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## From model to sitter: On reclaiming colonial photography

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on historic anthropological photographs, meant to depict Indigenous individuals as generic models of colonial stereotypes, and examines their later reclamation as portraits. Applying an intention-based account of portraiture, we discuss the historical context and contemporary examples of the utilisation of these images in order to address several questions. What happens when the depicted persons in colonial imagery are treated and presented as sitters, rather than model specimens? Does this change the nature of the image? If a photograph was not originally intended as a portrait, can it come to function as such at a later stage? Regardless of whether they fulfill all the requirements necessary for portraiture, these colonial photographs represent a vital resource for the reclamation of Indigenous cultural heritage. As such, this paper serves as an introductory discussion into the complex issues surrounding the recategorisation, repatriation, and restitution of colonial photographic archives.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The use of photography in colonial nations – whether in the service of commercial endeavours, scientific investigations, or historical documentation – contributed to and perpetuated racist colonial culture. Today, changes in our approach to such colonial images are called for. Existing archives can no longer be kept and displayed in ways that maintain and further entrench the old colonial hierarchies. It is widely felt, moreover, that Indigenous peoples should have the opportunity to reclaim the images of their ancestors. This raises important questions of restitution and radical institutional change. It also raises interesting aesthetic questions about the ways in which objectifying images can potentially be recontextualised and repurposed. Which artistic or curatorial strategies would help to make this possible? To what extent does the nature of the image itself change when viewers regard the depicted subject no longer as a model specimen of an ethnic group, but as an individual sitter with a unique identity? If a photograph was not originally intended as a portrait, can it come to function as such at a later stage? It is these aesthetic questions that we will seek to address in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

We briefly sketch the context of this discussion in sections II and III, though it goes without saying that we are unable to do full justice to the complicated relation between photography and colonialism in this short paper. Our focus will be on anthropological photographs from British colonies and the tool of the camera, which stripped away the model's agency, but could not eradicate their humanity. Through the comprehensive ethnographic volumes of *The People of India* and N. W. Thomas's photos of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, we will illustrate the conditions in which colonial photographs were made and collected.<sup>2</sup> In section IV, we discuss several ways in which artists and researchers have tried to re-present these historical photos, focusing on opportunities for reclamation of heritage and personal narratives. Finally, in section V, we consider the extent to which repurposed ethnographic photographs can be regarded as portraits.

## II. PHOTOGRAPHY AND COLONIALISM

The invention of photography coincided with a spectacular rise in world travel combined with an imperialist imperative for acquiring and expanding colonial territory. Photography became one of the principal tools with which to collect and organise colonial knowledge. In his essay, 'Photography and the Emergence of the Pacific Cruise', Michael Hayes states: 'Having colonial terrain represented, collected, pictured, and observed through photography is perhaps one of the most insidious forms of colonialism'.<sup>3</sup> It allowed colonial powers to map, exert control, and claim ownership over the conquered territories.

The introduction of new technology itself created a hierarchy of knowledge and a sense of othering. A camera was an expensive tool, not available for

purchase in the colonies unless one happened to be of great wealth and power.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the invitation to have your photograph taken by a professional photographer was highly exclusive. The hundreds of subjects ‘invited’ to pose for scientific and exploitative pictures are ironically included in this exclusivity. While they were often the first people in these colonial societies to experience the new technology, they rarely gained anything from its use, nor did they see the products of their ‘participation’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it should not be ignored how the inception of photography is situated ‘within the reproduction of certain forms of power than can reorganize, map, and penetrate the body’.<sup>6</sup> This power is then used in exploitative and controlling ways: through anthropological studies of racial differences and the production and sale of *cartes des visites*.

In her article, ‘Photography, Colonialism, and Racism’, Hannah Mabry speaks of the Victorians’ belief that the camera was considered more ‘exact and accurate’ than ‘the hand of the artist’.<sup>7</sup> Partly because of this belief in the honesty of photography, Victorians were able to overlook the severe social and ethical problems of colonial photographs, remaining oblivious to the ideological fantasies and untruths that these images conveyed. Paid to record and represent the Imperialist agenda, photographers created images that represented the European idea of the ‘civilizing mission’: the ‘duty’ to establish colonies for the ‘benefit of the natives, or for the “prestige” of the mother country’.<sup>8</sup> These views created certain expectations for the contents of colonial photographs, the common denominator being ‘the superiority of the industrialized, Protestant Anglo-Saxons over all other peoples’.<sup>9</sup> Photographs of colonised people wearing ceremonial outfits and doing archaic jobs or ‘exotic’ things were extremely popular with tourists and scientists alike. There was a high demand for these scenes from colonialist consumers, which created a market for cataloguing ‘primitive’ and non-Western bodies. These photographs became a form of currency for the intellectual and curious Victorian.<sup>10</sup>

With the ease of photography came the popularity of reproduced images. Each year, millions of postcards were produced in the colonies, featuring images of native peoples and tourist sites. According to Ayshe Ergogdu, ‘in order to be considered authentic enough to circulate in the market, a photograph had to conform to the premises of Victorian society’s regime of truth’.<sup>11</sup> The images needed to portray the colonised people as separate, exotic, and ‘other’ in order to maintain the separation between the coloniser and colonised.<sup>12</sup> Postcards were also used as a physical representation of wealth. Sending a postcard with a message indicated that one had enough leisure time and money to travel. Women were more likely to receive these messages as travel was often restricted for ‘the fairer sex’, so collecting postcards and arranging them in carefully curated albums became popular among upper-class Victorian women. In her essay discussing Algerian women in *cartes postales*, Rebecca J. DeRoo states, ‘postcards allowed women the opportunity to dis-

play publicly their taste, education, and individuality, and provided a means of negotiating between social custom and personal desire'.<sup>13</sup> Collectors could amass images and carefully curate them into a story that fit their narrative understanding of the world abroad and perpetuated the harmful stereotypes of the various peoples inhabiting the colonies.

The development of new branches of science also contributed strongly to the exploitative practice of collecting and cataloguing colonial peoples.<sup>14</sup> Ethnography developed as a discipline focused on amassing data on different cultures and societies. The belief that people outside of Europe were less civilised led to the desire to find a physical or cultural reason to prove white superiority. Johann Freidrich Blumenbach used comparative anatomy to evaluate racial types, including the judgemental tactics of physiognomy. 'Physiognomy used physical features as a guide to individual character and class', creating categories in which individual subjects would represent the 'traits of an entire race'.<sup>15</sup> Photography became the primary tool of ethnographers when collecting data on the physical features of colonial peoples and aided in colonial expansion and domination.<sup>16</sup> Aided in the fields of physical anthropology and comparative anatomy, new technologies allowed scientists to accurately capture physical characteristics, which helped them to organise and systemically rank peoples on perceived levels of 'civilisation'.<sup>17</sup> By reassessing historical research methods and conclusions, it is easy to see photography's role in colluding with colonialists in their creation of racial stereotypes.<sup>18</sup>

According to Diane Lewis, 'the separation between the culture of the colonist and the colonised; the exploitation of this difference to the betterment of the colonist; and the use of these theoretical differences as fact' was chiefly responsible for the creation of the idea of race and racial differences.<sup>19</sup> In order to reinforce these racial ideologies, colonial ethnographers travelled to remote areas to systematically describe the physical and cultural characteristics of Indigenous groups and nations. They used *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, a guide to collecting anthropological field data first published in 1874, as a manual for documenting the colour of skin, eyes, and hair; describing the shape of the face, nose, and lips; as well as ways of measuring human bodies.<sup>20</sup> A. C. Haddon described the latter method in his entry on Photography in *Notes and Queries* as follows:

When the whole nude figure is photographed, front, side, and back views should be taken; the heels should be close together, and the arms hanging straight down the side of the body; it is best to photograph a metric scale in the same plane as the body of the subject. It is desirable to have a soft, fine-grained, neutral tinted screen to be used as a background.<sup>21</sup>

These pictures are often referred to as 'physical type' photographs. By compiling this evidence, anthropologists could then attempt to identify and

categorise sets of people according to physical attributes. Physical type photos were collected and compiled into volumes and sent back to the anthropologists' home countries for further study. One reason why we opted for the term 'model' in the title of our paper: these rules offer a 'model' method of photographic collection whereby each person was manipulated to fit these parameters.

### III. *THE PEOPLE OF INDIA AND N.W. THOMAS*

A prime example of an archive of physical type photos collected for a colonial government is the multi-volume series *The People of India*. Recognised as one of the most significant instances of nineteenth-century ethnographic documentation, eight volumes containing 480 photographs were published between 1868 and 1875. These volumes featured photographs next to written documentation describing the tribes, races, and castes of the Indian people.<sup>22</sup> In his essay, "A Pure Labor of Love": A publishing history of *The People of India*, John Falconer describes how the volumes came about. The British Association for the Advancement of Science seized the opportunity presented by the upcoming Indian Census to gather detailed ethnographic information for a national survey. Edited by John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye, *The People of India* used photography to create a system of classification useful to British administrators in their governance of the colony. Judgements about tribal levels of 'civilisation' would be used to dominate and control the native population.

The first volume contains physical type photographs accompanied by detailed descriptions of each represented ethnic group. A photo of a Sonthal [sic] man is the first image in the first volume, and the depicted person is identified solely by tribe, race, and location. He is pictured from chest up with no visible clothing and posed in the full-frontal position. His eyes look into the camera, and his expression is one of concern or upset. There is no context given outside the label, so we are unable to know who this man is or what his life was like. Stripped of his authentic identity, he represents a 'generic tribesman'. The following page of text contains a description of the Sonthal tribe, including a description of their general appearance – 'well made and active men; possessing the thick lips, high cheekbones, and spread nose' – while the Sonthal women are described as 'not pretty according to the European idea of beauty'. The measured and matter-of-fact descriptions also include diet and hunting techniques, descriptions of clothing, and religious observances.

Other photographic methods are used throughout these eight volumes, including group images of people in traditional costumes. These carefully posed photographs are used much the same as the physical type photos in that they are evidence of cultural differences from Europeans. For example, in the photo entitled *Rajookmars*, four men of the Rajpoot [sic] tribe are lined

up against a wall. The men are in various costumes ranging from simple robes to elaborate embroidered tunics. From the adjoining text, we learn that the men of this tribe consider themselves to be regal warriors, but the author describes them as ‘agricultural’ and comments that their physical appearance is so similar to that of another tribe that ‘no distinct account of them is necessary’. Watson and Keye even mentioned the feared continuation of the practice of female infanticide, though it is not given any context.<sup>23</sup> Images like this are bound to perpetuate stereotypes and dehumanise subcontinental Indians by placing them into sets of ‘othering’ categories to make colonists feel civilised and superior.

Originally intended to be published in large edition sizes, public interest in *The People of India* had waned by the time all eight volumes were printed. This was not due to a lack of curiosity in the subject, but to the length of time between publications of volumes. Nonetheless, the set of volumes was praised for its thorough survey of the subcontinent and is to this day considered an important example of colonial-era ethnographic photography.

The colonial anthropologist Northcote Whitridge Thomas assembled another significant ethnographic archive. Working as the first ‘Government Anthropologist’ appointed by the British Colonial Office, Thomas conducted his fieldwork in Southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone between 1909 and 1915. He was dispatched to collect data, including anthropomorphic and physical type photographs, sound recordings, and records of local customs and laws.<sup>24</sup> Thomas’ work was then published for the Colonial Office and distributed to colonial administrators, learned societies, and universities. In addition to his published field reports, he ‘wrote a large number of academic articles and the manuscript of an ethnographic monograph’.<sup>25</sup>

During Thomas’ anthropological tours of West Africa, over 7,500 photographs were taken. Nearly half of these photographs were mounted in albums sent to London to be copied and distributed. Organised and categorised into types, over half of the images were physical type photos.<sup>26</sup> Following the example of *Notes and Queries*, he took highly posed ‘scientific’ images of his subjects. Only 30 of these photographs were eventually published in his official reports on Nigeria’s Igbo people and Sierra Leone. Like the plates included in *The People of India*, these sitters were stripped of their identities and they were referred to by their ethnic group’s name, physical type, or location. Unlike the Indian surveys, however, Thomas recorded many of the names of the people he photographed and information about their relatives and occupations. But unfortunately, these were not published in his official accounts.

#### IV. HERITAGE AND RECLAMATION

In recent years, artists and curators in different parts of the world have felt drawn to working with ethnographic photographs because they tell compli-

cated stories about violence and survival, or dispossession and dignity. Since they are often the only record people have of tribal ancestors, colonial physical type photos provide a unique way for people to connect to their heritage. This is why there is a need ‘for a critical vocabulary with which to address a broad range of national traumatic experience[s]’.<sup>27</sup> Several projects have attempted to do this by re-presenting these historical photos in new ways, focusing on the opportunities for reclamation of heritage and personal narratives. We now briefly discuss four of these initiatives.

(i) The *[Re:]Entanglements* project, led by Paul Basu, has been re-engaging with the ethnographic archive of N.W. Thomas, which includes objects, photographs, sound recordings, botanical specimens, published work and field notes. The project aims to better understand the historical context in which these materials were gathered, but also to examine and re-articulate their significance in the present. As it says on the project’s website: ‘If anthropological photography afforded the dehumanization of individuals, reducing people to “specimens” to be collected and ordered by type, the archive now affords the possibility of reuniting the subjects of these portraits with their names, which, in some small way, rehumanizes them and returns to them their individuality’.<sup>28</sup>

Researchers were able to identify where many of Thomas’ photographs were taken. They have returned the photographs to Nigeria and Sierra Leone and presented them to the descendants of those who were depicted. ‘In these contexts, rather than toxic traces of a colonial anthropological project, these photographs are treasured by family members as precious portraits of ancestors’. Families identified relatives previously known to them only through stories. Paul Basu and his collaborators also curated the exhibition ‘Photographic Affordances’ (2018) at the Royal Anthropological Institute in 2018. It included a selection of fine digital prints from scans of Thomas’ original glass plate negatives, devoid of their original, objectifying anthropological labels (such as ‘Man of Awka’, ‘Man of Mbwaku’ and ‘Woman of Isele Asaba’). The photographs were enlarged, carefully framed, and presented as portraits on the wall.

Unlike the small selection of physical type photographs that were published in Thomas’ reports, in which subjects appear lifeless and inexpressive, the unpublished prints and negatives show a much greater diversity of expression.

The informality of many of the unpublished physical types, in which subjects may also be found smiling and even giggling, though failing in the performance of ‘science’, affords a glimpse into the human interaction between subject and photographer-anthropologist that was, after all, at the heart of these fieldwork encounters.<sup>29</sup>

The complexity surrounding these photographs, and the multiple ways in which we can ‘read’ them, is also examined in Paul Basu and Christopher Thomas Allen’s film *Faces/Voices* (2018).

(ii) At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Baldwin Spencer and Francis James Gillen conducted ethnographic fieldwork throughout Australia. In 1902 they were in Borroloola to study the Yanyuwa people and as part of this endeavour they made hundreds of photographs. In their article ‘Why Can’t They Put Their Names’, Bradley, Adgemis, and Haralampou note that ‘as a product of the nature-science orientation of their fieldwork, Spencer and Gillen elected not to include individual names as they deemed it not important to the readership, visually representing Indigenous peoples as they would an animal species’.<sup>30</sup> Spencer and Gillen’s colonialist and paternalistic attitudes also manifested themselves in a variety of other ways.

In early 1981, an album of the photographs taken by Spencer and Gillen was returned to Borroloola by the Museum of Victoria. On that occasion, Don Miller, a Yanyuwa elder, pointedly remarked: ‘What’s wrong with these whitefellas, can’t they put a name, name these old people so we know who we are looking at, they are all family, poor things’.<sup>31</sup> This modest project of restitution has had a deep impact on the Yanyuwa community. Some of the depicted people could still be named by the older generation in the 1980s; ‘people cried over their relatives, picked them up and held them to their heads in acknowledgement of the kinship and the country’. The pictures themselves acquired a different status as a result of this act of restitution. They are

... now seen as a set of images of powerful times, when the Law was strong, when Yanyuwa country was under the control of Yanyuwa people, the dominant form of communication was Yanyuwa and when the history of Yanyuwa country could be understood from a very Yanyuwa-centric view.<sup>32</sup>

One instance in particular is described by Bradley et al. Spencer and Gillen had taken a profile shot and also produced a sketch of a ‘rainmaker’. Senior men of the Wawukarriya clan, Isaac Walayungkuma, Dinny McDinny and Pyro Dirdiyalma, recognized him:

When Dinny began to sing these verses, both Pyro and Isaac joined him, they sang and the photo of Wajamarra was passed between them. They looked at the photo, sometimes tapping on it slightly as percussion to their singing. There was in this photo of Jack Wajamara as suggested by Poignant (1992, 74), ‘a sense in which the photograph established continuities of self and families and made biographies and genealogies visible’.<sup>33</sup>



(iii) Artist Vernon Ah Kee's practice is underpinned by his personal experience as an Aboriginal person from the Kuku Yalanji/Waanyi/Yidinyi/Guugu Yimithirr people of the Innisfail, Cairns and rainforest regions of North Queensland. His 2004 series of large-scale charcoal drawings of male relatives, entitled *Fantasies of the Good*, developed out of a study of photographs that his grandmother had carried around in her purse. He had seen the photos since he was young, but without attaching any great significance to them. That changed when he started researching anthropological depictions of Aboriginal people years later and realised that the images were in fact reproductions of 19th century photographs taken by the colonial ethnographer Norman Tindale. The severely cropped 'mug shots' are certainly indicative of the objectifying colonial gaze, but 'the monumental scale and soft charcoal markings of Ah Kee's drawings also bring intimacy with the stories of survival, cultural pride, and family connections'.<sup>34</sup>

(iv) For his project *Gun-Metal Grey* (2007), the artist Brook Andrew selected six images from different collections, including the Royal Anthropological Institute, London; the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Cambridge; and the Mitchell Library, Sydney. The 'orphaned' images – images whose provenance is unknown – were then enlarged and screen-printed on a reflective foil surface, deliberately departing from the immediacy and crispness of a photographic image. The resulting works have a mysterious quality, somewhat reminiscent of early tin-type portraits, allowing the depicted person to disappear and reappear, depending on the source of light and the way the viewer moves through the exhibition space.

In *The Visitor and the Resident* (2016), Andrew enlarged his study to include images from all the four continents represented in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris, France). He invited ten people from different cultural backgrounds, mainly those whose families or ancestors came from the colonies, to select a few images from the museum's archives that they could respond to as if they were curating their own narratives, investigating their own story, or reflecting on the museum and the culture of collecting. He then photographed the participants with their selections. This resulted, as he put it, 'in a photographic portrait not only of themselves but of people in the archives'.<sup>35</sup>

## V. PORTRAITS AND PERSONS

A common thread runs through all the above projects. Various artistic and curatorial strategies are employed, but with a similar aim, namely, to subvert the alienating and objectifying colonial gaze, whereby subjects are treated as mere tokens of a racial type, as specimens of an ethnic group. Whether they are distant relatives or contemporary museum goers, viewers are invited to regard the people depicted in these ethnographic photographs differently.

No longer are they meant to be seen as mere model specimens, whose individual identity is deemed of no importance, they have become sitters whose unique appearance and personality are drawn forth in these photographs and drawings. This is what Cynthia Freeland has described as a process of ‘subjectification’.<sup>36</sup>

By recontextualising and repurposing these ethnographic photographs, one could argue, the images are transformed into portraits. Indeed, the term ‘portrait’ is one that is frequently used by the artists and researchers involved in the above projects. However, this does raise an interesting philosophical question: can an image that was not intended as a portrait actually change its status and become a portrait?

According to some theories of portraiture, this is perfectly possible.<sup>37</sup> However, according to intention-based accounts of portraiture, which we tend to favour, it seems that the answer must be ‘no’.<sup>38</sup> Something can only be a portrait, if it was made with that purpose in mind. To be more precise:

Some object  $x$  counts as a portrait only if  $x$  is the product of a largely successful intention to create a portrait. The maker of the object intends that  $x$  is a portrait only if (a) they have a substantive concept of the nature of portraits that largely matches the substantive concept held by a group of prior portrait makers, if there are any, and (b) the maker intends to realise that substantive concept by imposing portrait-relevant features on the object.<sup>39</sup>

It is safe to say that most of the ethnographic images described above were not meant to be portraits. The colonial photographers must have had a substantive concept of portraiture – after all, there were plenty of portraits in their home country and some of them even made portraits on other occasions and in different settings. On the other hand, strong evidence tells against any intention on the part of the photographers to realise that substantive concept. For one, they often showed no interest in the names of the subjects they depicted. Nor did they have any desire to capture their personality or inner life. The resulting pictures were meant for scientific and colonial documentation, they weren’t meant to be framed or displayed as portraits. If we uphold an intention-centred account of portraiture, does it then follow that the term ‘portrait’ should be banned from critical discourse on these projects? And are we to conclude that Vernon Ah Kee’s drawings or Brook Andrew’s series do not belong in portrait galleries or exhibitions focusing on portraiture?

Not necessarily. First, objects can be repurposed.<sup>40</sup> An artefact may be adapted or utilised for a different purpose and, as a result of this intentional intervention at a later stage, come to be regarded as a different sort of artefact. For instance, a wooden door may be repurposed as a panel for an oil painting, or vice versa. Such repurposing may involve some modifications to the object, e.g. removing the handle of the door, cleaning and sanding the surface,

hanging it on a wall, etc. But sometimes, no modifications are needed; or modifications are deliberately kept at a minimum, as when, for example, a prison camp is turned into a museum and site of remembrance.

This, we suggest, is what takes place in most of the projects we described above. Thanks to the various interventions of artists, curators, and researchers, the ethnographic photographs are being repurposed to function as portraits. Brook Andrew, for instance, enlarged the original images and screen-printed them on a reflective foil surface, giving the photographs an eerie quality reminiscent of early tin-type portraits. The finished works are then consistently exhibited in a museum setting. Something similar holds true for Vernon Ah Kee's work. He made new charcoal drawings based on the original photographs and presented these as portraits in an art show among other, more contemporary portraits. Researchers of Paul Basu's team not only made an effort to identify the subjects of the photographs but they also enlarged and framed photographs and displayed them as part of a portrait-style exhibition.

Secondly, even if the intervention is insufficient for proper repurposing to take place – as is possibly the case with the Spencer and Gillen photographs – it can still make sense to discuss those images within the broader context of portraiture. As a matter of fact, images that are strictly speaking not portraits, are regularly included in shows and publications that focus on portraiture. Here are just a few examples: Robert Rauschenberg's abstract combine *Trophy V (for Jasper Johns)* was not intended as a portrait, but was nevertheless included in Paul Moorhouse's book on Pop Art portraiture because of how the work evokes the presence of Jasper Johns, much like a portrait of the artist would.<sup>41</sup> Janine Antoni's *Umbilical* (2000) consists of a silver spoon with, on the one hand, a cast of her mouth and, on the other hand, a cast of her mother's fingers holding the spoon. Most obviously, the work is a play upon the saying 'being born with a silver spoon in one's mouth'; but it is also about familial connection and the ties that bind us – something it has in common with the tradition of portraiture. For that reason, it was included in Anne Collins Goodyear's book *This is a Portrait if I Say So*.<sup>42</sup>

Stijn Cole's *Doorkijk ('Vista')* from 2009 was included in the portrait exhibition *Capita Selecta* (2014), which took place at the Broelmuseum (Kortrijk, Belgium). It consists of a largely blank canvas, roughly the size of a traditional portrait, with nothing but a rectangular strip of blue and green in the top right corner. It's a playful reference to the vistas one sometimes encounters in the background of Renaissance portraits. As such, Cole's painting is what we would call a 'meta-portrait'. Meta-portraits are works meant to convey something *about* portraiture and they do so by challenging or deliberately thematising the conventions of portraiture. Meta-portraits can be portraits in their own right, but they typically are not. Other examples from the same exhibition are Ronny Delrue's *Lost Memory* (2006), a portrait photograph where the faces have been covered in black ink by the artist, and his *Relativ-*

ity (1995), which consists of two life-size abstract busts evoking the human figure, placed next to each other on plinths.

What these examples demonstrate is that curators, artists and researchers are often undisturbed by nominal disputes when organising or discussing portraiture exhibitions. We suggest that the same attitude should be adopted in relation to the projects described above.<sup>43</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

Moving forward, Brenda L. Croft states that ‘it will be an ongoing process for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to analyse and assess these documents that project inextricable links to the past and present’.<sup>44</sup> There are thousands of photographs in hundreds of archival collections to be reorganised and recontextualised, and the process has only just begun. The detrimental effect of photography as used by colonial powers can be reclaimed by the oppressed, and the faces of their ancestors ‘challenge and remind us to commemorate them and acknowledge their existence, to help lay them, finally, to rest’.<sup>45</sup> Repurposing these images as portraits and treating the depicted people as sitters with a unique appearance and personality can constitute an important step in coming to terms with this dark page in the history of photography.

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## ENDNOTES

1. We acknowledge that the moral and political questions around the restitution of archives are in many ways more fundamental and more urgent, but these will need to be left for another occasion.
2. In using only British colonial examples we recognize that there may be differences in the collection methods, treatment of subjects, and published use of images from those of other nations.
3. Hayes 2002, 2.
4. Upper caste Indians had early access to cameras and portrait photography because of their wealth and acceptance by the British as ‘civilised’, but they were an exception. Despite their privilege, their images were still collected, categorized, and published in the same volumes as the members of lower castes and rural tribes. See Falconer 2002, 13.
5. There are some exceptions that are worth mentioning, particularly as regards colonial India (see Howells 2022). But the general picture stands.
6. Hayes 2002, 4.
7. Mabry 2014, 1.
8. Hirono 2008, 1.
9. Ergogdu 2002, 8.
10. Ergogdu 2002, 22.
11. Ergogdu 2002, 29.
12. Soon after these ethnographic surveys, Britain would take photographs and develop a comprehensive cultural program in order to do the opposite: using images to create a vision of global British citizenship. See Gabrielle Moser’s publication: *Projecting Citizenship: Photography and Belonging in the British Empire* 2019 for

- an in-depth study of the effects of this program.
13. DeRoo 2002, 16.
  14. Among these were criminology and the pseudo-science of phrenology. Cesare Lombroso's *The Criminal Man* (1867) introduced the idea that individuals with certain facial features were prone to criminality. These new branches of study influenced other typological photography surveys, including Francis Galton's composite photos of human 'types' and August Sander's physiognomy project, *People of the Twentieth Century*.
  15. DeRoo 2002, 571.
  16. Falconer 2002.
  17. Basu 2021.
  18. Hight and Sampson 2002.
  19. Lewis 1973, 583.
  20. Basu 2021.
  21. Basu 2021.
  22. Falconer 2002, 11–12.
  23. Watson and Kaye 1868.
  24. Basu 2021.
  25. Basu 2021.
  26. Basu 2021.
  27. Eileraas 2003, 7.
  28. "[Re:]Entanglements" 2020.
  29. Basu 2021.
  30. Bradley, Adgemis, and Haralampou 2014.
  31. Don Miller quoted in Bradley, Adgemis, and Haralampou 2014, 55.
  32. Bradley, Adgemis, and Haralampou 2014, 58.
  33. Bradley, Adgemis, and Haralampou 2014, 63; see also Poignant 1992.
  34. Andrew and Neath 2018, 227.
  35. Andrew and Neath 2018, 238.
  36. Freeland 2010.
  37. See e.g. Spinicci 2009.
  38. See Maes 2015.
  39. Maes 2015, 315.
  40. Let us be clear that 'object' and 'repurpose' here refer to the photographs and not to the depicted subjects. Human beings should never be treated as mere objects and cannot be 'repurposed'.
  41. Moorhouse 2007.
  42. Goodyear et al. 2016.
  43. To be clear, we do not wish to suggest that it is only through artistic intervention that these photographs can be 'reclaimed'. (As pointed out earlier, there are strong moral and political reasons for the restitution of the archives and for respecting the agency of the descendants in this matter.) We have only tried to show that artistic and curatorial intervention is one way in which these images can come to function differently.
  44. Croft 2002, 14.
  45. Croft 2002, 141.

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