

Children as Protagonists in Colonial History

Watching Missionary Photography

MARLEEN REICHGELT

Although researchers have been pointing to the central position of children in colonial ‘civilising’ projects for years, colonised children remain a historical population that is notably hard to research. This article engages colonised children as central historical actors, by using a collection of missionary photographs taken in Dutch New Guinea (present-day West Papua) between 1905-1925 to study Marind children’s lived experiences and changing positions in a society increasingly dictated by Dutch colonial governance. By applying Ariella Azoulay’s method of ‘watching’ photography, in other words by examining the temporal and spatial dimensions in which the participants in the event of photography moved and interacted, this article aims to approach photographed children as protagonists in colonial history. This approach offers contrasting perspectives to the dominant missionary discourse in the textual archive in which children constitute a marginal and passive presence. Photographs not only have the power to make children visible and transform faceless masses into individuals, but – crucially – allow for a historical analysis centred around children’s movements, actions, and bodies. Children and their bodies – where they were located, which skills they had to learn, the clothes they wore – were the subject of decades-long Dutch colonial policy. Photographs are an indispensable source for recognising and understanding the implementation of this policy as well as colonised children’s responses to it. Watching photography allows historians to see and study young individuals whose lives were in no way marginal, and should be brought into focus in colonial history.

Onderzoek heeft uitgewezen dat kinderen een centrale positie innamen in koloniale ‘beschavingsprojecten’ en daarin uiteenlopende rollen vervulden. Niettemin is de aanwezigheid van kinderen in koloniale archieven vaak gering, anoniem en indirect en blijven gekoloniseerde kinderen bijgevolg een moeilijk te onderzoeken historische groep. Dit artikel beoogt om gekoloniseerde kinderen als historische actoren centraal te stellen, door middel van een analyse van een collectie foto’s gemaakt door missionarissen in Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea (het huidige West-Papua) tussen 1905-1925. Het doel is om de leefwerelden en de veranderende sociale posities te bestuderen van kinderen in een samenleving die in toenemende mate werd gedicteerd door het Nederlandse koloniaal bestuur. Met behulp van Ariella Azoulay’s methode van ‘watching photography’, waarmee zij bepleit om de temporele en ruimtelijke dimensies waarbinnen de deelnemers aan het fotografisch proces zich bewogen in ogenschouw te nemen, worden gefotografeerde kinderen als protagonisten in koloniale geschiedenis geconcipeerd. Deze benadering contrasteert met het dominante discours in het tekstuele missiearchief, waarin kinderen een marginale rol spelen en als volgzzaam gepresenteerd worden. Foto’s maken kinderen niet alleen zichtbaar en als individuen identificeerbaar, maar maken daardoor ook historische analyses mogelijk van de verplaatsingen, de handelingen en de lichamen van de kinderen. De lichamen van jonge mensen – waar ze zich bevonden, de vaardigheden die ze leerden, de kleding die ze droegen – waren vele jaren de inzet van Nederlands koloniaal bewind. Foto’s zijn een onmisbare bron als we dit koloniale beleid, maar ook de respons van de gekoloniseerde kinderen zelf hierop, willen kennen en begrijpen. De methode van ‘watching photography’ maakt een historische analyse mogelijk met deze jonge individuen, wier leven op geen enkele manier marginaal was en die een centrale plaats in de koloniale geschiedschrijving zouden moeten innemen.

I want you to look at the first photograph in this article (Figure 1).¹ It will likely take a few moments before the sepia-coloured scene starts to make sense, before you perceive the intricate hair extensions and three pairs of young legs, and realise you are studying the backs of people. A trained eye will perhaps recognise this image from a catalogue of ethnographic photography: images intended to classify types rather than identify individuals.² With this

1 I am indebted to my PhD supervisors Geertje Mak and Marit Monteiro, the COACC network and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments, constructive criticism and enthusiastic support. This article is part of my PhD project *Making the colonial child visible: Children moving*

between Indo-European and local cultures on Netherlands New Guinea (1905-1962) (2017-2022), funded by the Radboud Institute for Culture & History (RICH) at Radboud University, Nijmegen.

2 Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham 2017) 49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373582>.



▲
Figure 1. AR-PO27-20153 (no. 228154).

photograph, I could discuss the anthropological aspirations of the missionary-photographer. I could provide an analysis of the reproductions of this photograph in missionary journals and popular books, in terms of Catholic sensibilities to the (female) body, for example, or of the ethnographic studies which it illustrated. I could argue how the archival conditions in which this photograph is preserved testify to missionary narratives of conversion and success, on the one hand, and a longing for ‘the exotic’, on the other.³ After all, these are physical and narratological contexts in which this image has been embedded throughout the 110 years of its existence. One thing all these narratives have in common: the girls in the picture are reduced to passive objects on display.

The nature of photography also allows for an entirely different analysis, as Ariella Azoulay has argued.⁴ In this article, I combine her method of ‘watching’ photography with Clare Anderson’s approach of subaltern prosopography in order to perform an analysis that is not centred around the use or meaning of the photograph, but around the act of photography and, principally, the people participating in it.⁵ Taking up Tina Campt’s challenge to move beyond frames of stillness or subjection and engage photographs through a lens of mobility, I will analyse the actions, movements and encounters inscribed in three ensembles of photographs of young Marind on Dutch New Guinea to study the engagement of colonised children with the Catholic mission in its formative years, between 1905-1925.⁶

Children in missionary photography

The reason I ask you to look at this photograph is because encountering the girls pictured in Figure 1 has been the most striking aspect of my research. As I digitised and disclosed the photographic archive of the Catholic mission of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (*Missionarii Sacratissimi Cordis* – MSC) on Dutch New Guinea I found myself surrounded by children.⁷ Children laughing, children hanging around, children playing, children working, children standing in disciplined rows. Many photographs had children

3 Erfgoedcentrum voor Nederlands Kloosterleven (hereafter ENK), archive of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (hereafter AR-PO27).

4 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London 2012).

5 Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920. Critical Perspectives on Empire* (Cambridge 2012) 6-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139057554>.

6 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 51.

7 Information on the photographic practices of the MSC mission is based on an earlier research project, resulting in a database with 1,300 photographs, containing both metadata and the social biography of each picture. Marleen Reichgelt, *Marind children through the lens of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart: Missionary photography on Netherlands New Guinea, 1906-1935* (Research Master’s thesis; Radboud University Nijmegen 2016).

as their evident subject, but young people turned up serendipitously in just as many others: sitting between adults in villages, walking along with processions, standing on the edge of a scenic picture of the jungle. The eyes of children of all ages followed me as I turned page after page, opened box after box, scanned image after image.

The presence of these children had a profound impact on me and my understanding of the missionary project. What started out as a nagging feeling that I was missing something slowly grew into a critical realisation. The countless texts and studies in the missionary archive in which children were mere passive recipients of adult governing had circumscribed the boundaries of my imagination. Children were ‘meek’, ‘dependent’, ‘sincere’, ‘faithful’, or ‘playful’. Children were a faceless, uniform and easily controlled mass. The hundreds of photographs in the archive, however, depicted an entirely different ‘truth’. Being confronted with images which did not conform to these latent expectations slowly but surely widened my field of vision. In these visual sources, children appeared as mobile, acting individuals, omnipresent in the colonial project.

Although researchers have been pointing to the central position of children in colonial ‘civilising’ projects for years, colonised children remain a historical population that is notably hard to reach and to research. In recent years, international research has increasingly shown that the engagement of children in colonial ‘civilising’ missions was far more comprehensive and complex than previously thought.⁸ The lack of sources on children’s perspectives and lived experiences, however, makes it difficult to foreground children as actors engaging in Dutch missionary projects.⁹ Their presence in the archive is often fleeting, indirect and firmly embedded in a colonial discourse which instrumentalises them for colonialist objectives.

In this article, I aim to contribute to the historiography on colonial childhoods by using photography to perform an analysis centred around the movements and actions of young people growing up in an environment of

8 See the introduction to this special issue, Geertje Mak, Marit Monteiro and Elisabeth Wesseling, ‘Child Separation: (Post)Colonial Policies and Practices in the Netherlands and Belgium’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 135:3/4 (2020) 4–28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10871>; Olga Nieuwenhuys, ‘Theorizing Childhood(s): Why we need postcolonial perspectives’, *Childhood* 20:1 (2013) 3–8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568212465534>; Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian*

Mission: Education and Emotions in South India and Denmark (Basingstoke 2015). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1057/9781137432995>; David M. Pomfret, *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford 2015).

9 Allison James and Alan Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London 1990); Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt, *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education* (Leuven 2010).

colonial expansion, more specifically in Dutch New Guinea in the period of 1905-1925. Photographs are a rare source in which the presence of (individual) children is directly observable, which makes it possible to approach them as historical actors and offer contrasting perspectives to the dominant missionary discourse in the textual archive in which children constitute a passive, marginal presence.

Photography as historical source

Influenced by leading studies such as Deborah Poole's *Vision, Race, and Modernity* and Elizabeth Edwards's *Anthropology & Photography*, colonial and missionary photographs have since the 1990s been analysed extensively as visual objects that move across social and political borders and gain significance in cultural, social and communicative contexts.¹⁰ Despite the early realisation that the interpretation and meaning of a photograph depend heavily on the context in which it is viewed, much historical research on photography remains focused on the intentions, ideology and motivation of the photographer or publishing institution. Colonial photography continues to be interrogated primarily in terms of what it reveals about wider, predominantly Euro-American discourses about certain parts of the world and the people that inhabit them.¹¹

Certainly, other possible uses of photography in the study of history have been considered.¹² The historical study of (colonial) photography has instigated debates on the potential and limits of both anthropological and historical inquiry, with a particular focus on the constructed nature of what

10 Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology & Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven 1992); Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton 1997).

11 In anthropology, the insight that photographs (re)produce and maintain social relations has led to 'repatriating' photographs as a research method. See: Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs and the Sound of History', *Visual Anthropology Review* 21:1/2 (2005) 27-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/var.2005.21.1-2.27>; Joshua A. Bell, 'Out of the Mouths of Crocodiles: Eliciting Histories in Photographs and String-Figures', *History and Anthropology* 21:4 (2010) 351-373.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2010.521156>; Tommaso Sbriccoli, 'Between the archive and the village: the lives of photographs in time and space', *Visual Studies* 31:4 (2016) 295-309. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2016.1243931>; Jane Lydon, 'Democratising the photographic archive', in: Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley (eds.), *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive* (London 2017) 13-31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315271958-2>.

12 Barthes was concerned not least to urge his readers to think beyond only applying approved and restricted forms of 'objective' academic analysis to historical photographs. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York 1981).

constitutes scientific evidence.¹³ Influenced by actor-network theory and Edwards's material approach, photographs have been conceptualised as agentic entities, not only reflecting social relationships but also engendering them.¹⁴ The recent emphasis on the distinction and entanglements between the photographic image and the material object upon which it is made manifest has led to the neglect of other aspects, such as the image itself and, crucially, the people depicted in it. Moreover, placing the material object at the centre of analysis – whether it is an album, postcard, museum object, poster – inevitably leads again to an analysis of the intended purpose and visual narrative of the makers. Photographs should also be considered outside these narratives, which are often one-sided and can be summarised in terms of missionary success, colonial justification and exoticism.

Despite the contention of influential scholars such as Edwards that '[e]ven images emerging out of the profoundly asymmetrical power relations of the colonial period might [...] through tracing social being [...] carry a humanizing potential that allows the possibility of subjective experience', few historical studies have used photography to study the agency of the people depicted.¹⁵ In line with Lynn M. Thomas's argument that agency should be the axiom, the starting point of historical inquiry, rather than 'the impoverished punch line of empirically rich studies', my hypothesis is that the children depicted in missionary photography had agency, and that this agency can be researched through photography.¹⁶

Watching photography

My methodological approach mainly builds on research from fields such as anthropology, memory and trauma studies, science and technology studies, and African diaspora studies, where researchers have been at the forefront of

13 Jennifer Tucker and Tina Campt, 'Entwined Practices: Engagements with Photography in Historical Inquiry', *History and Theory* 48:4 (2009) 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2009.00513.x>. See also Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (eds.), *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham 2003).

14 The goal being to understand what kind of actions were afforded or even prompted by non-agential objects, such as photographs, in their historical context. Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photography and the Material Performance of the Past', *History and Theory* 48:4 (2009)

130-150. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2009.00523.x>.

15 Edwards, 'Photographs and the Sound', 31.

16 Lynn M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History* 28:2 (2016) 324. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12210>. I both entertain the distributive notion of agency originated in actor-network theory in underlining the ability of all (non)human actors involved to shape an event, and follow Scott in considering multiple motivations that lead to 'meaningful action'. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham/London 2011).

exploring new ways to conceptualise and operationalise photographs which were not taken at the behest of the people depicted in them.¹⁷ A key influence on my research was Ariella Azoulay's ontology of photography, a critical rethinking of the ethical and political nature of photography, developed through her work on citizenship and regime-made disaster in the context of Palestine. In contradistinction to the assumption that it is possible to discuss photography only from the point of view of its product and to attribute the photographer sole rights over it, Azoulay claims that photography is a product resulting from the encounter of many agents involved in 'the event of photography'.¹⁸ These agents all play different roles (photographer, photographic subject, onlooker, lamp operator, developer) in the event of photography, but no one is entirely in control of the encounter between them or the product(s) resulting from it: no one is sovereign in the event of photography.¹⁹ Because of this, Azoulay argues, photography is an excellent source to study (political) relations between people or groups of people. As a photograph is always the product of an encounter between people, and traces of this encounter are inevitably inscribed into the photograph, it always preserves traces of the gaze and action of additional protagonists, including the people being photographed. Thus, photography documents 'human existence in all of its dimensions, including forms of behaviour, objects, situations, customs, gestures, and places not formerly considered worthy of being seen'.²⁰

In this article, I will apply Azoulay's method of 'watching' photography. In other words, I examine the temporal and spatial dimensions in which the participants in the event of photography moved and interacted, in order to study the encounters between missionaries and children on Dutch New Guinea.²¹ Adopting Clare Anderson's approach of 'subaltern prosopography', which uses ensembles of fragmented sources to construct biographies of people with a marginalised status in the Indian Ocean who left more substantial traces in the colonial archives than are usually discernible, I opt to 'watch' three ensembles of photographs rather than singular images.²² At the core of these ensembles are photographs of individual children who have been photographed on multiple occasions, allowing me to trace them through time and space. All photographs have been taken in the first two decades after the establishment of the mission and are used to study children's

17 Tucker and Camp, 'Entwined Practices', 3.

18 Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 52.

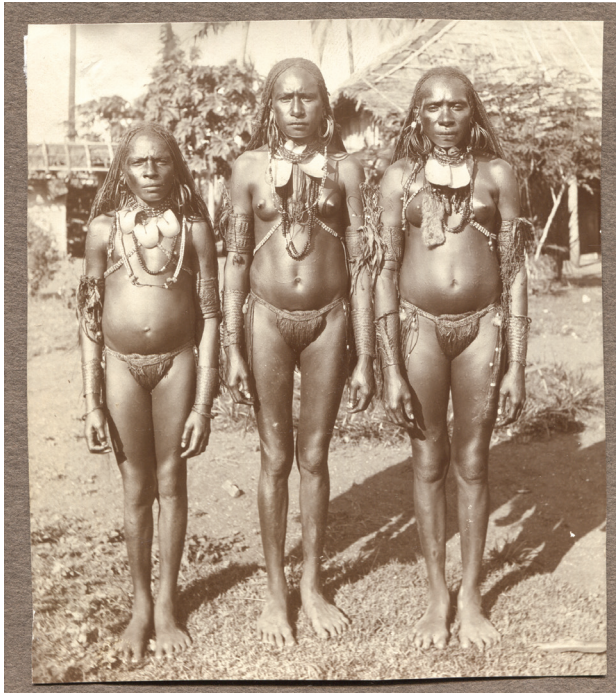
19 Azoulay, 17.

20 Azoulay, 107.

21 See also: Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London 2019). As this book is more of an exploration of the

implications of her methods and ontologies, namely the possibility 'to unwind history and unlearn our imperial rights, to continue to refuse imperial violence by making present what was invented as "past"', I will not engage it further here.

22 Anderson, *Subaltern Lives*, 6-7.



Top: Figure 1. AR-P027-20153 (no. 228154), Bottom: Figure 2. AR-P027-20210-2 (no. 228603).

lived experiences in a society increasingly dictated by colonial governance. The first two ensembles are typical of the photographic archive of this early period. The final ensemble has been chosen because it presents a notable instance of children's refusal and thus illustrates the importance of using photographs as a historical source to study the body, bodily practices and bodily tension. Inspired by Tina Campt's analyses of 'still' photographs through a lens of mobility, my analysis is centred around movement and (re)actions.²³ The analysis of the temporal and spatial conditions of the events of photography depends on detailed knowledge of the photographs' origin and a wide range of historical sources, which are used to offer both context and contrast to the photos throughout the article.²⁴

First ensemble: (inter)actions at the mission station

The first ensemble (Figure 1 and Figure 2) immediately presents the challenges of 'watching' photographs designed to transform their subjects into observable objects. We return to the picture of the three young women which began this article and place a different photograph of the same group beside it. Instead of showing the girls' backs, this picture depicts them facing the camera.

The first photograph had the paradoxical effect of partly obstructing the spectator's gaze by obscuring the identity of the women, but as such it provided a window of opportunity to let the gaze of the spectator wander unimpeded without being gazed back at. In contrast, the second photograph brings the girls into full view. The spectator's gaze is no longer disrupted; on the contrary, the two images together give access to almost every inch of these young women. The girls look very tense, standing stiffly, arms at their sides, almost like military troops waiting for inspection. They are frowning – out of anticipation or concentration? – or perhaps squinting against the sunlight. Their steady gazes are fixed on the camera lens. My eyes, in turn, are inadvertently drawn to the young women. I find it hard to fix my gaze, which keeps wandering over their faces and bodies. The camera is positioned close to the girls, and the background is out of focus, directing the spectator's gaze to the people being photographed.

Yet it is the background from which we can start the process of *watching* these young women, as it provides us spatial and temporal context. The thatched, rather shoddy buildings comprise the first mission station of the Catholic mission in Merauke, Dutch New Guinea. After the newly erected Apostolic Prefecture of Dutch New Guinea had been appointed to the Dutch province of the MSC in December 1902, the Merauke mission was established in the summer of 1905. The MSC missionaries were among the first Europeans

23 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 51.

24 Reichgelt, 'Marind children'.

to study the language and customs of the inhabitants of the region, the Marind-anim.²⁵ They dedicated much effort to their research, primarily to understand the religious and moral life of the people they tried to convert and to be able to preach in local languages, but also to gain support and publicity in relevant circles in Europe.²⁶

Photography was both essential for missionary propaganda purposes as well as a fundamental part of anthropological research.²⁷ After Father Superior Henricus Nollen's (1870-1951) repeated requests for photographic equipment were granted in August 1906, hundreds of people had their likeness taken in the same location where the young women are standing. The girls were photographed by Nollen himself as part of his research on the different Marind age grades: Marind-anim society was sharply divided by age and sex, with each group having a distinct form of dress.²⁸ Between August 1906 and early 1908, Nollen took photographs of individuals of each age grade, often portrayed from different angles (*en face*, *en profil*, *en dos*), against a neutral background. Although the style of these photographs is reminiscent of nineteenth-century anthropometric photography, Nollen's primary focus seems to have been to document the intricate dress of the Marind-anim.²⁹

Their appearance identifies the three young women as belonging to the *wahuku* age grade. A girl became a *wahuku* (plural: *wahuki*) after the first physical changes of puberty appeared. The ceremony was a festive occasion, during which the girl received her first hair dress and her first *nowa* – a small loincloth made of bark fibre, passing between the legs and the pubic cover for

- 25 Glossaries had been composed by marine officers, Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM) captains and *controleur* Seyne Kok. See also: Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia, 1808-1942: A Documented History. Volume 2. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 232 (Leiden 2014) 239.
- 26 Jean Kommers and Ad Borsboom, *Anthropologists and the Missionary Endeavour: Experiences and Reflections*. Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change 33 (Saarbrücken 2000); Patrick Harries and David Maxwell (eds.), *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa* (Grand Rapids 2012).
- 27 Edwards, *Anthropology*; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York 1993) 198-199; Deborah Poole, 'An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005) 159-179. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.33.070203.144034>.
- 28 Nollen included many photographs in his article 'Les différentes Classes d'Age dans la Société kaia-kaia, Merauke, Nouvelle Guinée Néerlandaise', *Anthropos* 4 (1909) 553-573. Fragments of the photographs under discussion in the first ensemble were included: a frontal close-up of their upper bodies (indicated in Nollen's article as figure 11a) and the middle girl's hair (11a). Incidentally, the middle girl is classified as *wahuku* in 11a, but labelled *kivasom-iwag* in 11a.
- 29 Not only were people never measured, but they were also only photographed from different angles if their attire asked for it. People without headdresses, for example, were never portrayed *en profil* or *en dos*. See also: Reichgelt, 'Marind children'.

all female age grades to follow. Nollen writes: '[A *wahuku*'s] nature becomes more reserved, and she no longer mingles with the boys. The *wahuku* helps her mother in the gardens, learns to beat sago and begins to take on some duties'.³⁰

As the photographs show, however, these *wahuki* did mingle with men: they encountered the male missionaries at the mission station. If we move beyond the classification of New Guinean people by European missionaries, if we follow Camp's approach and refuse to accept the 'truth' the images seem to present through their production of typified subjects, then what accounts of the *wahuki* as actors in history do these photographs articulate?³¹ The presence of these young women in a colonial contact zone is the first element of an analysis centred around the practices, encounters and movements inscribed into these pictures. The next photograph in this ensemble shows that this presence was not incidental.

The two girls who formed the edges of the threesome in Figure 2 are present in another group picture (Figure 3) taken at the mission station. This time, they are the first and third from the left. They are posing with two slightly younger *wahuki*. The spot where they are standing now is the location where the majority of Nollen's photographs were taken. The young women stand rather rigidly – feet together, arms beside their body, faces taut – waiting for the photographer to complete the procedure. The camera is positioned at their eye level, again quite near. A barrel, some timber and a folded deckchair can be seen in the background next to the door to the rectory. Judging by their shadows, it is the afternoon. Two girls carry shoulder bags; two hold panicles in their hands. Nollen's shadow is visible between the feet of the two *wahuki* on the left.

Whereas the first two photographs made it quite difficult to look beyond their intended purpose, made it hard to see more than still 'girls on display', this picture is less static. In this photograph, I see the fumbling of the hands, a slight turn of the shoulders, a head being tilted, eyes that were closed the moment the shutter clicked, bags being carried, plumes being held. All these small details make it easier to watch, instead of look at, these girls – to imagine the moments before and after the photograph was taken. Furthermore, watching the photographs together, the movement of the girls is undeniable: they are visibly turning around and posing on different occasions.

What other movements, encounters and practices can be perceived watching the *wahuki* in these three photographs, and what can be discerned from them? First, there is the obvious movement of the *wahuki* to the mission station. Little has been written on the lives of younger Marind around the colonial occupation of the south coast of New Guinea. While the various age

30 Nollen, 'Les différentes Classes', 557.

31 Camp, *Listening to Images*, 8.



Figure 3. AR-P027-20210-2 (no. 228698).

grades and the corresponding dress, ceremonies and societal position have been described in great detail by government officials, anthropologists and missionaries alike, little attention was paid to the children's everyday activities or the more practical aspects of child-rearing.³² Additionally, while the upbringing and initiation rites of teenage boys have been studied extensively, the education of their female counterparts received far less attention. Most texts, whether anthropological or missionary, do not provide more information than Nollen's previously cited lines: *wahuki* helped their mothers with (usually unspecified) 'domestic chores'.

In this context, the photographs are significant. The pictures show that the life worlds of girls and young women were not limited to work in the villages and gardens alone. *Wahuki* travelled to the mission station, and, as the photographs indicate, these visits were not incidental. Furthermore, visiting the mission station was no privilege limited to the older girls. Although the nearest village was at least 40 minutes away from the mission station, girls crossed this distance. The presence of these adolescents in Merauke not only takes them out of the domestic sphere but puts them right in the centre of Dutch colonial powers.

Second, the encounters ingrained in the photograph provide an insight into the social life of the *wahuki*. Not only were these girls acquainted with foreign men – a point to which I will return – but it seems they also had meaningful bonds with their peers. While this may seem obvious, the textual sources usually mention *wahuki* only in the context of older female relatives, mostly their mothers. The photographic archive, however, mostly contains pictures of *wahuki* with other *wahuki* – as opposed to girls of younger age grades, who are often pictured in the presence of older women. While I cannot contest that *wahuki* spent most of their time with their mothers, these photographs present an additional perspective on the social life of *wahuki*. Although taking a few photographs like this raises more questions than answers – perhaps *wahuki* were only allowed to travel in peer groups?³³ Or, looking at the age difference among the girls, perhaps an older *wahuku* functioned as mentor for younger *wahuki*? – systematically watching a collection of photographs can provide insight into social connections.

Third, the most evident practice in which the *wahuki* were engaged is the act of photography. There is ample evidence that the Marind-anim in the Merauke area had a thorough understanding of what the process of

32 Van Baal supposes that the male missionaries and anthropologists had no interest in women's tasks such as child-rearing. Jan van Baal, *Dema: Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture (South New Guinea)* (The Hague 1966) 140-141.

33 The 1906 handover report by leaving assistant-resident J.A. Kroesen describes how girls and women suffered from sexual assault by traders in Merauke. Jelle Miedema and Willem Stokhof (eds.), *Memories van overgave van de afdeling van Zuid Nieuw-Guinea. Irian Jaya Source Materials 7A:4* (Leiden 1993) 12.



Top: Figure 4. AR-P027-20153 (no. 228095). Bottom: Figure 5. AR-P027-20153 (no. 228096).

photography entailed.³⁴ They had been confronted with cameras since the colonial settlement in 1902 – and perhaps before, by incidental visitors. Furthermore, the darkroom which the missionaries had built at the mission station seems to have been a popular attraction. Missionary letters and articles give the impression that most people gladly came to Merauke to have their photographs taken, in exchange for tobacco, rice or tools such as knives.³⁵ Photographic meetings were sometimes arranged in advance, when the priests visited the villages around Merauke.³⁶ Like the photos in this ensemble, the majority of Nollen's photographs at the mission station were taken in the late afternoon, presumably because he was often away in the morning and because of the favourable lighting conditions. It is well possible that these *wahuki* too visited the mission station with the intention of having their pictures taken.

Of course, the girls' intentions cannot be determined definitively. But the fact that the movements, encounters and practices inscribed in the photographs are equivocal does not make them less valuable for contemplation. Take, for example, the shoulder bags worn by the girls in the second picture (Figure 3). Compared to the pictures without bags, the effect is that the girls become less static: bags are carried when on the move, to transport goods, necessities or valuables. Even though the content remains unknown, the bags are a sharp reminder that the *wahuki* in the photograph are not frozen in time or space but existed outside the frame of the photograph and are just 'passing through'.³⁷ Many photographs taken at the mission station show women – the transportation and trading of goods was generally carried out by women – with bags and cargo. Perhaps the girls were on their way back from one of the Chinese *tokos* or European stores in Merauke, having traded coconuts or other produce for tobacco, knives or iron.³⁸

The photograph contains other signs that point to possible motivations for the *wahuki* to journey to the mission station. The ankle of the girl on the far left, for example, seems to be bandaged.³⁹ If she let

34 This is in line with other research on missionary photographic practices. Helen Gardner and Jude Philp, 'Photography and Christian Mission: George Brown's Images of the New Britain Mission 1875-80', *The Journal of Pacific History* 41:2 (2006) 175-190. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223340600826086>.

35 Henricus Nollen, 'Reis naar Okaba-Sangasee', *Annalen van O.L. Vrouw van het H. Hart* 28 (1910) 276-278.

36 ENK, AR-PO27-5005-5006.

37 Gijsbertus Adrian Johan van der Sande, member of the 1903 North New Guinea expedition, remarks

that the construction of the bags is a skill passed on from mother to daughter in many New Guinean cultures. Gijsbertus van der Sande, *Nova Guinea: résultats de l'expédition scientifique néerlandaise à la Nouvelle-Guinée en 1903: Vol. 3, Ethnography and Anthropology* (Leiden 1907) 179-182.

38 In 1903, Merauke counted two European stores and twelve Chinese *tokos*. Marind traded their coconuts for iron, axes and knives. See: Jan Boelaars, *Met Papoea's samen op weg: De ontwikkeling van de mensen en de missionarissen. Deel 1 – De pioniers: het begin van een missie* (Kampen 1992).

a missionary look after her wound, this implies some form of trust and familiarity between the *wahuki* and the missionaries.⁴⁰ That brings us to the final encounter to which the photographs attest: the direct contacts between the missionaries and young Marind women. The letters and diaries in the MSC archive note that when visiting the Marind villages, the missionaries mainly interacted with women, as the men were often away or engaged during the day. However, missionaries' writings also show a large preoccupation with Marind boys, who – unlike girls – are mentioned (often by name) in stories about friendship, visits, and even sleepovers at the mission station. Similar contacts between girls and male missionaries were impossible to write about in the strictly enforced bourgeois social stratification of Catholic Europe, with the exception of girls who were presented as victims of abuse and in need of missionary protection.⁴¹ The photographic archive, however, features boys and girls of all ages, both at the mission station and in the villages.⁴² The photographs testify to regular contact between missionaries and Marind girls and serve as an important reminder that what missionaries wrote about their encounters with Marind-anim was not necessarily the actual practice at the mission.

Second ensemble: different contexts, shifting positions

The first cluster gave an overview of the (inter)actions that can be discerned from watching an ensemble of photographs taken in the same location but at different points in time. The second ensemble concerns two photographs of young boys taken in different locations, allowing for a consideration of the encounters between missionaries and children in different contexts, and the shifting positions of colonised children.

39 Boelaars, *Met Papoea's samen op weg*, 31.

40 On missionaries and medicine as a practice of interaction and conversion strategy, see: Tine Van Osselaer, Henk de Smaele and Kaat Wils (eds.), *Sign or Symptom? Exceptional Corporeal Phenomena in Religion and Medicine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leuven 2017); Geertje Mak, 'Touch in anthropometry: Enacting race in Dutch Papua New Guinea 1903-1909', *History and Anthropology* 28:3 (2017) 326-348. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2017.1281268>.

41 See, for example, Anna Li, born of a Marind mother and a Chinese father. Anna Li was abused

by her stepmother after her mother died and adopted by the mission. *Annalen van O.L. Vrouw van het H. Hart* 34 (1916) 119-120.

42 Unlike other missionaries working among people whose dress differed from European expectations, there seems to have been no disinclination to photograph potentially sensitive groups such as young children or women. Reichgelt, 'Marind children'; Thomas Hendriks, 'Erotics of Sin: Promiscuity, Polygamy and Homo-Erotics in Missionary Photography from the Congolese Rainforest', *Visual Anthropology* 26:4 (2013) 355-382. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2013.804332>.

The first photograph in this ensemble (Figure 4) shows a by now familiar picture: a group of children posing at the Merauke mission station, photographed by Nollen between 1906 and 1909. I judge them to be approximately seven to ten years old. The boys are wearing necklaces made of beads and mother of pearl, and bracelets on their upper arms. They are *patur*: the age grade for boys from their first steps until the onset of puberty. The oldest boy, in the centre, has started the process of stretching his earlobes.⁴³ Two of the children have knives stuck in the bands around their upper arms – a Western table knife in the case of the youngest boy. Judging by the shadows, it seems to be around midday. The group is standing in the same spot as the girls were, in front of the entrance to the presbytery. A stick on the ground possibly indicates where they were instructed to stand. The camera is positioned close by, at the eye level of the tallest boy. Compared to the *wahuki*, the *patur*'s poses are remarkably less rigid and less uniformly orchestrated. Much like the *wahuki*, however, the children look tense. The poses of the two boys on the left are strained, and their muscles are flexed. They are squaring their shoulders and facing the camera.

We encounter the youngest-looking *patur*, who was standing on the far left, again in a different photograph (Figure 5). This time, he is accompanied by two boys who seem slightly younger. The children are standing on sandy terrain, in front of a fence and some huts. All three are looking straight into the camera. The child on the left side of the picture is smiling, perhaps laughing even. His arms rest beside his body, and he is leaning backwards slightly. The two other boys are frowning and strike less relaxed poses: one has his arms crossed in front of his chest, while the other holds a stick behind his back. The *patur* on the right has moved slightly at the moment the photo was taken. The camera was located at the eye level of the tallest boy. The photographer was standing (kneeling?) at a short distance from the children.

These photographs testify to the importance of local children to the missionary movement, as well as to the shifting roles children adopted. To expand on this, I will turn to the objects held by the youngest *patur* in the two photographs, beginning with the knife. Like the photographs of the *wahuki* discussed previously, the dozens of pictures of *patur* at the mission station in the MSC archive point to Marind children's custom of visiting the missionaries. These visits were of great importance to the missionaries, as they were always seeking potential pupils and helping hands. To lure the children, the missionaries gave them attention and small gifts.⁴⁴ The table knife proudly

43 The piercing of the earlobes marked the end of infancy for boys, because from that moment on they were to sleep with their fathers in the men's house, instead of with their mothers. Van Baal, *Dema*, 140.

44 See the contribution by Geertje Mak in this issue: Geertje Mak, 'Children on the Fault Lines:

A Historical-Anthropological Reconstruction of the Background of Children purchased by Dutch Missionaries between 1863 and 1898 in Dutch New Guinea', *BMCN – Low Countries Historical Review* 135:3/4 (2020) 29–55. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10872>.



Top: Figure 6. AR-PO27-20210-3 (no. 228943). Bottom: Figure 7. AR-PO27-20210-3 (no. 228944)

strapped around the *patur*'s arm was likely a missionary present and signifies the mission's effort to bind children to them. The photos testify to their success: Marind children entered the colonial space of the mission compound frequently and freely, allowing the missionaries to engage with them on their own ground and on their own terms.⁴⁵

Although similar in style and content, the other photograph was shot under completely different circumstances. This time, the children are standing on the edge of Mbuti, a coastal village located at a 45-minute walking distance from Merauke. A closer look at the stick which the boy in the centre is holding reveals more about the conditions under which the photograph was created. Judging by the curved end in his left hand, as well as the little plate visible just above his left elbow, he is holding a Western-style walking cane. One of the missionaries who worked in Merauke around the time this photograph was taken, Father Cappers, was in possession of a cane which closely resembles the stick in this picture, which shows up in various other photographs.⁴⁶ Cappers had trouble walking and always carried his cane with him.

It, therefore, seems likely that the photograph was taken by Cappers, also because the two priests had divided the coastal villages between them, and Mbuti was part of his working ground. In his writings, Cappers describes how the children of Mbuti visited the mission station, how he taught them to smoke tobacco, let them play, and even how they slept in his room overnight.⁴⁷ Despite the propagandistic function of these stories and the stereotypical and one-dimensional descriptions of the children as guileless, carefree and absolutely smitten with the missionaries, the anecdotes indicate intimate contact between missionaries and children. A hint of close contact is present in the photograph as well. Although Cappers is not visible, his presence is made explicit by his personal belongings in the frame. The fact that the *patur* holds Cappers's cane, nonchalantly even, as if he has been playing around with it, implies contact and exchange. Cappers gave a personal item to the boy – quite possibly to have his hands free while taking the picture – who in turn accepted it.

This action not only implies trust and mutual dependence, but also makes visible how children become active participants rather than subjects of photography. The event of photography was dependent on their cooperation as much as on the photographer and the equipment. This extends to the mission project as a whole: children were not just grateful playmates – as Cappers's letters generally imply – but central figures in colonial history

45 Marleen Reichgelt, 'The Mission's Children: Practices of Appropriation in the Photographs of Marind Children in the *Annalen van O.L. Vrouw van het H. Hart*, 1907-1935', *Trajecta* 27:1 (2018) 171-194.

46 Eduard Cappers (1877-1945) was stationed in Merauke from August 1906 to April 1909. For photos of Cappers with cane, see: ENK, AR-P027-20210 (228313).

whose actions affected the work of the missionaries. This photo shows the children on their own territory, in a situation in which the *patur* are in control and the missionary is the dependent visitor. Recent research on Dutch New Guinea indicates that children formed an indispensable middle ground in bridging local and missionary culture. Children initiated contact with Marind society at large, functioned as guides in the backwoods, instructed on local customs.⁴⁸ The fact that the boys are situated near the edge of the village, walking stick in hand, signifies how children were often literally guiding the missionaries into their communities. Between the two photographs in this ensemble, the *patur* are transformed from targeted pupils to Mbuti's doormen.

It is not just the locations where the photos were taken that mark the shifting positions of the *patur*: it is also manifest in the bodies of these children. Their facial expressions, posture, gestures, gaze and use of space have been recorded in these historical photographs. When I watch these *patur*, I perceive apprehension and anticipation in the first photograph, the tensions of holding back or holding in, while I sense a relaxed confidence and perhaps impatience in the second one, a self-assuredness that comes with being in control. Despite the difficulty of 'reading' body language and facial expressions, despite cultural differences in non-verbal communication, these valuable testimonies to the experiences of colonised children should not be disregarded. The final ensemble explores this third merit of using photography as a historical source: the fact that people and their bodies – surfaces 'from which alternative counter-narratives can be produced', as Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy put it – become directly observable.⁴⁹

Third ensemble: bodies as locus of refusal

Arguably, this last pair of photographs (Figure 6 and Figure 7) is the most disturbing. However, it is precisely because the images are unnerving that they allow for an analysis of both the body as the locus of practices of refusal as well as the effect of historical bodies on the spectating historian. Both photographs were taken on the day of the opening of the village school in

47 ENK, AR-PO27-5005 and AR-PO27-5006.

48 Maaïke Derksen, 'Local Intermediaries? The Missionising and Governing of Colonial Subjects in South Dutch New Guinea, 1920-42', *The Journal of Pacific History* 51:2 (2016) 111-142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2016.1195075>; Marit Monteiro and Geertje Mak, 'Children as targets and tools: Colonial governance in missionary civilizing projects in the Indo-Pacific World (1870-1962)' (Project proposal; Nijmegen 2016); Reichgelt, 'The Mission's Children'.

49 Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy, *Different: Contemporary Photography and Black Identity* (London 2001) 38. Quoted in: Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers, 'Questioning difference: bodies, (re-)presentation, and the development of "multicultural Britain"', *Paedagogica Historica* 53:6 (2017) 730-750. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2017.1349157>.

Wambi in 1923. The photographer was Henricus Geurtjens (1875-1957), father superior of the mission post in nearby Okaba.

The first photograph depicts a group of 29 girls, ranging from approximately five to fifteen years old.⁵⁰ The age categories are *wahuki* and *kivasom*, the female equivalent of the *patur* with short cropped hair and necklaces as their sole decoration. The girls are positioned in roughly four rows according to height, with the ones in the front row kneeling down, and the ones in the back standing on some kind of platform. The arrangement resembles a school photo. Several younger children are huddling close together, and a *wahuku* standing on the far right of the group has her arms around the *kivasom* in front of her. The group is standing in front of the school, a foreign construction. The girls look distressed. No one is smiling, and the expressions range from vacant to despondent.

The second photo reveals more about the circumstances under which the pictures were taken.⁵¹ It depicts eleven girls from the previous picture, all *wahuki*. The girls are positioned in two rows, with the five taller girls at the back. They seem to be standing perfectly still, with their feet positioned closely together, and their hands clasped with those of the person next to them. All girls have their gaze fixed on the camera, with tense expressions. Again, no one is showing even the hint of a smile. The photograph is taken from a low angle.

Looking back at the first photograph, the *wahuki* from the second picture are standing in the two back rows.⁵² One is standing in the middle of the second row, between the youngest-looking *kivasom*. She seems very young to be *wahuku* – and taking a closer look, so do at least five other girls. They cannot be much older than seven years old, perhaps younger. The caption, typed on the back of the second picture with a typewriter by Geurtjens, reads:

Little girls of Wambi, who had been dressed up as wahuku (almost marriable girl) at the opening of the school in 1923, hoping to be exempted from compulsory school attendance. Their little plan fell through, however!⁵³

In 1921, a joint ‘civilising’ project by the mission and colonial government had made school attendance compulsory for children.⁵⁴ The residents of Wambi did not want their children to go the *kampong* school and, in an attempt to mislead the missionaries, had tried to make the girls seem more mature than

50 ENK, AR-PO27-20210-3 (228943).

51 ENK, AR-PO27-20210-3 (228944).

52 Protruding abdomen were a common feature among the Marind, likely caused by insufficient protein consumption. See Henricus Oomen, *Voeding en milieu van het Papoeakind* (The Hague 1968) 73, 116-118 and 125-127.

53 ENK, AR-PO27-20210-3 (228944): ‘Kleine meisjes te Wambi, die men bij de opening der school in 1923 als wahoekoe (bijna huwbaar meisje) had opgesierd, in de hoop, dat ze dan van den schoolplicht zouden worden vrijgesteld. De list mocht evenwel niet baten!’ All translations are mine.

54 Derksen, ‘Local intermediaries’, 126.

they were. The missionaries, however, had already drawn up the number of intended students earlier and noticed that children were missing on the day of the school's opening. The children were found after a short search and taken to the school building, where they were photographed.

The triumphant tone in Geurtjens's comment echoes amusement. Especially the six youngest children must have looked rather strange in the eyes of both the missionaries and the Marind-anim – perhaps not unlike children participating in child beauty pageants nowadays. Geurtjens described the sight thus: 'To us, [it was] definitely an amusing scene: moppets of nine or ten years old in big sister's toilette; unfledged hobbledehos as marriage candidates!'⁵⁵

The children, however, look ill at ease and far from amused. The look in their eyes seems almost accusing, as if they were determined to resist the gaze of the camera. The girls seem agitated at their lack of success, and perhaps even a little ashamed. It is possible that after first being found out, then being whisked off to 'school' and having to pose for a photograph, they felt ridiculed and put on show – especially if the belittling and mocking tone in the missionary narrative was also enacted on the spot. Furthermore, the *kivasom* may have felt that they had let their community down. This photograph shows girls caught between the demands of the missionaries and their kin.

At the same time, this case elucidates the value children had in their own communities. Geurtjens might reduce it to an amusing anecdote, but this incident was a serious matter to the Marind-anim. The manufacture and application of the ornaments, especially the long hair extensions, must have taken the women of Wambi – the present absentees of this photograph – considerable time and effort.⁵⁶ Moreover, the dress has specific social meaning, and applying it was usually accompanied by extensive ritual celebrations. The transition to an age grade could not be reversed. The fact that the protest seems to have focused on the compulsory school attendance of girls in particular was probably because most daily tasks were carried out by women. Girls were trained to work in the gardens from an early age onwards. The incident shows that the Marind-anim refused to relinquish their children's education, and were unwilling to miss them for the larger part of the day. These photographs testify to the considerable effort that went into refusing colonial policy.⁵⁷

It is not just the factual events surrounding these photographs that convey a history of colonial refusal: it is conveyed through the bodies of these girls. The photographs make us, as spectators, aware of what Camp't has called the complex set of muscular tensions of empire, 'the tense grammar of

55 Geurtjens, *Onder de Kaja-kaja's*, 17.

56 Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 82.

57 Following Audra Simpson, I see refusal as generative in (re)producing community, in this

case affirming the social relation between *kivasom* and their community. See Audra Simpson, 'On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, "Voice" and Colonial Citizenship', *Junctures* 9 (2007) 67-80.

photographically stilled presentations of vulnerability twinned with proud defiance'.⁵⁸ The *kivasom/wahuki*'s physical presence in these photographs bears testimony to the power struggle between missionaries and the Marind-anim, and the central roles children played in these conflicts.

Being confronted with the presence of these girls has another effect. It affects me. Although I find these photographs unsettling and difficult to engage with, it is also impossible for me to gloss over these children. I feel addressed by their gaze. This is a crucial last element in the potential of historical photography: these photographs present people. As opposed to most sources in the colonial archive, photographs provide a unique connection to historical communities. Although still mediated by the missionaries' selection and archival representation (to name but a few factors), it is a source which allows for different perspectives and different questions to emerge. Through photography, it becomes possible to watch individual children respond to and participate in the Catholic mission's interventions in their colonised society.

Conclusion

This article gauges the potential of historical photography in research on one of the least-accessible populations in colonial history: colonised children. What is afforded by watching photographic ensembles of young Marind to study their engagements with the Catholic mission? What changes in our comprehension of colonised childhood(s) when we move away from frames of stillness and representation and approach children as protagonists in colonial history?

The first ensemble provided an overview of the movements, practices and interactions that can be distilled from watching photography and what might be discerned from them. It showed how photographs can be informative on colonised children's social lives. The second ensemble elaborated on this premise and demonstrated how photographs depicting encounters between missionaries and children in different contexts – both in Marind communities and in colonial centres – can elucidate the complex, shifting roles that children occupied in the mission project.⁵⁹ The third

58 Camp, *Listening to Images*, 50.

59 The ambiguous character of missionary photography makes it an interesting source for both 'public' readings (anthropological, propaganda) and 'private' readings. As missions often stayed with communities for continuous and lengthy periods, missionary photography can be an excellent source to document a specific

community's response to foreign interference. Christraud Geary, 'Missionary Photography: Private and Public Readings', *African Arts* 24:4 (1991) 48-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3337044>; Paul Jenkins, 'Reading an Image in the Other Context: A Visual Essay' (2011). <https://crcc.usc.edu/reading-an-image-in-the-other-context-a-visual-essay/>, accessed on 21 November 2019.

ensemble concentrated on the position of young Marind in their own communities through an analysis of young bodies as conveyors of the refusal to be limited to the missionary category of ‘child’ and the compulsory school attendance that followed.⁶⁰

I believe Azoulay’s and Campt’s innovative methods of incorporating visual sources in research on historically marginalised people should have application within the discipline of history, especially within the history of childhood. I discern two primary reasons for this. First, through photography, children can be brought into focus as present, acting individuals, rather than submissive representations. Essentially, colonial photography might have been a system intended to put people ‘on view’⁶¹, but watching photography means watching living, visibly moving people who are not frozen in time or by the camera.⁶² Second, the photographs provide direct access to people and their bodies, which can act as surfaces of non-verbal communication from which alternative narratives may emerge, and confront the historian with the ‘living’ existence of their research subject.

Constructing and analysing the ensembles depended on detailed knowledge of a collection of hundreds of photographs. People were identified by relentlessly scrutinising faces, bodies and locations. I have found *watching* both an intense and intensive practice. I must have seen these pictures hundreds of times. I have seen and held them as loose prints, contained in albums, printed in publications, sometimes circulating on the Internet. But I have watched the scans most often. After entering the contextual information on each photograph and its various material appearances in a database, I made 600 dpi high-quality scans of each photograph. This opened up an entirely different way of watching these images. In some ways, they brought them even closer than their physical counterparts. I can zoom in on every detail, I can put different pictures (different people) next to each other, and I can compare different versions of the same photograph – all within a matter of seconds.⁶³ This process is both intimate and extremely invasive. To recognise individual people, I have compared faces, noses, hair, scarification patterns, hands, feet, knees, shoulders, breasts. Does this make me a voyeur of the worst kind, I wonder? Why did I open up, or expose, the collection like this? Do I have the right to watch people so unrelentingly?

Certain images, especially of people denoted as vulnerable, such as children, are not easy to look at. Sometimes, watching is difficult,

60 Campt has shown how photography was entangled with practices of refusal. Campt, *Listening to Images*, especially Chapter 2.

61 Taussig, *Mimesis*, 186.

62 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 57.

63 I will further discuss the methodological implications and affordances of zooming in on high-quality scans in my PhD thesis.

uncomfortable, painful.⁶⁴ But as historians, we cannot look away. Instead, as Karen Vallgård has suggested as response to Gayatri Spivak's assertion that epistemic violence is inherent in the search for an 'authentic' subaltern voice in her seminal 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 'we must actively and continually come to terms with the violence that always suffuses the process of knowing and representing'. Insisting that there is only subaltern silence to be found in colonial archives, or arguing that trying to foreground subaltern voices or perspectives is appropriation by the historian, 'can obstruct attempts to interrogate colonial cultures and prevent forms of inquiry which may prove fruitful'.⁶⁵ We must use our power as spectators responsibly, and neither ignore nor romanticise signs of subaltern agency.⁶⁶ 'Moreover, we must interrogate and persistently seek to disclose the ways in which our reconstructions inevitably distort and perhaps even undermine the actions and utterances by the historical actors under scrutiny'.⁶⁷ I have tried to do so by watching openly, and by watching with a purpose, making these ensembles not just invasive but also informative. By watching this intensely, I may infringe the privacy of the people depicted. But it makes all the difference between seeing 'representations' – characters in a missionary narrative – and seeing individual people. Watching photography allows the historian to see and study young individuals whose lives were in no way marginal, and should be brought into focus in colonial history.

Marleen Reichgelt is a PhD candidate at the History Department of the Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Her research project (2017-2022) is centred around missionary photography, which she uses to study the social positions, agency, and lived experiences of children engaged in the Catholic mission on Dutch New Guinea between 1905 and 1962. Her core research interests are intercultural contact and exchange in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, involving three overlapping fields: photography and visual culture, (Dutch) colonialism and postcolonialism, and the Catholic mission. In addition to her PhD project, Marleen works as archivist at the Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastery Life (*Erfgoedcentrum voor Nederlands Kloosterleven*, Sint Agatha) and as editor with the *Yearbook of Women's History*. E-mail: m.reichgelt@let.ru.nl.

64 Jane Lydon has written about photography as the focus of intense emotional engagement and her own emotional reactions to colonial photography. See: Jane Lydon, *The Flash of Recognition: Photography and the Emergence of Indigenous Rights* (Sydney 2012) 14.

65 Karen Vallgård, 'Can the Subaltern Woman Run? Gender, race and agency in colonial missionary

texts', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39:4 (2014) 476. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2014.938112>.

66 Concerning the civic duty of the spectator, see Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York 2008).

67 Vallgård, 'Can the Subaltern Woman Run?', 476.