

# ‘Removing the Youth from their Pernicious Environment’

## Child Separation Practices in South Dutch New Guinea, 1902-1921

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This article examines practices of child separation in South Dutch New Guinea during the first two decades of colonial administration and missionary presence, spanning the years 1902-1920. By examining the ways in which the Dutch Catholic missionary priests and brothers of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur* – MSC) sought to ‘civilise’ the Marind-anim and reconfigure Marind society, I argue that this ‘civilising’ project concentrated on the management, control and transformation of bodies and bodily practices – especially those of children. This project only appeared to be feasible in what I define as ‘spaces of transformation’, constituted by the mission’s boarding schools and new model villages, in which missionaries could establish some degree of authority. Designed specifically to separate Marind youth and socialise them in a manner distinct from that undergone by their parents, these institutions enhanced missionary efforts to transform Marind society by interrupting the transmission of knowledge and practice from one generation to the next.

Dit artikel onderzoekt praktijken die erop gericht waren kinderen uit hun oorspronkelijke milieu te verwijderen in het zuidelijke deel van Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea tijdens de eerste twee decennia van het koloniaal bestuur en de katholieke missie van 1902-1920. De analyse van de manieren waarop Nederlandse katholieke missionarissen en broeders van de *Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur* (MSC) de Marind-anim en hun samenleving wilden hervormen toont aan dat dit ‘beschavingsproject’ zich concentreerde op het controleren en transformeren van lichamen en lichamelijke praktijken, met name op die van kinderen. Dergelijke ‘beschavingspraktijken’ werden alleen uitvoerbaar geacht in die ruimtes waar de Nederlandse priesters en broeders een zekere mate van gezag konden uitoefenen.

Kostscholen en modeldorpen, die in dit artikel als ‘spaces of transformation’ worden gedefinieerd, werden speciaal opgezet om Marind kinderen en jongvolwassenen tijdelijk aan hun oorspronkelijke omgeving te onttrekken, zodat de overdracht van kennis en praktijken van de oudere generatie op de jongere generatie onderbroken werd. De missionarissen beschouwden dit als de enige mogelijke werkwijze om de kinderen te socialiseren op een manier die wezenlijk verschilde van de opvoedingspraktijken van hun ouders.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

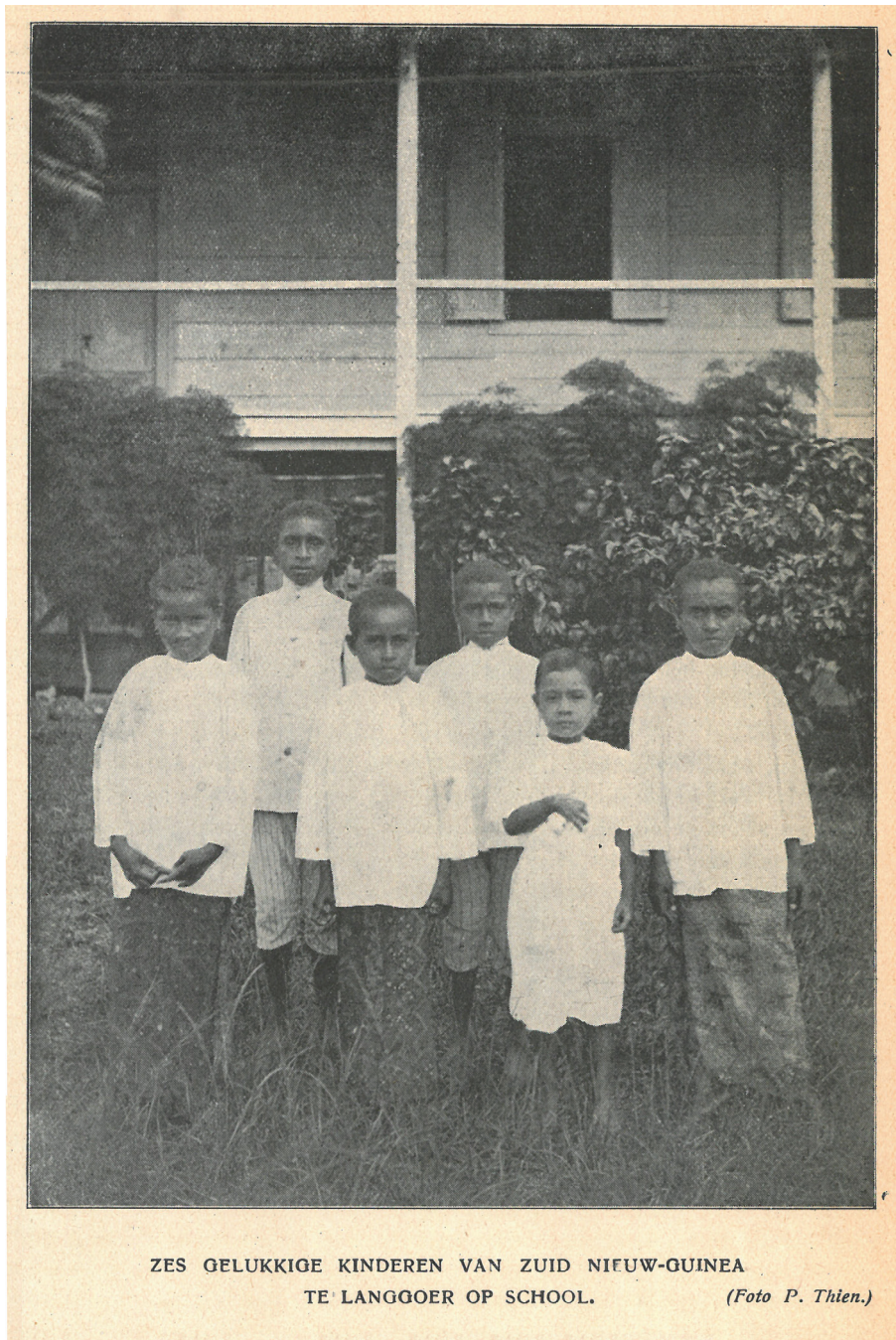
The first photograph in this article (Figure 1), depicting a ‘group of six happy children from Merauke and surroundings’, was published in 1920 in the *Almanak van O.L. Vrouw van het Heilig Hart*, the magazine of the Dutch Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (hereafter *Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur*, MSC). It was taken at the Catholic missionary boarding school in Langgur on Kei-Besar – an island 1,000 kilometres from the southern coast of Dutch New Guinea, where the children originally came from.<sup>2</sup> In an endearing story published alongside the photograph, missionary priest Jos van de Kolk explained that the Dutch MSC missionaries had ‘rescued’ the children from a ‘wretched’ society, relocating them to the boarding school in Langgur to be brought up by Dutch Catholic missionaries. In a postscript to the article the *Almanak’s* editors urged the Dutch public to donate generously: the only way to save all of South Dutch New Guinea’s children was by ‘removing the youth from their pernicious environment’.<sup>3</sup>

This is one example of how ‘child separation’ was presented to the Dutch public as part of benevolent civilising projects. Relocating non-European children from their communities in South Dutch New Guinea to the missions’ boarding schools in Langgur, however, turned out to be an expensive and inefficient way to ‘civilise’ and convert children. While a handful of eligible children were relocated abroad, the MSC missionaries experimented with ‘easier’ and cheaper ways to ‘civilise’ and discipline children in South Dutch New Guinea itself. This included practices which saw children separated, detached and distanced from their kin and from what missionaries believed was a wretched society. Drawing on various missionary sources from the archive of the Dutch MSC and studies examining Marind culture, I will explore these missionary practices through the lens of

1 This article is written on the basis of my PhD research: Maaïke Derksen, *Embodied Encounters: Colonial Governmentality and Missionary Practices in Java and South Dutch New-Guinea, 1856-1942* (2020).

2 Jos van de Kolk, ‘Zes gelukkige kinderen van Z. N-Guinea’ [‘Six happy children from South New Guinea’], *Almanak van O.L. Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* (hereafter *Almanak*) 30 (1920) 33-38.

3 Kolk, ‘Zes gelukkige kinderen’, 38.



▲  
Figure 1: This photograph was inserted alongside the article 'Six happy children of South New-Guinea' written by the Dutch Father Jos van de Kolk and published in the *Almanak van O.L. Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* in 1920. These six children are posing in front of the Catholic boarding school in Langgur, Kei-Islands. The original caption reads 'Six happy children from South New-Guinea, at school in Langgur. Photo by Father [Bernardus Petrus Johannes, MD] Thien'.<sup>4</sup>

4 *Almanak van O.L. Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* 30 (1920) 38. © MSC, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven.

embodied encounters.<sup>5</sup> This lens allows us to study with close scrutiny both the practicalities and materialities of the face-to-face meetings of missionaries, as well as the missionary efforts to refashion and discipline colonial subjects’ bodies.<sup>6</sup>

As put forward in the introduction to this special issue, the separation of children, usually combining ways to culturally detach them from their kin and society at large with physical separation or removal, often featured in colonial and missionary projects during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Historians Margaret Jacobs, Barry Patton and Amanda Barry, among others, have shown that the settler colonies of Canada and Australia vigorously pursued the forced separation of children from their kin, initially temporarily but often progressing to permanent removal.<sup>8</sup> These non-European children were acculturated into particular ways of knowing and being, thereby becoming adults disciplined to the ideological and bodily regimes of the coloniser. These practices were legitimised as philanthropic civilising projects, emphasising the future welfare of removed children.<sup>9</sup> Scholars of colonialism have already shown that projects of ‘civilising’ the children of the ‘heathen’ and ‘barbaric’ peoples were pursued for more pragmatic concerns for colonial governance: children were seen as malleable, changeable and educable, and therefore instrumental in the civilising mission. After receiving their ‘upbringing’, often in a missionary institution, the return of children to kin and community would set the transformation of society in motion and ensure it remained on course. Hence, the installation of disciplinary mechanisms in the hearts and minds of children and youth, encompassing the organisation of labour, leisure

5 Sint Agatha, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (hereafter ENK), archive of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, AR-PO27 (hereafter AR-PO27); Bruce M. Knauff, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, comparison, dialectic* (Cambridge 1993); Jan van Baal, *Dema: Description and analysis of Marind-anim culture (South New Guinea)* (The Hague 1966).

6 Maaik Derksen, *Embodied Encounters: Colonial Governmentality and Missionary Practices in Java and Dutch New-Guinea, 1856-1945* (unpublished PhD thesis; Radboud University Nijmegen 2020).

7 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: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10871>.

8 Amanda Barry, ‘“Equal to Children of European Origin”: Educability and the Civilising Mission in Early Colonial Australia’, *History Australia* 5:2 (2008) 41.1-41.16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2104/hao80041>; 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 2009); Barry Patton, ‘From the Influence of Their Parents: Aboriginal Child Separations and Removals in Early Melbourne and Adelaide’, in: Amanda Barry, Joanna Cruickshank, Andrew Brown-May and Patricia Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelist of Empire? Missionaries in Colonial History* (Melbourne 2008) 125-141.

9 Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, ‘Child Separation’.



time, sexuality and education, became crucial to any colonial modernising agenda.<sup>10</sup>

These colonial civilising projects cast children as ‘objects and agents’ – components of what David Scott has termed a ‘modern’ form of colonial governmentality.<sup>11</sup> In *Colonialism’s Culture* (1994) Nicholas Thomas demonstrated that conversion was important to this modern form of colonial governmentality, characterised as not ‘just a matter of religious change, but of wider social transformation’.<sup>12</sup> Under these conditions, imperial exploitation was linked in paradoxical ways with the management and improvement of the welfare of colonised populations. Allan Lester and Fae Dussart described this ethos with the rubric ‘humanitarian governance’, arguing that ‘humanitarianism was intrinsic to the emergence of modern governmentality’.<sup>13</sup> Others who have written about the ‘moral’ obligations of colonisers, as well as the humanitarian justifications for dispossession and exploitation, have done so in terms of ‘humanitarian imperialism’ to convey the rationales of colonial rule. They showed how humanitarianism was linked to western philanthropy and Christian missions that facilitated colonial rule and subjugated non-western cultures.<sup>14</sup>

For the Dutch case, this colonial paradox was already put forward by historian Elsbeth Locher-Scholten in 1981. She showed how much the drive to

- 10 Linda Clemmons, “‘We Find It a Difficult Work’: Educating Dakota Children in Missionary Homes, 1835-1862’, *American Indian Quarterly* 24:4 (2000) 570-600; Sarah de Leeuw, “‘If anything is to be done with the Indian, we must catch him very young’: colonial constructions of Aboriginal children and the geographies of Indian residential schooling in British Columbia, Canada’, *Children’s Geographies* 7:2 (2009) 123-140. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280902798837>; Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian Mission: Education and Emotion in South India and Denmark* (New York 2015). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1057/9781137432995>.
- 11 David Scott, ‘Colonial Governmentality’, *Social Text* 43 (1995) 191-202. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/466631>.
- 12 Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge 1994) 126.
- 13 Allan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines Across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge 2014) 20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139022026>.
- 14 James Heartfield, *The Aborigines’ Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836-1909* (New York 2011); Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940* (Oxford 2015). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198733034.001.0001>; Alan Lester, ‘Humanitarians and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century’, in: Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford 2005). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199253487.003.0004>; 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>; Jessie Mitchell, *In Good Faith? Governing Indigenous Australia through God, Charity and Empire, 1825-1855*. Aboriginal History Monographs 23 (Canberra 2011).

imperial expansion in the Dutch East Indies was linked to the Ethical Policy. This ‘civilising’ colonial politics was armed with a moral discourse stressing the obligation to improve indigenous welfare but at the same time mandated an overall intensification of colonial interventions for the purpose.<sup>15</sup> In this article I will demonstrate the way the civilising colonial politics played out in child separation practices that were equally framed in a moral vernacular of ‘saving children’, and whereby these practices were cast as part of a project that was ‘civilising’ Marind-anim.

The focus of this article is the region of South Dutch New Guinea. This was, and still is, a region far from political, administrative and Protestant centres based in the north of West Papua. Nowadays, the region hosts the largest number of Catholics in West Papua and the city of Merauke is the centre of both the ecclesial province and the regency. Catholics, however, are still a minority, numbering fifteen percent of the total population of West Papua. Nevertheless, one can roughly state that all (ethnic) Papuans are Christians and that Christianity is a core element of Papuan ethnic and national identity.<sup>16</sup> Christianity, however, did not create West Papuan nationalism which developed since the 1960s, but rather drove its institutionalisation and with it the quest for statehood. The networks facilitating the adaption and redefinition of Christian Papuan identity originated from an institutional framework provided by the missionary presence, as historian Suzanna Rizzo argued recently.<sup>17</sup> In South Dutch New Guinea, these institutional networks materialised only after 1922. That year the Catholic mission – in collaboration with the colonial government – began to grow a network of model villages to house all Papuans, with accompanying village schools for their children. It was a resettlement programme that eventually brought about the ‘pacification’ and de-facto control of South Dutch New Guinea.<sup>18</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the Dutch MSC missionaries and the colonial administration ran these institutions to place a portion of the Marind under strict supervision, promoting habits of conformity, discipline and godliness. This project was not possible without the engagement of hundreds of Catholic *goeroes* from the Kei and Tanimbar islands.<sup>19</sup>

15 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel, 1877-1942* (Utrecht 1981) 213.

16 Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Independent Indonesia: 1945-2010*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 298 (Leiden 2015) 331. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004285422>.

17 Susanna Grazia Rizzo, *From Paradise Lost to Promised Land: Christianity and the Rise of West*

*Papuan Nationalism* (unpublished PhD thesis; University of Wollongong 2004).

18 Jan Boelaars, *Met de Papoea's Samen op Weg: Deel 1: De pioniers; het begin van een missie* (Kampen 1992) 251-253.

19 Maaik Derksen, ‘Local Intermediaries: The Missionising and Governing of Colonial Subjects in South Dutch New Guinea, 1920-42’, *Journal of Pacific History* 51:2 (2016) 111-142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2016.1195075>.

The period under review, 1902-1921, was an exploratory phase of trial and error that laid a basis for the model village policy, in which village schools came to be the operative principle for a fundamental redefinition of Papuan (Christian) identity. During the years 1902-1921, only a dozen or so Papuans were baptised, most of whom were infants, children, or adults *in articulo mortis*. Initial resistance to Christianity was not the sole cause of this slow progress. Rather, Dutch MSC missionaries intentionally delayed baptism to concentrate their efforts on ‘civilising’ children first. These had to become a new generation responsible for generating deep and lasting change in Papuan society.

As I will elaborate in the first section, missionaries believed that this large-scale transformation of Papuan society lay in its human fundamentals: bodies, and the material cultures placed on them. Henceforward missionaries’ efforts concentrated on altering children’s bodies. They saw that a new kind of dress, made from fabric, changed Marind identity and had the ability to shake children loose from former cultural certainties. Missionaries came to see, however, that the success of their civilising project depended on what I define as ‘spaces of transformation’ – physical spaces that enabled missionaries to separate, detach and distance children from traditional ways of life. In the second section of this article I will elucidate the formation and functioning of such transformative spaces, concentrating on the Catholic mission’s boarding schools and new model villages established in Merauke and Okaba and designed specifically to socialise Marind children and youth, pressing them to break with the culture and customs of their community. In the last section before the conclusion, I return to the aforementioned picture of the ‘six happy children’ and shall examine their life stories more closely to pursue the question of why they were more eligible than other children to be sent to the boarding school of the Catholic priests and sisters in Langgur.

### **Re-dressing Papuans: cultural and social detachment**

South Dutch New Guinea was one of the last regions incorporated into the Dutch archipelagic empire, when, on 14 February 1902, Assistant-Resident Johannes Alexander Kroesen planted a Dutch flag on the ‘empty’ banks of the Maro river, marking the establishment of the colonial settlement of Merauke. Following the usual settlement pattern in the Pacific region, colonial officials and military personnel were soon followed by Chinese, Timorese and Klingalese merchants (*rulers*) and labourers, drawn primarily by the copra trade, and later by demand for birds of paradise. In 1902, Kroesen issued an official invitation to the Dutch MSC to settle in South Dutch New Guinea to carry out civilising activities with the object of curtailing the headhunting

activities of these Dutch subjects, the Marind-anim.<sup>20</sup> The Dutch Catholic missionaries arrived and established a mission station in Merauke in 1905 and three years later another one in Okaba.<sup>21</sup> This symbiosis between the Catholic mission and the colonial administration was enabled by the installation of the ‘Ethical Policy’ at the turn of the century. The conventions of colonial rule became characterised by ‘civilising’ politics, hand in hand with the de facto political control of the entire archipelago.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, linguistic and ethnographic activities by the MSC priests led to the documentation and study of Marind language, social organisation and cultural life. This documentation was not only used to inform the MSC superiors and the Catholic public at home, but also furnished accurate and practical information to Dutch civil servants and the colonial administration.<sup>22</sup> According to the MSC missionaries, Marind society was found in a degenerate state. Many aspects of Marind life contrasted starkly with both Catholic belief and western values, including infanticide, vivisepture, the conduct of blood feuds, sexual rituals and the diversity of sexual custom more broadly. The missionaries heavily objected to the institutionalised practice of men having sex with men, as well as the heterosexual collective fertility rituals (*otiv bombari*) with which young men and women were initiated after their union (marriage). However, it was headhunting, another prominent feature of Marind culture, which missionaries found the greatest challenge in their task of civilising them.<sup>23</sup>

20 Upon the establishment of Dutch colonial rule in South Dutch New Guinea, people from the Marind-anim tribe were described with various names. Colonial and missionary sources mention: Tugeri (people who carry knives), Kaia-Kaia (after their manner of greeting), and Kanakken (which are actually indigenous Melanesian inhabitants of New Caledonia among whom some of the Dutch MSC missionaries had previously worked). In 1911, the MSC priest Jos van de Kolk proposed to use a more ‘scientific’ name for the inhabitants of South Dutch New Guinea, one that was also used by the inhabitants themselves: Marind-anim (the Marind-people) or in Dutch *Marindineezen* as written in Jos van de Kolk, ‘De naam der koppensnellers van Zuid N. Guinea’, *Annalen van Onze Lieve Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* (hereafter *Annalen*) (1911) 134-135.

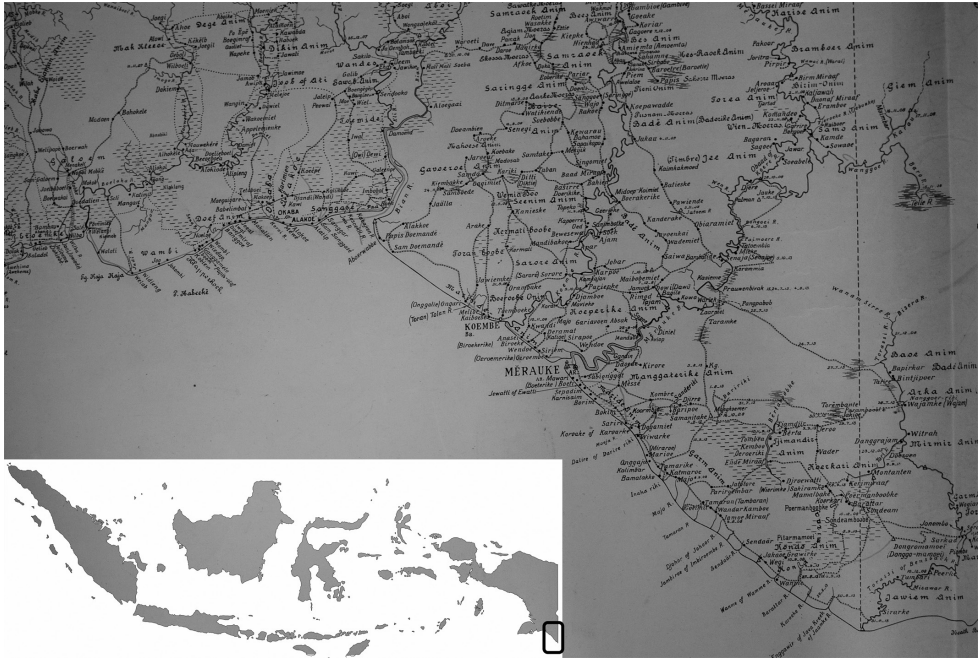
21 Johannes Alexander Kroesen to Governor General Willem Rooseboom, 25 February 1902, in: Jeroen Overweel, *Irian source materials* 13 (Leiden

1995) 102-106; Nationaal Archief, Ministerie van Koloniën, *Memories van Overgave* (hereafter NL-HANA, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave), 2.10.39, 410, Johannes Alexander Kroesen, *Memorie van overgave van de (onder)afdeling Zuid Nieuw-Guinea* (The Hague 1905); ENK, AR-P027, Alexis (Jean-Baptist) Henkelman to Father Provincial Clemens Offermans, 18 November 1900, 133; Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia, 1808-1942: A Documented History. Volume 2: The Spectacular Growth of a Self Confident Minority, 1903-1942* (Leiden 2007) 199. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004254022>.

22 ENK, AR-P027, 142, Van de Kolk to Father Provincial Brocken, 19 April 1911 and 2 June 1913.

23 For more on fertility rituals and headhunting, see: Thomas Ernst, ‘Myth, Ritual and Population among the Marind-Anim’, *Social Analysis* 1 (1979) 32-53; Van Baal, *Dema*, 807-821.





▲ Figure 2: Detailed historical map of the south coast of Dutch New Guinea, circa 1910. This historical map is combined with a map of present-day Indonesia in the bottom left corner, to enable the reader to geographically situate the discussed regions of South Dutch New Guinea and Kei-Islands.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The detailed historical map as it is used here, is part of a larger map of the region South Dutch New Guinea. This map is currently held in the msc archive. © Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, AR-P027, 6510. The map of present-

day Indonesia was created by the author via [freevectormaps.com](https://freevectormaps.com). © Striped Candy LLC, ID-EPS-01-0001, <https://freevectormaps.com/indonesia/ID-EPS-01-0001?ref=atr>.

Initially the MSC priests preached their beliefs to Marind as a desirable alternative to their ‘barbaric’ and ‘heathen’ traditions, with little success. Nor did the missionaries’ curative interventions prove to be effective. The missionaries intermeddling in the completion of ‘barbaric’ rites like vivisepture and infanticide did not put an end to these customs.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, providing alternatives for ‘getting head-names’, after missionaries had learned that the main reason for a headhunting raid was to gather *pa-igiz* (literally head-names) for their children, was not sufficient to terminate these raids.<sup>26</sup> Preventative measures in the form of child separation, detachment and re-education, the missionaries hoped, would eliminate these customs among new generations, effectively changing Marind society as a whole. This meant that Marind were not to convert to Catholicism only, but that the missionaries desired a transformation of what anthropologist Peter Pels described as ‘family and gender patterning; corporeal regimes like clothing, dances, and initiation; and agricultural and domestic objects and spaces’.<sup>27</sup>

Missionaries’ ethnographic experience led them to believe that ‘civilising’ Marind-anim required a drastic transformation of culture and society.<sup>28</sup> Marind culture was constructed and constituted through dress, particularly by the elaborate hairdo described in great detail by Father Henricus Nollen in *Anthropos* (1909).<sup>29</sup> An individual’s transition to an older age group was marked by a distinct hairstyle and accompanying dress: the adoption of a new corporeal identity laden with social meaning. The plaited hairstyle was first received as a rite of passage into adulthood marked by onset of puberty. With these rites, Marind children were initiated into the secret cults of the Marind, where adult knowledge was closely guarded. On reaching adulthood, Marind youths’ attainment of fertility was celebrated with an initiatory sexual ritual, and boys received additional coaching in preparation for their first headhunting expeditions.<sup>30</sup> It was these tribal traditions in particular that missionaries sought to transform.

25 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, August 1910; Johannes van der Kooy, ‘Levend begraven’, *Annalen* (1912) 343-345; ENK, AR-PO27, 6344, Van de Kolk to priest and brothers, 18 July 1911.

26 In Marind culture, every person had at least a clan name (*boan-igiz*) which often became the ‘call-name’, as well as a ‘head-name’ (*pa-igiz*) which was taboo (*dur*) and therefore not used lightly. The head-name was borrowed from the head that had been taken by the child’s father or relative. They were also mementoes testifying to the power of men, because fathers would live on as ‘true men’ in these names. See for more

information on headnames: Van Baal, *Dema*, 135-137.

27 Peter Pels, ‘The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997) 172. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.163>.

28 The chapter ‘Spaces of Transformation: Governing Marind-anim in South Dutch New Guinea, 1905-21’ in Derksen, *Embodied Encounters*.

29 Henricus Nollen, ‘Les différentes Classes d’Age dans la Société kaia-kaia’, *Anthropos* (1909) 353-573.

30 Van Baal, *Dema*, 145.

Missionaries gradually became aware of the openness to change among younger Marind generations, whereby a new kind of dress – fabric garments – could signify a departure from ‘regressive customs’ and an entry into the modern world of colonial citizenry.<sup>31</sup> Already in 1906, Henricus Nollen wrote in the station diary that Topoem and Warangau worked and lived in the colonial settlement of Merauke. Against their family’s wishes, they had broken with Marind customs by adopting garments. According to Nollen, this was an act of independence that could prove useful for missionaries in the future.<sup>32</sup> A few years later, Brother Jannus Joosten noted that ‘the Marind youth has become tired of their old habits because many come to Merauke and become Marind-Poe-anim (...) which means as much that they are now dressed kaja-kaja’s’.<sup>33</sup> Marind who adopted a different kind of dress were stigmatised by the somewhat shameful moniker of Marind *poe-anim* (Marind stranger), which indicates a discursive separation applied by Marind themselves.<sup>34</sup> There were also several instances which captures resistance against the incursion of foreign commodities and customs. For instance, in 1906, three boys working for a trader in Merauke were harassed by Marind men for wearing fabric clothing, forcibly stripped and threatened with death.<sup>35</sup> In Okaba, young girls were declared ‘marriageable’ (*iwag*) at increasingly younger ages, hurrying them into arranged marriages with Marind boys. Relying on the permanent nature of marriage bonds, this practice was meant to reduce the girls’ chances of marrying a *poe-anim* and subsequently wearing fabric clothes, further eroding Marind customs and community.<sup>36</sup>

These kinds of observations made the MSC missionaries realised that a new kind of dress had the ability to transform Marind identity and destabilise social relations. Hence, clothes made of fabric became a cultural ‘breaker’. As Father Henricus Geurtjens acclaimed, ‘by adopting clothes, the folks openly break with their *adat* and all its institutions’.<sup>37</sup> This open ‘break’ with local customary law and cultural practices (*adat*) was the exact result missionaries sought to achieve. Henceforward, with procedure resembling the initiation experience of Marind age-grade rituals, the missionaries ventured to re-dress Marind children to detach them from society and shake them loose from former cultural certainties.

31 Margaret Jolly, ‘A Saturated History of Christianity and Cloth in Oceania’, in: Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly (eds.), *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* (Acton 2014) 429-454, 432. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22459/DD.10.2014.16>.

32 ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 07 December 1905.

33 ENK, AR-PO27, 5008, Jannus Joosten to fellow brothers MSC, May 1909.

34 ENK, AR-PO27, 5008, Kooy to Father Van Rooyen, 8 January 1913.

35 ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 28 July 1906.

36 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Van de Kolk to Adrianus Brocken, 20 January 1914; ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, 1910; July 1911.

37 Henricus Geurtjens, ‘Reisindrukken’, *Annalen* (1916) 341-343.

By way of experiment, Father Van de Kolk began distributing clothes to all children who were not yet fully initiated into Marind secret cults, and some willing adults, in the village of Okaba in 1911. In his initial enthusiasm, Van de Kolk wrote several letters to colleagues stationed in Merauke and to his superiors in Langgur and the Netherlands, celebrating their initial success in ‘dressing’ the Marind. He even wrote to the newspapers, appealing to the Dutch public for donations of green and red clothes, believing Marind were particularly fond of these colours.<sup>38</sup> While Van de Kolk’s re-dressing experiment seemed to work at first, most adults and children discarded these clothes made of fabric in a matter of weeks.<sup>39</sup>

Transforming Marind lives and identities proved difficult in a society whose culture, according to the missionaries, ‘hindered’ the progress of ‘civilisation’, and where existing social organisation did not facilitate the imposition of colonial regulation. Furthermore, the Dutch MSC missionaries were hindered to effect change when Marind children stayed culturally and physically immersed in Marind society, a space wherein missionaries’ authority was in constant competition with that of elders and peers. To successfully introduce a Catholic way of life, to ‘civilise’ Marind children, transformative spaces had to be created: tangible and new cultural encoded spaces. In these spaces of transformation, Marind, particularly children, could be subjected to a process of ‘civilisation’. These ‘civilising’ forces worked dialectically with physical and social removal, culturally distancing, and ultimately detaching children from customary ways of life. This deliberately created vacuum would readily be filled by missionary authority and values.

### Spaces of transformation

An important aspect of Christian missionary practice was to attract children to the sphere of the mission station or draw them to the mission schools.<sup>40</sup> Four years after their arrival, missionaries established their first boarding school for young Marind boys at the Merauke station, with another one at their mission station in Okaba following in 1913 (see Figure 3). The local colonial administration in Okaba and Merauke supported the school financially, pledging five guilders per month, per student, toward the children’s ‘upbringing’.<sup>41</sup> The missionaries’ policy in South Dutch New Guinea

38 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Van de Kolk to Father Provincial Brocken, 30 July 1911; Jos van de Kolk, ‘Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea’, *Javapost* (1911) 638-640; Van de Kolk, ‘Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea’, *Centrum* (25 November 1911) 3.

39 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, February 1911.

40 Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods*; Helen May, Baljit Kaur and Larry Prochner, *Empire, Education and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies* (Farnham 2016).

41 Diary of Okaba, October 1915.

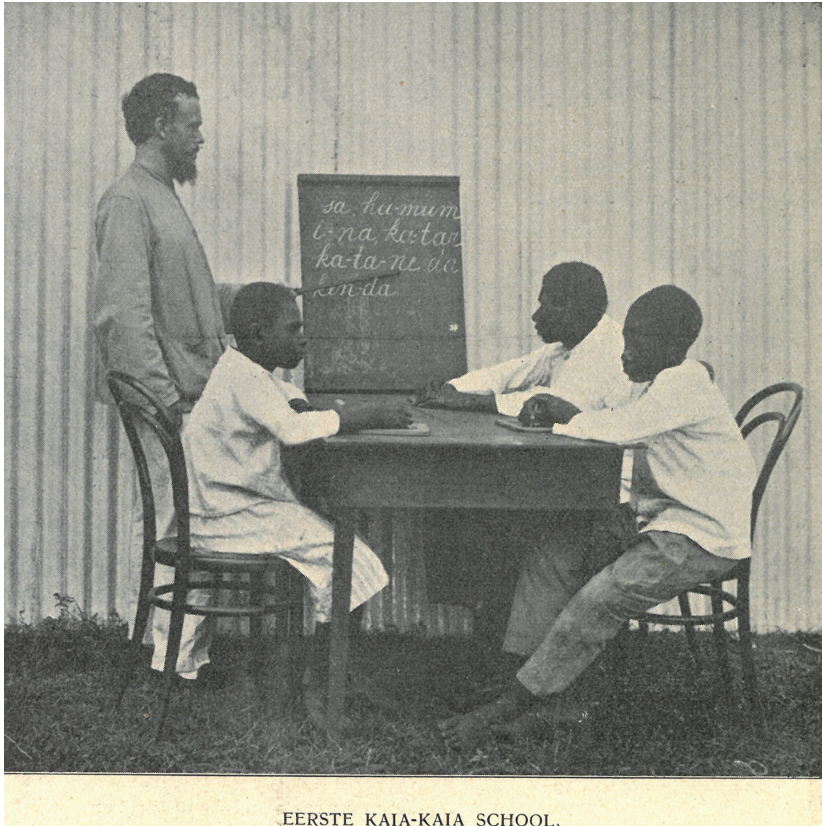


Figure 3: This photograph of the ‘First Kaia-Kaia school’ was published in *Annalen van Onze Lieve Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* in 1911 alongside a letter of Father Van der Kooy dating from 12 October 1910 and written at Merauke. The missionaries initially referred to people from the Marind-anim as Kaia-Kaia after their manner of greeting (see also note 20). In the picture Father Van der Kooy is standing and points to words written in the Marind language on a blackboard. The three Marind boys, dressed in trousers and shirts (but no shoes), are sitting on chairs around a table and in front of them they have a wooden framed slate board. This was the first picture of a school established by the missionaries in South Dutch New Guinea that was published in the missionary magazine. It portrays an idealised school setting in the mission station of Merauke of the MSC, in which Father Van der Kooy is teaching three Marind boys how to read.<sup>42</sup>

42 *Annalen* (1911) 24. © MSC, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven.



was not to forcibly take any children from their parents, as was common in settler colonies such as Canada and Australia under the child removal policies. Notwithstanding, detailed accounts of how boys were attracted and parents convinced are scant. The station diaries do show, however, that the missionaries used certain western novelties, such as an accordion, a record player, a wind-up tin man and colourful cloth, beads, mirrors and boxes, to ‘lure’ Marind family groups to the mission station and obtain parental consent for the care of their children.<sup>43</sup> Besides material enticements, the missionaries’ servant, Paulus Le Cocq d’Armandville, was brought from Langgur to expedite the same purpose.<sup>44</sup> Paulus was a Papuan boy from the Mimika region, taken by the Jesuit Le Cocq d’Armandville to the Kei Islands in 1896. There he was brought up by missionaries, and transferred from Langgur to Merauke when Father Jos Viegen took up the post in 1906. Paulus was to assist the missionary brothers and above all to ‘[...] contribute to attracting youth to the mission’.<sup>45</sup>

The boarding schools in Merauke and Okaba were developed to pursue a missionary strategy requiring youngsters to break with Marind village life by transforming and disciplining the bodies of its young boarders. Missionaries regularly welcomed and took in boys between the ages of six and sixteen. Some of the boarders had prior associations with ‘western’ culture, having worked for traders nearby, lived in Merauke or participated in one of the many exploration parties. As such, they had already experienced degrees of estrangement from their community.<sup>46</sup> On entering the schools, the missionaries insisted that the boys adhered to rules of physical ‘cleanliness’ and eschewed their plaited hairstyles and certain ornaments.<sup>47</sup> This is reflected by Van de Kolk’s account of the arrival of Walaw, who joined four other boarders in Okaba:

On a rainy day he turned up here, smeared from head to toe with soot and oil, the regular ‘gestation’ of the youngsters. Before handing him his first pair of trousers, we cut off his greasy hair-lengthenings and the pork streaks off his arms. [...] After that we sent him to the large washbasin, the sea.<sup>48</sup>

43 ENK, AR-PO27, 5008, Norbertus Hamers to fellow brothers MSC, May 1907; Henricus Nollen, ‘De litanie van een missionaries’, *Annalen* (1910) 52-54, 52.

44 ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 2 September 1906.

45 Jos Viegen, ‘Brief van den Zeer Eerw. Pater Viegen’, *Annalen* (1906) 361-364, 362.

46 ENK, AR-PO27, 5008, Kooy to Adrianus Brocken, 29 April 1912; ENK, AR-PO27, 5008, Joosten to fellow brothers MSC, May 1909, April and September

1910; Gerardus Jeason, ‘Eeenige kaia-kaia modellen Merauke’, 21 August 1910, *Annalen* (1911) 6-7; Petrus Vertenten, ‘Brief aan studenten’, *Annalen* (1914) 281-282.

47 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, July 1911; July 1915; Jos van de Kolk, ‘Oermensen, Naja’, *Annalen* (1914) 133-134.

48 Jos van de Kolk, ‘Oermenschen, Walaw’, *Annalen* (1914) 148-149.

While boys' physical appearances were altered to conform to missionary standards, the boarders would not receive Christian names until formally baptised.<sup>49</sup> Once admitted, the boarders were to adapt a new temporal regime: attending school, saying prayers, attending church and performing practical tasks such as construction work, household chores and maintaining the garden.<sup>50</sup> The transforming and disciplining of bodies under strict temporal regimes at mission stations or boarding schools correspond to practices documented in other colonial contexts by historians such as Tony Ballantyne, Karen Vallgård, Annelieke Dirks and Sarah de Leeuw.<sup>51</sup>

While the missionaries saw themselves as guardians, responsible for raising godly and orderly children, they thought it was undesirable to attempt to completely erase their pupils' origins. Consequently, they accommodated the boys' desire for sporadic contact with kin and community, permitting them to visit relatives, attend certain feasts and celebrations, and to wear certain Marind ornaments underneath fabric clothes.<sup>52</sup> The missionaries also accommodated previously arranged 'marriages' of their boarders. In 1910, Kenda, one of the boarders, announced to the missionaries that he had become *amnangib*, a married man.<sup>53</sup> The missionaries invited the couple to their station in Merauke and Brother Norbertus Hamers built a separate family dwelling for them – an uncommon domestic arrangement for Marind. 'We can only hope that soon more of these families will live apart, because only with a regular family life will it be possible to enhance fidelity in marriage and improve customs and mores', wrote Van de Kolk.<sup>54</sup> The housing of Marind couples compensated to some extent for the fact that single girls could not be accepted in the boarding schools of the male missionaries, as Catholic tradition demanded.

After other Marind couples followed Kenda's matrimonial example, the missionaries toyed with the idea of establishing entirely new villages with housing for nuclear families, physically separated from the Marind community and well within the sphere of influence of the missionaries.

49 ENK, AR-P027, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 17 April 1922.

50 Vertenten, 'Brief aan studenten'.

51 Karen Vallgård, 'Adam's escape: Children and the Discordant Nature of Colonial Conversions', *Childhood* 18:3 (2011) 298-315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568211407529>; Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Maori, and the Question of the Body* (Durham 2014); De Leeuw, "'If anything is to be done with the Indian, we must catch him very young'", 123-140; Annelieke Dirks, *For the Youth: Juvenile Delinquency, Colonial Civil Society and the Late*

*Colonial State in the Netherlands Indies, 1872-1942* (unpublished PhD thesis; Leiden University 2011).

52 Jos van de Kolk, 'Oermenschen, Baja', *Annalen* (1914) 133-134; ENK, AR-P027, 142, Johannes van der Kooy to Father Provincial Brocken, Merauke 29 January 1913; ENK, AR-P027, 5790, Diary of Merauke, August 1914; March 1915.

53 Jos van de Kolk, 'Nieuw Guinea', *Javapost* (1910) 458-459.

54 Van de Kolk, 'Nieuw Guinea', 458-459.

In 1911, Father Viegen suggested that the missionaries should buy a certain plot of land near the village of Demandé, which had potential as a coconut plantation and a place to set up a village where ‘dressed’ Marind could live and work separately from Marind society. In this new village, young Marind couples could adopt the nuclear model of domesticity, living and working in an ‘orderly’ and ‘morally sound’ environment, far removed from the ‘corrupted’ influences of natal villages.<sup>55</sup> The idea of such a village was only realised after the Dutch colonial administration had brought the coastal Marind villages of South Dutch New Guinea under effective colonial control in 1913. In February-March that year, the newly appointed Assistant-Resident L.M.F. Plate had authorised a large punitive expedition against several villages in the Okaba-Sangasee region, which had repeatedly defied the colonial ban on headhunting. Marind were imprisoned and killed, villages and boats burned. Hundreds of skulls, mandibles, arrows, spears, and other headhunting paraphernalia were confiscated.<sup>56</sup> After this punitive expedition, Plate intensified colonial control. As soon when Plate had appointed Marind village heads, imposed taxes – in the form of coconuts – and made Marind liable to compulsory labour services (*herendiensten*) the MSC missionaries seized the opportunity to establish ‘new’ villages – the so-called *model kampong*.<sup>57</sup>

In 1913, as a small-scale pilot, Noh-Okaba was set up on a plot of land beside the Okaba mission station. The establishment of a model *kampong* in Merauke followed soon after, for which the old station for experimental agriculture and its houses were put at the mission’s disposal by the colonial administration (see Figure 4). The number of residents gradually increased. Noh-Okaba began with ten residents, and their numbers tripled within the first year, growing to about 50 residents in 1915.<sup>58</sup> These first residents of these model villages were married couples who had previously called the mission stations home, as well as a few interethnic Catholic couples, Timorese and Chinese Catholic merchants and their Marind wives. As soon as the first families had moved in, the Dutch public was asked by the missionaries to donate money to ‘redeem a whole family from slavery of heathenism and the devil. The wild men who join the new village are won for civilisation and conversion’.<sup>59</sup> These separation practices were discursively framed in the

55 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Jos van de Kolk to Adrianus Brocken, 18 January 1911.

56 L.M.F. Plate, (Assistant-Resident). *Memorie van Overgave van de (onder)afdeling Zuid Nieuw-Guinea, 1915*, NL-HANA, Koloniën/Memories van Overgave, 2.10.39, 412; Jan van Baal, *De bevolking van Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea onder Nederlandsch bestuur*, 30-31.

57 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Jos van de Kolk to Adrianus Brocken, 18 January 1911; Jos van de Kolk, ‘Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea’, *Javapost* (1911) 536-537; ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Hendrik van Santvoort to fellow MSC, 17 February 1914; Jos van de Kolk, ‘Nieuwe dorpen in Nieuw Guinea’, *Annalen* (1914) 340-342; Vertenten, ‘Grootsch plan’, *Almanak* (1915) 43-49.

58 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba.

59 Van de Kolk, ‘Nieuwe dorpen’, 340-342.

Christian terms of ‘redeeming’, but it was thereby emphasised that this was for the moral good of the civilising mission.

The design and spatial layout of this model village was supposed to foster a bourgeois lifestyle inspired by western, Christian norms and designed to inculcate the according sense of community, space and time. Photographs in the archive also indicate that houses were neatly arranged, and the station diaries mention that streets had to be swept and cleaned regularly. This served to exemplify a modern nuclear family life to other Marind. In practice, however, Marind who belonged to the kinship of the inhabitants of the model villages were also allowed to share the houses intended for nuclear families only.<sup>60</sup>

Life in the model villages also came with a number of requirements aiming to detach and separate the inhabitants from traditional Marind life. First of all, residents had to wear fabric clothing and eschew Marind adornments, especially hair extensions and similar status symbols. Church attendance was mandatory, as were catechism lessons given in Marind or Malay.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, each family was given a plot of land for their sago palms, from which they extracted starch to eat, and by consequence eliminating the residents’ need to leave the compound for work in Marind communal gardens.<sup>62</sup> The missionaries had also negotiated special measures for model village residents with the colonial administration. While all Marind had been subjected to taxation and mandatory *herendiensten* since 1913, model village residents had to build houses, maintain roads, clean and clear terrains, do trellis work, and dig wells for mission stations and model villages, ensuring Marind resources, labour and bodies worked for the mission’s benefit while remaining under its control.<sup>63</sup> This creative use of the colonial administration’s existing policies to limit the mobility and sociability of Marind resident in the villages reflects the degree of importance accorded to their physical separation from Marind society.

The pupils of the boarding schools and residents of the model villages of Noh-Okaba and Merauke lived in new, culturally encoded spaces, governed by missionary authority rather than Marind *adat*. Here, Marind were subjected to a gradual process of ‘civilisation’ through which social change could be controlled and directed. Boarding schools and villages in which people were resettled and subjected to a ‘civilising’ scheme were not new or unique to South Dutch New Guinea, nor to the Dutch colonial context. In Minahassan society (north Sulawesi) the government had demolished traditional

60 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Hendrik van Santvoort, letter to fellow MSC, 17 December 1914.

61 Van de Kolk, ‘Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea’, 536-537; ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Van de Kolk to provincial, 18 January 1911; ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Henrik van Santvoort to fellow MSC, 17 February 1914; Van de Kolk,

‘Nieuwe dorpen’, 340-342; Vertenten, ‘Grootsch plan’.

62 ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Van de Kolk to provincial, 20 January 1914.

63 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, June 1915.

longhouses and resettled people in smaller dwellings and new villages early in the nineteenth century. In the Poso region (central Sulawesi), Protestant missionaries and the government relocated Panoma peoples into newly established villages with individual family dwellings, and introduced systems of taxation and compulsory labour.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, *kapelhoeven/fermes-chapelles* (farm-chapels) established by Catholic missionaries in the Belgian Congo by the end of the nineteenth century served, according to the missionary sources, as the primary idea for the development of model villages in South Dutch New Guinea. Notwithstanding, the Dutch MSC had previous experience with nuclear families living in new villages established in the Kei Islands. Here the administration had imposed the obligation to build new villages with houses for nuclear families, while imposing taxes as early as the 1900s.<sup>65</sup> Also in Europe, poverty relief projects such as the colonies of the Benevolent Society (*veenkoloniën*) in the Netherlands built new villages that aimed to transform paupers into productive citizens through the application of disciplinary regimes.<sup>66</sup> Generally, force was used to relocate people into these ‘new’ spaces, but all these projects of transformative spaces depended to a greater extent on the use of discipline.

The Catholic missionaries only achieved moderate and temporary success with the two boarding schools and model villages in South Dutch New Guinea. In fact, the MSC experienced many setbacks in their ambition and charge to consolidate such transformative spaces. The boarders and residents stayed in contact with kin and community, and continued to attend certain feasts and celebrations scorned by missionaries and the colonial administration alike. Furthermore, the station diaries mention that people creatively equivocated the dress code of the model villages by wearing certain Marind ornaments underneath the fabric clothes.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, quite a few

64 Helmut Bucholt, ‘Christian Mission and Social Development in Minahasa/Indonesia’, in: Wilfried Wagner (ed.), *Kolonien und Missionen: Referate des 3. Internationalen Kolonialgeschichtlichen Symposiums 1993 in Bremen* (Münster 1994) 307-324; Joost Coté, ‘Colonising Central Sulawesi: the “Ethical Policy” and Imperialist Expansion 1890-1910’, *Itinerario* 20:3 (1996) 87-107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115300003983>.

65 ENK, 140 (B), Jos van de Kolk to the provincial, 12 February 1914; Joris Vlamynck, *De Redder der Kaja-Kaja’s: Pater Petrus Vertenten* (Tiel 1949) 96; Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia*, 207.

66 Albert Schrauwers, ‘The “Benevolent” Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the

Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43:2 (2001) 298-328. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417501003504>; Frances Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture: The Rhetoric of Social Welfare in the Netherlands and France, 1815-1854* (Amsterdam 1995); Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge 1993); Rosalind Mitchison, *Coping with Destitution: Poverty and Relief in Western Europe* (Toronto 1991).

67 Van de Kolk, ‘Oermenschen, Baja’; ENK, AR-PO27, 142, Johannes van der Kooy to Father Provincial Brocken, Merauke, 29 January 1913; ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, August 1914; March 1915.





NIEUW-OKABA: NIEUW-GESTICHT DORP VAN GEKLEEDEN. — DE EERSTELINGEN.

Foto van den WelEd.Gestr. Heer PLATE, Assist.-Res. van Ned. Z.-N.-Guinea.



Figure 4: This photograph was published in the *Annalen van Onze Lieve Vrouw van het Heilig Hart* (1914) next to a letter of Father Vertenten. The original caption reads 'New-Okaba: Newly established village of the dressed – the first. Photograph by sir Plate, Assistant-Resident of South Dutch New Guinea'. This group picture portrays Marind villagers, Brother Van Santvoort, Father Vertenten and Father Van de Kolk (standing in the back), and Baba Geong (standing on the far right) in front of a house situated in the model *kampong* Noh-Okaba. Baba Geong was a Chinese trader, father of Anna-Maria (Li) and appointed by the administration as the village head (*kepala kampong*) of Noh-Okaba. All Marind men, women, and children are dressed in clothes made out of fabric, which was a requirement for residing in this model village. While this picture is meant to portray the missionaries' successes of the model village implementation and 'civilising' Marind, it is also a mirthless photograph when one looks at the body postures and facial expressions of the people.<sup>68</sup>

68 *Annalen* (1914) 283. © MSC, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven.

boarders or residents left to return to Marind village life.<sup>69</sup> Disregarding missionary appeals, Marind *poe-anim* still had the option to return to their natal villages. This merely required re-adapting their dress and hair, which needed to be re-plaited into strings, signifying renewed membership in their former cult group.<sup>70</sup>

The dissolution of Okaba’s mission station due to financial problems constituted one of the greater crises to the missionaries. Consequently, Noh-Okaba was put under the guardianship of a Catholic trader (respectively, Baba Geong, Liberato and Bandoi Anitoe), who received a salary of five guilders per month from the missionaries. Soon after, the orderly way of life of the model village crumbled and residents of Noh-Okaba returned to their Marind villages. In a similar vein, those who saw themselves forced to leave the model villages on account of the 1918 flu pandemic did not resettle in the model village in Merauke as the health threats subsided, but instead went back to their natal villages.<sup>71</sup> The course of these events attests to the limits of missionary authority and western hegemony even in those transformative spaces where missionaries attempted to shape human behaviour and induce new ideas, values and beliefs. These events, however, also testify to Marind agency. Life in the missionary institutions provided several opportunities for Marind to maintain certain aspects of traditional culture and practice, and Marind were able to move in and out of these institutions. In reality, these spaces of transformation under missionary disciplinary regimes proved to be much more open and dynamic than the Catholic missionaries envisaged or anticipated.

### Relocating non-European children to Langgur

Contrary to the ‘local’ separation practices by which Marind children were ‘saved’, the ‘six happy children’ of the picture in the introduction of this article were ‘saved from their pernicious environment’ in South Dutch New Guinea through admission as boarders in the Langgur school on the Kei Islands. In this location, 1,000 kilometres away from Merauke, where the local people had a different ethnicity, language and culture, these ‘six happy children’ would be raised and educated as teachers by Catholic priests, brothers and sisters. The relocation of children to Langgur was logistically challenging and expensive, leaving the question of why *these* six children were

69 ENK, AR-P027, 5790, Diary of Merauke, September 1914; March 1915; ENK, AR-P027, 5008, Joosten to fellow brothers, April 1910.

70 ENK, AR-P027, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 23 September 1914; Petrus Vertenten, *Vijftien jaar*

*bij de koppensnellers van Nederlansch Zuid-Nieuw-Guinea* (Leuven 1935) 104-105.

71 ENK, AR-P027, 5041, Diary of Okaba, 1915-1919; ENK, AR-P027, 5790, Diary of Merauke, 1915-1919.

chosen for salvation. What made them eligible above their peers in South Dutch New Guinea?

Closer examination of the life stories of the six children reveals that they were all baptised Catholics, whereas the boys in the boarding school and the young Marind couples in the model villages had not yet received the Holy Sacrament. Maria (second left in the front row, Figure 1), for instance, was the oldest child of Marind parents who were faithful followers of the Merauke mission. Maria's father Bido and his wife were the first Marind couple to live at the mission station, and later, Bido was appointed head of their model village in Merauke. According to Van de Kolk, the couple voluntarily sent their child overseas for further education.<sup>72</sup> Apart from Maria, the other five children were, however, not altogether of Marind extraction.

Franciscus (standing in the back, Figure 1) and Mia (the smallest girl, Figure 1) were of mixed descent. Their mothers were Marind and their fathers were Catholic merchants from Timor, whose presence was a lasting effect of the missionary endeavour in Ambon, Timor and Flores under the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. When their fathers passed away, the Dutch military commander in South Dutch New Guinea dictated that these Catholic children were to stay with the missionaries, as their Marind mothers were seen as a bad influence. Another girl of mixed descent, Anna-Maria (Li), had also arrived at the Langgur boarding school in 1915 because her Catholic father, Chinese trader Baba Geong, disowned her after remarrying.<sup>73</sup> These practices conformed to colonial regulations regarding Indo-European children in Java. Article 354 of the Dutch East Indies Civic Code declared the parental authority of indigenous mothers forfeit upon recognition by a European father. Hence, when the legal guardians of these children were omitted, they became 'orphans'. These children were admitted to institutional care to ensure they received a 'European' upbringing.<sup>74</sup> As missionaries in South Dutch New Guinea saw fit, Catholic children of mixed descent were conveyed to boarding schools in Langgur to secure their Catholic upbringing and 'guard' them against the 'barbaric' influence of Marind mothers and communities – something that was not thought possible in South Dutch New Guinea itself, because the spaces of transformation were still frangible.

The other two children in Figure 1, Wangei (tallest boy in the back, Figure 1) and Maria Digoel (standing on the far right, Figure 1), were referred to by the missionaries as stolen children. 'Stolen' children were children who were taken by Marind women during headhunting raids and brought back with them to the coast after the raids were finished. These children were then 'adopted' and raised by Marind families.<sup>75</sup> The missionaries at the time had observed many such 'stolen' children living in Marind villages, but were

72 Van de Kolk, 'Zes gelukkige kinderen', 33-38.

73 Petrus Vertenten, 'De kleine Li', *Annalen* (1916)

74 Chapter Two 'Civilizing Europeans' in Derksen, *Embodied encounters*.

75 Van Baal, *Dema*, 714.

unable to determine the underlying motive for kidnapping the children of rival tribes. With the benefit of hindsight, we now understand that this had special socio-demographic importance.<sup>76</sup> Marind had to compensate for the reduced fertility of women.<sup>77</sup> Missionaries initially did not intervene in the lives of these ‘stolen’ children at all.<sup>78</sup> It was only after Assistant-Resident Plate took custody of a number of ‘newly captured’ children during the punitive expeditions in 1913 and 1915 that missionaries were entrusted with their care. Some, such as the children Dikondi (Johannes) and Osi (Hendrik), kidnapped in the Digul area by Marind from the village of Wambi, were transferred to the mission by the Assistant-Resident in 1915, after which they were entrusted to the model village couple Mandoa and Kasim-heis of Noh-Okaba. They were only baptised after 1922, after which they received their Christian names.<sup>79</sup> Wangei however, was baptised and renamed Antonius by the missionaries in Okaba in 1913, after which he was sent to live with the missionaries in Merauke.<sup>80</sup> As they saw his potential as a teacher-catechist, he was transferred to Langgur in 1914.<sup>81</sup> Maria Digoel was kidnapped from the Digul area by villagers from Demandee, and was like Wangei baptised in 1913. After her baptism, she lived with Plate himself and his wife in Merauke. When Plate left South Dutch New Guinea in 1915, declining to take her with him, Maria was sent to the boarding school of the Sisters in Langgur.<sup>82</sup>

With the relocation of Catholic children to boarding schools in Langgur, missionaries not only hoped to secure their Catholic upbringing, but also to educate future role models who could reach out to the rest of the population. Appointing and fashioning local men and women as teachers and religious leaders was a common missionary strategy, which can be observed in the whole Pacific region.<sup>83</sup> Except for the few relocated children, Marind were

76 Van Baal, *Dema*; Knauf, *South Coast*; Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), Collectie demografie en antropologie in Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea, inventory 26, item 28; Simon Kooyman, M. Dorren, Louis Veeger, Jan Verschuereen MSC and Rijk Luyken, *Rapport van het bevolkingsonderzoek onder Marind-Anim van Nederlands Zuid Nieuw-Guinea* (Leiden 1955).

77 To address the depopulation problem, the missionaries drew up a so-called rescue plan. For more on this rescue plan, see Maaïke Derksen, ‘Educating children, civilising society: Missions schools and non-European teachers in South Dutch New Guinea 1902-1942’, *International Review of Social History* (forthcoming); Derksen, ‘Local intermediaries’; Chapter Four ‘Spaces of

Transformation: Governing Marind-anim in South Dutch New Guinea, 1905-21’ in Derksen, *Embodied Encounters*.

78 ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, February 1913.

79 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, January 1915; Henricus Geurtjens MSC, ‘Een praatje bij een plaatje’, *Annalen* (1925) 127-128.

80 ENK, AR-PO27, 6344, Van de Kolk to Van der Kooy, March 1913; ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, June 1913.

81 ENK, AR-PO27, 5790, Diary of Merauke, June 1915.

82 ENK, AR-PO27, 5041, Diary of Okaba, 1913 and 1915.

83 David Wetherell, ‘Creating an Indigenous Christian Leadership in Papua: Three Missions Compared’, *Journal of Pacific History* 47:2 (2012) 163-185. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2012.684767>.

not educated in these schools in Langgur until 1942, and the same was true for Papuans from other tribes. Furthermore, Wangei was the only one who, after he had married Anna Li, returned to work as a teacher in the village school of the newly established *model kampong* in Wambi in 1923. Unfortunately, he died a few months later.<sup>84</sup> From 1921 until the Pacific War in 1942, the missionaries did, however, recruit many pupils of Keiese and Tanimbarese descent to work in the many newly established village schools throughout South Dutch New Guinea.<sup>85</sup> These Keiese and Tanimbarese teacher families were regarded as ‘more civilised’ than Papuans, to carry out such a profession. That certain categories of children, and of colonised people in general, were marked by the Dutch missionaries as more suitable role models of ‘civilisation’ and colonial modernity than others, and how this distinction fed into processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as into present-day nationalist resentments, are subjects worthy of further investigation.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The ‘six happy children’ depicted in the aforementioned photograph were not only used as propaganda to wring the hearts and wallets of Dutch readers. Such images also legitimised child separation practices as a pillar of the missionary ‘conversion’ strategy and as part of a benevolent civilising project. As such, separation practices were discursively framed in terms of ‘saving’, ‘redeeming’, and ‘civilising’, thereby honouring the moral obligations of the Dutch missionaries and colonial administration. In this article, I examined separation practices which were central to missionary efforts to Christianise and transform Papuan identity and society. The management, control and transformation of bodies and bodily practices were crucial for the cultivation of colonial subjects and the facilitation of colonial rule.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Dutch Catholic missionaries in South Dutch New Guinea practised different ways of separating, detaching and distancing Marind children and youth from kin, culture and communities that were considered by the missionaries as detrimental to the children’s civic and moral development. A handful of children, all baptised Catholic, were relocated to the boarding school in Langgur. The preponderant Catholic environment in Langgur would, the missionaries thought, secure their Catholic upbringing and would cultivate future role models and teachers – something that was not thought possible in South Dutch New Guinea itself. For the other children, who were not (yet)

84 Jan Boelaars, *Met de Papoea’s Samen op Weg. Deel 2: De baanbrekers* (Kampen 1995) 15.

85 Derksen, ‘Local Intermediaries?’, 111-142.

86 For anti-Indonesian sentiment among the Papua’s, see: Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaption* (Washington 2005) 1-4, 42-44.



baptised, missionaries aspired to culturally and socially detach and distance them more locally. In so doing, the missionaries laid a strong emphasis on transforming the outward appearance and behaviour of bodies to signify change, which soon would become discernible on a wider social scale. Yet the existing social organisation of Marind society did not facilitate the imposition of colonial regulation. As a result of the difficulty the missionaries encountered in transforming youth in the culturally encoded spaces of the Marind village, children and youth needed to be separated from traditional life and society more physically. To this end, the missionaries established two small boarding schools and model villages, which became transformative spaces in the absence of familiar customs and material surroundings. These spaces, in which the missionaries could establish some degree of authority, enhanced missionary efforts to transform Marind society by interrupting the transmission of knowledge and practice from one generation to the next.<sup>87</sup>

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87 See also Mak's proposal for the concept of *Geslacht*, Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, 'Child Separation'.