000 photographs are to be believed, then images remain to be found. Letter from G.H. Governor to E.W. Brandes, 30 October 1928, National Geographic Society's Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Brandes also used photographs taken by Father Franz Kirschbaum (see below), and by Alfred Gibson, who ran a photographic studio in Port Moresby. More photographs by these and other members of the Expeditions have yet to be found. Webb, 'Photographs of Papua New Guinea', 73; M. Quanchi, *Photographing Papua: representation, colonial encounters and imaging in the public domain* (Cambridge 2007), 55.

<sup>37</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 304.

<sup>38</sup> Brandes assembled the largest collection, which he donated on 25 July 1929 (NMNH 106509). He purchased the second collection of objects from Percy Robinson, the long-term manager of Ogamobu Plantation on the Kikori River (NMNH 106585). After his premature death, Peck's mother-in-law Mrs C.A. Kleinoscheg donated the last two accessions on the 25 January and 15 October 1936 (NMNH 137754 and 131988). It is presently unclear whether Jeswiet or Pemberton collected objects.

<sup>39</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 295; Brandes and Sartoris, *Sugarcane*, 568.

the voyage through the Panama Canal to New Guinea is celebrated. The viewer is similarly transported over great distance to encounter supposedly untouched communities. Enchanted by the enabling capacities of their own technology, the Expedition consistently saw stasis and timelessness where there was movement and history.<sup>40</sup> For example, the first scene of Papua shot in Samarai consists of footage of men in outrigger canoes next to the Expedition's aeroplane. This juxtaposition establishes a leitmotif of the film and the Expedition members' photographs, whereby the self-perceived superiority of Western technology is affirmed over the supposed primitive mentality and technology of communities in Papua and New Guinea.<sup>41</sup> Aspects of the film footage, however, belie this intent and reveal the agency of these communities and their connections to the wider world. This is where the dissonance of the film's inter-titles and the footage itself becomes apparent. While inter-titles draw the viewer's attention to the men — 'Coastal natives of Melanesian type in outrigger canoe. They are distinguished by mops of frizzle hair' — plainly visible on the shore are the infrastructure of the colonial government and economy, such as warehouses.<sup>42</sup> Ignoring the presence of these buildings, along with questions of how the men in their canoes are entangled within the economic networks of these structures, the film conflates material culture and physical appearance as markers of race and temperament. Here, simplicity is inferred by differences in technology, and communities are marked as somehow less civilised. Such dissonances between the realities of the lives of community members and the film's projection of primitive mentality onto them are found throughout *Sugar Plant Hunting*. Bringing these otherwise unmentioned, but visually present, aspects of the colonial realities of Papua and New Guinean communities to the fore helps to destabilise the notions of racial inferiority pronounced by the film's inter-titles, and to recontextualise the encounters of the Expedition (Figure 2).<sup>43</sup>

Reinforcing the technological difference foregrounded in this scene, the film contains multiple aerial shots. The trip to Port Moresby consists of a panoramic pan in the cockpit, and aerial shots of the coast, villages and gardens which are interwoven with celebratory inter-titles: 'New Guinea's natural scenery is enchanting from the air — and the features attributable to primitive man even more thrilling when seen for the first time.' Aerial travel and surveillance were central to the Expedition members' redefining of ways of seeing, and exploring New Guinea.<sup>44</sup> The panopticism afforded by these aerial views was illusory, and worked to obscure the Expedition members' perceptions of the communities' movements and histories. As the film unfolds, the aeroplane is a constant

<sup>40</sup> J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: how anthropology makes its objects* (New York 1983).

<sup>41</sup> See Quanchi, *Photographing Papua*, 140–2.

<sup>42</sup> M. Demian, 'Canoe, mission boat, freighter: the life history of a Melanesian relationship', *Paideuma*, 53 (2007), 89–109.

<sup>43</sup> Though Brandes is the presumed source for the inter-titles, the extent of his knowledge of anthropology is unclear. For discussions of misunderstandings of anthropology of the time, see N. Thomas, *Out of Time: history and evolution in anthropological discourse* (Cambridge 1989); B. Douglas and C. Ballard (eds), *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the science of race 1750–1940* (Canberra 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods*, 48–98.

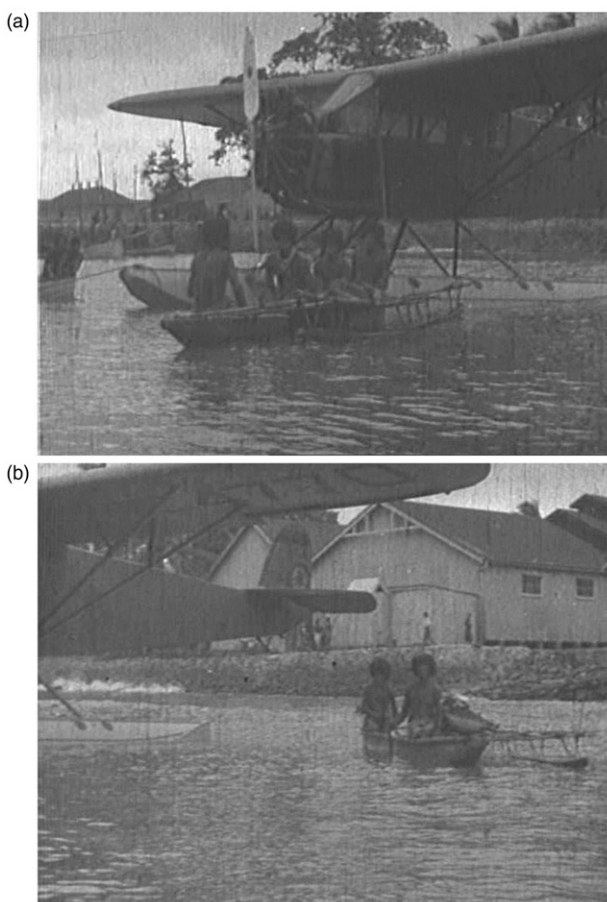


FIGURE 2: Stills from the footage of the Expedition's aeroplane at Samarai surrounded by men in their outrigger canoes. In the background a whaleboat is visible, as are various stores and government buildings (Courtesy of the Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institution).

presence, either as a means by which images are obtained, or as backdrop or stage for encounters. Montages of the aeroplane taking off and aerial scenes of the countryside are repeatedly deployed to reiterate its centrality, such that the aeroplane itself becomes a mode of representation, a condensed icon of modernity.<sup>45</sup>

By contrast, the film largely glosses over the Expedition's other equipment. A short scene of supplies on the chartered auxiliary ketch *Vanapa* becomes

<sup>45</sup>J. Ruoff, 'Introduction', *Virtual Voyages*, 6–9.

shorthand for the Expedition's ten days in Moresby obtaining provisions, which consisted of

1,150 gallons of aviation gasoline... tons of tinned food and rice, 3 portable boats with outboard motors, 6 wall tents and 39 tent flies, and usual complement of cots, blankets, fine-mesh sleeping nets, arms, ammunitions, hospital goods, and an assortment of scientific supplies, including still and motion-picture cameras...<sup>46</sup>

The Expedition also involved an array of colonial intermediaries who made their travel possible: eight armed Papuan Constabulary, and their commanding officer Assistant Resident Magistrate Ivan Champion; the camp manager Roy Bannon who supervised a crew of eight Papuans, including Gano, the cook, Euki, the wash boy, Emere, the aeroplane's crew, and Nape, Brandes' assistant.<sup>47</sup> These individuals and infrastructure are temporarily foregrounded through panoramic shots of the base camp at Everill Junction on the Strickland River and of the Expedition's members, which are interspersed with a scene of the constabulary force drilling. These segments, particularly the latter, are remarkable visual documents of the performance that colonialism entailed, and its various negotiations.<sup>48</sup> Other Europeans encountered are unevenly shown in the film. While Father Kirschbaum of the Marienberg Mission, who assisted Brandes and Peck in their visit to the Sepik appears in the film, Caroline Mytinger and Margaret Warner, American socialites who hitched a ride on the *Vanapa* to Everill Junction do not.<sup>49</sup>

While waiting three weeks for the *Vanapa* to reach Everill Junction, the Expedition collected sugarcane around Moresby, along the coast in the Central Province and in the Papuan Gulf. A short sequence of the latter appears after footage of the Lake Murray–Middle Fly and the Upper Fly River area, while the longer scenes of Hanuabada, Elevala, Hula and Aroma appear at the film's end. Despite the reasons for this non-chronological editing remaining unclear, I suggest that Brandes strategically positioned the segments in this way so that the film proceeded directly to the Expedition members' 'discoveries' in the interior. In this way, the appropriate mix of tension and expectation is preserved, and the more 'civilised' communities of the Central Province become a foil by

<sup>46</sup> Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 267–8.

<sup>47</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 267. Champion's experiences with C.H. Karius exploring the Upper Fly River in 1926–27, made him the logical choice for the Expedition. C.H. Karius, 'Exploration in the interior of Papua and North-East New Guinea', *The Geographical Journal*, 74:4 (1929), 305–20; see I. Champion, *Across New Guinea from the Fly to the Sepik* (London 1932); J.P. Sinclair, *Last Frontiers: the explorations of Ivan Champion of Papua*. (Queensland 1988).

<sup>48</sup> C. Gosden, 'On his Todd: material culture and colonialism', in M. O'Hanlon and R.L. Welsch (eds), *Hunting the Gatherers: ethnographic collectors, agents and agency in Melanesia, 1870s–1930s* (New York 2000), 227–50; A.I.K. Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother: the world of the Papua New Guinea colonial police* (Honolulu 1998); Stella, *Imagining the Other*.

<sup>49</sup> Mytinger and Warner travelled throughout the Solomons and New Guinea painting portraits (1926–30). Though noted in Brandes' *National Geographic* article, their absence in the film extenuates the masculine achievement of the Expedition members. Though not mentioned by name, the Expedition also interacted with patrol officers in Kikori, Lae and at Ambunti, along with Moresby residents Beatrice Grimshaw, Lt Governor Murray and F.E. Williams. Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 267, 316, 321, 326, 331; C. Mytinger, *New Guinea Headhunt* (New York 1946), 347–92.

which the remoteness of Lake Murray–Middle Fly and the Upper Fly River communities are heightened.

Leaving Everill Junction in early August, Brandes and Peck flew to Moresby and proceeded by air to Madang, where Father Kirschbaum joined them. Using the Ambunti police station as a base, the three explored by plane the Middle Sepik and made a short excursion to the Upper Sepik. The film disjointedly represents these visits with a brief focus on an unnamed village in the Upper Sepik, and the western Iatmul village of Nyaurangai (Jaurangi in the film). The only substantial footage from this time lies in Brandes and Peck's documentation of sago preparation near Ambunti. The film then shifts to villages around Moresby and along the Aroma coast, where extended filmic portraits of people, their dress and architecture echo earlier photographic preoccupations of previous visitors.<sup>50</sup> The extended footage of clothed Hula villagers holding their bibles is not remarked upon and any higher status that viewers might infer from these materials and inter-title references to their Polynesian blood, beauty and absence of headhunting, is qualified by placing the Hula villager's status as civilised in quotation marks. Absent from the film are any comments about the activities of Jeswiet and Pemberton who, escorted by Champion, collected sugarcane near Rigo while Brandes and Peck travelled around the Sepik.<sup>51</sup>

The film ends with the Expedition's reunion in Port Moresby's harbour, followed by disjointed scenes from the steamer trip to Australia, where once again the aeroplane is featured, and the purpose of the Expedition reiterated through a scene of Brandes watering collected sugarcane cuttings (Figure 3). Absent from the film are any references to the planting of sugarcane samples in the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Sydney facilities before the departure for Vancouver by boat; or the shipment of the sugarcanes by rail to Washington DC, and then to a 'detention greenhouse' in Arlington VA, where after a year they were sent to an experimental station in Florida for breeding.<sup>52</sup>

*'Tens of Thousands of Square Miles of the Earth's Surface Never Looked Upon by White Men Before': Lake Murray–Middle Fly and the Upper Fly River*

The Expedition's activities at Everill Junction during July are the film's most explicitly romanticised sequences, and where perceptions of the remoteness and savageness of those encountered are starkest. As the inter-title that forms this section's title indicates, the Expedition's movements captured on film in this region were steeped in the rhetoric of pioneering exploration.<sup>53</sup> These perceptions obscured the regional and global networks by which these communities were

<sup>50</sup> Quanchi, *Photographing Papua*, 111–25.

<sup>51</sup> Sinclair, *Last Frontiers*, 85; I. Champion 'Rigo District with the American Sugar Commission for the purpose of collecting canes', *Port Moresby Patrol Report* (Canberra 1928), G91, Item 555, Reel 45, University of San Diego Special Collections MSS 53 Microfilm.

<sup>52</sup> Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 332; Artschwager and Brandes, *Sugarcane*, 34–5.

<sup>53</sup> Compare with Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 284–5.



FIGURE 3: Still of Brandes, tending to sugarcane cuttings on a steamer bound to Sydney (Courtesy of the Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institution).

connected to outsiders, and their cosmologies of engagement with nonhuman actors.<sup>54</sup> Echoing colonial administrative rhetoric, and anthropological misperceptions of New Guinea populations of the time, the regions become foils for one another with Lake Murray–Middle Fly communities being characterised by their headhunting and cannibalism practices, while those of the Upper Fly River are Negritos, ‘remnants of a vanishing race . . .’ whose ‘diminutive, likable people must be regarded with compassion’.<sup>55</sup> Yet filmic and textual ruptures concerning these encounters subvert such narratives.

Though the Lake Murray–Middle Fly footage is a confusing composite of unnamed locales, Brandes did record village names while collecting artefacts, thus providing a sense of the Boazi and Zimakani speaking communities encountered.<sup>56</sup> On the main body of Lake Murray, they visited Kaundoma and Maravu, while on the Strickland they visited Davom and Miwa. They also ventured to Daviumbu Lagoon, and ‘discovered’ Wam Lagoon, which they named Lake Herbert Hoover.<sup>57</sup> Though briefly mentioned in Brandes’ article,

<sup>54</sup> M. Busse, ‘Sister Exchange among the Wamek of the Middle Fly’, PhD thesis, University of California (San Diego 1987); P. Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise: trade cycles in outer Southeast Asia and their impact on New Guinea and nearby islands until 1920* (Boroko 1996); R.L. Welsch, ‘Pig feasts and expanding networks of cultural influence in the Upper Fly–Digul Plain’, in A. Strathern and G. Strürzenhofecker (eds), *Migration and Transformations* (Pittsburgh 1994), 85–120; M. Busse, ‘Wandering hero stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea: culture areas, comparison, and history’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 20:4 (2005), 443–73; S. Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology: indigenous analysis of social and environmental relations* (Stanford 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Brandes, ‘Into primeval Papua’, 304. C. Ballard, ‘Strange alliance: Pygmies in the colonial imaginary’, *World Archaeology*, 38:1 (2006), 133–55; Stella, *Imagining the Other*.

<sup>56</sup> Mark Busse, pers. comm. 2008; Justin Shaffner, pers. comm. 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Brandes named the lake because of Hoover’s ‘sympathetic promotion of commercial aviation’ and his ‘popularity in Australia’, which derived from his work in the Western Australian goldfields. Brandes, ‘Into primeval Papua’, 259, 314–15.



no filmic reference is made to previous European activity in the Lake Murray–Middle Fly area. This lacuna facilitates the deployment of the tropes of first contact that follow.<sup>58</sup>

The circling of a longhouse in an unnamed adjacent lagoon (possibly Daviumbu) introduces the Lake Murray–Middle Fly region. An inter-title announces ‘First meeting with the headhunters. This village was probably never visited by whites before and the natives were at first prostrated with fear.’ In *National Geographic*, Brandes remarks ‘It goes without saying that we were considered supernatural’.<sup>59</sup> ‘First contacts’ are rife with conflicting perceptions, not the least of which are European misunderstandings of the supposed fear of those encountered. The strong emotions that these encounters provoke may in fact be wonderment at the communities’ capacities to forge social relations with strangers. Of central issue in these encounters for Melanesians was their attempt to turn these encounters into productive conduits for exchange.<sup>60</sup> The wandering hero narratives that informed communities’ understandings of their regional connections undoubtedly complicated these encounters, as did violent and non-violent interactions around the Bird of Paradise plume trade.<sup>61</sup> More telling than Brandes’ posturing is that mutual recognition was soon established through trade. This, however, did not dissuade Brandes from describing this first encounter in his article as involving him heroically advancing with turkey-red calico, while Peck ‘sought to make a deathless film record of our first meeting with the renowned head-hunters’.<sup>62</sup>

Poor lighting appears to have relegated this event to the film’s extra reels during editing. If my identification is correct, any tension present in this encounter is belied by Brandes’ glance to make sure Peck is filming and by Jeswiet’s casual checking of his belt pouch for items of trade. Though the technology differs, the scene and the representational strategies are strikingly reminiscent of other ‘first contacts’ in New Guinea that appeared in written accounts from the turn of the 19th century.<sup>63</sup> While it is unclear how much contact this community had with Europeans, it is clear that, if there is any fear in this footage, it appears to lie in Brandes’ apprehension that Peck may not be filming. As Bloom reminds us, the ‘mediating function [of the camera] serves to make the explorer capable of the act of creation itself. Once legitimised in terms

<sup>58</sup> Such engagements begin with the initial governmental patrol to Lake Murray by S.D. Burrows (1913), and continued with subsequent visits by Lt Governor H. Murray (1914). Luigi D’Albertis’ (1876 and 1877) and Sir William MacGregor’s (1890) exploration of the Middle Fly River prefigured these visits, as did the bird of paradise trade. Frank Hurley also visited the region in the 1920s. Busse, ‘Sister Exchange’, 130–51; Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, 175–203.

<sup>59</sup> Brandes, ‘Into primeval Papua’, 290.

<sup>60</sup> M. Strathern, ‘Artefacts of history: events and the interpretation of images’, in J. Siikala (ed.), *Culture and History in the Pacific* (Helsinki 1990), 25–44; M. Strathern, ‘The decomposition of an event’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:2 (1992), 244–54; E.L. Schieffelin and R. Crittenden (eds), *Like People You See In a Dream: first contact in six Papuan societies* (Stanford 1991).

<sup>61</sup> Busse, ‘Wandering Heroes’; Busse, ‘Sister exchange’, 74–160; Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, 175–203.

<sup>62</sup> Brandes, ‘Into primeval Papua’, 294.

<sup>63</sup> C. Ballard, ‘The art of encounter’; Stella, *Imagining the Other*.

of his particular relation to photographic technology, the explorer can claim complete authoritativeness for his vision.<sup>64</sup>

With this scene unusable, the film moves from the inter-title's positing of local fear to footage of trade. Brandes calmly hands out goods as the assembled men part with their bows and arrows, while Jeswiet and Pemberton load the aeroplane with sugarcane. Transitioning to what I believe is Maravu village on Lake Murray, an inter-title announces: 'Here we bartered for stuffed human heads as well as sugarcane.'<sup>65</sup> Brandes and Peck interact with the men and women who arrive from the aeroplane's pontoons. Hyperbolic inter-titles quickly ensue such as, 'Their faces reflect only primitive bestial passions.' Setting aside these racist categorisations the footage's redemption lies in the glimpses it offers of these transactions, and thus of the Lake Murray men's agency as they determined what the Expedition could collect from the plane's pontoons.<sup>66</sup> While we are not privy to their conversations, the men can be seen passing among themselves bundles of feathers, blocks of sago, as well as basketry gauntlets, for which, upon offering to the Expedition's members, they receive trade goods. We learn from Brandes' article that residents in some communities were so used to Europeans that they demanded trade axes for sugarcane and other objects.<sup>67</sup>

Peck chose not to film his companions during these exchanges, focusing exclusively on the Lake Murray men. Inter-titles make ethnographic assessments of the men's apparel and weapons, thereby layering the footage with anthropological objectivity and authority. Glimpses of Expedition members' pointing hands, and the side of Brandes' head, however, disrupt any distance created through the camera's lingering gaze and its catalogue-like inter-titles (Figure 4). An unpublished photograph by Peck within the NGSA further contextualises this footage. In the photograph, Brandes stands on the aeroplane's pontoon while leaning over the Maravu men, who stand knee deep in the water holding up items for trade, while Pemberton looks on. In one hand, Brandes holds a small Kodak camera to his face, while below the camera he holds a loop of beads. Assuming this image is representative of the Expedition members' practices, it helps explain some of the still and moving images in which people look quizzically up at the camera. Here we see faces not dazzled with fear, but puzzled by the delay and mediation of exchange. Such contextual renderings reveal elements of the intimacy of the Expedition's encounters, the bodily

<sup>64</sup> L. Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American ideologies of Polar expeditions* (Minneapolis 1993), 87–8, cited in R.J. Gordon, 'Introduction', in L.A. Vivanco and R.J. Gordon (eds), *Tarzan was an Eco-Tourist* (New York 2006), 18.

<sup>65</sup> Brandes collected two stuffed heads from the village of Maruva (E344822 and E344822) and one from another unnamed village (E344821). While by 1928 ordinances banned collecting human heads, the laws stipulated that recognised scientific institutions with written permission could export protected objects. To date, no such documents have been located. Brandes does thank F.E. Williams for his assistance with the collection. Williams would have been part of the permission granting process, Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 295–6, 331; M. Busse, 'The National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act', in K. Whimp and M. Busse (eds) *Protection of Intellectual, Biological and Cultural Property in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 2000), 81–95.

<sup>66</sup> M. O'Hanlon, 'Introduction', in O'Hanlon and Welsch (eds), *Hunting the Gatherers* (New York 2000), 1–34.

<sup>67</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 302.

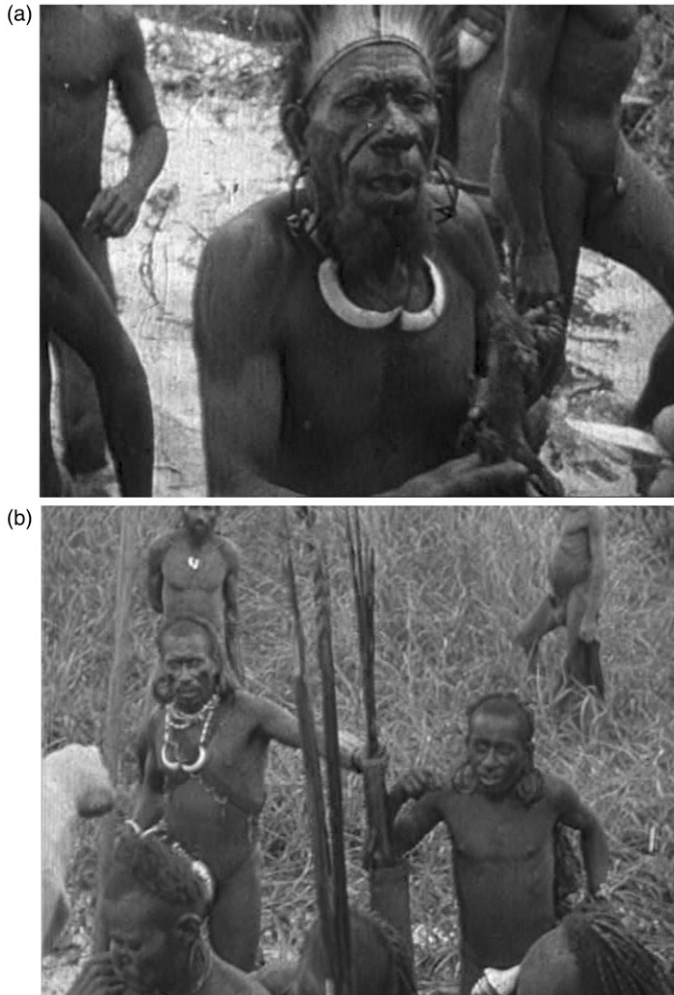


FIGURE 4: (a) Still of a Maravu man handing a headdress in exchange for a mirror or small tin box being offered in the bottom left; (b) Brandes' arm, visible on the image's left, points towards a man as he passes arrows, and fibre basket to a boy (Courtesy of the Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institution).

comportment that Expedition's members image making entailed, and thus how the film's narrative fabricated elements of danger.

On 24 July, Brandes, Peck and Champion flew inland to explore the Ok Tedi and Palmer Rivers. On the west bank of the Upper Fly River below D'Albertis Junction they visited Katingor and Kai-imbi, hamlets of the soon-to-be-vanished Negritos.<sup>68</sup> Here the film participates in the wider colonial imaginary around

<sup>68</sup> Brandes' ethnographic collection records these names. Katingor was situated on the bank of the Fly River (it is unclear as to which bank), while Kai-imbi was five miles inland. In the absence of contemporary settlements in this region and given the histories of movement during this time, without oral histories it is difficult to ascertain who these people were. They are most likely people known today as the Yonggom or the

Pygmies, stressing their antiquity, gentle nature and doomed future.<sup>69</sup> These projections not only obscure the communities' cultural achievements, history and regional interaction with European and Malay visitors, but also configure the Negritos as pre-cultural equivalents to the wild pre-domesticated sugarcane sought by the Expedition. The friendly and energetic Negritos prove themselves allies in the quest for sugarcane, and a welcome break from the 'fierce dispositions' of the Lake Murray–Middle Fly communities.<sup>70</sup>

Following aerial surveillance of the rivers, the team sighted 'small clearings in the jungle concealed from river, with houses built in trees and on 50 foot poles'. Upon landing, the surveillance is reversed, as an inter-title announces, 'we feel eyes on us but cannot locate them'. The camera pans over the aeroplane's wing, and stops on tree houses on the far bank, which are 'apparently hastily deserted'. However, 'The aborigine's curiosity overcomes his fear...', and Champion greets a canoe of five men with a handshake as Brandes looks on (Figure 5). Friendship established, the men proceed to collect sugarcane. Therein follows the only image of sugarcane *in situ*, thereby visually associating a supposedly antique race of man with sugarcane (Figure 1). This association is further reinforced in still images in which local men are pictured holding labels for the Expedition's field photographs of sugarcane.<sup>71</sup> Brandes' more informative written account relates how they 'bartered for weapons and ornaments. The pygmies seemed pleased with the matches, jackplaneblades, safety-razor blades, beads, and cloth.'<sup>72</sup> With no footage of these interactions, the film's only sequence of these encounters consists of a close-up of the five men on the river. Inter-titles help to visualise their racial status by cataloguing (and thus collecting) the men's personal adornment, and short stature (i.e., 'They average 4 feet 6 inches to 5 feet tall') (Figure 7). Brandes' *National Geographic* article further dramatises their otherness through the interplay of images and text wherein the shortness of their stature is contrasted to their soaring tree houses, which are likened to 'huge birdhouses'.<sup>73</sup> Both the film and text naturalise these oppositions, such that these men are not only portrayed 'as the dandies of the Papuan world', but also as being on the verge of disappearing.<sup>74</sup>

An episode in Brandes' article helps throw these rhetorical strategies into doubt. While at Katingor 'one of the real surprises of the trip' occurred when a man, named Jarep, addresses them in Malay. Through Peck, who knew Malay from his time in Dutch New Guinea, the party learns that Jarep worked

(footnote continued)

Awin. Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 304–14; Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, 192–9; Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*.

<sup>69</sup> C. Ballard, 'Collecting Pygmies: the 'Tapiro' and the British Ornithologists' Union Expedition to Dutch New Guinea, 1910–1911', in O'Hanlon and Welsch (eds), *Hunting the Gatherers* (New York 2000), 127–54; C. Ballard, 'Strange alliance'.

<sup>70</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 309; Ballard, 'Strange alliance', 143–4.

<sup>71</sup> See Figure 3 in Brandes and Sartoris, *Sugar Cane*, 568.

<sup>72</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 309.

<sup>73</sup> Seven images appear in Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 289–93, 296, 309.

<sup>74</sup> Brandes 'Into primeval Papua', 307; Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*, 43.

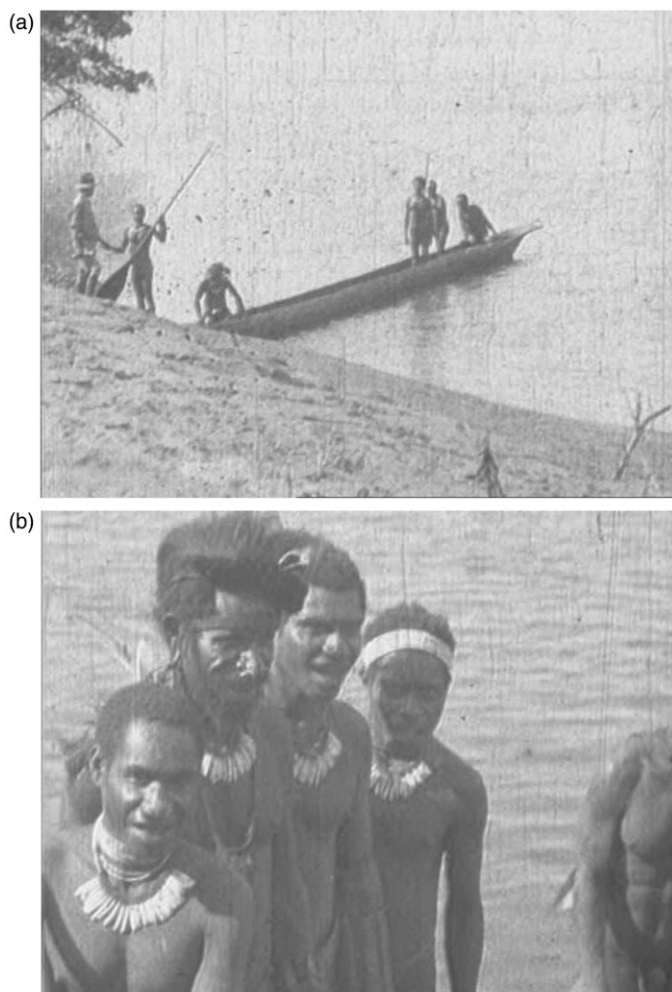


FIGURE 5: (a) Still from footage of Champion shaking hands of a young man on the bank of the Upper Fly River, while Brandes stands off camera to the right; (b) still image from footage of the five men who approached the Expedition (Courtesy of the Human Studies Film Archive, Smithsonian Institution).

in nearby Dutch New Guinea with a band of bird-of-paradise hunters. While only given a glimpse of the conversation that ensues, the encounter brings into view, however partially, Jarep's, and indeed the community's, regional and global connections.<sup>75</sup> While it is possible to over-read such connections, Jarep's activities help disrupt the Expedition's triumphant narrative of discovery, and place the community into a wider context of global trade. The absence of these connections in the film are not surprising, given the ways in which the film's overall effect, and intent, is to telescope space and time, transforming the

<sup>75</sup> Brandes, 'Into primeval Papua', 309 and 311; Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*, 192–9; Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*.

Expedition members' experiences into narratives for consumption. This process flattens out the intricacies of local interactions and histories encountered, in order to construct narratives of adventure, and fantasies of wild men and sugarcane.

WHILE IT MAY BE easy to dismiss expeditions and their films such as *Sugar Plant Hunting*, as Claude Lévi-Strauss famously did in *Tristes Tropiques*, in doing so we lose the opportunity to engage the multiple histories — popular, scientific and local — inscribed in the various artefacts of these endeavours.<sup>76</sup> As I have attempted to demonstrate here, one way forward in our engagement of these materials lies in considering the images generated by expeditions on their own terms, or at least through more contextual analysis.<sup>77</sup> This forces the researcher not to subordinate images to text, but rather to grant images agency in the production and negotiation of histories, and to engage them dialogically with the network of artefacts — texts, photographs, ethnographic collections — in which they were produced and circulated. While far from a perfect process, this serves to expand the scope of histories with which we can engage, and forces consideration of the contradictions, silences and messiness of our sources and narratives.

Produced out of a confluence of government and corporate interests, *Sugar Plant Hunting* is a result of the attempt to save the agro-business of sugar in the United States through the discovery of domesticated sugarcane's wild progenitor. The Expedition's triumphs over nature — both botanical and human — are celebrated through filmed feats of travel and 'discovery' enabled by their aeroplane. This valorisation relied on the fiction that the communities encountered were fixed and timeless. Bringing the 'noble' and wild sugarcane in conjunction with these temporal and racial imaginaries, the Expedition attempted to represent New Guinea as outside time and yet on the verge of massive externally driven transformation. The artefacts and networks created by this Expedition 'render[ed] new territories [and experiences] in terms recycled from familiar generic frameworks'.<sup>78</sup> New Guinea has long been a fertile ground for colonial imaginaries, as well as journeys in which Europeans discover regions already known to, and named by, local communities. *Sugar Plant Hunting* enlarged the scope of these endeavours and their fictions and helped create anew the imagined communities of uncontacted people.<sup>79</sup>

This paper has endeavoured to reveal the nuances that constitute this film and Expedition, thus undercutting their triumphal narrative and opening up room for other histories to emerge. Doing so is bound up with two concomitant goals. The first lies in examining the popular discourses, which borrowed from anthropology and are typified in films of the 1920s and 1930s. These narratives

<sup>76</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. J. and D. Weightman (New York 1992 [1955]), 17–18.

<sup>77</sup> Pinney, *Photo of the Gods*, 8

<sup>78</sup> Landman, *The tread of a white man's foot*, 96.

<sup>79</sup> J. Clifford, *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (Cambridge 1997). N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects* (Cambridge 1991), 178. Stella, *Imagining the Other*.



obscure the realities of the encounters from which these discourses emerged, and obscure the agency of communities in Papua and New Guinea. But doing so is also of particular importance if we are to understand, and deconstruct, the recent deluge of reality shows and quasi-documentary films about New Guinea and the wider Pacific, which unreflectingly perpetuate the stereotypes of films like *Sugar Plant Hunting*. The second goal lies in my belief that these films, though contrived and at times offensive, possess the possibility to be resources for indigenous communities, whose members can rework aspect of these films for themselves, thus making new 'screen memories' as part of their cultural archive.<sup>80</sup> While it might strike some that these goals are at odds with one another, I see each as part of a wider strategy by which more inclusive and critical histories of colonialism in the Pacific can be articulated. Films like *Sugar Plant Hunting* are part of the wider archival and museum legacy of our shared colonial histories which need to be engaged with as a means to make these materials and their narratives open to greater scrutiny. Doing so necessitates engaging in what Werner Herzog invoked as looking 'around the edges or over the top' of images and, through them, rethinking Pacific histories and their multiple sources.<sup>81</sup>

### *Acknowledgements*

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on Chris Pinney's suggestion that images 'narrate a different story, one told, in part, in their own terms', I examine the 1929 silent 35-mm film *Sugar Cane Hunting in New Guinea*. Emerging out of a particular moment in the colonial history of the Territories of Papua and New Guinea, the film and the United States Department of Agriculture Sugar Expedition from which it arose, provide important but largely overlooked glimpses into the workings of colonial science, racial imaginaries and exploration. Examining this film helps restore it to the larger discussion of such events of the 1920s, but more importantly enables a discussion of the narratives constructed and elided by this artefact. Doing so complicates the Expedition's account and repositions the film as an important vehicle for recovering silences in the histories of colonial science, practice and encounter in New Guinea.

<sup>80</sup> F.D. Ginsburg, 'Screen Memories: resignifying the traditional in indigenous media', in F.D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod and B. Larkin (eds), *Media Worlds: anthropology of new terrain* (Berkeley 2002), 39–57.

<sup>81</sup> J. Demme with W. Herzog, *A Pinewood Dialogue* (New York 2008), available online at [http://www.movingimages.us.pinewood/files/pinewood/3/91116\\_programs\\_transcript\\_pdf\\_304.pdf](http://www.movingimages.us.pinewood/files/pinewood/3/91116_programs_transcript_pdf_304.pdf)