

Introducing the Children's Photography Archive



Introducing the **Children's Photography Archive**

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



the child's gaze

The child's gaze exhibition catalogue was funded by the European Research Council Starting Grant (ERC-StG-335514) to Sevasti-Melissa Nolas.

The Connectors Study, the research underpinning this book, was led by Sevasti-Melissa Nolas who also carried out the London fieldwork. Christos Varvantakis and Vinnarasan Aruldoss managed the Athens and Hyderabad study sites respectively, including fieldwork. Local research and language support in Hyderabad was provided by Madhavi Latha; Robyn Long was the Research Assistant on the study and Claire Prater provided project management and administrative support.

Exhibition catalogue design: Giorgos Skarmoutsos.

We would like to thank all the children who took part in the study and whose photographs are the first deposits to the Children's Photography Archive (<https://cpa.childhoodpublics.org>).

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ISBN: 978-1-912685-54-7

Recommended citation for the book and introductory text:

Nolas, S-M. and Varvantakis, C. (2019) *The Child's Gaze: Exhibition Catalogue*. <https://childhoodpublics.org/communications/writing/exhibition-catalogues/>

Children are often the subject of photographic practice but rarely are they thought of as photographers in their own right. This exhibition catalogue accompanies the first ever child photography archive (cpa.childhoodpublics.org). The Children's Photography Archive is the (unplanned) outcome of a five-year study on the relationship between childhood and public life (CONNECTORS STUDY, 2014-2019; ERC-StG-335514) that took place in three cities (Athens, Hyderabad, London).

In the study we gave children digital cameras and asked them to take photographs of things that mattered to them in their everyday lives. Children returned photographs of just about anything: animals and nature, places in their city, books they were reading, cartoons they watched, posters on their walls, important people and relationships in their lives, their homes, toys, technology, important religious symbols and festivals they took part in, their birthdays and other celebrations, photographs of themselves playing and spending time with siblings and friends, as well as journeys to school and other activities and outings.

In the research we are exploring these photographs as 'idioms' of childhood, ways in which children relate to public life and the world beyond their private, everyday experience. Idioms are forms of expression that take us beyond language and encapsulate ways of understanding, acting and relating in and to the world. Understanding the idioms of childhood, we argue, gives us better insight into the diverse lifeworlds of childhood, as well as the ways in which children relate to the world at large.

Children in the study came from diverse backgrounds within each city, as well as coming from very different national and cultural contexts. In this way, and drawing on over 850 photographs, the Children's Photography Archive is a unique resource for exploring children's everyday lives and what matters to them through a visual medium. The photographs in the archive include selections from children themselves, photographs they considered to best capture what mattered to them. The archive also includes selections we made as a research team, photographs that we felt captured important aspects of children's everyday lives as we had experienced those during a three-year period of ethnographic research.

As well being a visual document of children's everyday lives, the photographs also allow us to explore a key feature of photographic practice: the gaze. The concept of the gaze is central to our understanding of ourselves, of otherness and of difference and, it is argued, shapes the way we interact with the world around us.

For example, as people, in our early years, we come to know ourselves through the gaze of our primary carers, and as we grow the gaze of significant others also informs our understanding of who we are at any given moment in time. Feminist have argued that films and photographs of women have been governed by a male perspective that represents women as men would like to see them and not as they see and experience themselves. Anthropologists have argued that much of what became known about the Global South in the 19th and early- to mid-20th centuries was shaped by a colonial point of view that failed to engage with local knowledge and lived experience.

Women and peoples of the Global South have begun to return the gaze, representing themselves, their lives and their experiences. The Children's Photography Archive is an opportunity for children to join such practices of self-expression and cultural creation. Other, different ways of looking at things, whether that be along lines of age, gender and/or culture, may not only be telling about those others to whom these gazes belong, but may as well open new pathways to novel knowledge about the world.

The Children's Photography Archive offers an opportunity to explore what a childhood gaze might look like and how children shape their worlds through the many ways in which they represent those worlds. This is a gaze which we find offers a playfully askew view on the world, whether that's found in the movement and blurriness of an image or the slightly 'odd' choice of photographic subject and the 'off' angle of the photograph. In selecting the 61 images that feature in this catalogue and the accompanying exhibition, we were guided by this 'gaze'.

There is at least one photograph from each child in the study and the final photographs were selected in dialogue with the entire Children's Photography Archive. This means that a number of the photographs represent a key subject that emerged in children's photographic practice (see previous page). Some of the photographs may be seen as creating sequences or continuities (e.g. the anonymous self-portraits) that explore themes of children's embodiment, as well as the enduring existential themes of life and death, care and concern; others, viewed side-

by-side, offer a critical commentary on contemporary childhood (e.g. photographs of 'healthy food' and McDonalds) on issues that we know create tensions in everyday family lives and public policy. Some photographs may be strange on first viewing, like the number of photographs of lamp shapes and wall clocks: a childhood exploration and documentation of the home as a primary space of dwelling and belonging. Other photographs in the archive can be recognised through established photographic genres (e.g. street photography or still life), and yet they often contain children's idiomatic expressions, resulting in resonant creative tensions that offer a sideways view on those typical photographic genres.

The photographs in the archive and the accompanying exhibition stand alone as aesthetic photographic representations, as well as being enhanced by the ethnographic story that gives the context of their creation. We have attempted to convey a precis of that ethnographic story through the titles we have given the photographs (e.g. A moment of quiet, next to the noisy Monastiraki Square). We also found ourselves drawn to images with a diachronic quality to them, echoing moments of our own childhoods (e.g. On the road).

Conventional portraiture is the only genre missing in the archive, catalogue and exhibition. Children in the study returned a number of photos of family and friends. We were unable to share these because of the study commitment to anonymity. Instead, there are a number of photos of anonymous self-portraiture from the children who experimented with ways of identity representation and concealment.

We hope that the Children's Photography Archive will become a place where child photographers can deposit their photographs, first and foremost. We also hope that the archive will become a resource for the exploration of children's photographic practices and what matters to children, as well as an educational resource for those concerned with childhood, to develop a better understanding of the child's gaze, children's everyday lives, and the visual cultures of childhood.

*Sevasti-Melissa Nolas
Christos Varvantakis*



'I love my friends.'

Girl, 7.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



Handcrafts and transformation.

Boy, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Self-portrait with a car.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Self-portrait with the street.

Girl, 6.

London, 2015.



The feel of water.

Girl, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Ecstatic encounters.

Girl, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Barefoot on the rug.

Girl, 6.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



Growing stronger.

Boy, 6.

[Hyderabad, 2015.](#)



Three generations.

Girl, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Mum's shoes in a row.

Girl, 7.

London, 2015.



On the road.

Girl, 7.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



Interspecies interactions.

Girl, 6.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



Dead bird.
Girl, 7.
London, 2015.



Hawk and vet.
Girl, 8.
Athens, 2016.



Cat in the kitchen.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Still life with fruit.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Everyday objects.

Boy, 7.

Athens 2016.



Popping a chapati.

Boy, 7.

London, 2016.



Lampshade.

Girl, 5.

London, 2015.



Balls in the closet.

Girl, 7.

Athens, 2015.



Grandma's hand and Playmobil.

Boy, 6.

Athens, 2015.



Barbie against the night.

Girl, 6.

Hyderabad, 2015.



Quilling creations.

Girl, 6.

Hyderabad, 2015.



Pencil case.
Girl, 7.
Hyderabad, 2016.



A home.
Boy, 6.
Hyderabad, 2015.



Much hugged teddy bear.

Girl, 7.

London, 2015.



A menagerie of stuffies.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Bicycle.

Boy, 8.

London, 2015.



Card trick.

Boy, 8.

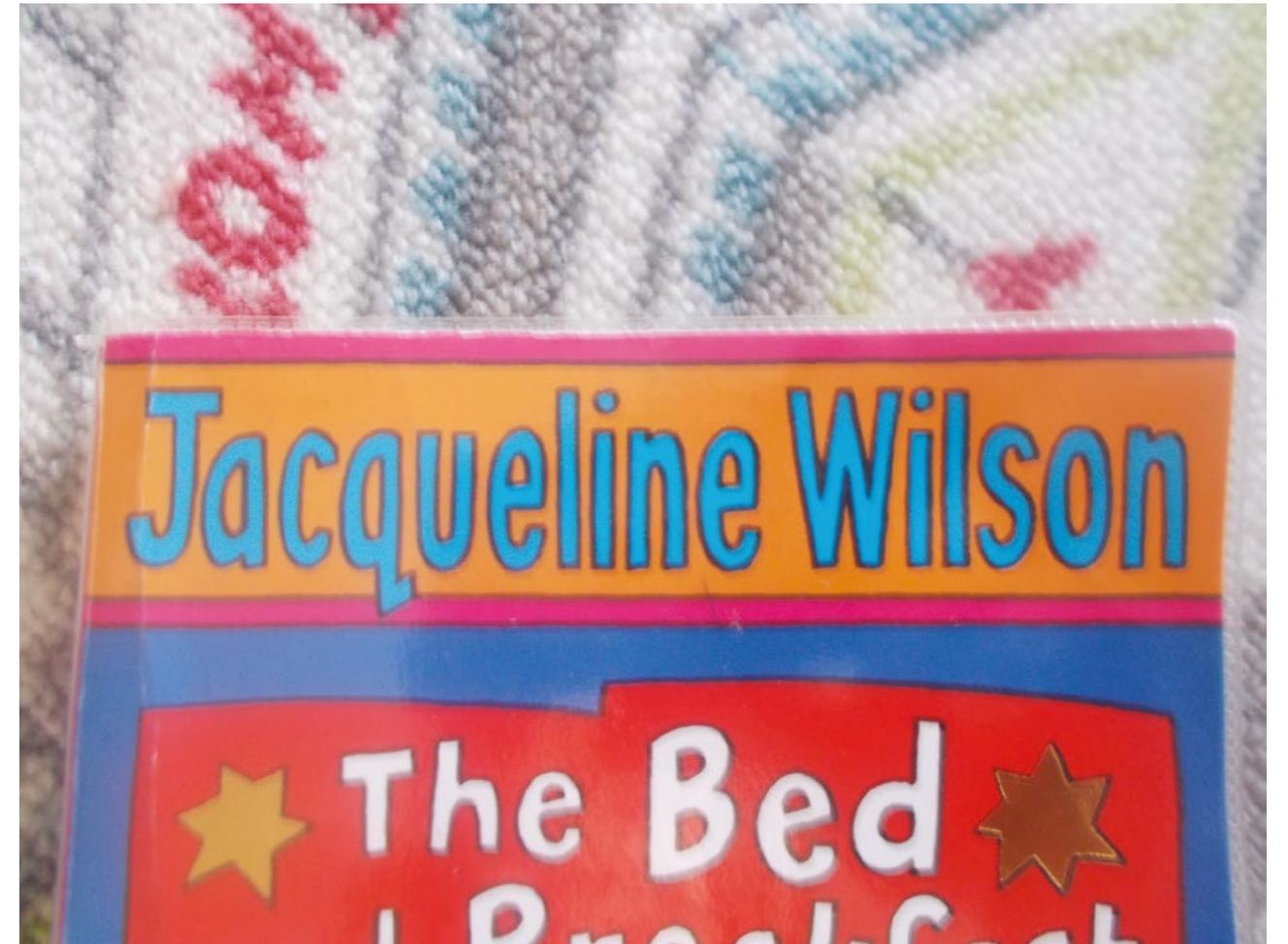
London, 2015.



BB8 portrait.

Boy, 7.

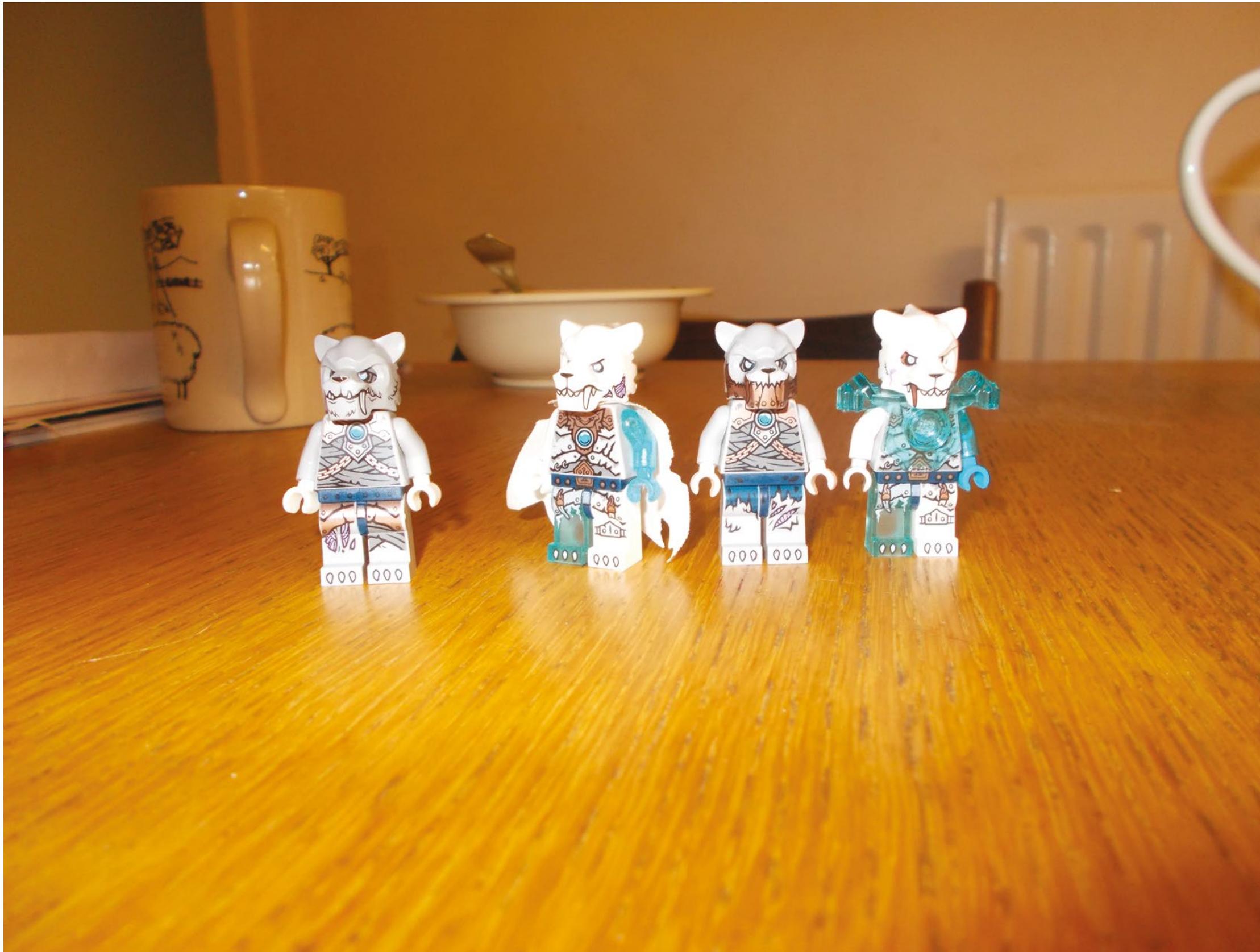
London, 2015.



The Bed and Breakfast.

Girl, 7.

London, 2015.



On the breakfast table.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Fragile divinity.

Girl, 6.

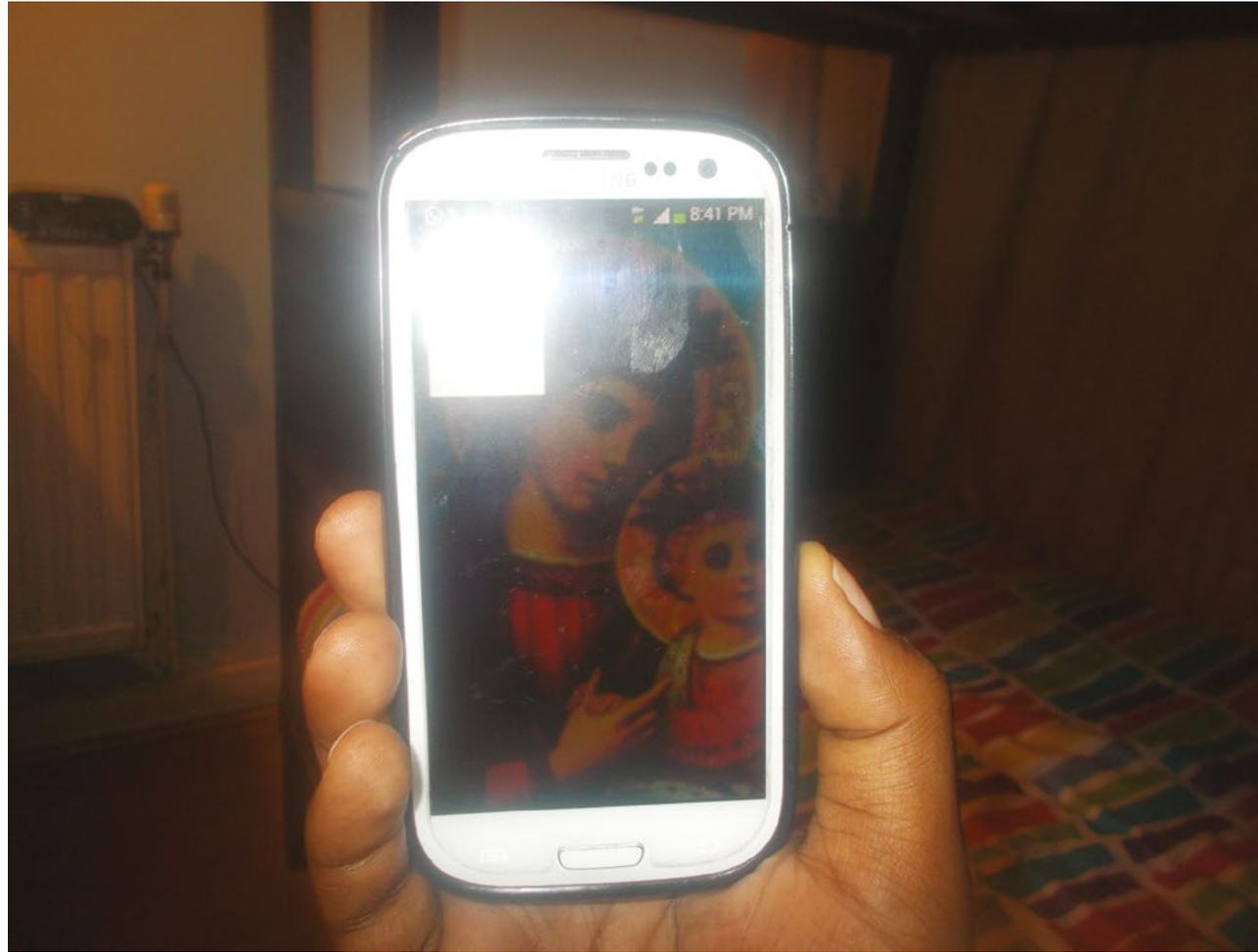
[Athens, 2015.](#)



My Secret Notebook.

Girl, 7.

[Hyderabad, 2016.](#)



Mary, Jesus and a mobile phone.

Girl, 7.

London, 2015.



Screen time.

Girl, 6.

Hyderabad, 2015.



Cartoon.
Boy, 7.
Athens, 2015.



The news at home.
Boy, 7.
Athens, 2015.



Time to oneself.

Boy, 7.

Athens, 2015.



Telephone.

Girl, 8.

London, 2015.



Superman.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Old tech.

Girl, 6.

Hyderabad, 2015.



Balconies across the way.

Girl, 6.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



On the rooftop.

Girl, 7.

[Hyderabad, 2015.](#)



At the threshold.

Girl, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Extraordinary clouds.

Girl, 7.

[Athens, 2015.](#)



A moment of quiet, next to the noisy Monastiraki Square.

Girl, 8.

[Athens, 2016.](#)



School drop off.

Boy, 8.

Athens 2015.



Pigeons and school-buses.

Girl, 8.

Hyderabad, 2015.



Playing cricket.

Boy, 7.

Hyderabad, 2016.



London Southbank.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Stormtroopers, Waterloo.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



Christmas lights, Oxford Street.

Girl, 7.

London, 2015.



Family outing.

Girl, 7.

Hyderabad, 2015.



South Norwood Recreation Ground.

Boy, 7.

London, 2015.



Central Athens.

Boy, 7.

Athens, 2015.



Building with the trees.

Boy, 6.

London, 2015.



On the coast.

Boy, 7.

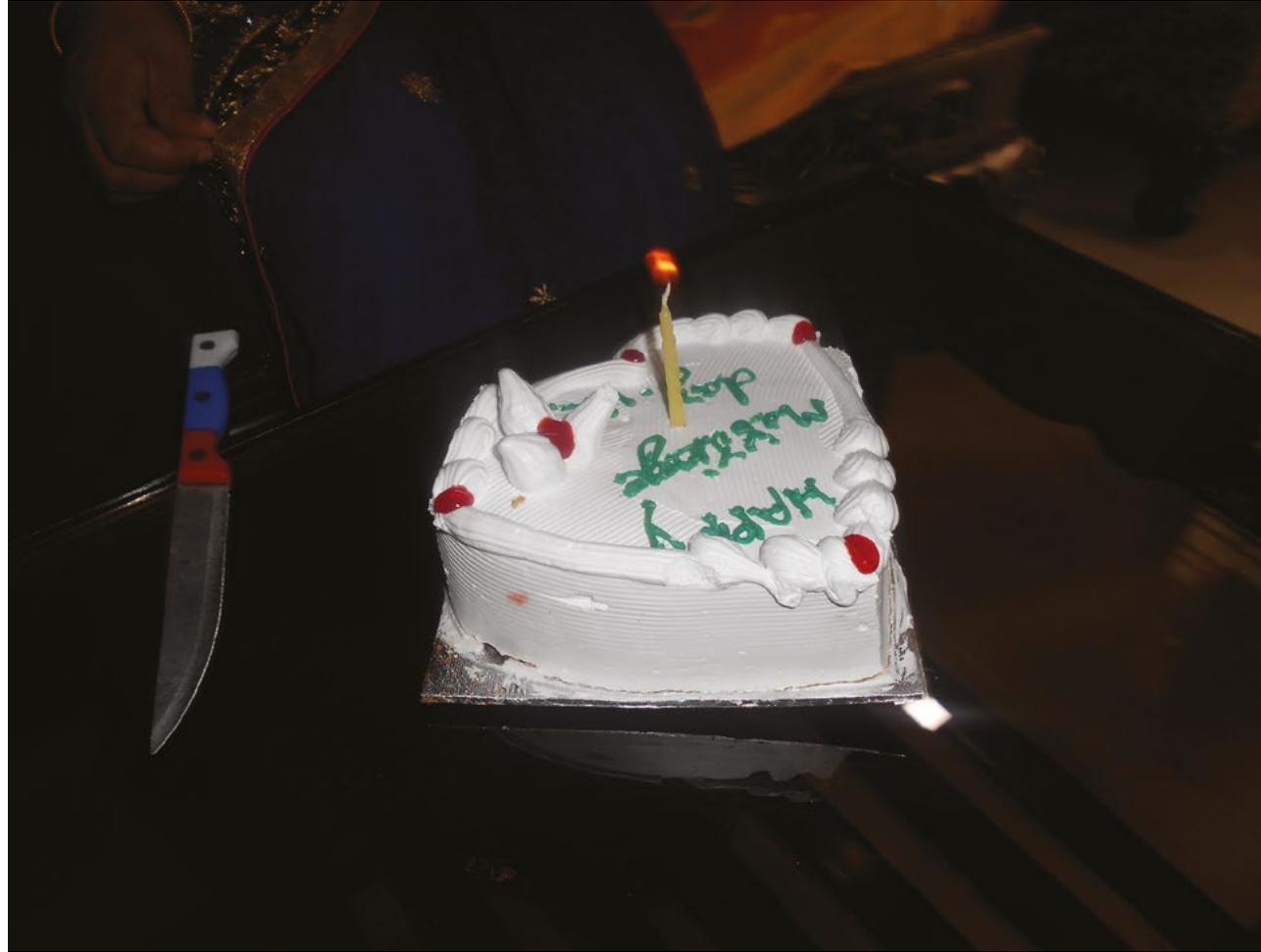
Athens, 2015.



Before the celebration.

Girl, 8.

Hyderabad, 2016.



Happy wedding anniversary.

Boy, 6.

Hyderabad, 2015.



A street performance during Bathukamma celebrations.

Girl, 9.

Hyderabad, 2016.

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The Children's Photography Archive is the first archive of its kind featuring the works of child photographers. The archive is currently based at Goldsmiths, University of London and is hosted on the Childhood Publics website <https://cpa.childhoodpublics.org>. Its original set up was funded by the European Research Council (ERC-StG-335514). It offers a unique resource for exploring and understanding the child's gaze, children's everyday lives and what matters to children, as well as the visual cultures of childhood.

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