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The history of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate

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The History of the Indonesian Dutch Restitution Debate

Working paper, Klaas Stutje

Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPOCE)

30 March 2022

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About PPOCE

The Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPOCE) is an initiative of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the National Museum of World Cultures and NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies that aims to develop a methodology for research on the provenance of collections acquired in colonial situations, and to provide policy recommendations on this matter. The project ran between November 2019 and March 2022 and was made possible by funding from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science. The final report entitled “Sporen. Onderzoek naar herkomstgeschiedenis en betekenisgeving van culturele objecten en collecties verworven in koloniale situaties” is available online, via the website of NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies.

About this document

This document discusses the history of the Indonesian-Dutch restitution debate between 1945 and today. It was created as a working document and a review of the available literature, and aims to provide a necessary overview of the long continuities and recent developments in the field of restitution and heritage debates between Indonesia and the Netherlands. A few preliminary conclusions were presented by Klaas Stutje on 18 November 2021 at the Virtual conference of the German Lost Art Foundation, entitled “The Long History of Claims for the Return of Cultural Heritage from Colonial Contexts.”

Apart from sections about the historiography on this topic and the prehistory of this debate, the document subsequently discusses the periods 1949, 1950-1962, 1963-1970, 1973-1978, 1980-1998 and post-1998. Each section on these periods examines the historical context, Indonesian and Dutch interests, the negotiations, and the particular objects under discussion. Moreover, each section ends with a few suggestions for further research. Apart from a general overview of Indonesian Dutch political relations and cultural negotiations, we tried to be as specific as possible in considering which objects were under discussion and why.

Historiography on this topic

For this document, we made use of a handful of very recent and excellent publications about the history of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate, retracing their archival references in the Nationaal Archief in The Hague and the archive of NMVW Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden.

Over the last few years, Dutch restitution of Indonesian cultural objects has benefitted from new scholarly interest, and the number of publications is rapidly increasing. A first publication that deserves mention is a chapter entitled “Isn’t it all culture,” that appeared in 2000 in a volume on fifty years of Dutch development cooperation. Written by professor in anthropology Els Postel Coster and Susan Legêne, then head of the curatorial department of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (today NMVW Tropenmuseum), the chapter describes the use of notions of culture and heritage in Dutch diplomacy

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and development policy in the postcolonial period. Among other topics, the chapter devotes six pages to the Indonesian Dutch negotiations between 1949 and the 1970s regarding Indonesian heritage in the Netherlands.¹

After a few years of silence, it was Jos van Beurden who started to publish about the protection of cultural heritage and questions of return, in the context of his PhD research at the VU University, and has been a very active participant in the discussion ever since. During his previous career as a journalist he had focused on the protection, theft, and smuggling of cultural and historical treasures of “vulnerable states and peoples.” In his 2016 dissertation, he specifically focused on colonial collections in the museums of former colonising powers. The dissertation has a long-term and international comparative perspective, but Part IV is entirely devoted to Indonesian Dutch cultural relations, with a special focus on the period between 1949 and 1978.² Also noteworthy is his *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, which contains a few reflections on the present state of the debate.³

In the same period, Cynthia Scott completed her PhD at Claremont Graduate University in Los Angeles on the history of Dutch cultural policy and demands for the return of Indonesia’s cultural property since independence. Her articles are extremely relevant. In 2020, Scott published a book on the basis of her dissertation, which also holds a chapter about postcolonial cultural property return debates since the 1970s.⁴

In 2018, the Dutch historical journal BMGN published a discussion folder in which authors were invited by Jos van Beurden to reflect on a few museum collections in the Netherlands and Indonesia that were compiled in the context of colonialism. In this special issue the contributions by Caroline Drieënhuizen, who writes about early cases of restitution to Indonesia, and Ajeng Arainkasih and Hafnidar, who consider the revaluation of the collection of the Aceh Museum in the postcolonial era, are especially

¹ S. Legêne and E. Postel-Coster, “Isn’t it all culture? Culture and Dutch development policy in the post-colonial period,” in: J.A. Nekkers and P.A.M. Malcontent (eds), *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation, 1949–1999* (The Hague 2000), 271–88.

² J. van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects” (PhD dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam 2016).

³ *Ibid*, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures: The Case of the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2012). In recent years, Jos van Beurden has continued publishing about the same topic. Among his recent publications are: Jos van Beurden, Kathleen M. Adams and Paul Catteeuw, “Teruggave ontrafeld, reflecties over museumobjecten in tijden van repatriëring en restitutie,” *Volkskunde, Tijdschrift over de Cultuur van het Dagelijks Leven* 120-3 (2019) 305-323; Jos van Beurden, *Ongemakkelijk erfgoed. Koloniale collecties en teruggave in de Lage Landen* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers 2021); Jos van Beurden, “Returns by the Netherlands to Indonesia in 2010s and the 1970s,” in: Louise Tythacott and Panggah Ardiyansyah (eds.), *Returning Southeast Asia’s Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2021).

⁴ C. Scott, “Sharing the divisions of the colonial past: an assessment of the Netherlands-Indonesia shared cultural heritage project, 2003 – 2006,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20-2 (2014) 181-195; *idem*, “Negotiating the colonial past in the age of European decolonization: Cultural property return between the Netherlands and Indonesia” (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate University 2014); *Ibid*, “Renewing the ‘Special Relationship’ and Rethinking the Return of Cultural Property: The Netherlands and Indonesia” *Journal of Contemporary History* 52-3 (2017) 646–668; *Idem*, *Cultural Diplomacy and the Heritage of Empire: Negotiating Post-Colonial Returns* (New York: Routledge 2020).

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relevant for the discussion.⁵ In 2021, Louise Tythacott and Panggah Ardiyansyah, both affiliated to SOAS University of London, published an edited volume about Southeast Asian art and heritage, as well as issues of (re)appropriation, repatriation, and ownership. In this volume Panggah Ardiyansyah discusses the trajectories of a few paintings of Raden Saleh and their modern reinterpretations, while Wieske Octaviani Sapardan writes about the social life of the Prajnaparamita statue after its restitution in 1978.⁶

Other publications that deserve mention discuss aspects of this debate. Among them is an article published in 2013 by Michael Karabinos about the return in the 1970s and 1980s of Republican and personal archives that were seized by the Dutch during the military attack of 1948.⁷ Furthermore, articles and book chapters written by Marieke Bloembergen, Martijn Eickhoff, Francine Brinkgreve, David Stuart-Fox and Hari Budiarti contain important insights concerning the prehistory of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate.⁸ Finally, in the following historical overview we will mention a few political biographies that may contain the memories of politicians that were directly involved.

Overall, the publications that primarily discuss the political restitution debate are heavily based on Dutch government archives in the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, most notably those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Culture. With the exception of the work of Indonesian scholars about recent reinterpretations of Indonesian heritage (see the work of Panggah Ardiyansyah, Wieske Octaviani Sapardan, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih and Hafnidar) Indonesian archives or memoirs, on the other hand, are not used. Most probably, this produces a ‘Dutch’ narrative, and one that leaves out claims and restitutions of non-state actors. Secondly, the publications focus almost exclusively on the period up to 1978, leaving the period between 1980 and 1998 seriously understudied. These problems could not fundamentally be solved in the context of this document.

⁵ C. Drieënhuizen, "Mirrors of Time and Agents of Action Indonesia's Claimed Cultural Objects and Decolonisation, 1947-1978," *BMGN* 133.2 (2018) 79-90; Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih and Hafnidar, 'Decolonising the Aceh Museum: Objects, Histories and their Narratives', *BMGN* 133.2 (2018) 105-120.

⁶ Panggah Ardiyansyah, "Restitution and National Heritage: (Art)Historical Trajectories of Raden Saleh's Paintings," and Wieske Sapardan, "The Return of Cultural Property and National Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia," in: Tythacott and Ardiyansyah (eds.), *Returning Southeast Asia's Past*, 163-186 and 213-234.

⁷ M.J. Karabinos, "Displaced archives, displaced history: Recovering the seized archives of Indonesia," *BKI* 169 (2013) 279 – 294.

⁸ Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, *The Politics of Heritage in Indonesia: A Cultural History* (Cambridge 2020); *ibid*, "Exchange and the Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java," *Journal of Asian Studies* 72.4 (November 2013) 893-916; F. Brinkgreve and D. Stuart-Fox, "Collections After Colonial Conflict: Badung and Tabanan 1906–2006," in: P.J. ter Keurs (ed.), *Colonial Collections Revisited* (Leiden: Leiden University Press 2007), 145–85; H. Budiarti, "Taking and Returning Objects in a Colonial Context: Tracing the Collections Acquired During the Bone-Gowa Military Expeditions," in Ter Keurs (ed.), *Colonial Collections Revisited*, 123–44.

History of Indonesian Dutch Restitution Debate

Pre-history

The history of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate concerning objects of art and culture does not just begin in the closing months of 1949, with the Round Table Conference that led to a transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch East Indies to the United States of Indonesia (RIS). It lies outside the scope of this document to examine this in detail, but the following section highlights a few directions of thinking about the pre-history of cultural heritage politics during colonial times articulated in the scholarly literature.

This pre-history should start with possible feelings of loss and grief among those who possessed and/or used cultural artefacts that were taken away in the context of colonial theft and looting or as a result of the imposition of a foreign property regime on the Indonesian societies. Many ancient Hindu-Buddhist buildings, sculptures, and objects were prized by local populations and aristocracies, even though they had often acquired an alternative meaning, such as for instance the famous Prajnaparamita statue of Singosari that was worshipped as Princess Dedes.⁹ Cultural awareness and the call for heritage protection also played a constituting role in the establishment of some modern Indonesian political organisations and movements, most prominently within Boedi Oetomo in 1908, and with intellectuals such as Suwardi Suryaningrat (Ki Hadjar Dewantoro) and Noto Soeroto as noteworthy representatives. In the 1930s, the *polemik kebudayaan* between Indonesian nationalist intellectuals addressed the meaning of history and culture for the new Indonesian identity, and in 1931 Sukarno introduced the *trimurti*-principle that linked a promising future to a glorious past and the dark present of colonisation.¹⁰ Even though these voices gained more and more popular support in the Indonesian society they were not powerful enough to provoke structural debates, let alone negotiations, with the colonial authorities or Dutch institutions over the possible return of objects.

Yet, discussions concerning the fate of Indonesian cultural heritage objects took place within various sections of the colonial state apparatus; in discussion with the Netherlands; with other countries; and with regional aristocracies. These negotiations will be discussed in the following sections.

Batavia vs. Leiden

A key part of the first discussion is the competition between the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten

⁹ P. Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Collecting Javanese Antiquities: The appropriation of a newly discovered Hindu-Buddhist civilization," in: P.J. ter Keurs (ed.), *Colonial Collections Revisited* (Leiden: Leiden University Press 2007) 73-83; Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, "A Wind of Change on Java's Ruined Temples: Archaeological Activities, Imperial Circuits and Heritage Awareness in Java and the Netherlands (1800-1850)," *BMGN* 128-1 (2013) 81-104, there 89.

¹⁰ H.A.J. Klooster, *Indonesiërs schrijven hun geschiedenis: De ontwikkeling van de Indonesische geschiedbeoefening in theorie en praktijk, 1900-1980* (Dordrecht: Foris publications 1985) 33-34; Soekarno, *Indonesië klaagt aan: Pleitrede voor den landraad te Bandoeng* (Amsterdam: N.V. De Arbeiderspers, 1931) 64.

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en Wetenschappen (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, shortly Bataviaasch Genootschap. Its museum was a predecessor of today's Museum Nasional in Jakarta) and the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden (today part of the National Museum of World Cultures) over the coordination and dominance in the distribution of cultural objects within the Dutch Empire. In 1778 the Bataviaasch Genootschap was established by the Dutch VOC official and botanist Jacobus Radermacher. Initially, the Genootschap itself was an expression of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fascination and hunger of European elites to collect cultural, natural, and ethnographic artefacts in the name of science. However well connected to the colonial authorities, the organisation outgrew its peers and gained a semi-official status in the course of the nineteenth century as an instrument of the colonial state to regulate the unrestricted collection and export of Indonesian cultural objects. Within a hundred years after its foundation, and at least until the formation of the Oudheidkundige Dienst in 1913, the Bataviaasch Genootschap came to function as the main consultant to the colonial government with regards to the preservation of cultural heritage throughout the archipelago. Among other things, it lobbied for the imposition of a prohibition of export of Indonesian antiquities from the colony without prior allowance of the Governor General. It also acquired a coordinating function in the collection and allocation of archeological artefacts found in the archipelago, and the first right to buy objects for its own collection.¹¹

As such, the Bataviaasch Genootschap's interests ran counter to those of the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden that aspired to be the epicentre of ethnographic activity within the Dutch Empire at large. The question where cultural and archeological objects were to be held revolved around the question of where they would be best accessible and to whom. According to the Bataviaasch Genootschap it was in the interest of "many a youthful Indies' scholars" that the Batavia museum would be the repository of Indies' antiquities, whereas the Leiden museum argued that the objects were better accessible to scientists in the imperial motherland.¹² In 1862, the competition between Leiden and Batavia came to a climax when the Indies' government decided that the Bataviaasch Genootschap would gain the upper hand, having a coordinating and inventorying function and a first say in which objects should remain in Batavia and which objects could go to Leiden.¹³

It is unknown whether the competition between Leiden and Batavia ever led to decisions to return items from the imperial motherland to the colony, and if so, which arguments those decisions were based on. In any case, it is likely that the division of objects gave rise to intensive correspondence concerning the rightful place of Indonesian collections. This is visible, for instance, in the case of the Dubois collection of paleo-anthropological objects, which was excavated in 1891 in Trinil in East Java and transported to the Netherlands, at least for the duration of its research and conservation by Dubois himself. Dubois did not manage to process the collection, and he died in 1940 without completing the task. In the meantime,

¹¹ E. Sri Hardiati, "From Batavian Society to Indonesian National Museum," in: E. Sri Hardiati and P. Ter Keurs (eds.) *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2005) 11 – 19, there 12-14.

¹² Quoted in: Hans Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden: Het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1778-1867* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij 2009) 447-8.

¹³ Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden*, 444-451, 463; Hardiati, "From Batavian Society to Indonesian National Museum," 14; E. Sedyawati and P. ter Keurs, "Scholarship, Curiosity and Politics," in: Hardiati and Ter Keurs, *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past*, 20-33, there 21.

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there was governmental disagreement over who held possession of the findings and which institute would receive them afterwards.¹⁴ In 1929, A.C. de Jong of the Indies' Bureau van den Opsporingsdienst, which was part of the colonial mining department, argued that the Indies' government remained owner of the objects and at least a selection of remains had to be returned to the colony to be housed in the Opsporingsdienst's own museum.¹⁵ This, however, never happened. After Dubois' death, the collection remained where it was: the Rijksmuseum voor Natuurlijke Historie, a predecessor of today's Naturalis Biodiversity Centre in Leiden.¹⁶

Another instance of friction between Dutch and Indies institutes regarding the preservation of Indonesian cultural heritage is documented by William Southworth in an interesting article about the arrival in the Netherlands of twelve Javanese stone sculptures in 1932. In the article, Southworth cites prominent functionaries of the Dutch Vereeniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst and the Indies Oudheidkundige Dienst, in which the former accused the latter of irresponsibly removing sculptures from their temples of origin.¹⁷

The primacy of the Bataviaasch Genootschap in the selection of cultural objects for its own museum is important, because it was the most important argument of postcolonial Dutch museum experts and government officials to turn down Indonesian claims: the most valuable objects had remained in Batavia and were now part of the Museum Nasional in Jakarta.

Batavia vs. third states

A second field of concern of the colonial authorities about the free circulation of the archipelago's cultural heritage may be found in the colonies' foreign policy. In the article 'Exchange and the Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java' Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff argue that cultural objects were not only transferred from the colony to its motherland, but also ended up in collections in other countries. They follow, for instance, the trajectory of "eight cartloads" of sculptures, which included five Buddha statues of the Borobudur temple, Ramayana reliefs from Prambanan, and two Ganesha statues from the Singasari temple. In 1896, these sculptures were donated to King Chulalongkorn of Siam, partly by the Governor General and partly by Prince Mangkunegara VI in Solo and other local parties, on the occasion of the king's visit to

¹⁴ Anticipating future excavations by foreign scientific expeditions, the Indies' government decided not to grant foreign institutions or persons access to the site in order "to avoid that the major part of scientific material finds its way to foreign countries," Begroting van Nederlandsch-Indië voor het dienstjaar 1913, Afdeling VI, Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel, Hoofdstuk II, p. 46: https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/19121913/0000342749/1/pdf/SGD_19121913_0001722.pdf (last accessed 30 March 2022).

¹⁵ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (NL-HaNA), Ministerie van Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk (CRM), nummer toegang 2.27.19, inventarisnummer 1425, letter from A.C. de Jong to B.G. Escher, dated 17 June 1929.

¹⁶ In the period 1975-1979 the question whether the Dutch or Dutch Indies' government had held possession over the Dubois collection flared up again in the context of possible claims of the Indonesian state as the institutional heirs of the Indies' colonial state. See: NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 1425.

¹⁷ William Southworth, "Twelve Stone Sculptures from Java," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 65-3 (2017) 244-75, there 247.

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Java. Most of these objects can still be found in several temples, palaces, and museums in Bangkok, but in 1926 three out of four Ramayana reliefs of Prambanan temple were returned to their original locations after interventions of Dutch archeologists, museum conservators in Siam, and the half-brother of the late King Chulalongkorn, Prince Damrong. Upon return, they were used in the reconstruction of the Siva temple at Prambanan. The other Javanese objects, however, were considered holy gifts of Chulalongkorn to the Siamese nation and had acquired new meaning as Buddhist heritage.¹⁸ It is interesting to read that the requests for restitution of these objects were in a large part fueled by feelings of regret and indignation on the side of Dutch archeologists of the Bataviaasch Genootschap, Indies' journalists, and government officials. They lamented the lack of concern and intervention of the colonial authorities in the careless desecration of the Javanese temples. Even the Siamese King himself had modified his wish lists somewhat because he realised that some of his desired objects "belonged to the Javanese people" and ought thus not be removed.¹⁹ Examples like these demonstrate a growing heritage awareness on the side of the colonial authorities and its critics, which even started to play a role in the realm of foreign relations and could give rise to restitution requests.

Colonial state vs. regions

Finally, sometimes the return of cultural artefacts to their local sites of origin was used by the colonial regime as a tool to support and legitimise loyal local aristocracies. As Hari Budiarti describes, this was for instance the case with the Gowa and Bone kingdoms in South-Sulawesi. In 1931 and 1938 more than a hundred objects that were appropriated in the seventeenth-century Makassar Wars and the Bone and Gowa military expeditions of 1905-1906 were returned by the Bataviaasch Genootschap to the remaining but relatively powerless kingdoms. After the Dutch military conquest of 1905-1906, the local aristocracies were made subservient to the colonial government and - from the Dutch perspective - relations had immensely improved. In 1931, Bone was granted the right to appoint a new sultan, followed by the Kingdom of Gowa in 1937. However, these reinstated sultans could not reign without their regalia which granted them power and legitimacy. Therefore, in 1931 and 1938 the colonial government returned the regalia to the sultans to support their authority within the region.²⁰ In a similar vein, in 1937-1938 the authorities seriously considered the return of heirlooms to the former rulers of the Balinese states that were defeated in 1906. Like the Bone and Gowa royal families, the Balinese royal families were allowed a limited form of autonomy, or "zelfbestuur." As Francine Brinkgreve and David Stuart-Fox describe, only two of four important *keris* from the Tabanan Kingdom in South Bali were returned in 1937. The authors remain unsure why the other objects were not returned after all.²¹

In other words, despite the absence of a real debate between Indonesians and Dutch colonial authorities, we can see kernels of a restitution debate in negotiations between Batavia and Leiden, between Batavia and third states, and between Batavia and regional aristocracies. The Dutch East Indies' state and its cultural policies can count as a predecessor of the later postcolonial Indonesian state in the way it negotiated with other foreign states, internal regions and the postcolonial Dutch state. This partial continuation is symbolised in a most concrete way by the fact that the Bataviaasch Genootschap,

¹⁸ Bloembergen and Eickhoff, "Exchange and Protection," 899-903.

¹⁹ Ibid, 901, 904.

²⁰ Budiarti, "Taking and Returning Objects," 134-138.

²¹ Brinkgreve and Stuart-Fox, "Collections After Colonial Conflict," 162-164.

the Indies' pivotal institute in cultural affairs, continued its work in the postcolonial era as the *Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia*, which was renamed as Museum Pusat in 1962 and the Museum Nasional Indonesia in 1979. However, the above examples also make clear that colonial restitution policies primarily served imperialistic interests, aimed at promoting the museumisation and scientific exploration of empire (first case), expanding the control over the indigenous society in the cultural sphere (first and second case), and appeasing local rulers and regions (third case). The activities of the Bataviaasch Genootschap symbolise the expansion of work areas of the Dutch colonial state, the dominant orientalist notion of what is and is not culture that is worthy of preservation, and the application of culture in managing state relations, between the Dutch East Indies and foreign countries and between the colony and the imperial motherland.

Research questions / follow-up

- Did Indonesian political intellectuals/movements reflect on Indonesian objects in Dutch/colonial museums?
- On what basis did the Bataviaasch Genootschap subdivide Indonesian collections between itself and Leiden? Are there examples of objects that were returned from Leiden to Batavia? If so, for what reasons?
- Can we find more examples of negotiations with foreign parties — for example, around the Pucangan Stone in Kolkata, and the Sangguran Stone in Scotland²² or collections in France (Guimet Museum) and the UK (British Museum)?
- Can we find more examples of the investiture of subservient local aristocracies with confiscated regalia? What was the argumentation behind the (denial of) return to heirlooms to royal families?

Further reading

- René Karels, *Mijn aardse leven vol moeite en strijd: Raden Mas Noto Soeroto: Javaan, dichter, politicus, 1888-1951* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij 2010).
- Journal 'Oedaya – Opgang'.

²² Van Beurden, "Treasures in Trusted Hands," 47-48.

1949

Context

During the turbulent and devastating years of the Indonesian War of Independence, representatives of the Dutch state, the Republican government in Java and Sumatra, and from the non-Republican regions of the archipelago went through several rounds of negotiations and agreements. These negotiations (namely, the Malino conference of July 1946, Linggadjati Agreement of November 1946, the Renville Agreement of January 1948, the Roem–van Roijen Agreement of May 1949) mainly concerned military affairs and the state-structure and constitutional status of the future Indonesian state. Cultural relations and the fate of Indonesian cultural heritage objects in Dutch hands were not discussed. Between December 1948 and January 1949 a second large-scale Dutch military attack took place under the name of “Operatie Kraai.” This offensive resulted in the Dutch occupation of the Republican capital, Yogyakarta, and the arrest of its political leaders, but the Dutch government lost international support and was forced to the negotiating table by the US and UN. The Round Table Conference (RTC) led to a transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch East Indies to the United States of Indonesia (Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS). Cultural affairs only became a matter of discussion during these negotiations. The main parties participating in the RTC were delegations from the Republican area of control, non-Republican areas unified in the Dutch-sponsored Bijeenkomst Federaal Overleg (BFO), and the Netherlands, all operating under the supervision of the UN-Commission for Indonesia and several representatives of minority groups. As the largest belligerents, the Dutch State and Republican government were most dominant in the discussions, with the BFO in a relatively minor and mediating role.

The restitution of colonial objects was only a small and relatively uncomplicated part of the larger negotiations in the context of the RTC, which included large and complex disputes in the sphere of economic, social, and military affairs, and the status of Western New Guinea.²³ Even when it concerned cultural relations, the future of objects in Dutch museums was just one issue in a long list of concerns, including the future of Dutch education in Indonesia, Dutch-language radio broadcasts, student exchange programs and scholarships, and Dutch heritage in the archipelago.²⁴

Indonesian interests

For the Republican delegation, who were the most dominant Indonesian party, cultural politics were mainly future-oriented and served the interests of revitalising the Indonesian spirit through access to global ‘modernity.’ As Caroline Drieënhuizen describes, remnants of feudal and colonial culture had to be replaced by modern ideas and a Renanesque voluntarist will to move forward as a nation.²⁵ With regards to history itself, post-1945 cultural politics were in line with a general reinterpretation of

²³ See: letter from Bot to Lovink, dated 30 October 1949, in: Drooglever and Schouten (eds.), *Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950, part XX* ('s-Gravenhage, Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis 1996) 467-470, there 469; Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *‘Renville’ als keerpunt in de Nederlands-Indonesische onderhandelingen* (Alphen aan de Rijn, A.W.Sijthoff 1980).

²⁴ Legêne and Postel-Coster, “Isn’t it all culture?” 272.

²⁵ Drieënhuizen, “Mirrors of Time,” 95.

national history along nationalist lines. Inspired by the political tractates of the first generations of nationalist politicians such as Sukarno and Hatta, and new historical publications of Pringgodigdo and Muhammad Yamin, the dominant Indonesian historical-cultural narrative was primarily interested in the post-1908 history of the national movement, and in nineteenth century rebellions as expressions of latent proto-nationalism. With regards to ancient history, the early Hindu-Buddhist empires of Srivijaya (seventh to the thirteenth c.) and Majapahit (thirteenth to the sixteenth c.) were remembered as glorious expressions of a proto-Indonesian identity and history. Consequently – and interesting in the context of restitution debates – these nationalists were not interested in the remnants of feudal society and coopted Indonesian aristocracies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or in cultural expressions of a regional or religious identity and history.²⁶

In other words, for the Republicans the return of cultural objects may not just be regarded as an attempt to reconnect to a lost national past, but primarily as a symbolic gesture of respect and acceptance as a nation among nations. However, existing literature on the RTC and cultural negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia does not address the aims and strategies of the Indonesian delegations, and does not make use of Indonesian accounts, memoirs, and archives. Moreover, little is known about the background of the Indonesian delegates. Were they part of the pre-WWII nationalist political vanguard? Did they have a background in the world of museums, heritage, and culture? Was there a fundamental difference between the BFO and Republican delegations with regards to cultural affairs?

Preliminary archival research indicates that the Indonesian delegation of the committee for Cultural Affairs consisted mainly of political heavyweights: nationalist veterans (Ali Sastroamidjojo, Sim Ki Ay, Muhammad Yamin) and Javanese highest aristocrats (Pakubuwono XII and Mangkunegara VIII). The delegation of the BFO consisted of lesser political elites and councilors from a wide range of non-Republican regions, some of whom had long political experience (Mononutu, Abdul Malik) and others who had recently come to power as anti-Republican local aristocrats in Dutch-appointed regional councils and parliaments.²⁷

Dutch interests

We know much more about Dutch considerations and internal debates. According to many historians, the Dutch delegation was primarily interested in ensuring the survival of the Dutch culture and language in Indonesia. The cultural well-being of the Dutch and Eurasian population of the RIS was at stake. They also feared to be replaced as a hegemonic power by the growing influence of British and American cultural missions, and hoped that a living Dutch culture in the archipelago could provide a basis of mutual understanding and shared destiny in the new confederal structure of the Netherlands-Indonesian Union.²⁸

Of a direct strategic interest was the reparation of the severely damaged reputation of the Dutch within the international community (the US and UN most notably) after Operatie Kraai. As most authors

²⁶ Klooster, *Indonesiërs schrijven hun geschiedenis*, 55-62.

²⁷ NL-HaNA, Delegatie RTC Indonesië, 2.10.40, inv. nr. 8, A.A.1.0 Stukken betreffende de samenstelling van de delegaties in commissies en subcommissies.

²⁸ NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv. nr. 12973.

mention, Dutch officials were even prepared to use the return of Indonesian cultural objects as a symbolic tool to promote its interests in other areas and create a positive image of goodwill. They refer to the positive reaction from Dutch Ministers Van Maarseveen (Overseas Territories; RKSP) and Stikker (Foreign Affairs; VVD) and Dutch High Commissioner in Indonesia Lovink to a Dutch railway employee's suggestion to make a generous gesture before the eyes of the world by returning a few "trophies" and "crown treasures" to Indonesia.²⁹ However, these politicians were keen to return objects only to the future successor state of the Netherlands Indies, and not to offspring of original owners. To the original owners, as the Dutch officials were well aware, "crown treasures" represented legitimacy to self-rule, and would thus be regarded by the new Indonesian state as an undermining of their authority.³⁰

Only Rutten (Minister of Education, Arts, and Sciences; KVP) rejected this "goodwill gesture." He was warned by the curators of Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden that it would involve months if not years of thorough research to distinguish looted regalia from the vast majority of honestly acquired pieces. Thus, the idea of a proactive gesture of goodwill was not carried out, and the issue of cultural restitution was left to the negotiating table.

Negotiations

In August 1949, a committee on cultural affairs was created as a sub-committee in the larger RTC framework. It had 18 Dutch, 7 Republican, and 11 BFO representatives, and it reached a draft cultural agreement in the end of October.³¹ This agreement aimed to promote official cultural relations between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the RIS, and to facilitate mutual cultural exchange between both societies through radio, film, press and other cultural outlets. A more permanent Gemengd Comité (Mixed Committee) with fourteen representatives of both parties would be established to develop a policy of cultural exchange and provide a forum for future negotiations. Apart from six procedural articles, thirteen of the twenty articles in the draft agreement considered items that guaranteed the continuation of pre-1942 cultural practices. Article 10, for instance, stipulated that both parties were allowed to establish institutes of education, arts and culture in the other country, but it was clear that this would benefit the Dutch in Indonesia more than vice versa. Only Article 19 was clearly a concession to the Indonesian side. It seems to have been added relatively late in the negotiating process at Indonesian behest, as it did not occur in any of the earlier drafts.³² It stipulated that:

Objects of cultural value which have their origin in Indonesia and which came into the possession of the Netherlands government or of the former Dutch East Indies authorities by means other than as specified

²⁹ Scott, "Renewing the "Special Relationship," 650-1; Van Beurden, "Treasures in Trusted Hands," 101-103; Drieënhuizen, "Mirrors of Time," 94; see NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv. nr. 13008, letters from D. Schurink to J.H. van Maarseveen, dated 31 May and 1 June 1949.

³⁰ NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv.nr. 13008, letter from Lovink to J.H. van Maarseveen dated 1 Augustus 1949

³¹ A copy can be found in NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv.nr. 12973.

³² NL-HaNA, Delegatie RTC Indonesië, 2.10.40, inv.nr. 7, E.O.0e, Stukken betreffende het vaststellen van een ontwerp Cultureel Accoord tussen Nederland en Indonesië.

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in private law for the acquisition of property shall be handed over to the Government of the RIS pursuant to the transfer of sovereignty by the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the RIS.³³

It continued by stating that:

“...the Mixed Committee would create [...] provisions regarding the possible exchange of objects of cultural and historical value, that are the property or in possession of one country and of origin or interest to the other country.” [transl. KS]

According to Cynthia Scott, with Article 19 the Netherlands agreed to make the other articles acceptable to the Indonesians and in this way to safeguard its cultural interests in Indonesia. Moreover, it could also demonstrate generosity and create goodwill to the Indonesian officials and the wider international community. The second part of Article 19 served the interests of the Dutch because at the time of the transfer of sovereignty, there was much Dutch cultural property to be found in Indonesia, including the archival records of the Dutch East India Company in the former Landsarchief, which are still in possession of today's ANRI.³⁴ Finally, it was in the Dutch interest that according to this article the property would be handed over to the RIS, and not to the Republican government of Sukarno or to (the offspring of) the original owners. Now that objects could no longer be returned as an act of generosity, it was very important for any future transfers to be carried out as a pragmatic handover from the Dutch state to its official successor in Southeast Asia, and not as a symbol of remorse or defeat.³⁵

Despite the fact that the delegations of the RIS and the Dutch came to an agreement and that the Charter of the Transfer of Sovereignty over Indonesia was signed on 27 December 1949, decisions on the most complex dossiers, including the status of Western New Guinea, were postponed. Moreover, the weak state structure of the RIS was seriously undermined by its most powerful member state, Sukarno's Republic. On 15 August 1950, the Republicans abolished the United States of Indonesia and replaced it with the unitary Republic of Indonesia. Moreover, further negotiations emanating from the RTC were stalled because of Indonesian dissatisfaction over the status of Western New Guinea and the obligation to accept Dutch government debts. The cultural agreement did not survive the further negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia either.

Objects under discussion in this period

Before we turn to the 1950s, some remarks about the kinds of objects under discussion. First of all, it is impossible to discern from Dutch sources the Indonesian gaze, as many of the deliberations around the option of the “generous gesture” or Article 19 took place without any Indonesian input. The debate within Dutch government circles took place on the basis of assumptions about the Indonesian position only.

In intra-Dutch correspondence, officials spoke of “trophies” and “crown treasures” originating from “Indonesian power holders.” The correspondence dealt almost exclusively with the Lombok “treasure,” and to a lesser extent also with the remains of the Bali treasure. The High Commissioner of the Crown,

³³ NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv. nr. 12973.

³⁴ Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 47.

³⁵ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 101-103.

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Lovink, also mentioned possible regalia from Aceh, Jambi, Palembang, Madura, Banjarmasin, and Pasir, but only to argue that these had been conquered so long ago that it would be impossible to find them back in museum depots or elsewhere. Thus, from the Dutch side, the discussion was narrowed to objects originating to former aristocracies. I have found no mention of paleo-anthropological remains, manuscripts, religious items, and statues.

Very interesting in this context is a long list of “Crown treasures of Indonesian power holders,” compiled by museum curators of Rijksmuseum, Indisch Instituut and Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, on request of the Minister of Art, Science, and Education. In total the list comprises 1457 objects, including jewelry and valuables from the Lombok and Bali war booty, and excluding other categories such as religious items, ethnographic objects and manuscripts. Even though the officials were aware of the sacred value of some of the treasures, the list seems to be confined to *preciosa*, which are not necessarily the same.

Objects on the list in NL-HaNA, Buitenlandse Zaken / Code-Archief 45-54, 2.05.117, inv.nr. 13008

Indisch Instituut in Amsterdam	41 gold and silver ‘lijfsieraden’ and ‘statiewapens [staatsiewapens, KS]’ [‘personal jewelry’ and ‘weapons of state’]
	91 Hindu-Javanese jewelry (pre-1400)
Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam	388 Lombok ‘treasure’
	159 Lombok ‘treasure’ ‘veiligheidsvitrine’ [‘safety showcase’]
	100 other jewelry
Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde	291 objects acquired between 1844-1915
	327 Lombok ‘treasure’
	40 Bali treasure
	20 Klungkung ‘treasure’

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Research questions / follow-up

- What were the backgrounds of the Indonesian delegates? Pre-WWII nationalist political elite, cultural sector, Javanese or not?
- What were the expectations of Indonesian delegates when they included Article 19?

Further reading

- Memoirs/biographies of Dutch politicians, such as Willem Drees, Joseph Luns, Herman van Roijen, Willem Schermerhorn.
- Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *Twenty Years Indonesian Foreign Policy: 1945–1965* (Mouton & Co 1973).
- Idrus Nasir Djajadiningrat, *The beginnings of the Indonesian-Dutch negotiations and the Hoge Veluwe talks* (Jakarta : Equinox Pub., 2009).
- R. Nalenan, Arnold Mononutu, *potret seorang patriot* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung 1981).
- Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Milestones on my journey, The memoirs of Ali Sastroamidjojo: Indonesian patriot and political leader* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press 1979).
- S.L. Van der Wal, *Officiële Bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen 1945-1950* ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff 1971).

1950-1962

Context

For the Netherlands, the 1950s were a decade of post-war economic recovery and enduring political stability. Having lost Indonesia, it tried to rearrange the remains of its colonial empire, granting more political autonomy to Surinam, the Dutch Lesser Antilles, and Western New Guinea while safeguarding its economic interests in those places. Furthermore, instead of relying on its erstwhile neutral status and colonial empire, the Netherlands was among the founding states of both the European Coal and Steel Community (a predecessor of the EU) and NATO.

The situation for Indonesia was considerably more difficult. After the dismantling of the RIS and the establishment of the Indonesian Republic in 1950, the political situation in Indonesia remained very turbulent. With formal independence gained, the Indonesian Revolution was far from over, leaving many economic, social, and political issues undecided. The economy was in ruins, the country severely lacked trained personnel, and a handful of religious and regional militant movements challenged the authority of the Republic. The central government had to perform a balancing act between nationalist, communist, and Islamic political movements. Between 1948 and 1958 no less than 17 cabinets were formed, and in 1957 Sukarno sidelined the elected parliament and replaced it with a more authoritarian system of governance under the name of Guided Democracy.

In foreign affairs, Indonesia began to pursue a self-confident and assertive foreign policy, opening diplomatic missions in many parts of the world, and with Sukarno making frequent state trips abroad.³⁶ In 1955, the country was host to, and one of the driving forces behind, the first large-scale Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung. With representatives from many newly independent nations in Asia and Africa this conference aimed to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to provide a new diplomatic order as an alternative to the US- and USSR-power blocks. Less focused on cooperation and reconciliation were highly intense conflicts with Malaysia between 1963 and 1966, and with the Netherlands over Western New Guinea in 1962-1963.

The conflict over Western New Guinea, which the Netherlands had successfully excluded from the RTC-agreement, highly determined the post-independence relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands. As a reaction to the Dutch refusal to leave Western New Guinea, Indonesia stopped broadcasting in the Dutch language in 1954. In 1957 it ordered 40.000 Dutch nationals to leave the country and Dutch companies and assets were nationalised. In 1962, the dispute escalated to a low-level military conflict. In the face of mounting diplomatic pressure from the US and UN and a pending large scale military conflict, the Netherlands re-entered negotiations, after which Western New Guinea was transferred to the UN, which subsequently transferred the territory to Indonesia in May 1963.

³⁶ J. Lindsay and M.H.T. Liem (eds.), *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965* (Leiden: KITLV Press 2012) 9.

Indonesian interests

Indonesia's cultural and intellectual milieu was just as turbulent as the political landscape. In the 1950s, artists and intellectuals from different political backgrounds were rethinking the position and content of Indonesian cultural heritage in a radically new time and world. Leftist cultural organisations such as LEKRA emphasised the value of popular non-elitist and anti-“feudal” culture, while other organisations and intellectuals stressed the “peaks of regional culture” (Ki Hadjar Dewantoro) or Islamic art and culture. In the context of our discussion, the official nationalist reading of Sukarno is important since this interpretation became more and more dominant during the 1950s.

Just as the Republican nationalists were dissatisfied with the political outcome of the RTC conference and the establishment of the RIS, they regarded the cultural articles of the RTC agreement as too permissive towards the Dutch and as a continuation of cultural imperialism.³⁷ It was their priority to secure full independence, also in the cultural sphere, before new relations could be forged. Thus, after the abolition of the RIS and the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, it became clear that the RTC Cultural Agreement would not be ratified. This would also mean that Article 19 about the exchange of cultural property, the only article in the interest of the Indonesians, could not be effectuated. This did not imply that the Indonesians were no longer interested in their cultural heritage overseas, but they hoped to repatriate objects with a combination of public pressure, direct bilateral negotiations, and contacts with cultural institutions in the West.

In the spring of 1951, Muhammad Yamin, a writer and poet, member of the Republican RTC-delegation and Minister of Education between 1953 and 1955, said to a journalist of the press agency Aneta that it was in the interest of the Indonesian nation for the government to reclaim its objects, which were of “immeasurable historic-scientific” value. These included the Dubois-collection of fossils and five other paleo-anthropological remains, the Nagarakrtagama, a fourteenth century palm leaf manuscript that had been part of the booty from the Lombok War, and the thirteenth century Buddhist statue of Prajnaparamita. The Prajnaparamita and the Nagarakrtagama symbolised the mighty precolonial empires of Majapahit and Singasari. According to Yamin, these had been the precursors of the Indonesian nation, extending from Malaysia to Papua and beyond. The skulls represented the pride of Indonesians that Java may have been “the oldest island in the world,” with the Indonesian archipelago as the cradle of mankind. They had been unrightfully taken away in an act of European scientific imperialism. In the words of Drieënhuizen: “The Nāgaraktāgama, the Prajñāpāramitā and the fossils became the historical, aesthetic, and spiritual embodiment of the Indonesian people. By stressing that Indonesia was heir to cultures that thrived and united a significant part of the archipelago before Indonesia existed as a nation state, he also symbolically claimed the history of the nation ‘back’ to the Dutch occupying powers.”³⁸

According to Cynthia Scott, anticolonial demands for the return of cultural property were also voiced

³⁷ Legêne and Postel-Coster, ‘Isn’t it all culture?’, 272.

³⁸ Drieënhuizen, “Mirrors of Time,” 95-97.

during the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung. The twenty-nine participating states condemned “racialism as a means of cultural suppression.” In a central statement, they lamented the fact that cultural history had always been used to subdivide and rank regional cultures and traditions to set one community against another.³⁹ At this point it is not known whether demands for restitution of cultural heritage were voiced during the Bandung conference.

Dutch interests

Following the Indonesian rejection of the RTC agreement, the Dutch government chose to take a passive attitude on cultural affairs. The Dutch Cultural Sub-committee of the Commissie Aangelegenheden van Indonesië (CAVI) advised not to push too hard on defending Dutch cultural interests to avoid provoking the Indonesians too much.⁴⁰ Dutch interests in the economic and social sphere were more important and at risk. The return of cultural objects would henceforth continue to function as pocket money for any future bilateral ad hoc decisions and exchanges between the Dutch and Indonesia. Indonesian cultural objects could also be exchanged against the VOC-archive or even the entire Landsarchief in Jakarta. However, we have found no indications that Article 19 was ever used as such.

With regards to statements such as that of Muhammad Yamin, the Dutch adopted a passive attitude as well. The High Commissariat in Indonesia saw no reason to react to the “unpleasant and provocative” demands to return the skulls, the Nagarakrtagama and the Prajnaparamita. Internal correspondence shows a receptive attitude towards Yamin’s demands, but as long as there were no official requests in the context of negotiations, the Dutch government chose not to respond to public outcries. In the face of sharply deteriorating diplomatic relations over the course of the 1950s, such a request became more and more unlikely.⁴¹

Negotiations

A direct dialogue in the period between 1950 and 1962 is thus virtually absent. On 25 February 1952 there were talks in the Hague between the Interdepartementale Commissie and an Indonesian mission headed by Supomo. The Indonesians declared that they did not wish to work from the basis of the RTC cultural agreement because they experienced the majority of its articles as renewed cultural imperialism. Instead, they preferred to arrange Article 19 in ad hoc bilateral negotiations. The Dutch government agreed to that idea. One government would file a request, and if the other government found enough reason to do so, an ad hoc committee would be formed. However, according to a Dutch internal official report from 1974, there have never been negotiations on the basis of this agreement.⁴²

³⁹ Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 75, 78; V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press 2007), 45.

⁴⁰ NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Culturele Zaken, 2.10.35.05, inv. nr. 1, memorandum from department of cultural affairs to Van Gorkom, no date.

⁴¹ NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Dossierarchief, 2.10.54, inv. nr. 1684, letter from D.J.F. de Man to J.H. van Maarseveen; Drieënhuizen, “Mirrors of Time,” 99.

⁴² NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, internal memorandum “Eventuele teruggave van Indonesische culturele voorwerpen,” no date [1963], 3.

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In 1954, during Indonesian Dutch negotiations on the revision of the RTC-agreement, the Indonesian delegation declared once more that it did not wish to continue negotiations on the basis of the cultural agreement. According to Jos van Beurden, the Dutch delegation offered to reinstall Article 19 in return for a new Dutch chancellery in Jakarta funded by the Indonesians. The Indonesian delegation, under supervision of the Indonesian Minister of Education, Arts, and Sciences Muhammad Yamin, rejected this proposal.⁴³ From then on, the cultural agreement was officially dead.

Any further references to the restitution of objects only took place in the public domain and should be interpreted in the context of growing animosities between both countries. For instance, in 1956 the Secretary General of the Indonesian Department of Education, Research, and Culture, Hutasoit, sent a telex complaining that he had received no information about Indonesian objects in Dutch museums and depots. He stated that compared to the large number of objects removed to the Netherlands the museums in Indonesia were empty. He issued a press statement in which he said that Indonesia would ask for the return of its property, with large quantities of objects of historical value and scientific importance. According to Dutch officials, an official request was never made, and he received no official Dutch reply, either.⁴⁴

To the contrary, this period ended with the illicit shipping away of a collection of 380 Papuan ethnographic objects to the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, which had been compiled for a new museum in Hollandia (Jayapura). This happened in 1962, in the final days of Dutch rule in Western New Guinea, and according to Pieter Pott, Director of the Leiden Museum, this was done by Dutch officials in a private capacity. Upon returning the items in July 1975, Pott stated that he had never favoured this transfer, but that an immediate return could not be effectuated under the circumstances then prevailing. He decided to hold the collection in custody until the situation in Western New Guinea “had been cleared up, and a safe return of the objects could be arranged.” Yet, the decision of the Dutch civil servants to send the objects off to Leiden was probably triggered by the fact that Pott and Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde had initiated the formation of this collection in 1959 and were thus regarded as prime stakeholders.⁴⁵

Objects under discussion in this period

Apart from Yamin’s press statement, the Indonesian requests and Dutch internal correspondence never went beyond the arrangement of official relations between the two countries. Nowhere was it specified which objects it concerned. Indeed, Yamin was more specific in his press statement. He mentioned six paleo-anthropological collections,⁴⁶ the Nagarakrtagama and “other Lontar and regular manuscripts of

⁴³ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 103.

⁴⁴ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, internal memorandum “Eventuele teruggave van Indonesische culturele voorwerpen”, no date, p. 4; Legêne and Postel-Coster, “Isn’t it all culture?” 274.

⁴⁵ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, memorandum “Nota inzake Indonesische cultuurgoederen (niet archieven) in Nederlands openbaar bezit,” by P.H. Pott, dated 11 October 1974, p. 13; NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266, “Speech of prof. dr. P.H. Pott, delivered at the function of the formal transfer of Irian Jaya objects, held in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden June 13 1975.”

⁴⁶ Apart from Dubois’ Pithecanthropus Erectus, this concerned Homo Modjokertensis, Pithecanthropus Robustus, Meganthropus Paleojavanicus, Homo Soloensis and Homo Wadjakensis. According to a Dutch official, these latter five skulls were held by professor Königswald in Utrecht.

historical value written in Indonesian, Kawisch, Sundanese, and Makassar languages,” and finally the Prajnaparamita statue in Leiden.

On 18 April 1951, in response to Yamin’s statement in the press two weeks earlier, the head of Cultural Affairs of the Ministerie voor Uniezaken en Overzeese Rijksdelen, Van Duffelen, advised his minister to be receptive to any eventual request. The skulls had been in possession of the Dutch East Indies state and should thus be returned to its successor. The manuscripts were already sufficiently studied and could thus be returned as well. Van Duffelen also dryly mentioned: “Earlier on there were rumors about the claim of the so-called Lombok ‘treasure,’ which is currently in the Rijksmuseum. It seems that Yamin has overlooked this collection.”⁴⁷

Research questions / follow-up

- How should we understand the position of Yamin? Where did his ideas about Prajnaparamita, Nagarakrtagama, and the Dubois-collection originate? Was he a unique individual or part of an intellectual network?
- What was the cultural policy of Indonesia in the context of Bandung in 1955? Did the conference result in Indonesian or concerted demands for restitution of cultural heritage?

Further reading

- George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press 1956).

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, Koloniën / Dossierarchief, 2.10.54, inv. nr. 1684, internal letter from Van Duffelen to Van Maarseveen, no date [18 April 1951].

1963-1970

Context

Two events in the 1960s decisively changed the deadlock in the relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands after 1950. In 1962, after a near military escalation in the conflict over Western New Guinea, the Dutch finally gave in and handed over sovereignty of the area to the UN, which subsequently transferred the territory to Indonesia in May 1963. This transfer, that would prove to be disastrous to Papuan aspirations for self-determination, created space for a restoration of cultural relations between the two countries.

Secondly, in 1965 Suharto came to power after an alleged communist coup against Sukarno, that was countered by Suharto-led troops. The counter-coup led to a large-scale politicide against communists and the labour movement at large, leading to at least half a million deaths. The subsequent New Order regime of Suharto was characterised by strong authoritarian rule with an important role for the military. In foreign affairs, the Suharto regime aligned with the Western bloc. With the war in Vietnam at its peak, the anti-communist Suharto gained much Western support in return for a far reaching liberalisation and restructuring of the economy.

In Indonesia's attempt to attract Western donors and investors, the Dutch government succeeded in securing a steering role. When in 1966 Suharto approached Western donors, the Dutch government reacted by pressuring the other countries not to donate before the Indonesians had paid fl. 600.000 in compensation for the confiscation of Dutch companies and assets in 1957. Once this was done, the Dutch managed to occupy a chairing position in the Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI), an international aid consortium of ten countries that provided Indonesia with low-interest foreign aid to cover its budget deficit. In this position, the Netherlands succeeded in keeping pressure on Indonesia. This pressure was also exerted via large scale bilateral aid programs. Between 1966 and 1981 the Netherlands donated 2 billion guilders of aid, which made Indonesia the biggest recipient until 1975.⁴⁸

Dutch Interests

With regards to the return of cultural objects, the attitude of Dutch officials had changed regarding the distrust of Indonesian capacity to manage museum collections in a responsible way. They were no longer hinting at using the return of objects in exchange for diplomatic favors. Rather, they preferred to keep the Dutch museum collections intact and to offer copies of documents and expertise instead. In this they were informed by museum officials and historians such as Pieter Pott and Hans Teeuw, Chair of

⁴⁸ P.A.M. Malcontent, "The Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs: Development Aid as a Political Instrument," in: Nekkers and Malcontent (eds), *Fifty Years of Dutch Development Cooperation*, 220.

the South East Asia Studies Department at Leiden University and of the KITLV institute in the same city. The advice of the latter two experts was often used in official correspondence.⁴⁹

Following the formal restoration of relations with Indonesia, an interdepartmental working group (*Coördinatiegroep culturele betrekkingen met Indonesië*) was established in the Netherlands in June 1963, consisting of officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Education, Arts, and Sciences. They prepared for renewed cultural relations between the two countries. In the final months of the Sukarno-presidency, the *coördinatiegroep* advised the Dutch government to cautiously avoid the impression that the Netherlands were “pursuing a policy of cultural penetration.” However, after April 1966, when Suharto’s military regime was firmly in control, the *coördinatiegroep* expected that the “political climate there will become more favourable to the Netherlands.”⁵⁰

Indonesian interests

The new era after 1965 also left its traces in the historical practice in Indonesia and in the articulation of a national historical narrative. From the early days of independence onwards, Indonesian historians continuously sought to rethink the position and content of Indonesian cultural heritage and history, in various directions. After 1965, critical intellectuals were muzzled and the Indonesian military and historians affiliated with the regime became most dominant. They saw nationalist history writing as a powerful tool of nation building. This is for example visible in the rise of military history, partly undertaken by the military itself, and *pahlawan*-history, in which the lives of national heroes are honored and sanctified.⁵¹

It seems that the rise of nationalist historiography fueled renewed efforts to return objects to Indonesia. Between 1963 and into the 1970s, Indonesia repeatedly put the restitution of cultural objects on the agenda, albeit initially without much success.

Negotiations

In 1963, cultural negotiations also reopened with regular talks between Ministers of Foreign Affairs Subandrio and Joseph Luns. Initially, Indonesian attempts to raise the issue of the return of objects met resistance with the Dutch, most notably from Theo Bot (Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences; KVP). On 14 July 1963, the Minister for People’s Welfare Muljadi Djojomartono stated in an Antara press statement and to the Dutch Chargé d’affaires in Jakarta that it would be good, in the light of new positive relations between both countries, when the Netherlands would return “Indonesian historical manuscripts in Dutch archives” and books from the Rijkmuseum voor Volkenkunde and Tropenmuseum to Indonesia. This call was repeated and extended by Indro Soegondo, a high official of the Ministry of Education and Culture, who hoped in September 1963 in a press release with AFP and Antara that the

⁴⁹ Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 98-99; for instance: NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, “Nota inzake het probleem van zgn. teruggave aan Indonesië van voorwerpen van cultureel belang uit Nederlandse openbare verzamelingen,” by P.H. Pott, dated 30 June 1969.

⁵⁰ Legêne and Postel-Coster, “Isn’t it all culture?” 274-5.

⁵¹ Klooster, *Indonesiërs schrijven hun geschiedenis*, 128-144.

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Netherlands would return “historical items from the antiquities,” that were valuable and unique. He revealed that “Indonesia has the full and detailed list of the Indonesian cultural items now still kept in the Netherlands,” without being more precise.⁵²

In response, on 19 August 1963, the *coördinatiegroep* discussed the matter, and said that there had to be a distinction made between manuscripts that were Indonesian cultural achievements and those that were archives of Dutch colonial and VOC rule. Interestingly, they interpreted the calls of Djojomartono and Soegondo primarily as a request for archival records, and not for cultural objects of a written form. The *coördinatiegroep* advised to make an inventory of archival records and to promote a “gradual exchange” of objects on the basis of scientific interests. They also suggested to send a functionary of the Rijksarchief to Indonesia to seek for possible counter claims in the Indonesian National Archives. However, early in 1964 Minister Bot reacted negatively to the proposal of his own *coördinatiegroep* and refused to transfer any museum property to Indonesia. Bot, who had started his administrative career in the Netherlands Indies and had held high positions in the Ministry of Colonies, in the secretariat of the Netherlands-Indonesian Union and as Secretary of State for Netherlands New Guinea, feared that a lighthearted decision of transfer would create undesirable precedents for Dutch museums and institutions in the formerly colonising world at large.⁵³ After Dutch officials had internally secured that there existed no list of contestable objects and that Dutch government institutions had never received official claims, as Indro Soegondo had suggested, there was no formal follow-up from the Dutch side. They preferred to await formal Indonesian requests concerning concrete objects.⁵⁴

The issue resurfaced in the context of the Jakarta negotiations on a new Indonesian Dutch Cultural Agreement in June and July 1968. The agreement, signed by the respective foreign ministers,⁵⁵ stipulated that “the question of cultural objects of Indonesian origin remaining in the Netherlands” had to become topic of consultation between the two states. The Indonesian department of Education and Culture raised the return of objects again as a necessary precondition of any cultural agreement. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs blocked this veto, but made sure that President Suharto would raise the issue personally.⁵⁶ This happened three times: with the Dutch ambassador Schiff in July 1968; with Van Thiel, the chair of the Dutch parliamentary delegation that visited Indonesia that same year; and during the visit of Marga Klompé, Dutch Minister of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work. In all three instances, Suharto suggested sending back copies of important documents, archives, and manuscripts, as a minimum if full restitution was not possible. According to Scheltema, the president probably was referring to Malay and Acehnese manuscripts, seized during the Aceh War, and 400 Javanese handwritings that were part of the Lombok collection, all of which were held in the library of

⁵² NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, post-telegram from J.G. Kist to J.M.A.H. Luns, dated 7 September 1963.

⁵³ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, memorandum “Overzicht van Nederlands-Indonesische contacten inzake de kwestie van de teruggave van Indonesische voorwerpen van culturele waarde, 1949-heden,” dated 31 October 1974, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 105.

⁵⁵ The Indonesian Foreign Minister was the Suharto-confidant Adam Malik. Following the 1965 contra-coup, the former minister Subandrio was suspended and imprisoned for 29 years.

⁵⁶ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, letter from E.L.C. Schiff to J.M.A.H. Luns, dated 19 July 1968.

Leiden University.⁵⁷

On 10 March 1969, the Minister of Education, Arts, and Sciences objected to the transfer of manuscripts because of the bad state of Indonesian facilities. He agreed with the suggestion of Suharto and a proposal of Teeuw to exchange microfilms of the Leiden manuscripts. Only Nagarakrtagama could be transferred, because it had been thoroughly studied and copied, and was of high symbolic value to the Indonesians. A transfer of this manuscript would not damage scientific interests. Following this opinion, Prime Minister De Jong informed the chair of the Dutch parliament in July 1969 that the Dutch government was principally prepared to return these handwritings on the basis of reciprocity. But, apart from Nagarakrtagama “which has an almost sacred value for Indonesia,” the Dutch government preferred to pursue the suggestion to send photo-copies. Returning the original manuscripts would create undesirable precedents - also internationally - and scientific chaos, and would furthermore be impossible, given the deplorable state of Indonesian museum infrastructure.⁵⁸

Thus, in 1969 and 1970 KITLV copied and sent 100.000 microfilms to ANRI in Jakarta in exchange for 20.000 microfilms of the VOC archives. Moreover, the agreement also gave the impetus for the establishment of an Indonesian Studies Programme between the KITLV/Leiden University and universities in Indonesia, under the supervision of Teeuw, which provided many Indonesian students and professionals with the possibility of studying in the Netherlands.⁵⁹ Also, the Erasmus House was opened as a cultural centre of the Netherlands in Jakarta.

Objects under discussion in this period

It seems that the Dutch government successfully diverted attention from historic objects to a discussion about the reproduction of manuscripts and archival records and the sharing of expertise. An exception was the historically important Nagarakrtagama. Already in 1969, Prime Minister De Jong had agreed to returning the fourteenth century manuscript, and was only waiting for a suitable moment.⁶⁰ This moment came in September 1970 on the occasion of a state visit of President Suharto to the Netherlands. This state visit followed an earlier trip of Prince Bernhard to Indonesia in March 1970, and was followed by a formal state visit by Queen Juliana to Indonesia in August 1971. At each of these occasions, gifts and valuables were exchanged. During Suharto’s visit to the Netherlands Juliana presented Nagarakrtagama to the Indonesian president as a gift of the Dutch government to the Indonesian people.⁶¹ It came from the library of the University of Leiden and had been part of the 1894 Lombok “treasure.” Among many other gifts that were exchanged were two paintings by the renowned

⁵⁷ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, letter from H. Scheltema to F.J.F.M. Van Thiel, dated 17 May 1969; Van Beurden, ‘Treasures in Trusted Hands’, 106.

⁵⁸ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, confidential letter from P.J.S. de Jong to F.J.F.H. Van Thiel, dated 9 July 1969; Scott, ‘Renewing the “Special Relationship,”’ 658; Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 107.

⁵⁹ Scott, “Renewing the ‘Special Relationship,’” 659; <https://www.kitlv.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Professor-Teeuw-Foundation-1991-2015-Awarding-the-creative-and-scholarly-in-the-cultural-exchange-between-Indonesia-and-the-Netherlands.pdf> (last accessed 30 March 2022).

⁶⁰ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, confidential letter from P.J.S. de Jong to F.J.F.H. Van Thiel, dated 9 July 1969.

⁶¹ “Soeharto nodigt koningin uit,” *De Tijd* (4 September 1970) 3.

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Javanese artist Raden Saleh Sjarif Bastaman (1811 - 1880) that had belonged to the private collection of the Queen.⁶² At the end of the nineteenth century, Raden Saleh had donated these paintings to the Dutch royal family in gratitude for their financial support, and the Dutch queen donated them to the Suharto family directly. With regards to other objects, the Dutch government drew a red line, fearing international repercussions and chaos, and distrusting Indonesian infrastructure. The idea to use historic objects as leverage in cultural diplomacy was not voiced again.

Most intriguing in this period is of course Indro Soegondo's claim of the full and detailed list. Dutch government officials had the impression that this list did not exist, but Indonesian archival research can perhaps lead to other conclusions. Yet, it symbolises Indonesia's desire to have a full and independent overview of Indonesian heritage in Dutch possession. In 1970 and 1974, Indonesian officials undertook missions in the Netherlands to retrace historical objects. They did this incognito, or at least without informing the Dutch authorities on a national level.⁶³ The first time was in the summer of 1970 when a Military Attaché of the Indonesian embassy visited the Bronbeek museum in Arnhem, where equipment of Prince Diponegoro was held. He was looking for more military objects and loot. A second time was in September-October 1974, when three representatives of the Historic Building Foundation (Yayasan Gedung-Gedung Bersejarah) came to the Netherlands for an investigation to retrace Indonesian historic items for possible use in Indonesian monuments, and for the Museum Kebangkitan Nasional and the Museum Sumpah Pemuda. The three, Sudiro, Soemarmo, and Hadisutjipto, did this on invitation of the Amsterdam municipality, but they used their time to visit twenty-one institutions, speaking to thirty-eight officials and experts.⁶⁴ In Rijkmuseum voor Volkenkunde they raised the status and return of the West New Guinea collection.⁶⁵ According to Jos van Beurden, the Sudiro trip resulted in a new list of ten thousand claimable objects, but it seems that he refers to a list compiled by Satyadi (see below).⁶⁶ To date, I have not been able to trace either of the three lists. Therefore, it cannot be verified how specific these lists were, and if they gave rise to concrete demands for restitution.

Research questions / follow-up

- What did Indro Soegondo mean in September 1963 with his statement that "Indonesia has the full and detailed list of the Indonesian cultural items now still kept in the Netherlands"? And is this list

⁶² According to Jos van Beurden it concerned a 1851 painting depicting a buffalo hunt and a 1870 painting depicting a fight between a man and a lion: "Treasures in Trusted Hands," 112. See also Panggah Ardiyansyah, "Restitution and National Heritage," 171.

⁶³ This is disputed by Sudiro himself, who wrote in reply to NRC Handelsblad that the Dutch ambassador and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs was informed, Sudiro, "Indonesische kunstschaten," NRC Handelsblad (17 January 1975) p. CS4.

⁶⁴ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, telex from Jalink to M. Van der Stoel, dated 16 October 1974. See also NL-HaNA, Buza / Code-archief 1965-1974, 2.05.313, inv. nr. 9646, code message of M. Van der Stoel to [Dutch embassy in] Jakarta, dated 25 October 1974; NL-LdnRMV, Correspondentie-archief, inv. nr. 112, nr. 1399, letter from Sutaarga to Pott, dated 27 August 1974.

⁶⁵ NL-LdnRMV, Archief P. Pott, Kwartaal+Jaarverslag 1975, letter from P.H. Pott to Holzhaus, 19 May 1975, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Van Beurden, "Treasures in Trusted Hands," 110.

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different than the one Jos van Beurden ascribes to Sudiro or the one compiled by Satyadi (see below)?

- Why did Suharto not push harder on the return of objects? How did the Dutch government get away with the creation of photocopies only?

1973-1978

Context

The exchange of micro-films and expertise in 1969-1970 and the transfer of Nagarakrtagama to the Suharto's in 1970 heralded a new era in Indonesian Dutch cultural relations. However, the surprise visits of Indonesian officials in 1970 and 1974 also made clear to the Dutch authorities that its former colony was not content with royal gestures and immaterial exchange alone.

Two other developments helped to accelerate the restitution discussion in the 1970s. As described by Jos van Beurden and Cynthia Scott, illicit trade in cultural objects from the so-called Third World and the fate of objects from the colonised world in Western museum collections came high on the agenda of the United Nations and UNESCO. A growing number of formerly colonised states in the UN General Assembly started pressing for legislation, which resulted in the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property*, and the 1973 UNGA Resolution 3187 XVIII entitled *Restitution of Works of Art to Countries Victims of Expropriation*. This latter resolution, called for by President Mobutu Sese Seko of the Republic of Zaire, explicitly mentioned a special obligation of former colonising countries to restitute "*objets d'art*, monuments, museum pieces, manuscripts and documents."⁶⁷ Cynthia Scott demonstrates that the Indonesian Dutch negotiations were not directly driven by these UNESCO conventions and that they were the result of earlier interactions and negotiations. Nevertheless, positive UNESCO publicity of the Dutch attitude around 1969-1970 helped to reinforce the pro-restitution camp within Dutch government and society.⁶⁸

Secondly, in 1973 a centre-left cabinet came to power in the Netherlands, with Joop Den Uyl (PvdA) as Prime Minister. All the Ministers and Secretaries of State who were relevant in the restitution debate were progressive politicians, most notably Max van der Stoel (Minister of Foreign Affairs; PvdA), Harry van Doorn (Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work; PPR), and Jan Pronk (Minister of Development Cooperation; PvdA).⁶⁹

Dutch Interests

The new political leaders in The Hague struggled to formulate an unambiguous Indonesia-policy in the wake of the anti-communist purges of the Suharto regime and the detention of some 72,000 political prisoners in the beginning of the 1970s. To make things worse, Indonesia invaded and annexed the former Portuguese colony of East Timor in December 1975. Within PvdA circles, there was satisfaction that a communist takeover in Indonesia was averted, but much unease as well with regards to the deplorable human rights situation under the new regime. Minister of Foreign Affairs Max van der Stoel was in favor of a discrete and cautious approach towards his Indonesian counterparts, using quiet

⁶⁷ Unesco. http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/pdf/UNGA_resolution3187.pdf (last accessed 30 March 2022).

⁶⁸ Van Beurden, "Treasures in Trusted Hands," 108-109; Scott, "Renewing the 'Special Relationship,'" 665.

⁶⁹ Scott, "Renewing the 'Special Relationship,'" 661; Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 144-145.

diplomacy to address the issue of human rights and Dutch interests. Minister of Development Cooperation Jan Pronk, on the other hand, unilaterally took a much more direct approach, threatening to stop development aid if Indonesia would not respect human rights. In this discussion, which even escalated into a personal conflict, cultural relations were of secondary importance. But it seems that both camps agreed not to allow relics from the colonial past — such as cultural objects — to weaken their moral position as critics of the Suharto regime. The possible reproach of neocolonialism was to be avoided at all costs.⁷⁰

In this, the interests of the foreign policy ministries of Van der Stoep and Pronk differed somewhat from the views of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work. In reaction to the 1970 UNESCO conventions, as Jan Pronk remembers in an interview with Jos van Beurden: “The Foreign Ministry was in favour of accession, whereas other ministries were against and high-ranking officials often delayed and came up with pretexts not to do it.”⁷¹ The position of the Foreign Ministry was supported by the Dutch embassy in Jakarta, which signaled broad support amongst Indonesian government officials and experts for the issue of restitution. It would not have been realistic to hope that the whole debate would “blow over after some strategy of delay.”⁷² On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work was influenced by cultural organisations such as the Stichting Behoud Borobudur, and by Dutch museum officials, most notably by Pieter Pott. They filed long reports in which the popularly held conviction that Dutch museums were full of loot was rejected and in which all kinds of ethical, juridical, and practical objections were raised.⁷³

Indonesian interests

On the side of Indonesia, the authorities continued along the same the line they had pursued since 1965. In a general effort to reinforce the nationalist narrative, ten new provincial museums had to be established that had to function as centres for national education. According to Ida Bagus Mantra, Director General of Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government committed itself in the Second Five Year Development Plan [Repelita II, 1974–1979] “to the improvement of already existing musea and the establishment of a significant number of new musea, spread all over the country.” The return of objects would be “a source of national pride and therefore constitute a fundamental contribution to the development of national consciousness of the very diverse population of the Indonesian archipelago.” He continued that it was “the responsibility of the Indonesian Government to seek for the return of selected cultural objects to Indonesia and to make

⁷⁰ Malcontent, “The Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs,” 219-224; Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 122.

⁷¹ Quoted in Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 108.

⁷² NL-HaNA, Buza / Code-archief 1965-1974, 2.05.313, inv. nr. 9646, letter from A.L. Schneiders to J.J. de Jong, dated 9 December 1974.

⁷³ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 107-108; for instance: NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, “Nota inzake het probleem van zgn. teruggave aan Indonesië van voorwerpen van cultureel belang uit Nederlandse openbare verzamelingen,” by P.H. Pott, dated 30 June 1969; and ibidem, letter from C. Nagtegaal to Vernède concerning Borobudur fragments, dated 29 November 1973.

them accessible to the Indonesian people to enrich their cultural experience as members of a nation which can be proud of a rich cultural heritage.”⁷⁴

According to the Dutch embassy, most of the Indonesian government officials and experts held moderate opinions and expectations about which objects, and how many, would return to Indonesia. However, there were others, most notably the Sudiro group that was also behind the secretive mission of October 1974 to recover Indonesian historic items, who were much more “impatient” and who put pressure on the Indonesian government.⁷⁵

Negotiations and returns

Between 1972 and 1974, after the momentous 1970 transfer of Nagarakrtagama, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly pushed for a more structural continuation of cultural negotiations. On 19 October 1972, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a memorandum to its Dutch counterpart proposing the creation of a committee of Dutch and Indonesian experts to recover “items of historical and scientific value,” either by restitution or by creating copies.⁷⁶ There was no follow-up on Dutch side, but in January 1974 Minister of Foreign Affairs Adam Malik raised the issue again with Van der Stoel on the occasion of the latter’s visit to Indonesia. He argued that the Dutch government should consider the possibility of returning the Indonesian “archeological and other historical objects,” among which he included museum pieces, historical Lontar documents, and recent archival records that were confiscated from the young Republic in the 1940s.⁷⁷ On 14 Augustus 1974, Mantra and Saleh of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs raised the issue a third time with university professor Teeuw and Schneiders of the Dutch embassy in Jakarta, referring back to earlier requests in 1954 and 1972, and even to the 1949 Cultural Agreement. In this last attempt, Mantra also repeated the Indonesian wish to establish a joint committee of experts.

Early in 1975 the Dutch government finally agreed to intensify cooperation and to set up a team of Dutch and Indonesian cultural experts.⁷⁸ The activities of this team were thoroughly analysed by Jos van Beurden and others who regard it as the apex of Indonesian Dutch restitution cooperation.⁷⁹ In November 1975, the joint team first met in Java and during two intensive weeks visited many historical sites, museums, and monuments. The actual negotiations took place on the first and the last two days of the trip. Both teams were directed by the Director Generals of their countries’ respective cultural Ministries, e.g. Mantra and Rob Hotke.⁸⁰ In his opening address, Mantra argued for the return of three

⁷⁴ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266: “Statement of the Indonesian delegation on the Return of Indonesian Cultural Objects.”

⁷⁵ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code-archieff 1965-1974, 2.05.313, inv.nr. 9646, letter from A.L. Schneiders to J.J. de Jong, dated 9 December 1974.

⁷⁶ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv.nr. 4193, “Overzicht van Nederlands-Indonesische contacten inzake de kwestie van de teruggave van Indonesische voorwerpen van culturele waarde, 1949-heden,” dated 31 October 1974.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 111.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 112-124; Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 1-3.

⁸⁰ Members of the Dutch delegation were R. Hotke (Chairman; director general for cultural affairs of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work), P.W.A.G. Cort van der Linden (head of the directorate of cultural cooperation and foreign information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), A.M. Kalmeijer (Central department

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categories of objects: cultural objects (significant cultural achievements), historical objects (with a link to memorable events in the past), and objects of aesthetic value for the Indonesian people. He acknowledged that “not all Indonesian cultural objects located in foreign countries ought to be returned to their land of origin.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, the Indonesian claim was much higher than the Dutch had anticipated. On the first day of negotiations the Indonesian delegation mentioned that they possessed lists of more than 10,000 objects, compiled by a team under aegis of Satyadi (see below).⁸² In reply, the head of the Dutch delegation, Hotke, did everything to lower expectations and he outright rejected large scale transfers. “It is not without reason that UNESCO could not and would not make a ruling, demanding that all countries should return artistic treasures to their land of origin. UNESCO simply recommended that any particular wishes should be dealt with in bilateral discussions, which might result in cooperation in the matter of museums.”⁸³ The Dutch government and experts preferred to work from concrete cases with a problematic history. Moreover, Hotke, stressed that, historically, most important collections had remained in the colony, and that the Dutch government had no authority to decide over objects in private possession, which greatly reduced the number of objects under discussion.

Within the joint team, the Dutch team was better organised than their Indonesian counterparts. According to two elaborate Dutch reports of the trip to Indonesia written by Pott and most likely by Hotke, the Indonesian delegation came unprepared on the last two days of the trip.⁸⁴ Moreover, Jos van Beurden mentions a visit on the last day of Minister for Education and Culture, Sjarif Thayeb, who surprisingly stated that Indonesia was not interested in having large quantities of objects since he had no idea where to store and display them.⁸⁵ With this statement he severely undermined the efforts of the Indonesian experts. As a consequence, the final text of the Joint Recommendation that was created on 22 November 1975 reflects the first draft of the Dutch delegation, and was written by Pieter Pott.⁸⁶

international relations of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work), P.H. Pott (Director of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden), A.E.M. Ribberink (head of the Dutch National Archives) and A.L. Schneiders (Council of press and cultural affairs of the Dutch embassy in Jakarta). The Indonesian Delegation consisted of I.B. Mantra (Chairman; director general for cultural affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture), Harsja W. Bachtiar (dean of the history and socio-antropology department of UI), Koentjaraningrat, Rudjiati Muljadi (Centre for the promotion of language studies), Noegroho Notosoesto (head of the history department of the Indonesian military), Haryati Soebadio (Ministry of Education and Culture), P.J. Soejono (Archeological Service), Soemarmo (Ministry of Information), Soemartini (director of ANRI), Ilen Surianegara (Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Amir Sutaarga (Directorat of Museums of the Ministry of Education and Culture).

⁸¹ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266: “Statement of the Indonesian delegation on the Return of Indonesian Cultural Objects.”

⁸² NL-LdnRMV, Archief P. Pott, Kwartaal+Jaarverslag 1975, “Kort verslag van de missie van deskundigen naar Indonesië” by Pott, dated 10 December 1975.

⁸³ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266, “Speech pronounced on November 10th 1975 by Mr. Drs. R. Hotke.”

⁸⁴ NL-HaNA, Ministerraad, 2.02.05.02, inv. nr. 1930, “Verslag van de reis naar Indonesië van de Nederlandse delegatie,” p. 8; NL-LdnRMV, Archief P. Pott, Kwartaal+Jaarverslag 1975, “Kort verslag van de missie van deskundigen naar Indonesië” by Pott, dated 10 December 1975.

⁸⁵ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 114.

⁸⁶ NL-HaNA, Ministerraad, 2.02.05.02, inv. nr. 1930, “Verslag van de reis naar Indonesië van de Nederlandse delegatie,” p. 8; Compare Joint Recommendation, in Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 122-124 and NL-

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This explains the fact that the Joint Recommendation indeed departed from specific cases, as the Dutch had wanted. It stated that “the two delegations recognise that specific objects and specimens which are directly linked with persons of major historical and cultural importance or with crucial historical events in Indonesia should be transferred to the country-of-origin.”⁸⁷ The word “transfer” (“overdracht”) was consciously applied while “return” (“teruggave”) was avoided as it implied illegal acquisition.⁸⁸ Also, as Jos van Beurden remarks, the category of objects of aesthetic value was nowhere mentioned in the Joint Recommendation, and only objects in the Netherlands that were state owned were under discussion. For privately owned objects, the recommendation contained vague Dutch promises of assistance and “sincere efforts” for return.⁸⁹

Despite the fact that the Dutch hand was clearly visible in the document, the Joint Recommendation of 1975 brought about a considerable number of “transfers,” part of “a first stage” of implementation.

- Between 1975 and 1987, archives were exchanged between ANRI and the National Archive in The Hague. Dutch official archives from immediately after the Japanese occupation were transferred to the Netherlands while the Yogya archives that were captured by the Dutch between 1945 and 1949 were transported to Indonesia. The majority of exchanges concerned microfilms.
- On 24 March 1976, a fossilised dwarf elephant and land turtle from Timor and Flores were transferred from the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie in Leiden to the cultural attaché of the Indonesian embassy in The Hague.⁹⁰
- On 15 August 1977, the director of the Royal House archive, on the authority of Prince Bernhard, handed another painting of Raden Saleh about the arrest of Prince Diponegoro to the Indonesian ambassador, after a special request of Minister of Foreign Affairs Adam Malik.⁹¹
- On 12 September 1977, 243 items from the large Lombok “treasure” were handed over to the cultural attaché of the Indonesian embassy. 122 objects came from Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde and 121 from Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. These selections comprised half of the entire Lombok “treasure” in the Netherlands.⁹² It is not clear why not everything was returned. Dutch museum experts emphasised that the most important items were in the Museum Nasional in Jakarta. This would imply that the remaining items in the Netherlands were of minor cultural value. However, another reason may well be strategic. A 1974 memorandum on Indonesian cultural objects in Dutch

HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266 “Draft Statement of Agreement between the Indonesian and Dutch Delegations on the return of Indonesian Cultural Objects.”

⁸⁷ Joint Recommendation, in Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 122-124.

⁸⁸ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, “Nota inzake de zich in Nederlandse rijksinstellingen bevindende kunstschaten, handschriften en archiefonderdelen van Indonesische oorsprong,” 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv.nr. 10268, “Overdracht van Kunstvoorwerpen aan Indonesia” by Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri, no date [January 1984].

⁹¹ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10268, “Overdracht van Kunstvoorwerpen aan Indonesia” by Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri, no date [January 1984].

⁹² NL-LdnRMV Serie-archief, inv. nr. 2364-1.

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museums frankly stated: “It is to be recommended to keep a limited and small collection behind, out of tactical considerations and as object of negotiation in future discussions.”⁹³

- On 7 October 1977, the saddle and bridle, *payung* and spear that had been captured from Prince Diponegoro in 1829 were returned to Indonesia’s ambassador, much against the will of Museum Bronbeek that had kept the objects in its collection.
- In January 1978, the Prajnaparamita statue was returned to the Museum Nasional in Jakarta on the occasion of its bicentennial.

Of a slightly different character was the transfer on 13 July 1975 of 380 earlier mentioned ethnographic objects from Western New Guinea at the Indonesian embassy in The Hague, which had been smuggled out of Dutch New Guinea in the final days of Dutch rule. As all parties agreed, the removal of the objects had clearly happened against the New York Agreement of 1962 and the return of the collection was to be realised regardless a cultural agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia.⁹⁴

Of a different nature were also the returns of the Ngandong skulls and the Homo Modjokertensis, that, according to Drieënhuizen, were returned from the personal collection of the emeritus professor in geology, G.H.R. von Koenigswald, who had worked in Java and Utrecht but moved to Frankfurt after 1968. The remains were returned to the Indonesian paleoanthropologist Teuku Jacob in 1975 and 1978. Other than the previous items, this concerned a transfer between private parties.⁹⁵

Objects under discussion in this period

In Pott’s 1975 report on the joint team of experts’ trip to Indonesia, he mentions that “there seems to be a list compiled by a team led by Satyadi, that comprises more than 10,000 objects.” It is unclear if Pott has actually seen this list or not. According to Pott, the list was not very precise and the Indonesians requested more information. “For instance, they want the full catalogue of the collection of the museums in Amsterdam (Tropenmuseum), The Hague (Museum voor het Onderwijs [today’s Museon]), Leiden, Rotterdam, Delft, and Leeuwarden, and of private collections, including most notably the Gall collection, and information about the sources [that were used] by Krom and Von Heine Geldern for their publications in the 1930s [about the Borobudur temple, K.S.]” With regards to concrete objects, the Indonesian delegation was most interested in items “from the former army museum in Aceh (unknown)[?],” the Lombok “treasure,” insignia of the Luwu court, the equipment of Prince Diponegoro, the sword of Pattimura, and the Wadjak skull and other remains of the Dubois collection.⁹⁶

⁹³ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4193, “Nota inzake de zich in Nederlandse rijksinstellingen bevindende kunstschaten, handschriften en archiefonderdelen van Indonesische oorsprong,” p. 5. In a later version of this memorandum, this passage was deleted with the side note that it was better removed because of Indonesian sensitivities [“Deze zaak zit de Indonesiërs nogal hoog”].

⁹⁴ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266, “Speech of prof. dr. P.H. Pott, delivered at the function of the formal transfer of Irian Jaya objects, held in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden June 13 1975.”

⁹⁵ Drieënhuizen, “Mirrors of Time”, 99.

⁹⁶ NL-LdnRMV, Archief P. Pott, Kwartaal+Jaarverslag 1975, “Kort verslag van de missie van deskundigen naar Indonesië” by Pott, dated 10 December 1975.

The list of Satyadi is highly relevant because it seemingly went far beyond the often mentioned highlights of Indonesian heritage in the Netherlands, and at the same time was more precise than vague suggestions of “everything.” More research in Indonesia is needed to locate the list and know more about the background of Satyadi.

Other objects that were brought to the table during the joint team of experts’ meetings - and which were not described above as being returned or part of Pott’s description of the Satyadi-list - were the Ganesha, Durga, Nandishvara and Mahakala statues of the Singasari temple, four hundred ancient manuscripts (microfilms were returned), and the *keris* of Prince Diponegoro (that went missing, but was retraced and returned to Indonesia in March 2020). Finally, Mantra also brought to mind the fates of an archeological collection of objects that was sent to Thailand and - according to him - had gone down in the Java Sea after a shipwreck (probably referring to the earlier mentioned collection of Bloembergen and Eickhoff) and a collection that was burned at the grand International Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931.⁹⁷

It is striking that in this last major round of negotiations in the 1970s, and despite Dutch attempts to minimise claims to concrete items and collections, the Dutch and Indonesian delegations approached the objects under discussion in a much more systematic and categorical way than before. In the decades preceding the 1970s, the discussion was either narrowed down to single objects or collections of high symbolic value, or broadened to amorphous conceptions of “everything.” Thus, Nagarakrtagama and the Lombok “treasure” have consistently been under discussion, but it never became clear what would happen to the other thousands of “anonymous” objects in Dutch possession. On the part of the Indonesians, this was also the consequence of a lack of access to Dutch inventories. However, in the 1970s museum experts and government officials tried to get a grip of the subject matter by making assessments per category. These assessments sometimes differentiated in time (objects acquired before 1942, between 1945 and 1949, and after 1949), in character (objects of historical, aesthetic, or cultural importance; crown treasures, ethnographic collections, or archeology), in legal status (private collections vs. objects in possession of the state), or in quality (objects vs. archives vs. manuscripts). Also important was a differentiation in ways of acquisition (military loot, art market, donations, archeological excavations) with museum experts such as Pott emphasising the fact that the large majority of Indonesian objects in the Netherlands was not looted and was collected in legally and ethically honest ways.⁹⁸

This categorisation suggests that even in the most narrow interpretation of returnable objects, the path was now open to consider lesser known items, as well. Yet, the 1977-1978 first stage of returns did not result in a second stage or a more permanent stream of objects flowing from the Dutch state to the former colony. Although it was not made explicit in the Joint Recommendations, the first stage of

⁹⁷ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10266, “Statement of the Indonesian delegation on the Return of Indonesian Cultural Objects.” See also Marieke Bloembergen, “Koloniale vertoningen: de verbeelding van Nederlands-Indië op de wereldtentoonstellingen (1880-1931)” (PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam 2001) 251.

⁹⁸ For instance: NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, “Nota inzake het probleem van zgn. teruggave aan Indonesië van voorwerpen van cultureel belang uit Nederlandse openbare verzamelingen,” by P.H. Pott, dated 30 June 1969.

returns had to be followed by joint investigations into missing objects or items with unclear possession status. However, these plans never materialised in a general impression that after the returns of the 1970s “the issue” had now been sufficiently solved.

Research questions / follow-up

- Who were the Indonesian members of the joint team of experts?
- Where is the list of Satyadi? How does it relate to earlier mentioned lists of Sudiro and Soegondo? Who was Satyadi?
- Which categories were left out of the discussion (private collections, religious collections, Islamic art, etc), and why?
- Why were the Ganesha, Durga, Nandishvara, and Mahakala statues of the Singasari temple not returned?

1980-1998

Context

The 1980s saw a further consolidation of the Suharto regime, characterised by a prominent role for the military and rampant corruption. Opposition movements that periodically flared up were effectively repressed. In the realm of culture, Suharto obliged all political and cultural organisations to subscribe to the national ideology of Pancasila. This theory, invented by Sukarno but made compulsory as a national doctrine by Suharto in 1983, consisted of five “Indonesian” principles, which could easily be applied to suppress diverging political and religious movements. The Suharto family placed itself in the ancient Javanese courtly tradition, which was also reflected in an increasing Javanisation and centralisation of the Indonesian economy and government.

The Dutch political attitude towards Indonesia meandered between a neutral stance as it concerned internal affairs of a befriended country, and severe criticism as it concerned human rights and political liberties. In 1978, the issue of human rights moved to the background, after the Den Uyl government was followed by a right wing coalition under Van Agt. Jan Pronk left the stage as one of Indonesia’s most ardent critics. However, in 1986 Pronk returned to Dutch parliament and became Minister of Development Cooperation between 1989 and 1998, in the centre coalitions of Lubbers III and later Kok I. In this capacity, the Dutch concern over human rights became more articulate again, especially in the wake of the November 1991 Dili massacre, in which at least 250 East Timorese pro-independence activists were shot during a demonstration against the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Other bones of contention were the fate of the 1965 (former) political prisoners, and a growing concern over the suppression of Papuans in Western New Guinea.⁹⁹

In March 1992, very irritated about the critical attitude of the Dutch government and Jan Pronk in particular, the Indonesian government cancelled all Dutch aid cooperation and expelled them from IGGI. The Indonesian Minister of Economic Affairs, Radius Prawiro, lamented the “reckless use of development aid as an instrument of intimidation and as a tool for threats to Indonesia.”¹⁰⁰ This was a severe blow for the interventionist policy of Jan Pronk as he had seemed to have overstepped his powers. Relations with Indonesia would remain tense until the downfall of the Suharto regime in May 1998.

Negotiations

Before assessing the cultural relations between both countries in the 1980s and 1990s, we have to be aware that the literature on topic mostly ends with the returns of the 1970s. Cynthia Scott’s *Cultural Diplomacy and the Heritage of Empire* contains a chapter about the situation after the 1970s but mainly focuses on the UK and France.

⁹⁹ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10146, “De Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen,” by J.J.P. de Jong, dated 17 October 1983.

¹⁰⁰ “Indonesië wil geen hulp meer van Nederland,” *De Volkskrant* (26 March 1992).

On the basis of preliminary archival research, we can conclude that human rights concerns and Indonesian Dutch animosities did not seem to affect cultural exchange, which continued, for instance, in the form of successful exchange programs between Indonesian universities and archives and Dutch academic institutions. Yet, the restitution of objects was no longer a formal part of the discussion, as can be gathered from a 21-page agreement concerning bilateral cultural cooperation for the period 1982 and 1983.¹⁰¹ As Jos van Beurden remarks, after 1978 Dutch officials were relieved that the transfer operation of cultural objects was finished without major political and diplomatic scandals and upheavals in the Netherlands or Indonesia.¹⁰² Among museum experts and scholars, this may have differed somewhat. Cynthia Scott argues that in the 1980s, but more intensively in the 1990s and 2000s, a range of scholars began investigating how colonial-era collections had been amassed.¹⁰³ This resulted in new interest in cultural imperialism in the nineteenth century, but did not lead to additional returns.

The high profile restitutions of the 1970s and the publicity around it also triggered continued interest in the topic among private parties in Indonesia. In the early 1980s, Dutch officials observed a wave of restitution claims and requests for reimbursement from descendants of former Indonesian traditional or colonial aristocrats.¹⁰⁴ In March 1980, for instance, a descendant of Si Singamangaraja XI, a Batak priest-king of the Bakkara dynasty of North Sumatra, requested the return of a machete (Piso Gadja Dompok) and book (Pustaka Harajaon) written by Si Singamangaraja XI himself. A certain “Golkar” announced a trip to the Netherlands to request “all Sumatran antiquities [...] that were held in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Utrecht during Dutch rule between 1816 and 1942” in connection with the new cultural cooperation between the Netherlands and Indonesia.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, in September 1980 an 81 year old former district head from North Sumatra requested the restitution of a Dutch medal of recognition that was granted to his grandfather but taken away in 1866.¹⁰⁶

It appears that these descendants typically lacked access to the official Indonesian diplomatic channels, especially in the centralised and closed New Order regime, and tried to find a hearing with Dutch

¹⁰¹ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194: “Programme for Cultural Cooperation 1982-1983,” signed 6 May 1981 by Haryati Soebadio and M.J.J. van Loosdrecht; Legêne and Postel-Coster, “Isn’t it all culture?” 284.

¹⁰² Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 125.

¹⁰³ Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 170-171.

¹⁰⁴ There have been requests from private parties before 1980. In 1969, for instance, the Islam Social Association in Jakarta requested the return of the Buginese epic poem, La Galigo. From the other direction, that same year the widow of late engineer Resink requested the return of fifteen statues and other items from the Yogyakarta museum Sonobudoyo, that were given to that museum in loan in 1935 but were never returned. Both requests were to no avail. NL-HaNA, Ambassade Indonesië 1962-1974, 2.05.188, inv.nr. 863, letter from J. Noorduyn to J.J. Ras, dated 15 August 1969; “Nederlandse wil beelden in Djokja terug,” *Algemeen Handelsblad* (9 December 1969).

¹⁰⁵ According to the Dutch Embassy, this request was probably fraudulent, and originated from circles around a businessman of Batak descent, Lawrence Manullang: NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10268, letter from Weterouwen van Meeteren to Ch.A. van der Klaauw, dated 27 February 1981.

¹⁰⁶ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv.nr. 10267, translation of a letter from Patuan Kumala Alamsyah to Wilhelmina II, dated 30 September 1980.

museums and institutions directly.¹⁰⁷ The Dutch ambassador advised vigilance, as some of these requests were certainly fraudulent. Any claim should always be checked with experts of the KITLV or KIT, and in case nothing was known of the claimed objects, the claimants had to be redirected to the Indonesian authorities, especially within the ANRI. The Indonesian authorities could then decide to pursue the claim via the official bilateral route.¹⁰⁸ This advice was seconded by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and seemingly put an end to private restitution claims.

A remarkable request came in December 1982 from Haryati Soebadio, Director General of Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture. She requested to send one copy of the signed Linggadjati Agreement of 25 March 1947 on loan to the ANRI. Each party had received four copies of the agreement, but in the military and political turbulence of the 1940s and 1950s the Indonesian copies had been lost. The Dutch authorities were very receptive to this request because they hoped to reinforce the good relations that existed between the Dutch and Indonesian national archives. In February 1983, a copy was transferred on the occasion of an Indonesian Dutch meeting of archivists and museum experts.¹⁰⁹

Research questions / follow-up

- How many requests from private parties can we find? How were they processed and (re)directed? And to what extent did their requests differ from those of the Indonesian central government?

¹⁰⁷ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10267, letter from J.P. Sinambela to the queen of the Netherlands, dated 24 March 1980; and *ibid*, letter from P.H. Pott to Director General for Cultural Affairs, dated 8 August 1980.

¹⁰⁸ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10268, letter from Weterouen van Meeteren to Ch.A. van der Klaauw, dated 31 March 1981.

¹⁰⁹ NL-HaNA, Buza / Code 1975-1984, 2.05.330, inv. nr. 10268: letter from C.H.A.Plug to A.E.M. Ribberink, dated 10 February 1983.

Post-1998

Context

In May 1998, Suharto resigned from office after months of mass protests and riots against the dreadful economic situation and in favour of democratic rights. Following his resignation, the country underwent a period of transition, known in Indonesia as the *Reformasi* era. This transition was a complex and uneven process that not only included democratisation and liberalisation, but also the decentralisation of government, more freedom for religious movements, and an emergence of separatist and communal conflicts in Aceh and Maluku.

In itself, these dramatic events had little direct effect on the Indonesian Dutch restitution discussion other than that provincial museums, parallel to provincial governments, claimed more autonomy from the central Jakartan institutions, and started to undertake quests for restitution themselves.¹¹⁰ Attempts from local governments and former aristocracies to reclaim ancient power symbols and heirlooms from the Museum Nasional in Jakarta interestingly echo requests in 1937-1938 to return heirlooms to the Bone and Gowa kingdoms and to Bali.¹¹¹

Reformasi also brought an improvement of Indonesian Dutch relations, with Indonesia again accepting Dutch development aid. However, in the Netherlands there had been a reshuffle of positions in government, following the formation of a second cabinet under Prime Minister Kok in the same year. Jan Pronk was moved from the position of Minister of Development Cooperation to the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Environment. His post was taken by Evelien Herfkens, who preferred to work via multilateral and supra-national institutions. She diminished the number of recipients of Dutch aid, and - in contrast to Jan Pronk - depoliticised the giving of development aid. In this sense, a neutralisation of Indonesian Dutch relations took place.

More importantly, the rise of right wing political parties in the Netherlands after 2002 was paralleled with an increasing sensitisation about the Dutch colonial past among broad layers of Dutch society. This sensitisation concerned the colonial roots of racism in society, the lack of recognition for the ongoing effects of the history of slavery, and the extreme violence of Dutch troops in the context of the Indonesian war of independence. With regards to the last issue, on 17 August 2005, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot (son of the aforementioned Theo Bot) was present at the sixtieth celebration of Indonesian independence. He declared on behalf of the Dutch government that between 1945 and 1949 the Netherlands had been “on the wrong side of history.” This formulation did not imply a juridical recognition of responsibilities, but paved the way for large scale scientific research on the Dutch colonial past. In February 2022, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH), and the Netherlands Institute for War,

¹¹⁰ Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih and Hafnidar, "Decolonising the Aceh Museum: Objects, Histories and their Narratives," *BMGN* 133.2 (2018) 107.

¹¹¹ Budiarti, "Taking and Returning Objects," 140; Brinkgreve and Stuart-Fox, "Collections After Colonial Conflict," 178.

Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (NIOD) presented the results of a joint research programme, which concluded that the Dutch government and military leadership deliberately condoned the systematic and widespread use of extreme violence by the Dutch armed forces in the war against the Republic of Indonesia. A day later, the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, offered “a sincere apology to the people of Indonesia for the systematic, and widespread extreme violence by the Dutch during those years, and the previous Cabinets who consistently looked away.”

Within the Dutch museum sector in particular, Cynthia Scott observes the rise of a “shared cultural heritage” narrative as a new conceptual frame enabling Dutch museums to collaborate with Indonesian museums on a cooperative and collegial basis, and also validating Dutch expertise on the topic.¹¹²

Negotiations and returns

The relaxation of the grip of Indonesian authorities and the increasing power of regional governments probably also created space for direct initiatives between Dutch and Indonesian museums and private partners.¹¹³ In 2005, the World Museum in Rotterdam donated 185 wayang puppets to the Museum Wayang in Jakarta in the context of strengthening the municipal relations between Jakarta and Rotterdam.¹¹⁴ In 2008, the Order of the Capuchins of Tilburg and the Tropenmuseum donated 18 and 4 ethnographic objects, respectively, to a new cultural centre in Sintang, West-Kalimantan. Moreover, in 2009 the Order sent 33 objects from their Sumatra collection to Museum Pusaka Nias in Gunung Sitoli.¹¹⁵ In 2014, descendants of Governor General Baud, who had acquired the wooden pilgrim’s staff of Prince Diponegoro in 1834 as a donation from one of Prince Diponegoro’s rivals, decided to return the staff to Indonesia. With the help of Rijksmuseum curator Harm Stevens, they established contact with the Galeri Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta, and on 5 February 2015 Erica Baud handed the pilgrim’s staff over to the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Anies Baswedan. The object is currently held by the Museum Nasional in Jakarta.¹¹⁶

The closure of Museum Nusantara in Delft in January 2013 was a complicated matter. The former Etnografisch Museum in that city held a collection of more than 18,000 Indonesian objects. Budget cuts and a low number of visitors forced the museum to close, and a new destination had to be found for its collection. After removing 4,000 objects that were deemed essential to Dutch heritage collection, and 2,000 objects that were qualitatively not up to museum standards, 12,000 objects were offered to the Museum Nasional in Jakarta. Initially, the Indonesian partners seemed willing to accept the transfer, which was scheduled to take place around April 2016. However, when Hilmar Farid assumed office as the new Director General at the Indonesian Ministry of Culture, he objected, as he later explained, to

¹¹² Scott, *Cultural Diplomacy*, 175.

¹¹³ In an overview of returned objects, Jos van Beurden mentions the return in 2003 of “two ancient Hindu statues to Indonesia” from a Dutch government institution. I have not found further evidence of this. Van Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 53.

¹¹⁴ Van Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 47.

¹¹⁵ Van Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Van Beurden, “Treasures in Trusted Hands,” 129; Harm Stevens, *Gepeperd Verleden, Indonesië en Nederland Sinds 1600* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt 2015) 159-163.

the lack of transparency, involvement, and research, and he turned down the offer. Subsequently, the collection was subdivided amongst a large number of museums in the Netherlands, Europe, and Asia (not Indonesia). At the end of 2016, the Museum Nasional in Jakarta indicated that it was still interested in a selection of the objects, after which, under intense time pressure, 1,564 objects were chosen to be repatriated to Indonesia. On the occasion of the state visit of Mark Rutte to Indonesia in November 2016, the Dutch Prime Minister handed a golden Buginese *keris* from the Nusantara collection to Indonesian President Joko Widodo.¹¹⁷

The return of the Nusantara collection, even when it was driven by budgetary motivations, seems to signal the beginning of a new period in Indonesian-Dutch cultural relations, with the restitution of objects acquired in colonial situations explicitly on the table. The return in 2020 of the *keris* of Diponegoro, which was promised by the Dutch government in the 1970s but never effectuated, was an important highlight in this respect. New developments, both in Indonesia (the installation of a Repatriation Committee in 2021¹¹⁸) and in the Netherlands (the publication of far reaching recommendations by a committee led by Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You, and a positive reaction of the Dutch Minister of Culture¹¹⁹), seem to indicate that the number of restitutions will probably increase in the foreseeable future. For an assessment of a few of the most recent national and international developments and trends, that form the immediate context for the establishment of the PPOCE project itself, we forward the reader to the first chapter of the final report of PPOCE.

¹¹⁷ Linawati Sudarto, "Historic Dutch-Indonesian Collection Seeks New Home," *Tempo* (9 October 2016) 46-47; Van Beurden, "Returns by the Netherlands," 191-193.

¹¹⁸ Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. See: <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2021/01/repatriasi-upaya-indonesia-kembalikan-benda-cagar-budaya-dari-belanda> (last accessed 30 March 2022).

¹¹⁹ Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (ed.), "Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht" (Raad voor Cultuur 2020); Ingrid van Engelshoven, "Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context" (Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer, 29 januari 2021); "Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process" (NMVW 30 april 2019).

Conclusions

Looking over more than seven decades of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate, a few basic continuities and periodic changes can be discerned. First of all, between 1945 and the end of the 1970s, Indonesian authorities have continuously pressed for the restitution of cultural objects. Depending on the diplomatic climate, these demands were sometimes very purposeful and result-oriented, and sometimes intended for propagandistic purposes. The Dutch attitude, on the other hand, was much more changeable, from calculating in the 1940s, to uncooperative in the 1950s and 1960s, to accommodating in the 1970s, after which the issue disappeared off the agenda entirely. Until very recently, at no point in time did the Dutch authorities depart from a feeling of remorse or from a desire to undo historic injustice. Instead, the interests of the Dutch state and heritage institutions informed the policies.

Secondly, Indonesian officials always operated from a disadvantaged position, lacking a clear overview of the content of Dutch collections and of the ever more complicated Dutch institutional landscape. This led to misdirected claims, to secretive missions in Dutch museums, and hints about self-compiled long lists of objects. Related to this is the fact that Indonesian official claims typically concerned a few masterpieces, such as the Prajnaparamitra and Nagarakrtagama, which at the same time seemed to function as a *pars pro toto* for the entire collection of Indonesian objects in the Netherlands. Dutch officials and museum experts, on the other hand, always tried to reduce the debate to concrete cases of clear historical provenance, thereby sharply reducing the number of objects under discussion. Once the most impressive objects were returned at the end of the 1970s, it seems that the Indonesians had no reason or grounds to pursue further claims. Illustrative of this phenomena is a request from Director General of Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture Haryati Soebadio in April 1981 in which she asked her Dutch counterpart for an inventory of all remaining Indonesian archeological material in Dutch museums and in private possession. In internal correspondence, a Dutch official of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work simply replied that the request could not be answered because it was unclear which material the Indonesian DG had in mind.¹²⁰

This lack of overview of the entire collection of Indonesian cultural artefacts in the Netherlands, and the fragmented understanding of their background and history of provenance, is still ongoing, both among Indonesian and Dutch policy makers and heritage professionals. If we want to give a new impulse to the restitution discussion between the Netherlands and Indonesia, we can reopen the investigation into some unresolved issues such as the Dubois collection of paleoanthropological remains, the Singosari collection, or the Borobudur stone Buddha heads. Alternatively, it is important to look for possible blind spots and lacunae left by officials and museum experts in the past, and to work on an integrated understanding of the entire Indonesia collection in the Netherlands. Better access to museum inventory systems and archival sources for external researchers is of utmost importance.

In this respect, it needs to be emphasised that the literature on this topic - and this document as well - is

¹²⁰ NL-HaNA, CRM, 2.27.19, inv. nr. 4194, "Notulen van de 12e vergadering van de Nederlandse Adviescommissie," dated 2 April 1981.

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almost exclusively grounded in Dutch source material, with archival documents reaching until the 1980s. Consequently, the discussion is very much focused on diplomatic correspondence on the state level and the resulting debates within the Dutch ministries of culture and foreign affairs. The few examples of private initiatives in Indonesia and the Netherlands in the early 1980s and 2000s remind us, however, that there may be many more unresolved issues under the radar. An investigation into Indonesian government archives may provide us with a clearer idea of Indonesian strategies, considerations, and desires. Where are the lists of Soegondo and the 10,000 objects of Sudiro/Satyadi, and which objects were considered but not brought to the table by Indonesian delegations? Secondly, there may be many more direct requests of Indonesian private parties or lower administrations that were accepted or declined without reaching Indonesian or Dutch state bureaucracies. Their requests may also have been directed to Dutch municipalities or individual museums, leaving no traces in Dutch ministerial archives. A better understanding of the history of the Indonesian Dutch restitution debate will thus necessarily also result in a more balanced handling of Indonesian heritage in the Netherlands in the future.

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