

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

CALLISTER, Sandy — *The Face of War: New Zealand's Great War Photography*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008. Pp. 150.

In *The Face of War: New Zealand's Great War Photography*, Sandy Callister sets out to scrutinize “how photographs shaped, and continue to shape” New Zealanders’ memories and understandings of the Great War. In doing so, Callister engages with a myriad of subjects, including, but not confined to, medical photography (in particular photographs of those who suffered facial wounds), memorialization, battlefield photography, and how photographs acted (and continue to act) as a bridge between battle front and home front, war and peace, past and present. The result is a compelling cultural history that not only offers new insight into how the “war to end all wars” affected New Zealanders, but also challenges the traditional photographic remembering of the conflict in which the battlefield has characteristically had primacy.

Callister argues that New Zealanders’ tendency to privilege photographs that portray the “spectacle of war” when seeking images of the conflict have acted to obscure, if not render invisible, other forms of photographic evidence that illustrate the impact of war on the dominion. As a result, New Zealanders’ collective memory of the war has become skewed. By focusing on images of the trenches, primarily those that clung precariously to the hillsides of the Dardanelles, New Zealanders have forgotten much else of their nation’s experience of the war.

No stronger case for this argument is made than in Callister’s exploration of the images of those men who received severe wounds, and particularly those who were wounded in the face. The removal of these disturbing photographs from the view of the public — which began during the war — has caused New Zealanders to forget horrific realities of war and become complacent in the face of euphemisms for wounding, especially since these “broken gargoyles” have long since died. It is in these pictures that we are confronted with the visual definition of “nicked by shrapnel”: a long, deep gouge in the side of a man’s face; eyes blasted from sockets; limbs torn from bodies. It is here we see “vivid and undeniable evidence of the violence meted out to New Zealand soldiers” (p. 101). Importantly, these images also draw attention to those men whose sacrifices are often overlooked in public rememberings of the war: the maimed and disfigured.

The Face of War also offers important insight into how photographs became both loci of memory for and bridges of connection between those who went to war and those who stayed behind. Photographs allowed soldiers to retain a tangible link to their loved ones, no matter where they might be. The reverse was equally true. Photographs of New Zealand's men-folk in uniform not only gave those who stayed within the bounds of Aotearoa a treasured keepsake, but also — in the case of those photographs sent back home from foreign shores — allowed them to share in some of the adventure. Most importantly, photographs provided visual evidence of the sacrifices families had made, particularly if their loved ones had fallen in battle. In this vein, Callister's examination of the way in which photographs were used as proxies for the bodies of loved ones who would never return to New Zealand's shores is of great importance. Acting as personal focal points for the traumatic loss of loved ones for many individuals, families, and communities, photographs became important sites of mourning that are deserving of greater examination by those seeking to examine how New Zealanders grieved and remembered, both individually and as a nation.

As one might expect in such a wide-ranging but relatively short work, there are both general and specific weaknesses. In more than one instance it would have been better if Callister had spent more time teasing out and directly engaging with the complex and intertwining strands of individual points, rather than simply flagging them and moving on to the next, equally interesting, topic of discussion. Callister's argument that overrepresentation of Gallipoli in New Zealand's Great War photography has influenced the way New Zealanders visualize and remember the First World War (p. 52) is one such example. Callister offers no direct evidence to support this provocative statement, which hangs — seemingly as an afterthought — at the end of the introduction to her chapter examining Western Front photography. This is unfortunate because the comment seemingly denies, or at the very least downplays, the importance of many other factors that are often posited as explanations for why Gallipoli holds a central position in New Zealanders' collective memory of the Great War. The traumatic experience of Gallipoli — which was the young dominion's first introduction to the horrific realities of industrialized warfare — became a central foundation in New Zealand's nation-building myth. Critiques of such mythologies aside, the continuing existence of the belief that New Zealand was born on "Anzac's tortured ridges" raises the question of whether New Zealanders visualize the Great War through the prism of Gallipoli because of the relative preponderance of photographs from that theatre of war, or because of the national mythology tied to that event. This question is even more pressing when we consider that Australians — whose national mythology affords Gallipoli a similar position to the one it holds in New Zealand's nation-building epic — also visualize the Great War in a similar manner.

It is also possible to question the way in which Callister reads some of her photographic evidence. For example, a photograph of two soldiers nonchalantly standing in a field in Gallipoli and smiling into the camera evinces, according to Callister, their lack of military professionalism because, in acting like "battlefield

tourists,” they are exposing themselves to snipers. Maybe so, but one might equally argue that the photograph indicates that these two men are experienced soldiers because they knew where it was safe to stand to have their photograph taken (p. 32). Photographs can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways, and, while Callister touches on this point on more than one occasion, she nevertheless fails to engage directly with this issue.

The Face of War is a groundbreaking study that draws attention to importance of photographs as conduits through which to engage with the diverse, complex, and often contradictory aspects of New Zealand’s Great War experience. Moreover, while *The Face of War* focuses on New Zealand’s Great War, Callister’s wider meditations about the use of photography as historical source not only transcends borders, but will also be of use to those scholars engaging with other topics.

Nic Clarke
University of Ottawa

CARTER, Sarah — *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press; Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2008. Pp. 383.

This innovative book brings together a wide range of subjects and sources to pursue a theme not previously articulated in a single work. Sarah Carter’s focus is actually sharper than the title conveys. Canadian authorities and church leaders in this period did not simply promote marrying one spouse of opposite gender. They insisted on a particular form of marriage: exclusive, lifelong, and intolerant of divorce or separation for any reason except death. Carter highlights the startling fact that, up to less than a century ago, the only legal path to divorce in Canada was through an act of parliament.

Although the pressures increasingly placed on First Nations people, from the 1800s onward, to marry in conventional church ceremonies and to eschew polygamy have often been discussed, the extent to which other groups — notably Mormons, Doukhobors, and Quakers — were pressed to conform to mainstream practices is little known. The relative powerlessness of these newcomers to the West afforded them little chance to articulate or defend their practices in the face of Canadian courts and authorities. Carter effectively maps this “diverse marital landscape of western Canada” (subtitle, chapter 2) and the campaigns aimed at “making newcomers to western Canada monogamous” (title, chapter 3). In placing their stories first, she demonstrates that monogamy was not just an “Indian” issue; Canadian authorities also challenged non-conforming minorities of European background. These groups, often small and dispersed, were less successful than established Aboriginal communities in subverting and resisting the pressures imposed on their modes of marriage and divorce.