

# 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

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This case study aims at looking behind the construal of imperialism as ‘white people saving brown children from brown people’ by reconstructing the reasons why locally enslaved children became available for missionaries of the Utrechtsche Zendingvereeniging (UZV) to purchase in Dutch New Guinea between 1863 and 1898. This analysis shows that, contrary to what the missionaries often claimed, children within local communities in the area of the Bird’s Head, Cenderawasih Bay and Biak-Numfoor islands were carefully raised to become part of the complex gift-kinship-systems of their people. However, some children, as well as adults, had the misfortune to live on the fault lines of competing or conflicting communities. Children were probably sold to repair systematic differences in power and wealth between inland and coastal peoples. Especially children who were already in a weak position – orphans, or children who became related to sorcery – were the first ones to be sold. Within local communities, after they were given away, sold or captured, children could be kindly adopted within another family, exploited to work the land, further traded or used in negotiations. Precisely during the first decades of the missionaries’ presence, the tensions and violence between inland and coastal communities raised, due to an uncontrolled boom in the hunt and trade of birds of paradise. This international market thus augmented those fault lines that ‘produced’ children for local slave markets, and, in the end, for missionaries to purchase. The missionaries themselves could only buy these children within the rationale of yet another ‘economy’: a western Christian-humanitarian economy in which the missionary ‘redemption’ of locally enslaved children raised money and support for the missions back home.

De Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging (UZV) rechtvaardigde haar aanwezigheid aan de noordkust van Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea tussen 1863 en 1898 onder andere door lokaal tot slaaf gemaakte kinderen vrij te kopen, oftewel, door ‘bruine kinderen te redden van bruine mensen’. Dit artikel probeert te reconstrueren wat er achter dat beeld schuilging: hoe kwam het dat kinderen aan de zending te koop werden aangeboden? Dit artikel toont eerst aan dat kinderen uit deze regio’s van Bird’s Head, Cenderawasih Bay en de Biak-Numfoor-eilanden, anders dan de missionarissen beweerden, zorgvuldig binnen hun lokale gemeenschappen werden opgevoed en in specifieke gift-verwantschapssystemen werden opgenomen. Vervolgens wordt gereconstrueerd hoe en waarom sommige kinderen, net als sommige volwassenen, terecht kwamen op de breuklijnen *tussen* verschillende gemeenschappen die met elkaar in competitie of in conflict waren. Kinderen werden wellicht door hun eigen gemeenschap verkocht om onevenwichtige machtsverhoudingen tussen groepen die in het binnenland en aan de kust leefden te herstellen. Met name kinderen die al in een zwakkere positie verkeerden – wezen of kinderen die in verband werden gebracht met tovenarij – werden het eerst verkocht. Nadat ze waren verkocht of geroofd werden kinderen soms in hun nieuwe gemeenschap geadopteerd, maar soms ook uitgebuit en vaak weer verhandeld. De zendingen vestigden zich in Nieuw-Guinea juist op het moment dat de jacht op en de handel in paradijsvogels ongecontroleerd toenamen. Deze internationale markt versterkte de breuklijnen en de gewelddadige spanningen tussen de lokale gemeenschappen, waardoor er meer kinderen op de lokale markt voor slaven terecht kwamen, en er uiteindelijk ook meer kinderen aan de missionarissen te koop werden aangeboden. De missionarissen zelf konden deze kinderen alleen verwerven binnen de logica van een ander soort ‘economie’, namelijk een westerse, christelijk-humanitaire gift-economie waarin het ‘vrijkopen’ van deze tot slaaf gemaakte kinderen waardevol bleek voor een toenemende Nederlandse fondsenwerving en steun voor de zending in Nieuw-Guinea.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The girl I bought for fl. 54.70 in two-and-a-half guilder coins and goods at Doreh this week is a weak, fragile soul, with little sparkling brown eyes, which looked around very shyly in the beginning. The lamb has been raided from Biak, her parents are dead, and from her earliest youth onwards she had been a slave of one of the chiefs at Doré. Skinny and exhausted this naked child stood

1 This article has come into being with the critical and supportive help of many others. My sincere gratefulness goes to the other authors of this

special issue, two anonymous peer reviewers, Alicia Schrikker, Tessa Lobbes and Hans Spijker, who all have greatly contributed to the quality of this article.

before me, and I was happy when the deal was done and the little creature belonged to me.<sup>2</sup>

This passage in a letter by missionary's wife M. L. Van Balen-Michaux to the women's support society for the mission in The Hague is typical of how the missionaries of the Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging (UZV), situated at the north-east Bird's Head peninsula of Dutch New Guinea, described their purchases of enslaved children. Such narratives were readily circulated in missionaries' journals, such as the popularised *Het Penningske*, directed at Dutch youth where the same event is narrated. The purchase is described as a success already:

I have called her Johanna, and it is wonderful to see how her cheeks swell, her knees become less shaky, and a smile appears around her mouth. She is now starting to play [with the others], and it is as if she feels she is our child and not our slave.<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch Protestant mission of the UZV started in 1862, when missionary Johannes Lodewijk van Hasselt and later on his wife Wilhelmina van Hasselt-Mundt joined the first two German missionaries who had arrived at Doreh in 1859. Van Hasselt settled his post close by at Mansinam, a small island opposite Doreh on the border between Cenderawasih Bay and the Bird's Head peninsula of New Guinea. The area stood under the competitive influence of the Resident of Ternate, who was appointed by the Dutch colonial administration, Dutch trading companies active in the same region, and local raiding and trading peoples from, among others, the islands of Biak and Numfor.<sup>4</sup> The entire mission comprised a handful of mission posts on the coasts or islands in the same region, mostly consisting of the missionary, his wife, their own children and five to sometimes more than twenty Papuan foster children, youth and weak or old adults.<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning, the missionaries had bought children and some vulnerable adults who had been locally captured, traded or enslaved. These so-called 'saving' practices went hand in hand with legitimating discourses and narratives in which the parent(s) and their communities were

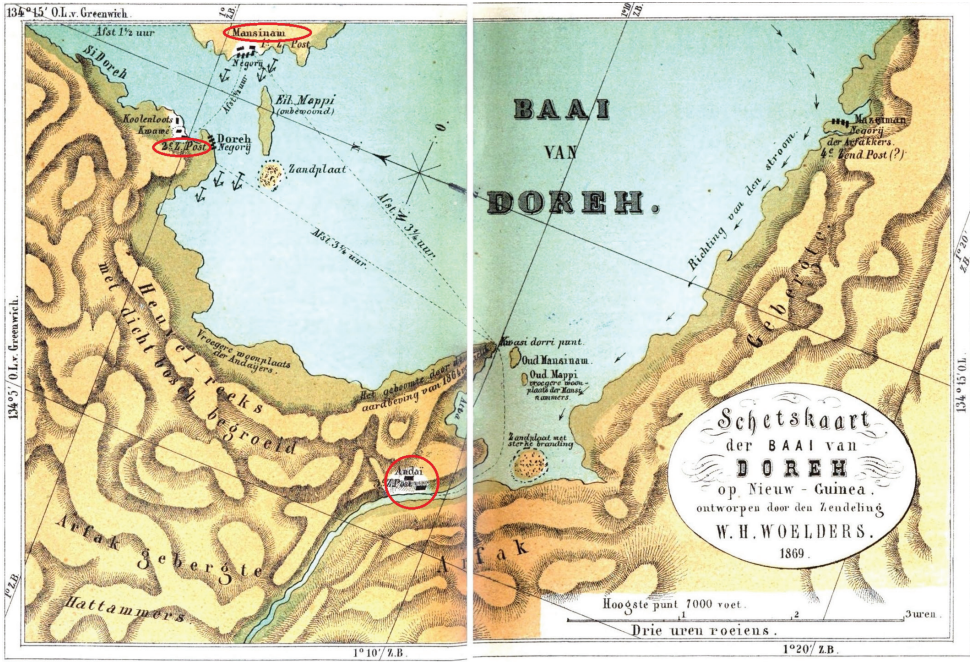
2 Utrechts Archief (hereafter UA), Archief Raad voor de Zending (hereafter ARZ) 1102-1, 2200-4, Letter from M. L. Van Balen-Michaux, 29 November 1892. All translations GM.

3 *Het Penningske* (1893) 3.

4 Pieter Drooglever, *Een daad van vrije keuze: De Papoea's van westelijk Nieuw-Guinea en de grenzen van het zelfbeschikkingsrecht* (Amsterdam 2005) 13-64; Jelle Miedema, *De Kebar, 1855-1980. Sociale*

*structuur en religie in de Vogelkop van West-Nieuw-Guinea* (Dordrecht 1984) 1-41; Clive Moore, *New Guinea: Crossing Boundaries and History* (Honolulu 2003).

5 Freerk Kamma, "Dit wonderlijke werk": *Het probleem van de communicatie tussen oost en west gebaseerd op de ervaringen in het zendingswerk op Nieuw-Guinea (Irian Jaya), 1855-1972. Een socio-missiologicalische benadering* (Oegstgeest 1977).



▲ This drawing made by missionary Willem Hendrik Woelders carefully isolates the mission posts (red circles) from the nearby Papuan settlements on the beaches ('negorij'). It also reveals the lack of detail on the hinterland and the missionaries' dependence on Papuan kayaks for connections between mission posts (rowing times indicated).<sup>6</sup>

6 Willem Hendrik Woelders, 'Schetskaart der baai van Doreh op Nieuw-Guinea ontworpen door den

Zending W.H. Woelders. 1869', in: *Berigten van de Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging* 1870, 17.

deemed inadequate or dangerous or made invisible altogether. Missionaries and their wives circulated an abundance of letters and reports among their supporters, telling stories of Papuans<sup>7</sup> capturing and trading adults and children, of threats to kill people who were old, sick, disabled or accused of witchcraft, of complex negotiations in which compensation in (child) 'slaves'<sup>8</sup> was asked for crimes or mishaps, or about children 'sold' or given away among Papuan groups. Meanwhile, the actual children's past before enslavement was cut off from their accounts almost completely. Missionaries' reports tended to highlight the loving care with which the children were welcomed in their households and downplayed the services and labour the children provided.<sup>9</sup> In both *Het Penningske* and the *Berigten van de Utrechtsche Zendingvereeniging* (BUZV), the mission's official journal, it was strongly suggested that purchasing enslaved people, mostly children, was the only way to save at least some of them from the miserable or life-threatening situation they were in.

As many (gender) colonial historians have argued, such narratives, discourses and practices together served much larger imperialist goals than 'saving' the children only, as they justified colonialism as humanitarian, allowed white women a political or public role, raised money and offered the opportunity to discipline the bodies and minds of a new generation of colonised people along Western, Christian and capitalist lines.<sup>10</sup> According to historian Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford, complaints of local administrators and missionaries about violent local practices were a crucial incentive to bring Dutch New Guinea under further 'ethical' control, as the colonial administration feared that these would damage the Dutch international reputation as coloniser.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one of the

7 See page 36 and 55 for a reflection on this term.

8 On page 35-36 and 43-50, I will explain more precisely what is meant by the word 'slave' the missionaries used. Both academic literature and sources use this concept of 'slaves' rather than 'the enslaved'; I use 'slave' to relate to these sources but change to enslaved when feasible.

9 See for female labour: Nilofar Afzal Watan Naini, Madeleine van Heerd and Tessa Kalsbeek, 'Save the children? De rol van kinderen in de Nederlandse zending in Papoea Nieuw-Guinea (1866-1903)', *Ex Tempore* 38:2 (2019) 97-111.

10 Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian Mission: Education and Emotions in South India and Denmark* (Basingstoke 2015). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137432995>; Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill 1994);

Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln 2011); Geertje Mak, *Huishouden in Nederlands Nieuw Guinea: Geschiedenis van geslacht op geslacht*. Oratiereeks (Amsterdam 2017); Katharina Stornig, 'Catholic missionary associations and the saving of African child slaves in nineteenth-century Germany', *Atlantic Studies* 14: 4 (2017) 519-542. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2017.1301146>.

11 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:1 (1994) 91-111. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002246340000669x>; Danilyn Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua* (Chicago 2012) chapter 2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226731995.001.0001>.

solutions to local violence and slavery practices UZV missionaries repeatedly mentioned was ‘direct colonial administration’. This happened with the instalment of a permanent governor at Manokwari near Mansinam in 1898, after which the missionaries’ practice of purchasing children themselves changed into a collaboration between the administration (taking enslaved children away) and the mission (fostering them).<sup>12</sup>

Even within UZV missionary circles, critical questions had arisen in 1894, when some called the purchase of children ‘slavery in disguise’ (‘vermomde slavernij’). The UZV installed a commission to examine the situation. The key issue was whether the children, transferred to the mission, actually remained enslaved and thus were not *free* to convert to Christianity. Remarkably, one of the ‘mitigating’ circumstances mentioned was that ‘otherwise the missionaries couldn’t find servants’.<sup>13</sup> Internationally, these discussions are remarkably different from Protestant views on ‘redemption’: in Africa, Protestants were generally opposed to it, because it would only raise the local demand for enslaved people.<sup>14</sup> Contrastingly, Catholic missions profited from presenting their cause as a way to save children from slavery.<sup>15</sup>

These discussions notwithstanding, missionaries in Dutch New Guinea continued to buy children until 1898, when the governor was installed. Because of the general contempt they expressed for ‘primitive’ Papuan culture and society and their view that Papuans did not ‘raise’ their children at all, the children were not just ‘saved’ from misery, death or slavery, but also from living in their own society and – even more important – from heathenism. This is a clear example of what Karen Vallgård in *Imperial Childhoods* aptly described as the ‘construal of imperialism within Europe and North America as a project of white adults saving brown children from brown adults’.<sup>16</sup>

12 UA, ARZ 1102-1, Agenda’s en notulen Algemene Vergaderingen en vergaderingen Hoofdbestuur, inv. nr. 2140, 25 April 1893, 24 April 1894, 22 April 1895, 27 April 1896, 26 April 1897, 25 April 1896. This transformation is suggested in a letter of 24 January 1906 (UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200) in which Wilhelmina van Hasselt-Mundt mentions how she got to ‘foster’ a family (consisting of a mother and two children) through the intervention of the governor. Instead of ‘buying’ them, they are now ‘put under her protection’.

13 BUZV (1895) 87-88; (1886) 93; (1887) 98; (1898) 83; (1900) 106-107; UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2140, Bestuursvergaderingen, 25 April 1893; 24 April 1894, art. 12; 22 April 1895, art. 13; 27 April 1896,

art. 17; 26 April 1897, art. 16; 25 April 1898, art. 10. Unfortunately, the report of the commission to which is referred in some of these sources cannot be found in the uzv archives.

14 William G. Clarence-Smith, ‘The Redemption of Child Slaves by Christian Missionaries in Central Africa, 1878-1914’ in: Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph Calder Miller (eds.), *Child Slaves in the Modern World* (Athens 2011) 173-190.

15 Michel Panoff, ‘Y eut-il des esclaves en Nouvelle-Bretagne? Une critique des témoignages?’, *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 85:2 (1987) 133-155. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/jso.1987.2576>; Stornig, ‘Catholic missionary associations’, 519-542.

16 Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods*, 3.

This article aims to look behind this construal. After all, the fact that there *were* children available for missionaries to acquire cannot be denied, and still begs the question of how it was possible at all. What were the circumstances under which hundreds of children became available to the missionaries to purchase between 1862 and 1898 on the north-east coast of the Bird's Head of New Guinea? How had they become a commodity? As stated in the introduction to this special issue, it is crucial to unpack the structures and practicalities behind the seeming self-evidence of child separation. It will be argued that the children appeared on the fault lines of different value systems: they became dislodged from their own communities due to imbalances between local gift economies, after which they started to circulate in a market economy concurrent and in competition with a 'charity gift economy'.

### Slavery in Dutch New Guinea

The fact that *uzv* missionaries 'ransomed' children they considered 'slaves' is not unknown but hardly further explored.<sup>17</sup> Anthropologists and historians of the Bird's Head and Cenderawasih area in many cases describe it as accepted fact that (in the past) the people they studied were involved in slavery: capturing, trading, adopting or exploiting people, including children.<sup>18</sup>

Much of the literature on early modern East Asian slavery systems in general is concerned with the concepts of 'closed' and 'open' slavery.<sup>19</sup> 'Open' systems are associated with people buying off their debts or guilt by selling themselves, whereas 'closed' systems often involved trading and transport. Enslaved people in 'closed' systems became completely dependent on their owners, as they were cut off from their original societies, whereas 'open'

- 17 Danilyn Rutherford, 'Love, Violence, and Foreign Wealth: Kinship and History in Biak, Irian Jaya', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4:2 (1998) 255-256. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3034502>;
- Danilyn Rutherford, 'Frontiers of the lingua franca: Ideologies of the linguistic contact zone in Dutch New Guinea', *Ethnos* 70:3 (2005) 387-412. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840500294490>.
- 18 Drooglever, *Een daad*, 13-64; Miedema, *De Kebar*, 1-41; Moore, *New Guinea*; Rutherford, 'Love'; Rutherford, 'Frontiers'.
- 19 Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht: Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* (Amsterdam 2015); Gerrit Knaap, 'Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Capitalism, Modernity, and Antislavery in the Dutch Orbit*. Carribean Series 15 (Leiden 1995) 193-206; Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, 'Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world: a study into the networks and backgrounds of the slavers and the enslaved in South Asia and South Africa', *Slavery & Abolition* 38:1 (2017) 95-116. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2016.1159004>;
- Anthony Reid and Jennifer Brewster, *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (St Lucia 1983); Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek: De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum 2015).

systems still offered possibilities for a ‘return’ or a gradual assimilation into society over generations. Matthias van Rossum suggests a more gradual model of open and closed slavery systems, which seems useful to obtain a better understanding of local slavery systems and the impact of redemption by missionaries in late-nineteenth-century north Dutch New Guinea as well, as we will see.<sup>20</sup>

Weak polities, competition and warfare among Papuan peoples as well as their alleged racial difference from East Asians made Papuans a ready target for slave-raiding and -trading. Muridan Widjojo meticulously described how Papuan Biak-Numfor clans, settled on islands north-west of the Bird’s Head, provided the sultanate of Tidore and the VOC with (enslaved) Papuans raided from the Bird’s Head coasts and inland.<sup>21</sup> Thereby, slaves transferred from a partly open system (among Papuans themselves) to a closed system. Anthropologist Jelle Miedema offers an overview of later developments, and describes how during the nineteenth century, the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore – formally representing Dutch rule – also organised their own *hongis* (fleets) to demand tribute from these coasts and their hinterlands, including slaves.<sup>22</sup> His studies offer the best historical insights into slavery in the Bird’s Head region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but precisely the late nineteenth century is missing from this long-term overview. One fundamental point all these studies implicitly make clear, however, is that the term ‘Papuan’ itself is problematic. The originally Malayan term was created and used by outsiders, pointing to a physical feature of all peoples of the island of New Guinea: their curly hair.<sup>23</sup> This racialised distinction might help to explain why they were readily traded as slaves by East Asians in an open system, but it does not help to understand how Papuans came to capture and sell other Papuans – to that end we need to understand distinctions and frictions among the Papuans themselves.

Both Widjojo and Miedema show how the demand for slaves under VOC and Dutch indirect colonial rule via Ternate and Tidore stimulated local Biak-Numfor raiding cultures to capture people, who in some cases had already been enslaved before their capture. Yet, the demand for slaves as tribute ended around 1860, so how do we understand the developments after that time? For the period between 1859 and 1898, the accounts of a handful of missionary posts offer the only information available based on long-term contact between Europeans and local people. To understand their accounts, it is worthwhile to show where they were situated (see the map below).

20 Van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*, 33-35.

21 Muridan Satrio Widjojo, *Cross-cultural alliance-making and local resistance in Maluku during the revolt of Prince Nuku, c. 1780-1810* (dissertation; Leiden University 2007) 113-134. Whether the Papuans involved were already slaves at the time of

the raid or became enslaved during the raid is not clear. Both situations may have occurred.

22 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 1-41.

23 This is the most accepted understanding of the origin of the word ‘Papuan’. See: Drooglever, *Een daad*, 19.



Reading these sources critically against the background of anthropological studies of a range of different peoples in the area of the Bird's Head peninsula, Cenderawasih Bay and Biak-Numfoor helps to create a critical distance to the missionaries' framing of the events. But this reading strategy will also illuminate the specific situatedness of the anthropologists, who after World War II tended to study communities from *within*, which led to a much better understanding of socio-cultural-economic value systems of a particular community, but tended to obscure insights in relations *between* different communities.

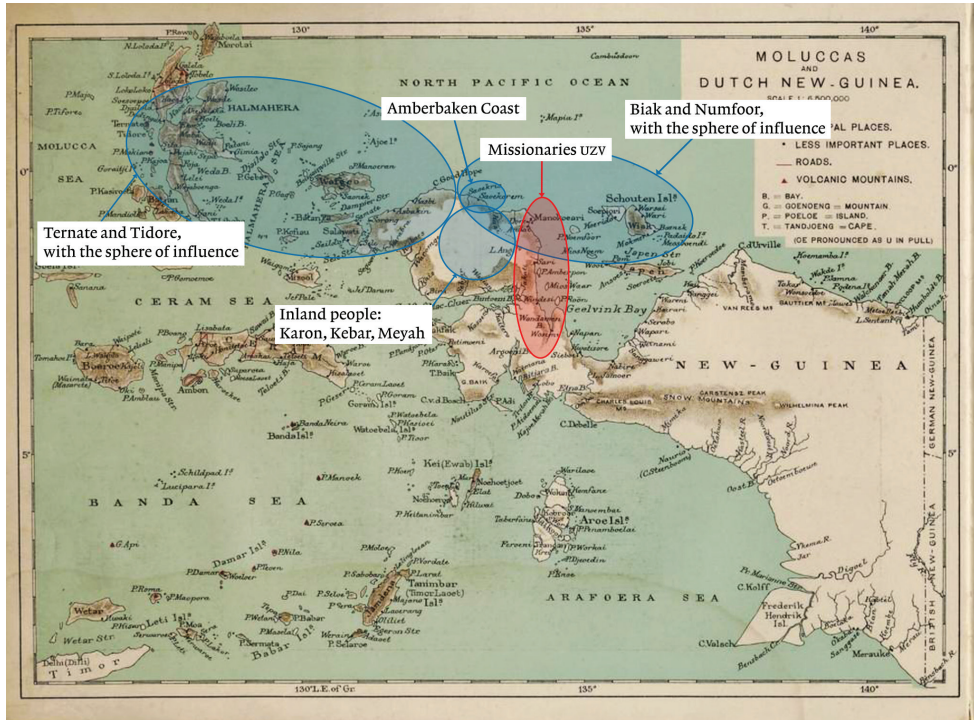
This article aims to understand colonial governmentality not so much from the rationale of the colonial mission to transform colonised communities through their children, but from the logics of the Papuan people themselves. Therefore, I start by reconstructing children's positions within different gift-kinship systems on the basis of anthropological studies. Then the reasons are analysed why children might have been cut off from those gift-kinship systems, or how they appeared on the fault lines between different peoples. The subsequent section shows how both the Western-driven boom in trade in birds of paradise and the missionaries' purchases of children amplified these fault lines. When children thus became commodities, they appeared on yet another fault line: between a market economy and a 'charity gift economy'.

### Raising children within local gift-kinship systems

New Guinea is well known for its huge number of different cultures and languages. The Bird's Head is no exception.<sup>24</sup> However, anthropologists studying the Biak-Numfoor people and the very diverse groups living in the Bird's Head and Cenderawasih Bay all describe gift-economy systems, in which gifts circulate to establish, maintain or reaffirm relationships. To give someone something creates the promise of a future return gift and thus a social connection. Among the circulating gifts, brides and bride wealth were the most important, linking horizontal social relations to generational relations. The bride represented an enormous wealth, for which the family of the bride-takers often paid life-long return bride wealth.<sup>25</sup> Gift circulation thus created kinship and strong networks of other social relationships. Not the gift or food itself, but the indebtedness it created is what was valued most. Only circulating gifts were considered 'alive': by giving them away almost

24 Jelle Miedema, Cecilia Odé and Rien A.C. Dam, *Perspectives on the Bird's Head of Irian Jaya, Indonesia: Proceedings of the Conference, Leiden, 13-17 October 1997* (Amsterdam 1998).

25 Paul Haenen, *Weefsels van wederkerigheid: Sociale structuur bij de Moi van Irian Jaya* (dissertation; Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen 1992) 37-50; Miedema, *De Kebar*, 71-95; Rutherford, 'Love'.



▲ The Dutch missionaries settled at interesting crossroads, as indicated on this map. Separated from Papuan settlements, the mission posts were restricted to coastal areas, which were dominated by Papuan Biak-Numfoor clans who had once settled on the northern Cenderawasih Bay islands and on the northern coast of the Bird's Head peninsula. Missionaries called them Numfoor or Numfoor people or *strandbewoners* (beach people), but also used names of the islands or settlements where they lived. The mission stations centred around Doreh, the only large port of that region, where steamships could land and coals could be obtained, and where all traders passed by. The steeply rising hinterland behind their posts was populated by different peoples on both plains and mountains, missionaries called them 'mountain people' or *Arfakkers*. All these peoples could be in conflict with each other. Moreover, in general, Papuan people were very mobile, as they travelled a lot, also over very long distances such as to Ternate or Tidore. They moved around during the seasons and had long histories of migration, as the settlement of Biak-Numfoor clans along the coasts demonstrates.<sup>26</sup>

26 Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, *The 'Paketvaart' Atlas of the Netherl. Indian Archipelago*

(Amsterdam/Batavia 1912). <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB24:077938000:0020>.

immediately after receiving them, they created new indebtedness and thus new relations. That is the power of gifts.

An anthropological study by exception focusing on the position of children is Gilles Gravelle's analysis of the Meyah, an inland people very close to the Van Hasselt missionary post on Mansinam.<sup>27</sup> Gravelle described the Meyah kinship system by showing how it was woven into a boy's life from birth onwards:

For the Meyah, every action, every request, and every form of assistance that is given is strictly governed by the reciprocal relationship involved. From the time a child begins to know who his key relatives are, he is instructed to develop those relationships by assisting these key relatives in any way he can. Thus he is already starting to build liability in others that he will be able to reclaim later on in life.<sup>28</sup>

In this patrilineal society of the Meyah, the relationship of the male child with his father was very important. The father had to teach him all the knowledge and experience he needed to survive in a complicated world: how to hunt, cultivate the land, maintain relationships, the history of conflicts and how to avoid (further) enmities, who was indebted to his father and how to prevent offending certain spirits. Finally, '[i]t is of utmost importance that he develops a close relationship with as many of his father's relatives as possible'.<sup>29</sup>

Just as among most New Guinean peoples, the relationship between the male child and his mother's brother was of almost equal importance. Yet, it was slightly different, because it was a gift-giving and gift-returning relationship and, therefore, more important in creating social relationships. At a young age, the boy would stay at his uncle's house for months; the uncle would provide food, take him to the gardens, make small bows and arrows for him and treat him affectionately. At a later age, the uncle would teach him stories of the spirit world and traditional songs and help collect the bride wealth. At the age of 18-20, the boy was expected to return all this by helping in the gardens, building houses and providing wild meat.<sup>30</sup>

Turning to the peoples on the coast and islands who were generally more involved in travelling, trading and raiding, anthropologist Gerrit Jan Held offered the most information on the upbringing of children through

27 Different spellings are Meach and Meax. At the coast and by the missionaries they are called 'Arfak people' (*Arfakkers*).

28 Gilles Gravelle, 'A Look at Cohesion, Mutual Obligation, Reciprocity, and Social Interaction among the Meyah', in: Marilyn Gregerson and

Joyce Sterner (eds.), *Kinship and Social Organization in Irian Jaya: A Glimpse of Seven Systems*. Summer Institute of Linguistics and International Museum of Cultures 32 (Jayapura/Dallas 1997) 183.

29 Gravelle, 184-185.

30 Gravelle, 183-184.



This still is taken from *Mahakoeasa (Acte 5) Menschen uit het steenen tijdperk [People from the Stone Age]*, part of the 1929 Maha-filmcyclus produced by the Nederlandsch-Indische Film Maatschappij. This film was aimed at informing the Dutch audience about the Dutch East Indies. The silent movie commentary slides in this film are extremely belittling or derogatory towards the depicted Papuans, and clearly represent the contemporary colonial discourse. Yet, the 1929 footage also gives rare evidence of the ways children were raised and the roles they deployed within Papuan communities. In all probability they raised their children in similar ways during the period in which the missionaries' wrote that Papuan children hardly got any education. This still illuminates how children worked together with adult men to cleave the trunk of a sago palm to extract sago. During these activities, children were clearly raised to learn the advanced skill to extract this starch. The sago palm grew at swamps such as the ones near Waropen, and was the main source of food for the whole area.<sup>31</sup>

31 Directed by Iep A. Ochse, this film was shot in Manokwari, Arfak mountains, Doreh, in 1929. The still is taken at 11:16 from the digitised version

© Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, Hilversum. <http://in.beeldengeluid.nl/collectie/details/expressie/79257/false/true>.

a detailed description of the many ‘rituals of life’ or *Saira* on the island of Waropen in Cenderawasih Bay. After rituals of initiation and during pregnancy, rituals were held at childbirth, the first moment of ‘taking the child outside’, cutting the hair and fitting the first leg-rings, the return from (the first) long voyage, the feast for the perforation of the nose (initiation), name-giving, filing the teeth and tattooing.<sup>32</sup> While other peoples living in the inlands, islands and coasts in the area differed from the Meyah and Waropen peoples in many respects, they were probably similar enough to assume that children were raised as intensely and carefully as Gravelle and Held described, to grow into a person in their clan’s network and learn skills necessary for future subsistence.

The descriptions by Held and Gravelle of how children were raised stand in sharp opposition to the UZV missionaries’ repeated remarks about Papuan children. According to them, Papuan children were not treated as children, nor raised or educated.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, where the later anthropologists stressed the importance and strength of kinship and social ties through the circulation of goods, the early missionaries only saw goods and people robbed, raided or killed, and interpreted the circulations of people, deeds and goods as acts of revenge or demands for compensation rather than as gifts. How can we account for that seemingly unbridgeable difference?

### Children on the fault lines

To my mind, the different positions of the missionaries and the post-Pacific War anthropologists is crucial here: whereas the missionaries were situated *outside* and *between* different communities in the area, most later anthropologists were situated *within* and concentrated their study on one community. What did anthropological studies offer to understand relations *between* different peoples in the area, instead of *within* them? What were the boundaries of gift-circulating communities?

According to almost all studies on gift and kinship in the Bird’s Head region, (originally) *foreign* goods played an important role in wealth and bride wealth.<sup>34</sup> *Kain timur*, for example, ancient fabrics from Timor and further west imported from the south coast of the Bird’s Head since the sixteenth century, had become the central part of bride wealth in the north of the Bird’s Head peninsula, so much so that it was also used as a general term for

32 Gerrit Jan Held, *The Papuas of Waropen* (The Hague 1957) 128-166. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-5928-1>.

33 For a brief exception, see: Wim Jens et al., *Zaaien in zoo barren grond: Uit het dagboek van Willem*

*Leendert Jens, zending op Nieuw Guinea 1876-1899* (Wassenaar 1997) 273-274.

34 Kamma, “Dit wonderlijke werk”, 66-68; Rutherford, ‘Love’.



This second still is taken from the *Mahakoeasa (Acte 7)*, *De Papoea en zijn strijd om het bestaan* [*The Papuan and his struggle for subsistence*] and depicts a Papuan father with a toddler in a dugout canoe near houses on poles in Manokwari in the Doreh Bay. This section of the film clearly shows how these children living on the coast were trained to kayak from their early age on. It also features a canoe competition among youngsters. While the Dutch missionaries must have observed these kind of activities every day, they held on to the idea that Papuans did not raise their children at all. The silent movie gives a brief comment before each scene, in which a remarkable admiration can be detected for the skills of the Papuan rowers.<sup>35</sup>

35 This still from *Mahakoeasa (Acte 7)* is part of the 1929 Maha film cycle. *Mahakoeasa* was directed by Iep A. Ochse and produced by Nederlandsch-Indische Film Maatschappij and was shot at Manokwari, Arfak mountains, Doreh. The still

is taken from the digitised fragment at 03:41.

© Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, Hilversum. <http://in.beeldengeluid.nl/collectie/details/expressie/79255/false/true>.

bride wealth.<sup>36</sup> Circulating among the Moi, Kebar or Karon inland people, *kain timur* cloths became more valuable, the more hands they had passed through and the older they were. Through their circulation, social ties and networks were reaffirmed or established. But logically, at one point in time these fabrics were not gifts: they had been imported through trade or barter. Moreover, ‘inflation’ of *kain timur* over generations among inland people like Moi, Kebar, Karon as well as competition at ceremonial gift parties among Biak and Biak-Numfor clans at the coasts were built into the system, so that new imports continued to be needed.<sup>37</sup> The exchange of foreign goods between ships and coastal peoples and between coastal and inland peoples involved much less peaceful relations than internal gift-kinship relations. After all, exchange and robbery did not create social ties but rather mark difference.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, historical anthropologists who concentrate on the changing relations *between* peoples can tell much more about slavery and the selling, capture and adoption of children. Their accounts help to link the anthropological studies to the UZV missionaries’ observations, so that the latter start to make much more sense.

Valérie Lécrivain’s historical-anthropologist study of Melanesia and the eastern part of New Guinea, bordering precisely on the region under study here, proved very helpful in this context. In a rare instance of inquiry into the existence of slavery prior to the arrival of Western missionaries and traders, she offers three potential answers to my question of how children might have become available for the missionaries to buy. First, it was mostly the imbalance between wealthier coastal and poorer inland peoples which led to the capture, trading, exploitation and sacrificing of people. This imbalance was greatly enhanced by the arrival of Western traders and firearms during the nineteenth century. Second, to be cut off from one’s own (network of) people – either by being ‘given away’ by one’s own people (often under pressure) or by being forcefully raided – actually meant being ‘socially dead’ and created complete dependence on their new owners. This can be distinguished from people captured who were waiting for a ransom paid by their own people. Finally, children could have been either sold or captured; in both situations it was possible that they were adopted as kin within a family but also severely

36 Haenen, *Weefsels*, 21-52. For the history of imports of *kain timur*, see: Miedema, *De Kebar*, 71-81.

37 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 95-103, and Haenen, *Weefsels*, 47, show that bride wealth is always slightly more in the next generation than in the previous. Rutherford, ‘Love’, and Kamma, “Dit wonderlijke werk”, 62, point to competitive (marriage) ceremonies among Numfor peoples.

38 David Graeber, ‘On the moral grounds of economic relations: A Maussian approach’, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 14:1 (2014) 65-77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X13494719>; Anna Tsing, ‘Sorting out commodities: How capitalist value is made through gifts’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3:1 (2013) 21-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.1.003>.

exploited for labour or sex or traded on.<sup>39</sup> These core elements describe fairly well what can be reconstructed from available studies of the area to the west of the area Lécrivain described, the Cenderawasih Bay, Biak-Numfoor and northern Bird's Head area, even if Lécrivain herself did not think so.<sup>40</sup>

### *Selling, capturing and/or trading children*

The Meyah had strong relations with Biak-Numfoor immigrant clans on the coast, which probably meant they had better access to foreign goods than people living in the interior.<sup>41</sup> According to Gravelle, it was 'common for the Meyah as well as other groups of the eastern Bird's Head to purchase children'; such a child was called *mendes*.<sup>42</sup> He then explained that Moskona people sold children to the Meyah for lack of bride wealth:

The Moskona are considered poor, and they must occasionally sell children in order to attain the crucial eastern cloth (*kain timur*) that is an essential part of bridewealth. The Meyah are considered rich in eastern cloth, as well as other forms of bridewealth. Therefore, they do not sell their children to other groups or even to kinsmen.<sup>43</sup>

Such a lack of bride wealth could also lead to the migration of brides towards the coast. Miedema showed there to be a distinct direction of brides from the Kebar people to the coast, towards people wealthier in valuable foreign goods such as *kain timur*, porcelain and iron goods (traditionally produced on Biak) long before and after post Second World War pacification.<sup>44</sup> Combining this insight with Gravelle's explanation for selling children – the need of poorer people for *kain timur* – and Lécrivain's study, it is my inference that children might have been 'sold' to prevent brides from leaving inland communities. Selling children could counter the structural imbalances of wealth between coast and mountains, created by the import of foreign goods at the coasts and the monopolies held over this trade. Missionary sources suggest yet another variant in dealing with this problem: they describe situations in which coastal peoples 'lend' an enslaved woman to an inland man, under the condition of 'paying' with two thirds or half of the offspring.<sup>45</sup> This strategy also led to more children being available for purchase.

39 Valérie Lécrivain, 'Captifs, femmes louées et enfants vendus: Les prémices de l'esclavage en Mélanésie', *L'Homme* 152 (1999) 29-51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/hom.1999.453662>.

40 Lécrivain, 44-45.

41 Kamma, "Dit wonderlijke werk", 65; Gravelle, 'A Look', 170.

42 Gravelle, 'A Look', 187.

43 Gravelle, 'A Look', 187.

44 Miedema, 'Anthropology', 494-506.

45 Woelders, BUZV (1885) 9; BUZV (1886) 53-54. Woelders here speaks about Numforezen (people from Numfor, possibly Biak-Numfor migrants on the coasts) and of Arfak people (people from the mountains, generally).



But there were other imbalances in which children became cut off from their own kin and community as well. Anthropologists Held, Freerk Kamma and Rutherford designate Biak-Numfoor and Waropen clans as raiding peoples, whose internal social relations and hierarchies were very much centred around the organisation of raids. They describe highly competitive, inflationary ‘giving rituals’, in which the hosting bridegroom’s family had to offer unreciprocable amounts of foods, whereas the brothers of the brides had to bring foreign goods to create their reputation. According to Kamma, sometimes children were sold to avoid losing one’s reputation.<sup>46</sup> But mostly, these cultures led to the violent raiding of other peoples. For Waropen, Held discusses raids during which villages from other clans were attacked by surprise in the early morning and people unable to flee were captured – a clan activity which only disappeared between 1918 and 1928 – as crucial for the young, just initiated boy. It would make him a desired lover, praised in the eyes of women, and a hero feared by the enemy.<sup>47</sup>

The UZV missionary journal and letters are full of stories about such raids, but from the perspective of their victims: the people who were captured and killed.<sup>48</sup> Through the best-selling story *Van slaaf tot evangelist: “Petrus Kafiar”* (in English: *From slave to missionary: “Petrus Kafiar”*), the story of people raiding each other was made typical for the kind of children ‘ransomed’ by the mission. The story goes as follows. One day, Kafiar’s father died. His father is reported to have been a hero: he raided other people himself, and managed to defend his village twice against other raiders. To avenge his father’s death, adult men from Kafiar’s village looked for other people to kill. The old enemies, hearing that the village of Kafiar was away on a raid, took advantage of the absence of the men, raided Kafiar’s village and captured or killed the women and children left behind, among whom was Petrus Kafiar. The story not only gives us a picture of the victim of a raid, it also shows that raiding peoples themselves had to be constantly alert for raids.<sup>49</sup>

Kafiar was bought by the missionaries, and proved to be a good pupil who apparently adapted himself easily to the missionary standards. In 1892 he and another adopted Papuan youngster, Timotheüs, were the first to be sent to the school for missionary helpers (‘gurus’) in Depok, Java. At his return, he was requested to start his own mission, which came into being at his own birth island Biak in 1908.<sup>50</sup> However, as Rutherford showed, from the perspective of the Kafiar clan they had brought Petrus back from the

46 Kamma, “Dit wonderlijke werk”, 221.

47 Held, *The Papuas of Waropen*, 203.

48 Rinnooy, BUZV (1872) 205-206; Jens, BUZV (1880) 211; raiding is mentioned by Van Hasselt almost every quarter of a year in the 1880s to 1890s; see also: UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-3, E. Woelders-de Vries,

letter dated 22 July 1886, Andai (26 people captured during raid).

49 J.L.D. van der Roest and Frans Johannes Frederik van Hasselt, *Van slaaf tot evangelist: “Petrus Kafiar”* (Oegstgeest 1920) 19-21.

50 BUZV 1892, 169 and 1908, 118-119.

missionaries to Biak, which shows the Biak people still considered him a ‘free man’ – someone they tried to find and ransom. According to Rutherford, it was no coincidence that his mother – who had fed him and to whom he was indebted for life – came to collect him. In the eyes of the Biak people, Kafiar’s reputation as a foreign (*amber*) Christian teacher was a valuable reward. Through the mother’s pursuit of recognition for having created a ‘recognized’ person, Petrus Kafiar’s foreignness was appropriated like a kind of immaterial booty.<sup>51</sup> Rutherford’s analysis makes clear how little the missionaries understood and were willing to understand the children’s background. It reveals that their purpose was to keep the purchased children under their strict influence, rather than restoring ties with birth families. They were only sometimes helping in restoring such ties by ‘ransoming’ enslaved family members of already purchased children in their households – thus keeping them under their control.<sup>52</sup>

Just like Held’s study of Waropen, Rutherford’s study of the (contemporary) Biak gender and kinship system in relation to ‘booty’ from what is considered ‘foreign’ (*amber*) land helps to understand this logic from *within* Biak society but does not include the impact of past raiding violence on raided communities except their being constantly on guard. This is exactly the reverse of what the missionaries witnessed, since they had no clue about the internal communities’ gift and kinship systems but *did* witness the violence on its borders.

On the basis of Miedema’s historical-anthropological work, it becomes clear how the two ‘systems’ described above – children used to counter imbalances between plains and coasts, and raiding cultures – might historically have started to intermingle. Miedema reconstructed the historical developments with regard to slavery and the capture or selling of children in the larger area of the Moluccas and northern Dutch New Guinea after the VOC period.<sup>53</sup> While Biak and Numfor people had helped to carry out *hong*i raids in the early modern period, Miedema describes the relations between Ternate/Tidore and Biak/Numfor in the nineteenth century as competitive – both tried to control the trade between the products produced in the mountains or plains and the foreign traders visiting the coasts. The region Amberbaken at the northern coast of the Bird’s Head was central to this competition – both a site of local agriculture and access point to the hinterland.<sup>54</sup>

Trading, raiding and warfare went hand in hand, as Miedema suggests, and during raids, people could be murdered or captured, including

51 For *mansren*, see: Held, *The Papuas of Waropen*, 68-69; Kamma, “Dit wonderlijke werk”, 617-622; Rutherford, ‘Love’, 255-256.

52 See for example: Van Hasselt, *BUZV* (1873) 12-13; Idem, *BUZV* (1888) 43, 155.

53 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 1-25; Idem, ‘Anthropology’.

54 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 1-25.

children.<sup>55</sup> Given that the north-western coasts of the Bird's Head were still being raided by Biak-Numfor and Ternatean or Tidorese groups until after the 1860s, Miedema considers it likely that people 'gave', sold or were forced to sell their children to prevent an attack. Buying children instead of capturing them might have become more usual over time.<sup>56</sup> As he made clear elsewhere, however, under what he calls 'war-capitalism', the boundary between 'capturing' and 'buying' a child could be very fine.<sup>57</sup> Also, children in a weaker position, such as orphans or those with only one parent, might have been 'given' more easily than children in a stronger position.<sup>58</sup>

UZV missionary sources confirm both the central importance of Amberbaken as a place where people were 'bought' (under threat) or captured, and the idea that children with only one or no parents were easily sold. They pictured it as a cultural 'custom' of Amberbaken itself, while the children were probably (also) brought from the hinterland. In 1872 missionary N. Rinnooy wrote that at Amberbaken 'there exists a law that someone whose father or mother dies becomes the slave of the nearest kin'.<sup>59</sup> Another missionary also mentions this 'habit' and explains that the people from Doreh possessed so many slaves because they had easy access to Amberbaken.<sup>60</sup>

One last reason a child might have been cut off from his or her kin and community mentioned by Miedema is when a child became associated with sorcery or black magic. UZV missionaries mention several situations in which they intervened to prevent the killing of people accused of having used *manoin* (evil spirit) or being *manowin*, mostly after someone suddenly died.<sup>61</sup> While they did not report children being sold for that reason, Miedema reports the history of Jonathan Ariks, the son of someone accused of sorcery. Sold via Amberbaken to a Meyah, the Meyah sold him in turn to the missionaries: the latter 'demanded' children, in the Meyah's eyes, and they rather brought them an adopted child (*mendes*).<sup>62</sup> Children associated with *manoin* might thus have been the first to 'offer' in case of a violent attack or need for (foreign) goods.

To summarise the reasons for selling or giving away children: peoples, mostly those living in the plains or mountains, who were overpowered by

55 Miedema, 'Anthropology', 504-506.

56 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 12, 99-100.

57 Miedema, 'Anthropology', 504-506.

58 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 38-39, gives a detailed background of the trade in children in weak positions.

59 Rinnooy, *BUZV* (1872) 205.

60 Bink, *BUZV* (1885) 195; for more on Amberbaken as a central place for the trade in child slaves, see: Miedema, *De Kebar*, 38-39.

61 Jens, *Zaaien*, 161, gives two examples: Rossie (50 years old) and Sabina (40 years old), bought by

Jens; Woelders *BUZV* (1889) 177-179, mentions a man accused of using *manoin* on a child who died, and Woelders paid because the man belonged to him; Van Hasselt, *BUZV* (1883) 22-27, mentions an accident to a child, and a woman, accused of *manoin* and threatened with drowning, being bought by van Hasselt and taken to a ship; *BUZV* (1889) 173, includes an account of the same story told by a ship's captain who took the 'witch' on his ship; Van Hasselt, *BUZV* (1891) 5, 50-51.

62 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 38.

other peoples, mostly the ones living in the coastal areas, through violence or difference in wealth, could have been pressured or forced to do so. Lack of bride wealth, incidental situations of ‘indebtedness’ as well as trade under the threat of (fire)arms could cause such pressure. Moreover, it seems likely that children who were more vulnerable within their communities, such as the ones accused of sorcery or (half-)orphans, were the first to be ‘sold’.

#### *Adopting, trading, exploiting*

But why would raiders and traders be interested in children? What happened to them after having been severed from their communities and having entered a new one? Both for the Kebar and for the Meyah, adoption systems are described. Miedema explains why among the Kebar sometimes children from other families were adopted in one’s house – children called *budak*. The *kain timur* system was more or less a gamble for the participants, because the amount and gender of children that stayed alive until marriage could ruin a family as well as bring fortune. Therefore, the imbalance was sometimes restored by adopting a child from another family. Female *budak* were most prized because they would bring bride wealth in the future.<sup>63</sup> *Budak* could temporarily or permanently become part of the most important social unity among the Kebar, the ‘nuclear family’ (*nonik*).<sup>64</sup> A similar adoption system was described in detail about the Meyah:

How the *mendes* fits into her new kinship relationship is strictly up to those who purchased her. One family may treat her as a slave, using her to perform tasks without receiving the affection or compensation that a biological daughter may receive. Others will treat her as a part of the family, giving her the same affection and benefits that the other children receive. If a child is diligent and works hard, she may become well accepted by members of the family. If she is lazy or troublesome, she may be sold to another person.<sup>65</sup>

Within the ‘nuclear family’ a *mendes* related to the others just as the other siblings. However, a *mendes* had no inherited obligations nor benefits *outside* the adopted nuclear family. Both *budak* and *mendes* could stem from within the same community, but also bought or caught from another people. A remarkable discussion of a Papuan from Manokwari with missionary G. G. L. Bink indicates that, in his eyes, the position of bought and adopted children among Papuans was better than that of the children bought by the missionaries:

63 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 99.

64 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 134.

65 Gravelle, ‘A Look’, 186-187; for a similar adoption system among the Kebar, see: Miedema, *De Kebar*, 99-100.

See, when someone among us is in trouble because he does not get any children, it sometimes happens that he buys a small boy or girl. He treats it then as his own children, and when he dies, they inherit from him. But you and the other *toewans* don't act like that with the Papuan children.<sup>66</sup>

**A spot-on remark: the children adopted by the missionaries did not inherit, and thus were not fully acknowledged as their kin.**

While missionaries were blind to local adoption practices, they often reported complex negotiations in which Papuans used captured children and adults ('slaves') to buy off accusations of adultery, murder or sorcery. If no compensation in goods or slaves was possible, the missionaries often wrote, threats to kill or raid could be the result.<sup>67</sup> There is indeed historical-anthropological evidence that captured children also served as goods in negotiations. According to Miedema, Kebar people used *budak* as a commodity between kinship-gift communities. They robbed or bought *budak* from people to their west and sold to Meyah in exchange for *kain timur* or black magic medicine. Or the children were kept for future use – for example, to buy off murder.<sup>68</sup> For the island of Waropen, with its raiding culture, Held describes the position of a *ghomino*, mostly a child or a woman captured during a raid, as someone who has had the misfortune of 'being cut off from his clan'. That meant that such a child was considered (socially) dead. Held noted that Waropen fishermen did not exploit captured people.<sup>69</sup> Given the importance of enslaved people in negotiations, apart from being a trophy by which Waropen men could prove their courage, *ghominos* were probably mainly used to obtain ransoms or as goods in negotiations. Two concrete cases reported by the missionaries show that orphaned children from one moment to the other could turn into 'goods' used in such negotiations. The orphans involved were said to be inherited by their family, who allegedly were free to sell them as slaves. The missionaries managed to intervene by purchasing the children, after which the goods could be used in the negotiations. The children were not left to the families who had had the intention to sell them, however, but

66 Bink, *BUZV* (1886) 177.

67 Examples of remarks about slaves as goods in negotiations: in cases of injury or theft (damage to a party), slaves are among the goods with which you could pay compensation: Rinnooy, *BUZV* (1872) 211-212; complicated negotiations about the mother of Korano: Woelders, *BUZV* (1872) 34-35; complicated negotiations about the child of Majoor: Woelders, *BUZV* (1874) 166-173; implicated in debt, had to pay a slave because he had Majoor in school: Woelders, *BUZV* (1886) 53-54; paying for

a murder by giving goods and slaves: Woelders, *BUZV* (1886) 131-133; paying dowry and debts in firearms and slaves through multiple links: Bink, *BUZV* (1888) 22; after an accident with a firearm, paying compensation for a killed female slave: Bink, *BUZV* (1890) 136-137; slaves in negotiations about women: Woelders, *BUZV* (1885) 9; Bink, *BUZV* (1885) 195; Woelders, *BUZV* (1886) 54.

68 Miedema, *De Kebar*, 38-39, 95-103.

69 Held, *The Papuas of Waropen*, 68-69.

were put in the missionaries' households. It is reported that one of them had sought protection at the missionaries' yard himself.<sup>70</sup>

Finally and importantly, UZV missionaries regularly mentioned that the enslaved were meant to work the land, something free male (Biak-Numfoor) Papuans refused to do; only women and slaves were reported to work in the gardens. As Wilhelmina van Hasselt-Mundt states: 'The people living at the beach are not fit for working the land. To plant the necessary vegetables, beans and some rice he keeps his slaves (...)'.<sup>71</sup> That Biak-Numfoor people used the enslaved to work the land is also affirmed by Held, who mentions this as one of the main differences from the very similar Waropen culture.<sup>72</sup> Missionary Van Balen describes Farsirido, a complete 'slave village' set up to work the land; according to him, the enslaved were treated mildly and had a lot of freedom.<sup>73</sup>

So far, the position of children cut off from their communities as described by Lécivain for the more eastern part of Melanesia is thus strikingly similar to both Miedema's and Gravelle's observations among inland peoples in the Bird's Head and confirmed by observations of the missionaries: purchased children, once cut off from their community, were at the mercy of their new owner and could be kindly adopted, further traded in negotiations and/or exploited. Just as in Van Rossum's analysis of East Asian slavery systems, the question is to what degree children were cut off from their original community, and to what degree did they have a chance to build new relationships via adoption. This also puts the position of the children the missionaries acquired into critical perspective: missionaries did not allow or accommodate their return to their original communities, nor fully adopted them as family.

### Commodified children: an increasing imbalance

In a discussion with the Korano (local representative of the Sultanate of Tidore) of Andai with missionary Willem Hendrik Woelders, they had the following conversation (in the words of Woelders):

K.: 'Before mister came here, we did not buy slaves.'

W.: 'Did I teach you this appalling trade, then?'

K.: 'No, we did know it, but we did not have goods. Since you are here and many strangers have come, out of whom we made a lot of profit, what can we do better than buy slaves who work for us?'<sup>74</sup>

70 Bink, *BUZV* (1881) 206; Woelders, *BUZV* (1884) 165-173, claimed that the boy, Wammenai, had hidden himself on his yard to escape being sold and had also expressed his wish to stay with the missionaries during a publicly negotiated deal.

71 UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-5, Letter from Minna van Hasselt-Mundt, 26 April 1897.

72 Held, *The Papuas of Waropen*, 68-69.

73 Van Balen, *BUZV* (1892) 50-51.

74 Woelders, *BUZV* (1884) 6-7.

According to the Korano, the trade in slaves was not ‘Papuan culture’, but something introduced with the profit from trade with the recent arrival of European, Chinese and Ternatean hunters and traders. Indeed, the capture and trading of children can be more precisely placed in the historical context of the enormous boom in the trade in birds of paradise between the 1870s and 1900s, a development that has escaped Miedema’s attention. While there had already been some demand for these birds in the context of natural science collections before the 1860s, after that time and in particular with the quickly increasing European demand for feathers for fashion only, the trade and hunting technique changed profoundly. Because it was no longer necessary to preserve the entire bird, guns could be used to shoot them. Dutch trading companies from Ternate as well as Chinese traders organised the trade at the coasts of the northern Bird’s Head, via Ambonese hunters, who in turn hired local hunters. Firearms were distributed without much control, and the results were reportedly devastating.<sup>75</sup> Missionaries sent warning messages, and in 1906 the substitute Assistant Resident of Dutch New Guinea, J.W. van Hille, wrote: ‘That there are still inhabitants in New Guinea is certainly not thanks to the hunt for birds of paradise’.<sup>76</sup> As murder and incidents causing death led to demands for compensation, these killings were probably one reason why children increasingly started to be used as commodities.

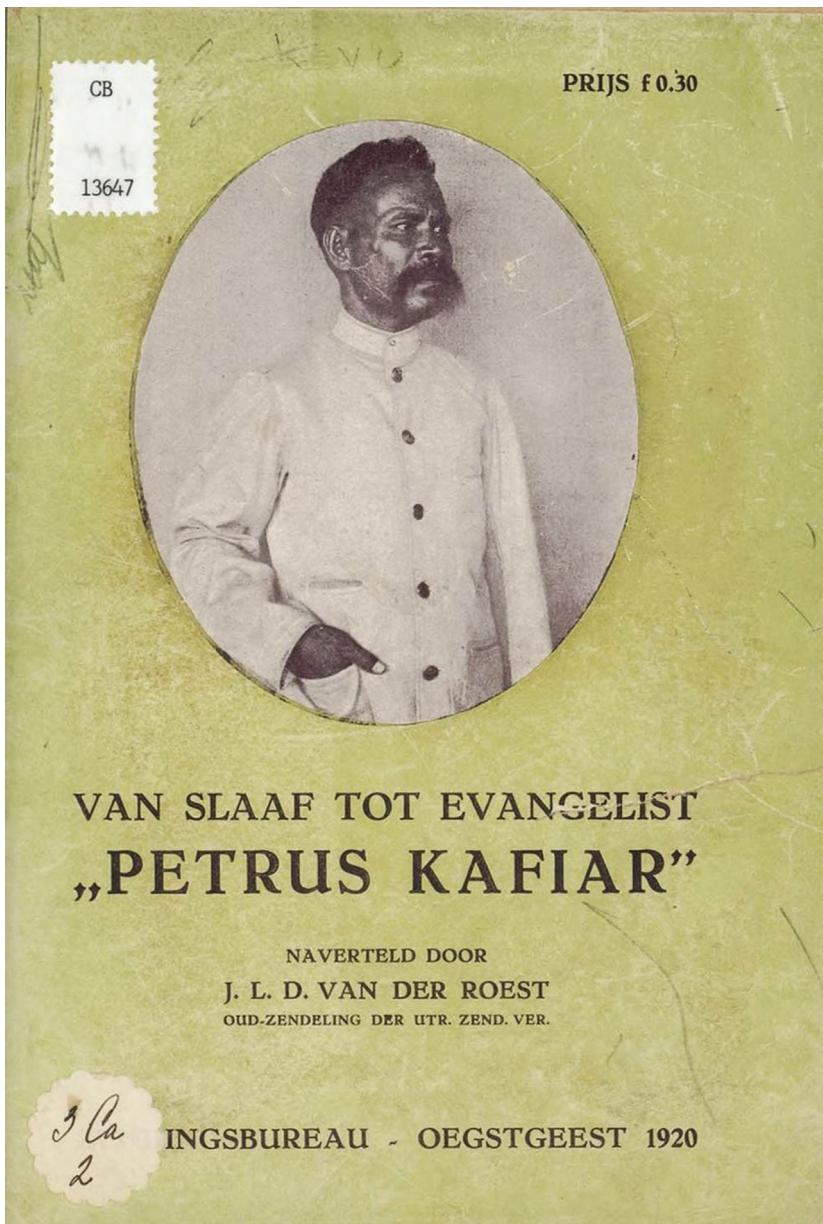
The already asymmetrical power relations between Biak-Numfor clans on the northern Bird’s Head coast and inland people became even more imbalanced. Telling is a conflict between the missionaries and the Biak-Numforese coastal clans about a new mission post. Guru Petrus Kafiar was meant to start a mission post at Arfoe, in the inlands between Amberbaken and Doreh. However, the people from Doreh, controlling the trade at Amberbaken, strongly resisted and threatened him with murder. They did not want ‘that the inland people would get any wiser! Then they would sell their birds for high prices to strangers instead of to the Numforese’.<sup>77</sup>

The missionaries’ main concern about the booming trade was that it prevented them from disciplining coastal people to work the land: with their profits coastal Papuans could buy slaves to do that, or buy food from the

75 Timo de Jong, *Opnieuw op ontdekkingsreis: Postkoloniale perspectieven verleggen in het land van de paradijvogel* (Master’s thesis; Radboud University 2015); Robin W. Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection* (Berkeley 1975) 159-160.

76 J.W. van Hille, ‘Reizen in West-Nieuw-Guinea’, *Tijdschrift van Het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 2:23 (1906) 454; Van Hasselt, BUZV (1899) 66; UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2140, Notulen Algemene Vergadering, 27 April 1897.

77 UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-5, Letter from Minna van Hasselt-Mundt, 26 April 1897.



▲  
Cover of the sixth edition of the bestselling story of Petrus Kafiar, a model missionary narrative of the ‘redemption’ of an enslaved Papuan child written by Dutch missionaries Van der Roest and Van Hasselt. Such stories were targeted at the Dutch public to raise their empathy with ‘poor Papuan children’, and showed the ‘good works’ of the mission and their ultimate success. These books were crucial in missionary fundraising.<sup>78</sup>

78 Van der Roest and Van Hasselt, *Van slaaf tot evangelist: “Petrus Kafiar”* (Oegstgeest 1920) coverpage. © Protestantse Kerken Nederland. Het

Zendingsbureau te Oegstgeest. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBVUo2:000002229:00001>.



inland people.<sup>79</sup> However, the missionaries also discussed the booming trade in relation to their own problem with regard to ‘ransoming’ enslaved children. As Van Hasselt-Mundt wrote in 1892:

These days, ransoming these poor lambs has become more difficult than in the past. [T]he Papuans do not know of any prosperity apart from the possession of a great number of slaves, (...) which has become very easy for them because of their enormous gains from the trade. When they sell a number of birds of paradise, they soon have a slave, and when now poor robbed children are presented, by second or third hand sold, they seldom bring them to us, or they ask such huge prices that we are not capable of buying a child, even when the heart so dearly wishes to.<sup>80</sup>

By purchasing children, the missionaries augmented the demand for them and thus their price. Furthermore, the missionaries often purchased sick, wounded, starving or disabled adults and children.<sup>81</sup> To show their Christian-humanitarian motives to their supporters at home, they accentuated these purchases while downplaying those more straightforwardly purchased to help them out, but there is no doubt they actually did buy people they considered ‘of no use’.<sup>82</sup> Ironically, they thus helped the coastal tribes make a profit out of captured people who were useless for *their* purposes, such as gardening, hunting birds of paradise, and marriage. It appears that the Papuans actually came to understand that the missionaries could be *forced* to buy when they made things even worse. Under the eyes of the missionaries, they let adults and children starve, beat them or threatened to kill them.

For example, in 1889, people from Kwawé offered missionary Woelders a woman for sale, which he declined. Four days later they returned: ‘Kicking and hitting they chased her, constantly shouting: “Walk a little faster. If sir doesn’t buy you, we will drown you tonight”’. Woelders ended up paying.<sup>83</sup> In 1891, Van Hasselt wrote that Biak people ‘bring starved people

79 A well-documented report on the situation in relation to the problems of ‘teaching’ local people how to cultivate the land and participate in trade: UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2215, Commissie Handel. See for the increasing worries of the missionaries about this problem also: UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-5, Van Hasselt-Mundt, 26 april 1897.

80 UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-5, Van Hasselt-Mundt, 2 January 1892; for a similar complaint, see: Bink, BUZV, 195.

81 In addition to people threatened with death after having being accused of *manoin* (see above): Jens,

Zaaien, 161; Van Hasselt, BUZV (1882) 146; Woelders, BUZV (1889) 179 (woman mistreated and threatened with death); Van Hasselt, BUZV (1891) 50-51; UA, ARZ 1102-1, 2200-7, Wilhelmina van Hasselt, 12 August 1890.

82 ‘A number of children, mostly puny, sickly and deformed are collected here and there by the missionaries’, Luigi D’Albertis, *New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw* (London 1880) 71. At several points, missionaries mention the (lack of) usefulness of the people they bought.

83 Woelders, BUZV (1889) 179.

for sale, and say that both adults and children have been sold by their families because of the famine. The sold people themselves say that that is a lie. They have been lured by nice talk, and left without food during their travel'.<sup>84</sup> Could it be possible that in these cases the sellers had maltreated the enslaved to motivate the missionaries to buy them?

Involuntarily, no doubt, the missionaries thus augmented the prices for such maltreated, starving, ill, old or disabled people and helped increase the imbalances between coastal and inland peoples even further. At the same time, in *their* own Protestant charity gift economy, the misery of the 'poor lambs' was a valuable selling point.<sup>85</sup> The international market thus amplified the fault lines between coastal and inland Papuans, producing captured, 'socially dead' children for purchase. The missionaries themselves could only buy them within yet another 'economy', a Western Christian-humanitarian want of colonial 'good causes', an economy in which redeeming children from slavery raised money. The stories circulating about (successful) 'redeemed' children in the mission journal and the gifts directly connected to the 'redemption' of children indicate both the fine-grained societal support in the Netherlands for these practices, as well as the financial gains.<sup>86</sup> These gift economies circling around children can be considered a cornerstone of politics labelled as 'ethical' or 'humanitarian imperialism' up until today, as also indicated in the introduction to this special issue.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

This case study is, first, meant as an invitation to think more structurally about (post)colonial missions encroaching on local systems regulating relations between generations. Under which conditions and to what extent did parents, families, clans or communities allow their children to be partly or temporarily raised by strangers? The case presented here – in relation to both discussions of 'open' and 'closed' slavery and histories of child removal and adoption – urges us to systematically question the (im)possibilities of the

84 Van Hasselt, *BUZV* (1891) 50-51.

85 An article on the Protestant (UZV) charity gift economy is in preparation by the author.

86 Geertje Mak, *Children as Gifts: Christian community-building through Protestant missions in Dutch New Guinea (1860-1906)* (paper presented at COACC conference *Children in (Post)colonial Missions*; Amsterdam 4-5 July 2019); see also Stornig, 'Catholic missionary associations', 522.

87 For 'ethical imperialism', see Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion', 91, footnote 1; for 'humanitarian imperialism' and the specific place of children therein, 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). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10871>.

child retaining its relation to family and community, as well as whether one could fully become a member of a new family or community.

Second, turning to the New Guinea case, the power dynamics producing children cut off from their original communities, to be ‘saved’ by the uzv mission, reveal a simple but radical insight: the term ‘Papuan’, always already a racialised term from the outside, prevents us from understanding ‘their’ agency, as differences between them played a crucial role. Bluntly put, when anthropologists keep to their one studied clan or people, while historians stick to the term Papuans, we all miss what missionaries unintentionally added to the picture: what happened on the fault lines *between* different Papuan groups.

Third, Dutch, Chinese and Ambonese traders and hunters apparently had no scruples in amplifying local differences as long as they profited. Ironically, however, missionaries with their Christian-humanitarian motives also ‘profited’ from these differences, as only on the fault lines did they have access to children who were vulnerable because they were no longer embedded in gift-kinship relations. Reasonably, they even added to the differences in wealth and power. Therefore, we might ask whether, just as exploitative or violent colonialism abused and amplified differences within and between colonised peoples, Christian and humanitarian colonial projects did.

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