PRESSING  
MATTER

# Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums

## "THE DUTCH EXCEPTION"- MILITARY COLLECTING AND COLONIAL POLICY 1795- 1950

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Why is it important to speak on Dutch Colonialism in a discussion examining colonial collections and how they entered museums? Why is it important to understand the policies and visions that were had for establishing and maintaining an empire? Why is a historical overview of dutch colonialism important to a discourse on collections and the question of ownership?



If there is a "Dutch" way to colonialism that differs from other European entities then the question is should the objects be viewed differently? Can we examine all colonial collections and colonial histories as the same? Was there something "dutch" about the colonial histories of the Dutch East Indies? The question of ownership, objects acquired through military conflicts are examined in this research as strategic and tactical efforts of the military to destabilise societies. The questions are then raised of the counter insurgency and the role objects

played in what is often represented as gifts; where such objects "Pusakas" act as negotiating

colonial constructs as 'objects of persuasion'. Similarly the question is being asked of

military takings of objects from the elite groups, were these actions, efforts of

the military at 'governmenting mentality'. This research then

seeks to present the question for

consideration in the return and

repatriation debate of objects:-

on the basis of the value

placed on particular objects

in colonial administration,

should they be included?

The research project,

Doing Justice in the

Shadow of Law (working

title), explores questions of

ownership and legality with

regards to cultural objects

collected in former colonies. By

looking at objects that were

collected in different colonial

contexts - military interventions, trade

alliances, missionary and scientific

expeditions for example - and situating

them in their (historical) legal context, the

project aims to contribute to a better understanding

of the legal conditions under which these objects have

been acquired, as well as curated, stored and displayed. Moreover,

by opening a dialogue between objects and the legal framework for the

protection and restitution of cultural property, the project problematises the

juridical status and legal personhood of formerly colonised people and

objects taken from them. Particularly,

by taking into consideration that

different entanglements with objects

possible challenge the values and

principles linked to the current

(dominant) understanding of cultural

property - as governed by international

treaties. In that vein, the project also

examines the extent to which the law

can be part of a solution in our dealings

with cultural objects collected in former

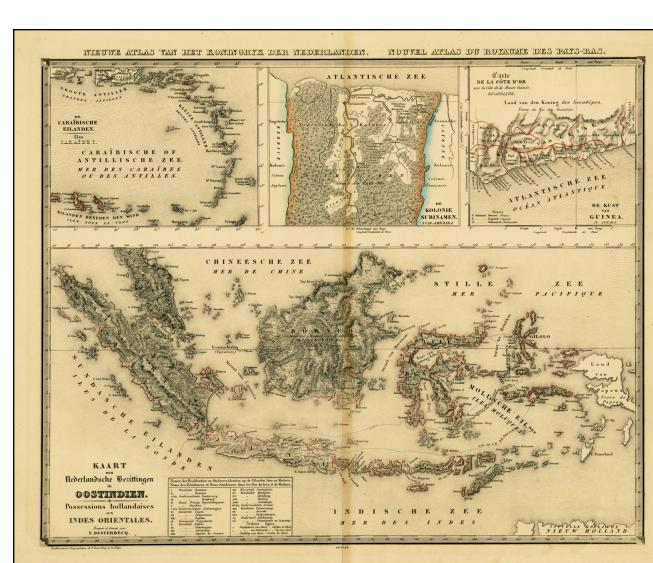
colonies, and how the law can be

rethought to include those who have been legally excluded in the past and

present due to colonialism.

## DOING JUSTICE IN THE SHADOW OF LAW

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rethought to include those who have been legally excluded in the past and

present due to colonialism.

## FROM CULTURAL GENOCIDE TO CULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION: THE LEGACY OF THE DEMOLITION OF BANTEN ROYAL PALACE BY DAENDELS IN 1808

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Since its first introduction in the draft of the Genocide Convention in 1948, the concept of 'cultural genocide' has raised considerable debate. Yet, in discussions and circumstances where material culture is at stake, it is not uncommonly invoked. Engaging with

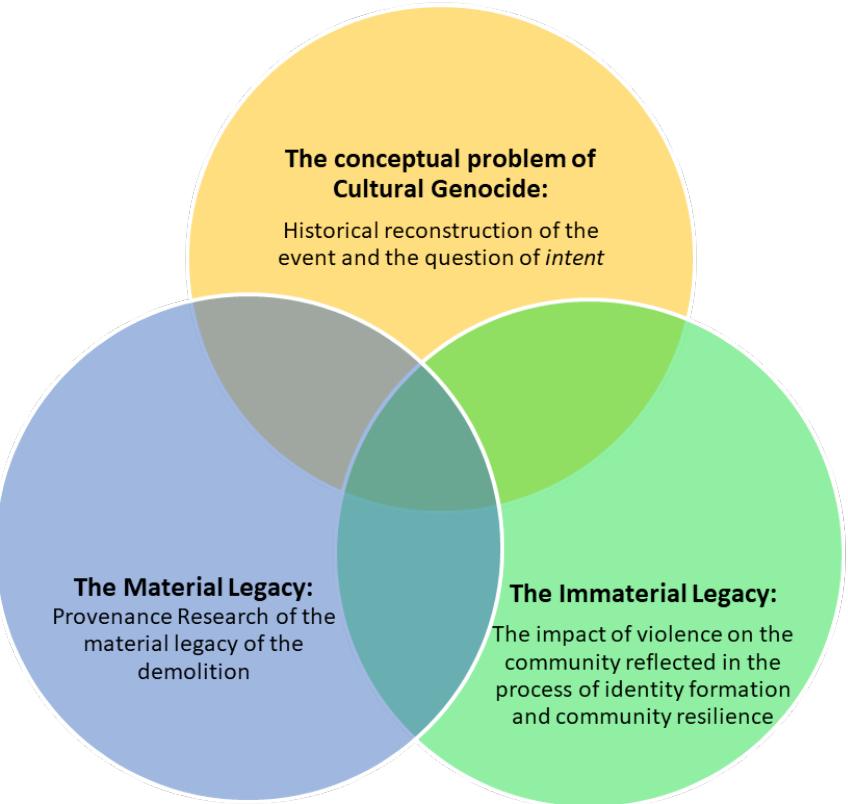
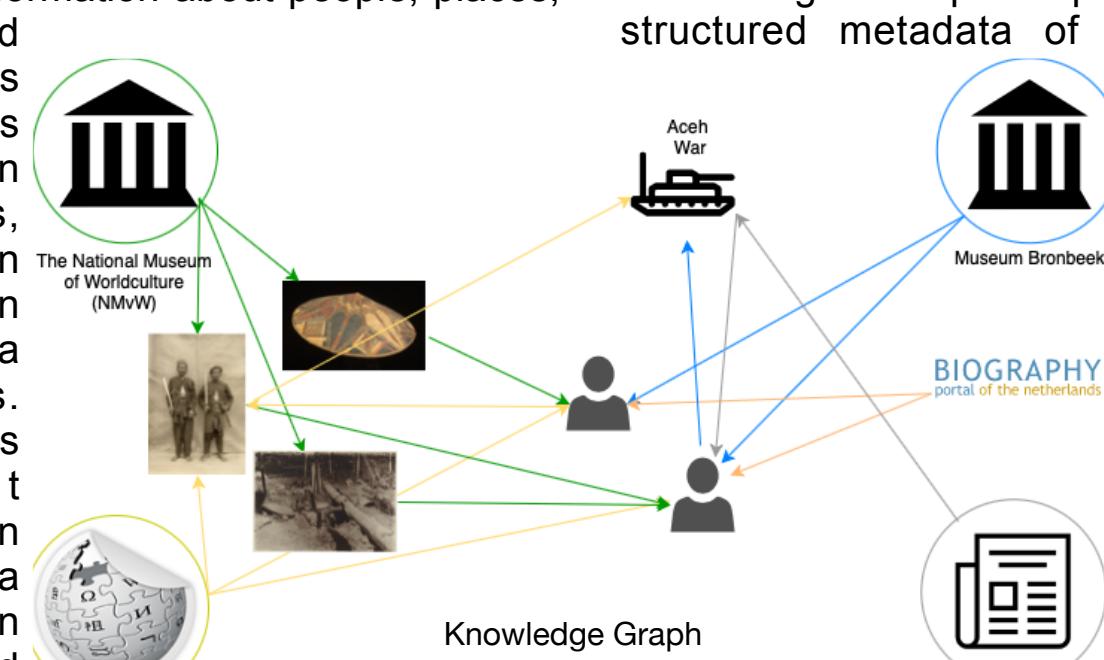


Figure 1. The research entanglement

reflections on potential forms of cultural genocide in connection with the demolition of the royal palace of Banten in 1808 by the Dutch colonial government, the present research discusses both the material and immaterial legacies of cultural genocide, including in museums as spaces with tangible remains and objects of cultural genocide, archaeological sites, and what this might mean for reconciliation and identity formation.

To what extent does Knowledge Graph constructed from heritage object's metadata and further enriched with collector's biography information has the potential to scale-up objects' provenance research for museum experts?



This research will first focus on entity linking across institutions to construct a Knowledge Graph representing both structured metadata of objects and the collector's biography. This work aims to use this newly formed Knowledge Graph to find interesting patterns to scale-up provenance research and analyse the effect of adding such information to the current data source.

Experiments with the different modalities of data and pattern mining techniques

will reveal to which extent this data enrichment places a role in finding useful knowledge for the domain researchers.

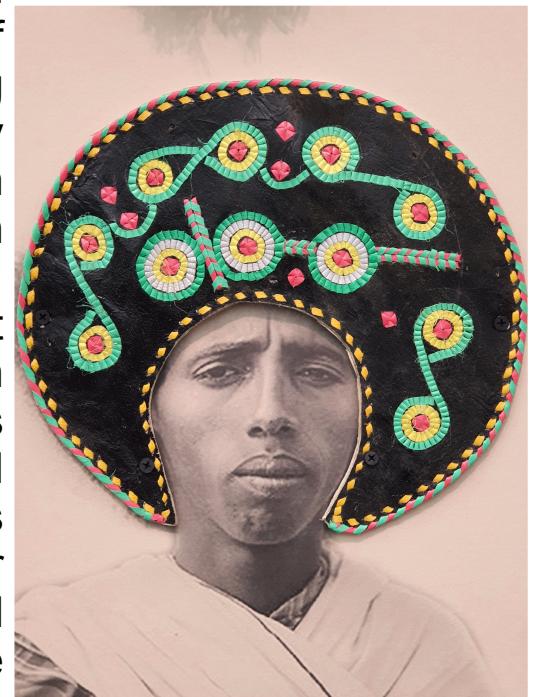
Tentatively titled 'A redistribution of hope. Contemporary art, ethnographic collections and refusal' this research focuses on contemporary art artistic

engagements with heritage that was collected and categorized as ethnographic. It's anchored within the reconciliation arm of the Pressing

Matter project and seeks to trouble that concept altogether by engaging with refusal, as utilized by the Practicing Refusal Collective. At the center of the research is a focus on hope and the refusal to accept the attempted cordoning off and deadening of the heritage stored in these collections.

By close reading artistic productions from several contemporary artists, with the help of decolonial thinking, Black studies and image circulation theory, attention will be paid to how these artistic engagements imagine futures that escape historically anchored conceptual and structural institutional attempts to deny futures of the heritage in their storage. This leads to thinking about engagement with this heritage literally outside of the walls of the ethnographic museum itself and within the contemporary art context with all of its own complications and potentials.

I'm coming to this research with a decolonial art practice background and as a Black Caribbean man from islands that, as Inez van der Scheer has coined, share continued Dutch occupation and colonization. This informs the urgency within this research to think about how other futures, other than those demanded by the continued colonial violence unleashed on communities that have formed me, can be imagined.



Wendimagegn Belete, Your Gaze Makes Me (2021), detail. Presented at Future Generation Art Prize, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kyiv Ukraine. Photo by Quinsky Gario.

## A REDISTRIBUTION OF HOPE. CONTEMPORARY ART, ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS AND REFUSAL

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