



# GENDERED EMPIRE

Intersectional  
perspectives on  
Dutch post/  
colonial  
narratives

YEARBOOK  
OF WOMEN'S  
HISTORY  
JAARBOEK  
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39

# Colonial Heritage and Restitution

A round table discussion among museum professionals

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In 2019, the steady wind that had been rattling the shutters for some time turned into a storm that blew the dust of Europe's museum cabinets. Spurred by the tireless efforts of activists and backed by big promises from prominent politicians, appeals for restitution and attempts to 'decolonize' powerful institutions rocked the foundations of museums across Europe. From Emmanuel Macron's promises of restitution to the Republic of Benin to the reopening of the Africa Museum in Tervuren and the Humboldt Forum in Berlin: debates on responsibilities for pillaging in the past as well as equal representation dominated the political, academic and – last but certainly not least – public debate.

In October 2019, the Amsterdam Museum's permanent exhibition at Hermitage Amsterdam was enriched with 'Dutch Masters Revisited', curated by Jörgen Tjon a Fong, thirteen portraits of prominent Dutch people of colour posing as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical figures – incidentally, the portrait of Yosina Roemajauw as Christina van Geugten (1749-1780) pictured by Stacii Samidin is the cover of this *Yearbook*. During the opening of the exhibition, artistic director Margriet Schave-maker announced that the Amsterdam Museum would no longer use the term 'Golden Age', as it only tells half the story and leaves little room for new perspectives. The announcement was immediately met with widespread condemnation, and the museum's social media feeds were flooded with negative comments. Prime Minister Mark Rutte used his weekly press conference to lethargically exclaim 'what nonsense!', calling it a 'beautiful phrase' and adding that the Dutch should be 'fiercely proud' of their nation's seventeenth-century successes. But even Rutte's puerile reaction could not blot out the

fact that the tide had shifted and the politics of representation had started to make their mark on the Dutch museum world.

While the 'Gouden Eeuw'-debate raged, the editors of the *Yearbook of Women's History* met in September 2019 and discussed how to incorporate and address these debates in our upcoming issue on Gender and Dutch colonial heritage. As historians, each of us has been confronted and is grappling with issues similar to those at the core of the heritage debate. Who owns or controls access to historical sources – and, consequently, to some of the chief ingredients of history writing – has become an urgent, weighty issue made all the more so by the commercialization and privatization of (digital) archives and increasingly strenuous visa procedures for scholars in the global south. Who, furthermore, gets to decide how these historical sources should be interpreted and what their place should be within historical narratives? Whose notions of historical and cultural value prevail in the heritage sector?

Considering both the academic relevance and international momentum, our aim was to ask heritage experts to critically discuss the colonial heritage debate in the Dutch museum world. The aim was threefold: Firstly, to trace the origins of the debate and how positions have shifted over time, inside and outside the Netherlands. Secondly, to reflect on issues of restitution and ownership, specifically on the role that gender might play in this regard. As pointed out by scholars and activists, the restitution of colonial heritage is easily abused as political strategy characterized by gestures that attempt to pacify or whitewash without tackling or addressing the fundamental roots of that heritage: the historical, often enduring, power imbalance. How can museums make sure their actions do not only reinforce patriarchal and Eurocentric power dynamics? Thirdly, to look ahead. What are the consequences of the broader conversation about restitution for museums, both here and elsewhere? Could the widespread restitution of colonial objects usher in a new era of research? Research initiated by scholars in former colonised countries, rather than the former colonisers?

In order to ensure that the discussion benefitted from a variety of perspectives, we invited a group of museum professionals, ranging from directors and (head) curators to artists and researchers, to engage in a conversation at Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Unfortunately, things do not always go as planned. On the day of the Round Table one of the participants fell ill and another, who was to join the conversation through a video call from Suriname, was unable to establish a stable connection. Despite the unexpected decline in participants, the conversation still turned out to be rich and its topic almost inexhaustible. The discussion was led by historian and heritage specialist Wim Manuhutu, and joined by Henrietta Lidchi, who is chief-curator at the National Museum for World Cultures, and researcher Jos van Beurden, an expert on the protection of cultural heritage and colonial restitution projects. In order to do justice to the multiperspectivity we aimed for in our original set up, we approached curator Priya Swamy and historian and independent curator Sadiyah Boonstra with the request to write a response to the text version of the round table. Their insightful reflections and fundamental questions have been included as *post scriptum* and will hopefully inspire readers in their own reflections.

The central question of the conversation on January 21<sup>th</sup> was: ‘How do museum professionals tackle the current debate on colonial cultural objects and the question if they should be returned to their places of origin and if so, in what way?’ In the ensuing discussion, the perspective of museum ‘insider’ Lidchi contrasted informatively with the sometimes critical point of view of ‘outsider’ researchers, like Van Beurden. To us, their discussion proved enlightening regarding the way the colonial heritage debate ‘seems to be circling back up’ every ten years or so and how discouraging it can be for curators like Lidchi to see issues remaining on the table *ad infinitum*. Lidchi identifies three reasons for the seemingly slow progress: 1) the nature of claims for restitution has changed over the years; 2) earlier initiatives to decolonise institutions have proved unsustainable, especially due to the termination of funding; and 3) the lack of a coherent and uniform international policy. Van Beurden identifies the indecision of national politics and the lack of culturally diverse backgrounds among curators and policymakers as a substantial part of the problem, one that endures in Dutch museums in general.<sup>1</sup> Both Lidchi and Van Beurden emphasise the importance of well-informed provenance research, by well-trained researchers.<sup>2</sup>

Respondent Swamy, on the other hand, points to the responsibility of museums to change their self-serving institutional logic. She fears that sustainable restitution practices will remain just out of reach as long as ethnographic museums continue to perpetuate Eurocentric and colonial notions of ‘cultural value’. A shift in institutional thinking and self-understanding is necessary in order to honour (rather than merely acknowledge) community stakeholders’ views on material culture and to understand an object’s value outside the museum context, Swamy argues. In the same vein, Boonstra underlines the need for a paradigm shift: restitution is not about loss, but an opportunity for new perspectives on our shared past and for more equal relationships with ‘people across the world who live and embody different histories and trajectories’.

Even though the issue of diversity came up several times during the discussion, gender was a matter which proved rather hard to bring to the heart of the conversation. This is interesting in and of itself, and might allude to the fact that for the majority of museums dealing with (colonial) heritage, gender has not been a key factor in their approach to their collections – perhaps because the upper echelons of most museums are still male.<sup>3</sup> The absence of an institutional gender perspective in a museum’s understanding of its collections leads to forms of erasure. The most thought-provoking consideration in that regard has to do with the ‘essence’ of museums, the nature of museological display and the history of ‘collecting’. Lidchi raises the question when she asks: ‘How much of what we’ve got in our institutions is “domestic decoration”, and if we were to think of it in that way, would we like it as much?’ In her most recent book, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Ariella Azoulay discusses the consequences of classifying objects into the transcendental category of ‘Art’, ‘under which objects could be uprooted and converted into tokens of art for stocking Western encyclopedic museums, while the infrastructure for such diverse practices – what permitted these objects to be produced, performed, used, displayed and shared in their own communities – was simultaneously destroyed’.<sup>4</sup> As such, the paradigm shift so urgently called

for by respondents Boonstra and Swamy could, by honouring community stakeholders' understandings of material culture in time lead to the de-silencing of *herstories* and *theirstories* in our museums.

### *Discussion*

*Wim Manuhutu:* Museums are dealing with a debate surrounding the restitution of cultural heritage. It has been supposed that since the 1960s and 1970s a shift took place within this debate to acknowledge indigenous rights. Indigenous voices have been instrumental in getting museums to acknowledge the issues surrounding their collections, especially in the United States and other places that experienced settler colonialism. Looking back on the past few decades, when did you first notice that restitution became something to be debated in the Netherlands?

*Jos van Beurden:* In the Netherlands the debate started right from 1945, certainly in the relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia. In general within the debate on restitution I distinguish three waves. The first one is what I call a colonialism discourse; countries became independent, and were trying to gain economic and political rights and to redefine their relationship with the former colonizer. They started claiming objects and the claims were very general: 'we just want our items back.' This was quite uncomfortable for the Netherlands and other European countries. This first wave lasted until about 1970. The discourse then changed into a development discourse, where former colonies were forced into a more friendly relationship with European countries and objects were returned under the guise of 'aid' to their museum sector. But only a few former colonizers gave back objects, Belgium and the Netherlands for instance did it, but gave back as little as possible. Others, such as Australia and Denmark, were more generous. Great Britain, France, Spain and Portugal did not give way at all. The end of this development era was around 2000, maybe with the publication of the Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums, issued in 2002. Major museums in Europe and North America tried to end the discussions about past (colonial) acquisitions and promised to act more ethically in the future. In hindsight, it was their last defence wall against claims from former colonies and from diaspora groupings. We are now in the third wave, with changing global power relations, more specified claims, a stronger role for the diaspora and changing ethics in Europe and North America. This wave is part of the general debate about decolonization, racism and inclusion.

*Wim Manuhutu:* So you focus on inter-state relations, which of course is complicated by the fact that many of these former colonized states tend to have issues with indigenous communities, who also hold claims to collections, but not necessarily through state actors. Henrietta, you have extensive experience in the UK and the Americas, but also in the Netherlands. Would it be possible to make some sort of comparison?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I agree with Jos that you have to trace back requests for the return of cultural objects prior to the 1960s and within a context of postcolonial demands and positioning in regard to former colonizing powers. You see it in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, but also Nigeria and in the context of individuals or states who want to build a new museum sector in their country. This is a transitional moment, where you see individuals who had formerly worked for colonial institutions, working for and in some instances wanting to build new national institutions in formerly colonized countries.

Then there are also the indigenous demands in North America, which grew in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the American Indian Movement and as part of the demands for sovereignty. It was a reclamation of cultural value. One of such reclaims that succeeded in the 1970s was the demand from the Pueblo of Zuni for the Ahayu'da (known outside the Pueblo of Zuni as 'war gods') to be returned to them, and this occurred from both private and public collections. This was prior to the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in the early 1990s.

Cynthia Scott's *Cultural Diplomacy and the Heritage of Empire* charts the evolution of the various demands for the return of cultural objects, by the Republic of Indonesia, from the 1940s and then the 1970s. She charts the shift from more general claims to claims for very specific cultural objects made during the negotiations between Dutch and Indonesian parties. However, if you chart the development of claims for the return of cultural objects, it appears that each generation has a different purpose for the request. The requests from the 1940s are different from the requests from the 1970s, or the 1990s or yet again 2010s. They do not have the same purpose, so to say that history repeats itself would be to misunderstand the changes in political and social contexts. We are compelled to ask: what is it that this renewed conversation is seeking to redress? This is not solely about the cultural objects, but about the context in which that question becomes relevant again.

*Jos van Beurden:* In the 1990s in the Netherlands, in as far as the discussion was about ethics, it was more about the ongoing illicit trade. Less about museums and more about art and antiquities, dealers and auction houses, although it did happen that museums took over their tainted objects. To give one example, in 1996, a Dutch art dealer was caught in the port of Rotterdam trying to import thirteen bronze Buddha heads from Ayutthaya in Thailand and two sandstone celestial nymphs from the Angkor region in Cambodia. It became a scandal and the parliament adopted a resolution that the Netherlands should adhere to the UNIDROIT convention, which they later dropped.<sup>5</sup> So, in those years the focus here was scarcely on disputed colonial collections.

*Wim Manuhutu:* There is a parallel here with the debate surrounding slavery. People will respond to questions about colonial slavery by stating 'well, there is slavery now', which is true of course, but that does not detract from the horrors of colonial slavery. There seems to be a tendency to focus on the here and now, rather than the colonial past. We talked about the Netherlands being quite late in ratifying the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

*Jos van Beurden:* Which partly had to do with the fear of claims for colonial objects. In the 1970s, European countries – with Great Britain and Belgium in the lead, and the Netherlands following – obstructed the adopting of this convention. But their fear of claims was unfounded because the treaty did not have a retroactive clause.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I suppose, though, that one of the big aspects in this debate is the relationships between museums and the states in which they reside. There is no uniform condition across Europe. There are different systems in place and that makes it very complicated for people outside of Europe to understand. One of the things this debate should tell us is to not be naïve about such things. The other thing it tells us is that governments in the late 2010s do not want to fund some of the initiatives that were part and parcel of the debates on restitution such as community-based collaboration or the development agendas that were important coming out of the 1970s. I don't think it is unreasonable to say that the reason this debate is circling back up, is because the gains the initiatives in the 1990s made, were contingent on a sustained amount of funding that has now seeped away.

*Wim Manuhutu:* Regarding the Netherlands, we talked about Indonesia, where, upon independence, claims were immediately made, but what happened in Suriname? Were there similar demands?

*Jos van Beurden:* Although Dutch people and institutions took many objects from Suriname as well, I found little evidence of claims from Surinamese parties. We know much about war booty from Indonesia and other *voc* possessions in Asia, but little from *wic* possessions and Suriname. Apart from war booty, in Asia, the Dutch were interested in objects from Hindu and Buddhist monuments. These were scarce in Suriname, as most religious artifacts and other objects were made of perishable materials. One exception is a discussion about a displaced ceremonial chair of a Maroon headman, which after much discussion stayed where it was, in Herrnhut near Dresden, while a copy was sent to Suriname.

Significant, however, is the return of archival materials from the Netherlands to Suriname, especially so since the administration in Paramaribo and the government in The Hague agreed as early as 1916 to ship archives to 'safe' places in the Netherlands but they remained property of the colony Surinam<sup>6</sup> and were to be returned, as soon as Suriname itself was able to store them properly. By now, all of these archives have been returned.

*Wim Manuhutu:* If you look at the different waves that you have mentioned, where are we now in the twenty-first century?

*Jos van Beurden:* As I said, the claims are becoming more specific and museums here are beginning to act. In September 2017, the Rijksmuseum began researching the origins of a bronze ceremonial cannon of the king of Kandy,<sup>7</sup> as part of a pilot study that traced



FIG. 1 Ceremonial cannon which once belonged to the king of Kandy (Collection: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, object no. NG-NM-1015).

the provenance of ten controversial pieces. In November 2019, the research into the cannon was discussed at a conference, during which the museum said it had not yet finished the research and that it needed more time. This aroused amazement among the attendants. The nature of the cannon, war booty, is not disputed. The object was taken in 1765 by the VOC and, after a long journey, it ended up in the Rijksmuseum around 1880. Sri Lanka first asked for its return in 1980, but its claim was rejected at the time. At the conference, the director of Sri Lanka's national museum was clear: her country wants it back. Earlier that year, the Rijksmuseum had announced in the media that it would visit Sri Lanka to discuss their research. It was brought as a first, but I wondered: Why not do provenance research together right from the beginning? How long can we keep on putting the interests of former colonies second?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I do think there are questions around that particular cannon and there is a good paper by Nira Wickramasinghe on why the cannon had a kind of superlative nationalist role within state ideology.<sup>8</sup> I think that the notion that we can simply hand things back in order to wipe clean the past is overly simplistic. There is an argument to be made that cultural objects do not circulate in neutral spaces. There are therefore great political considerations to be taken into account concerning what it means to



give back. Are you giving it back to a national government or are you giving it back to the people who view it as an ancestral object? The notion that you can just hand it back negates everything we know from the 1990s.

*Wim Manuhutu:* One might say that it is not your place to ask the ethical question, to put those considerations on the table. Countries or communities of origin might say: 'we want it back, and what we do with it does not concern you'.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I do feel like there should be no conditionality on return. What I am saying is, a state that required something in 1975, is not necessarily the same state that might require it in 1990. International political considerations matter, whether you like it or not.

*Wim Manuhutu:* Does that not make it easier for museums to say, in the end, this is political, we have done everything we can, in terms of research and such but, in the end, the minister decides?

*Jos van Beurden:* That is too easy. Museums are only now beginning to do more provenance research. Recent evidence of this is the research into the kris of Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855), whose opposition to Dutch colonial rule and leading role in the Java War made him a National Hero of Indonesia. In 1975, a committee of Dutch and Indonesian experts agreed to the transfer to Indonesia of cultural goods relating to historically significant figures. As part of this agreement, the Netherlands was obliged to locate the treasured and sought-after kris. Several attempts were made, but these searches were not thorough. It was not until 2017 that the National Museum of World Cultures started a serious investigation into this very complicated item and included experts from Indonesia. In March 2020, it was officially returned by King Willem-Alexander during the Royal Netherlands state visit to Indonesia.<sup>9</sup>

I want to add an element to the discussion. European museums focus on disputed objects and collections. Countries such as China, Ethiopia, the Republic of Benin and Nigeria, and in the case of Diponegoro's kris, Indonesia as well, want to retrieve war booty, to undo injustice committed in the past. The experience with the deaccessioning of thousands of objects of the Museum Nusantara in Delft shows another aspect. The museum had to close down in 2013 and the Delft municipality had agreed to the repatriation of objects from the former Dutch East-Indies to Indonesia. What happened? Indonesia rejected the repatriation offer, and finally an Indonesian delegation came to select 1,500 items, approximately ten percent of what had initially been offered. In this specific case, undoing injustice was not a primary motivation for the Indonesian side, but rather more of a needs-based approach, of fillings gaps in their collections.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* There is kind of a transactional way in which people view collections. I have come to believe that museum collections have multiple embedded narratives. If you look at a collection which includes a series of cultural objects that have been bought from dealers, they have a very different narrative than cultural objects pur-

chased by families and collected by one person in a particular country. However, we cannot restrict ourselves to a simply transactional way of approaching a collection. Otherwise objects end up simply as traces and in some instances only traces of colonial intention, which is to deny them other lives and histories.

One of the elements of the Dutch context that is slightly different than the British context is the understanding of collections in those terms. Other countries may pay more attention to their own historical investment in collecting than is habitually the case in the Netherlands, and thus have a longer track record of provenance research. It takes a lot of work to understand what a collection is and what it does and when you're looking at the question of return, it seems to be that there are a series of questions: Why is it here? How do we get here and how do I know that? This points us to the reliability, or otherwise, of sources that we have inherited as museum curators, and alerts us to the need to understand their innate bias. However these are essentially provenance questions. The next question then becomes: Where is the object doing its best work? And that question might have a completely different answer. The answer to the first set of questions might be that the object performs very well in relation to provenance research, but performs badly in relation to the second question regarding value and thus return. Hypothetically, it could have been collected by someone who had fantastic relations with the people and the country he acquired the object from. It may have been fairly traded and well – documented. So, the answer to question one might be a gold star and then question two potentially presents a completely different answer, namely it is not doing its best work where it is at present. Current processes in museums do not really allow for such contradictory answers.

*Wim Manuhutu:* What I find interesting about your answer is that you say that the narrative turn in museums occurred later in the Netherlands. There was this exhibition on shared collections of the *Bataviaasch genootschap* in the Nieuwe Kerk in 2005. It was one of the first exhibitions in the twenty-first century where the history of the collectors was included, in different categories, including the military, public officials, missionaries, scientist and others. With that came a more nuanced answer to the question of repatriation. There came into being an understanding that these matters can be enormously complex. That some objects were looted, whereas others were gifts. We also have to be mindful that the idea of a 'gift' is not always straightforward. For instance, something might be given to someone because that someone is a high-placed official or royal and the person giving the gift might do so in hopes of being looked at favourably. If we want to think about a more nuanced way of looking at repatriation, we have to take into account the colonial relation. To some people anything that has a colonial connotation is inherently bad and should be given back. They would say, there is no such thing as a gift on equal terms.

Do you think that captions and the way that information is shared with the public, acknowledges the fact that a gift in a certain context may not be a gift in the common-sense way of the word?



FIG. 2 Statue of Ganesha, a Hindu deity, from a temple complex at Singhasari, north of Malang, eastern Java (Collection: Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden). Photograph © ErikvanB/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0.

*Jos van Beurden:* Captions can certainly be improved. The Rijksmuseum has a rack of over ten spears that were 'given' to Governor-general Baud in the 1830s. In the caption 'the museum' wonders whether these gifts were indications of 'extorted loyalty', thus putting the gift in context. Every time I enter the Museum Volkenkunde, I see a major Ganesha statue from Java, and every time I wonder why the caption does not mention Indonesia's 1975 claim to it.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* But how does one write a label, in a hundred words, that does justice to the context, in a way that clearly describes the factual aspects of the story, which most people might not understand, because it can get rather complicated, in a way that does not make it seem like you are dismissing the question of repatriation, or like you are apologising for the acquisition of the object? I do think it is an important debate, and it is very public and museums obviously care about the public. The impact of social media has changed this debate since the 1990s. What has changed in provenance research is how easy it is to compare and access other museums and their collections (because of digitization).

*Wim Manuhutu:* This notion of sharing, shared heritage, it is a term that many people like to use and it is often used in policy papers without questioning it, yet it easily gets very complicated. It is part, to this very day, of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, people talk a lot about shared heritage, there are programmes, there is some funding – is that a notion that you can work with, as a professional and as head of curators of this museum?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* That you 'share' a heritage means that the people in both parts of that relationship are entangled. The space of national imagination is permanently inflected by the presence of another country or another part of the world in your history. What that means, and how you then play that out, and the terms on which you wish to engage with that other part of the world in the current day is a completely different matter. But there is no doubt about it that Indonesia is in the imagination of the Dutch nation, in the same way that India (what was India which is now Bangladesh, Pakistan, India) is in the imagination of the British nation. But does that mean that if you both sit at the table that you are equal? That depends which table you are sitting at and when – because that equality can go either way. Just look at the economic power and population of Indonesia. In the modern world, Indonesia has a very important role, so you can't say that it's the same dynamic as in the 1960s.

But if museums across the world can work happily and productively within a funding scheme based on shared heritage, then I say, why not. But I think that's about the nature of engagement, the long-term relationships of trust and dialogue you build up with people that you work with in any collaborative relationship. Those terms that you have in a curatorial relationship, participating, co-creating, et cetera. Institutions will always have different qualities of relationships with different parties, but we need to be clear about what the quality of that relationship is, how sustainable it is, and

people need to have autonomy and sovereignty within that relationship. So that they also have a voice in the public manifestation of the project.

*Wim Manuhutu:* Can the concept of shared heritage also be an obstacle rather than an instrument for the return of heritage – because there are many ways of ‘sharing’?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I would say it’s the Annette Weiner paradox of keeping-while-giving [laughter].<sup>10</sup> There is an element of that, not that she uses it in that way, but it comes back to the issue of what is being transacted and for what reasons. Most moments of ‘sharing’ have been community-based undertakings, which essentially are so temporary that the long-term impacts are potentially limited. In the 1990s there was money, but possibly not sufficient consideration of the ultimate legacy. Community-based projects of repatriation have resulted in a whole literature of case studies, rather than a tradition of sustainable practice.

We have to ask ourselves: ‘how far have we come?’ Each individual has moved, but how far have institutions moved? For us as practitioners, our most important relationships are individual. When you move, your relationships have a tendency to move with you. That is our big conundrum. Our big conundrum is that our deepest relationships are made individually, but our most important *lasting* relationships should be embedded institutionally.

*Jos van Beurden:* That’s exactly what you see in the Benin Dialogue Group. The European side is expanding but there are some permanent people, while at the Nigerian end some representatives have attended all meetings, but many others have been replaced. This has an impact on the negotiations.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* And then we also have to take into account administrative issues, and the fact that we tend to work with people we can connect with... So that all narrows your circle of working relationships. These are all insufficient, practical answers to a moral question. But the reality is also that they are the political answers. And that is a further level of complexity and negotiation. It requires institutional courage to surmount those difficulties and make things sustainable.

Restarting relations again and again can be very discouraging, and I think that repatriation, like a number of things in the museum profession, is about belief. You believe in it, and then you work towards it. But it requires you to continuously recalibrate your strategies, methodologies, practices.

*Jos van Beurden:* Restitution has to do with a belief, with a vision, and an internal political decision.

*Wim Manuhutu:* The restitution of human remains is a particularly delicate and urgent issue, that in some ways paved the way for further debate on the ethics of collecting. Some museums, mostly but not exclusively ethnographic, still have human remains in their collections.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* My experience with this stems from the UK. One of the restrictions in the UK museum field, is the fact that primary legislation essentially disallows national museums to permanently give up anything in their collections. The law had to be changed in order to allow human remains to be removed from museum's collections. This was another instance where politics did matter. In 2000, the British and Australian prime ministers, Tony Blair and John Howard, issued a joint statement pledging to increase repatriation of human remains to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2004, the Human Tissue Act was passed. It included a clause stating that national museums had the power to transfer human remains less than 1,000 years old out of their collections 'if it appears to them to be appropriate to do so'.

In Germany in 2019, all the ministers of culture got together and talked about issues of repatriation, and one of these issues was the return of human remains.<sup>11</sup> Across Europe, there are different relationships with (physical) anthropology, because of the Second World War, and once you break the deadlock on human remains, then you open up a particular series of issues related to ethics and collections. Until a more recent period, these were still seen as 'scientific collections' in Germany. The fact that you have broken that deadlock, means that you break another deadlock. One chink in the armour leads to another. Only then different conversations become possible.

*Jos van Beurden:* I support what you say. The problem with provenance research of human remains can be that the origins of these remains are sometimes unknown. It is painful and embarrassing. We need a dialogue about this with former colonies, and we need to decide together about something like a *lieu de memoir*, maybe more than one, where such remains can be buried. The Tropenmuseum has the intention, instigated fifteen years ago by Susan Legêne, to return human remains, but admits that the origin of some is unknown and that sometimes the countries of origin do not want them.

The most recent repatriation case in the Netherlands concerned Māori and Mori human remains by Museum Vrolijk in Amsterdam to New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> At the pictures of the ceremony, one could see how moving it was, not only for the Maori, but also for the Dutch. That is the positive side of repatriation, it can be strengthening and healing.

Another problem with provenance research is that museums argue that they do not have the money or the personnel. So, even when legal steps are taken, whether or not they are implemented and how really makes a change to the community.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* For the sake of practical argument, given the size of most collections, an institution needs to function regardless of whether they are doing provenance research, you still need to do exhibitions et cetera. So, one of the implications is that a significant proportion of time is dedicated to internal research and community collaboration, whereas the sustainability of a museum is dependent on public function. So, these functions can run in contradictory directions. I think that you need a series of strategic judgements, 'this is what we are going to do and this is how we are going to do it', in order to cope with the load that this implies. Because you can't start from zero and go to 450,000 systematically, that's just not possible.

So, the project that I have in the UK is: how do you historically reconstruct a military campaign and find all of the objects linked to that campaign?<sup>33</sup> That is the rationale of the army, so if you follow that rationale you will find the material that the army collected. You have to make a series of incisive strategic judgements, knowing that it will never be comprehensive, and then work at it systematically. The systematic attention has been lacking so far.

*Jos van Beurden:* The German guidelines also mention prioritization, but they avoid the power question of who then will decide on what the priorities should be?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Well, as chief curator I think you cannot wait until someone decides for you what is important. These priorities are under our management and if someone comes around and says 'Well this is my priority', then we can respond, but we do not need to wait for such requests to be made. This is not an unknown history. There is a documentation trail. So, it is possible to make a series of, not perfect, but strategically-informed, historically-informed judgements about the kinds of things that you want to know about your collections and how they came in. Because you as an institute have a professional responsibility to know these aspects of your collection, and if someone then were to come around and wants to know this as well, you have done your work.

*Wim Manuhutu:* Thanks for bringing up the military. The military is male. How do you take into account gender in this discussion of provenance research and restitution? What role does gender play?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Most histories and most museums are 'male'. Most people that run museums are men, most people that worked in them until the latter part of the twentieth century were male. So it is interesting to consider whether or not there are women in the piece without entertaining an essentialist notion of what gender is. So how the practice of collecting is gendered. One of the aspects is a focus on trophies and triumphalism versus memory and family. We tend to think of museums as canons. How much of what we've got in our institutions is 'domestic decoration', meant to decorate the home, and if we were to think of it in that way, would we like it as much?

The discourse of museums takes out the domesticity of objects. While a many objects, even military objects, are given by women. Women donate to the memorial culture as much as men. In a sense, the memory of the museum has gender in it. Another aspect in which the memory of the museum is gendered, is that often, the people who fabricated the objects were women. Irrespective of what these objects represent, the makers were women. In other parts of the world, the leaders were women as well. By making this a male story, you eradicate a whole field of agency centred on things. If I were to make a donation in the memory of Jos, his name would go down in the history, not mine, even though I am the one giving it.

*Wim Manuhutu:* When in conversation with colleagues in Europe, what is the state of affairs on this debate?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Let me put it like this: when I first started my third wave of research, on indigenous North America, I had a very critical friend, very critical of me, in this context, all the time. That was not an easy process, but I have always thanked her for it. Because it meant that I have never taken a particular set of relationships for granted, which has been enormously helpful to me in my career. One of the things I realised, for example, when I wrote a book about my research, is that I named everybody. Everyone in that research is named, and everyone who is named was consulted. When someone wanted me to take something out, I did. Why did I do that? I did not think that my personal contribution to the field was so stellar, that it required me to contradict someone's personal wishes when they had given me their time, energy and thoughts. The anthropological field does not require you to do that. The museological field does require you to acknowledge your sources and individuals, you cannot professionally go against people's wishes, and that carries a particular kind of responsibility, but I am not sure how widely shared that is.

*Jos van Beurden:* My first major research project was partially about gender, so I have always been concerned with it and have been wondering what it means for the subject of cultural heritage and restitution. And, to be frank, apart from clichés such as that most violent collecting was done by men, I don't know the answer.

You gave the example of women offering gifts to the colonial administration or the military. There are also cases where women were on the forefront of complaining about or protesting against confiscation or destruction of objects by missionaries. Additionally, I think that when considering alternative dispute resolution, which is happening in the Benin Dialogue, you need female characteristics. I wouldn't say that only women can resolve these disputes, but sensitive people are required.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Just to build on that – I think gender plays out in negotiations still. We need to be wise to gender, to the ways in which gender operates in different cultures in order to understand what kinds of conversations you can have and with whom.

*Jos van Beurden:* Most museums are still run by men, with women at a second level. Talking about alternative perspectives and encouraging dialogue: it makes a difference. It was the same with the *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain*, written by the Senegalese academic and writer Felwine Sarr and the French art historian Bénédicte Savoy. You really feel it has been written from both sides. It makes the atmosphere different. Opposed to the framework here, and the German guidelines, these are typically white products.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Except the German guidelines have been reissued and they had a whole series of consultations.



*Jos van Beurden:* Yes, but the report by Sarr and Savoy was a co-production from the start, that sets it apart from many others. It's a different approach.

*Wim Manuhutu:* How do we move forward? Are you hopeful? Or tired, or sceptical?

*Jos van Beurden:* I am a bit sceptical. Everyone is talking about these matters nowadays, but very little happens. Institutions always have more to discuss, like with the Benin objects. Sometimes I'm afraid that we will lose the momentum. Museums have made quite some progress: there are new generations of curators and leaders, younger generations who are less conflicted about these issues. And we have to stay focused on the issue of equality between the different parties, otherwise we are cheating ourselves. At the same time, diaspora groups in several European countries have begun to influence the discussion, sometimes with practical results.

*Wim Manuhutu:* What you are saying is that there is progress, discourse is changing, but you are afraid that a certain political momentum, which is necessary, is fading away, because other trends and interests are becoming more important. What can a museum do to keep the conversation going, to push the conversation forward? And what are its limitations?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* I think that museums need a portfolio of different strategies. I can understand the frustration of people who have been in the field a long time, because: how many times do museums have to be told?! How many different answers do you need to have to get to the point where you say 'I have heard this before'? Bernie Grant (1944 –2000) for example, one of the first Black British MPs, had a very clear mandate around objects from Benin City. When I first walked into the Museum of Mankind in 1993, the question of their contested history and retention was on the table.<sup>14</sup> It's now 2020, and it is still on the table. So, I understand the frustration. At the same time, I have worked in those institutions so I also understand that even if the change is not seismic, it *is* tangible. And I think that it is a generational shift as well as a perceptual shift and a digital shift. There is a difference between the intellectual function that a museum represents and the political context. The big question of restitution and return is how those functions align. Provenance research, in-depth research about objects in museum collections, has massively improved in the last few decades. And we are all the better for it. It creates clear questions, but it also creates an inescapable set of requirements. If you shift from seeing an object as representing something, to thinking it means something as a very complex biography, then what you can do with it by necessity shifts as well. Museums need to prepare themselves for a different type of conclusion. They cannot passively wait in the wings.

Regardless of whether reports are co-productions like the Sarr-Savoy report or guidelines with lots of consultations, those are all strategies for preparation. They create a different kind of tone, a different kind of objective, a different kind of context – and all of those are required to give people the political courage that they will need to

return things. And courage is always bigger when the leap is smaller. It's about setting your course and making sure that you know what you're doing. The museums have to do that and no one should deviate them from course that are engaged in providing accurate and transparent histories of their collections.

*Marleen Reichgelt:* I have an additional question about something you said earlier, Henrietta, about there being a whole literature of case studies but no record of sustainable practice. This is something which I think pertains to archives as well – there is always a next case project or pilot study. How can we move beyond that, and start working towards building sustainable practice of restitution or 'sharing'? What is needed for that, other than courage? International collaboration, involvement of national governments?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* There is a natural affiliation where you've got a 'russian doll' of institutions underneath politics, underneath foreign affairs, underneath culture – European nations find that very, very, easy. Could we get Europe or UNESCO to agree on one strategy? Ideally, yes, but if you're going to wait for that... I guess I am more for a get on with it scenario rather than relying on your state and its friendly relationship with other states scenario. If you believe it, you should just get on with it. That is the lesson: the people who have believed in this issue over time have moved it along. Not the governments, but the individuals. And it has moved along. It's the activists, and the community-based leaders, and particular kinds of curators and particular kinds of funding streams... it's an equation of small gestures.

*Jos van Beurden:* We need strong counterparts. At the moment, there are negotiations going on between Belgium and Rwanda. The Rwandan party is well organised. They are discussing both archives and objects, and also the return of objects from the Africa Museum in Tervuren. It reminds me of New Zealand's repatriation efforts to locate, identify, negotiate and physically return *kāiwi tangata* (Māori skeletal remains) and *kōimi tangata* (Mori skeletal remains) to Aotearoa New Zealand. The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme brings together host communities, national museums, government.<sup>15</sup> Rwanda is doing the same and it's working, while the political situation in Congo makes such a unity impossible.

*Wim Manuhutu:* With (institutional) power comes responsibility. The fact that both the National Museum of World Cultures and the Rijksmuseum are now looking into provenance research and have done projects like 'Words matter'<sup>16</sup> and revisited the museum catalogue is important, because other museums look at those two institutions and will be more prone to follow.

One last question about academia. What role could academics and students play?

*Henrietta Lidchi:* Academic research linked with museum collections presents the best option to resolve these matters; you've got philosophers, legal theorists, people who are good at provenance research in an archive... essentially you need multi-disciplinary understandings of many objects, anthropology, history, spiritual practice. I also think we are approaching a point where we will need to train provenance researchers. Provenance research is a skill that requires a lot of archival ability. It is not just about taking research and shoving it in a museum, but a high-level set of skills, depending on material culture on the one hand and archival studies on the other. I am very enthusiastic about training a new generation of researchers to do this work at a high level. Although it might not be at the moment, it will end up being a theorised practice. If the amount of young and talented people working on provenance research at the moment increases, they will be able to theorise about questions such as the nature of evidence and its role.

*Jos van Beurden:* There could be more cooperation between museums and independent scholars. I can see that there is an interest among young academics in this type of research. Looking at the research report about the kris of Diponegoro, the role of academics is clear and constructive. Another example is the 2018 report of the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart and the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen about the provenance of their colonial collections from Cameroon, Namibia, and the Bismarck Archipelago.<sup>17</sup> Provenance research is a special skill, closer cooperation with academia is good for the sake of control and because there is loads of work to do.

*Henrietta Lidchi:* We hope to get a project started about sorting digitized documentation. Crowd sourcing on the one hand, but also putting databases together, almost making them into visual arguments. Because it is only once you have digitized your database that you know issues of quantity. Or issues of generation of terms. You can start to see things you were not able to see before. It establishes a very different relationship between argument and evidence, and once that is shifted then the potential is that it will not be able to go into the reverse or be static. And I think that is the fundamental change. It may not be the change everybody expected after President Macron stood up in Burkina Faso, but it *is* a massive change.

*Imagining a radical decolonial, intersectional turn* by Sadiah Boonstra

This reaction demonstrates the need to pay greater attention to the notion of power, specifically the notion of 'coloniality of power'. Restitution issues are in essence about inequality, historical injustice and the need to rewrite history. Therefore, it seems that generally speaking the redress that is being sought concerns the question why such objects are in the Netherlands in the first place, even when they were acquired within the legal frameworks of the time. Secondly, although the discussion touched on gender, an intersectional approach should be more broadly applied to matters of restitution.

Especially the notion of race is important to consider in this context. Lastly, the round table posed the question where we are in the twenty-first century. Rather than how much – or how little, if you wish – has been achieved in terms of restitution or provenance research, I would like to pose the question what else can and should be done regarding the repatriation of cultural objects in the twenty-first century?

In connection to this the question was raised why such objects are present in Dutch museum collections. Henrietta Lidchi makes the argument that objects do not circulate in neutral spaces but rather move in political spaces. This applies as much to the countries where museums, collections and objects are currently situated such as in the Netherlands as it does to the countries who ask for the return of objects. From this follows that restitution issues, the provenance of museum collections – especially of those founded as colonial, ethnographic or anthropological museums – and issues of race, gender and colonial history, should be critically assessed within the context of the emergence of museums and collection formation.

The museum developed its main characteristics alongside the emergence of Eurocentrism in the nineteenth century. Alongside universities, museums became major institutions facilitating the development of new sets of knowledge, including archaeology, anthropology, history and art history. The museum and the representation of the colonies through objects drew the outlines of the domain of the colonised lands, the nature of the people it ruled and the history of its power. Crucial in this process was the selection and ordering of objects. Generally, the consequent knowledge building and the separation of Europe from other people and worlds through the process of ‘othering’ resulted from a Eurocentric and colonial worldview. This specific form of colonialism was facilitated by what sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls ‘coloniality of power’, which produced specific social discriminations that were later codified as ‘racial’, ‘ethnic’, ‘anthropological’ or ‘national’.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, writing in the Dutch context Gloria Wekker applies Edward Said’s concept of the cultural archive as ‘a storehouse of “a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference” ... [and,] in Raymond Williams’ seminal phrase, ‘structures of feeling.’ Wekker shows how cultural archives and connected worldviews have deeply influenced processes of collection formation, narratives, and publics in the Netherlands. Crucially, the cultural archive is not something of the past, but continues to be ‘located in many things, in the way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined. [...] [I]ts content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule.’<sup>19</sup>

The same dynamics of coloniality of power are deeply embedded in the heritage concept. Scholar of Heritage and Museum Studies Laurajane Smith argues in *Uses of Heritage* (2006) that what is claimed and labelled as ‘heritage’ results from a negotiation over meanings and values. The creation of ‘heritage’ is a process in which the meaning and value of the past in the present is created and re-created, authorised and re-authorised. This meaning making takes place among different communities over often contested and sensitive political, national, religious, and ethnic identity issues

that are situated in different local, national and global value systems. As a result, what is deemed 'heritage' is ultimately the outcome of power relations.

The notion of '*shared* heritage' then suggests the possibility of a framework which gives space to concerns and accountability of multiple, generally two, parties 'sharing' a certain 'heritage'. However, as Lidchi rightfully points out, 'shared' does not necessarily mean 'equal' but rather indicates an entanglement of interests. In my view, the meaning of 'shared heritage' depends in practice on the power dynamics between museums and their counterparts in countries with which this 'heritage' is 'shared'. It is contingent on the leaders of both parties' commitment to principles of shared authority and power, as well as an openness to actively engage with counterparts. The means of production and management of 'shared heritage' should not remain in the hands of one institution. The concept of 'shared heritage' is only valuable if it is used to create a safe space which generates new histories representing multiple perspectives and voices.

The above shows that the selection of cultural objects as part of heritage collections is not a neutral process. It involves determining which context is more apt for an object. In the discussion, the importance of relationships with counterparts for such processes were emphasised by the panellists. The question here is: who decides what for whom? The conversation between the three panellists focused largely on geo-political relations. However, it is worthwhile to explicitly consider the notion of race in dynamics of restitution. In the context of the negotiation of restitution issues it is pivotal to be acutely aware of the fact that contemporary relationships are inevitably deeply informed by the racial grammar of the cultural archive.

Therefore, it is important also to acknowledge that (the impression of) a colonial positionality and 'cherry picking' is quickly created. 'Cherry picking' refers to the idea that Dutch museums can be selective in what they pick from collections before they return to, for instance, Indonesia, whereas Indonesia then has to deal with the 'leftovers'. This can be connected to the argument made about (Dutch) legal and institutional frameworks that are not always clear and understood by outsiders. While this is understandable, the argument could also be reversed. Counterparts too, are dealing with social, political and legal dynamics and frameworks. It is therefore crucial to include and equally share authority and power over the process of restitution with such counterparts. To achieve this, museums must push themselves to include black, brown, female and queer, voices in provenance research and restitution processes in order to adopt a more intersectional approach. In the context of sharing power and authority in matters of restitution and provenance research we need to ask, moreover: what has been silenced, and made invisible and irrelevant in museum collections as a result of the coloniality of power? To answer that question museums must take a profound decolonial approach and start seeing history from outside the framework of the dominant west, i.e. Western Europe and the US. Museums need an 'outsider' perspective for decolonial thought and meaning.<sup>20</sup>

The roundtable posed the question: where are we now? I wish to expand this question and ask: what should be done? Radical decolonial intersectional museum policies and practices are required to achieve a paradigm shift. Museums must acknowledge the Eurocentric roots of the museum, its coloniality of power and its crucial role in forming the cultural archive. Processes of restitution should be situated in decolonising the cultural archive and with an understanding of the context of objects that once belonged to former colonised peoples. Museums should take responsibility and be accountable for actions taken in the past and their implications and legacies today. Museums should give up some of their authority and power: true repatriation must be unconditional.

Second, a radical decolonial and intersectional position is a prerequisite for dealing with restitution and provenance research. Museums should critically look at the context in which objects were acquired and collected, and the extent to which coloniality of power and notions of race shaped those particular contexts. In other words, museums have to unlearn their own self-made narratives and engage in the task of questioning their dominant worldview and the representation thereof.

Third, the notion of restitution as a belief was discussed during the roundtable. In my view however, restitution goes beyond mere belief. Restitution is not just about decolonising museum collections, but also about decolonising society and the world at large. Therefore, restitution is and should be a profound commitment to equality and historic justice. It requires a radical decolonial stance, and therefore a decolonial conviction and commitment to challenge and reset the cultural archive.

Essential for this is systemic institutional change on all levels. Multi-coloured boards and staff will create space for listening to colonial silences and writing different stories. This diversity will not just be beneficial for the stories a museum will be able to tell but is also important in forging relationships with possible counterparts and partners. This will contribute to more equal collaborations and relationships and provide the much-needed institutional embedding.

To conclude, what we need is a paradigm shift. In general debates about repatriation as well as in the round table discussion to which this writing is a reaction, restitution is implicitly regarded as some sort of loss, as a loss of objects in the first place, but perhaps more importantly, it is about the loss of power. It is necessary to move away from the perspective of a perceived 'crisis'. Every crisis, perceived or real, holds unexplored opportunities. The twenty-first century needs restitution and provenance research to be regarded as an opportunity. These processes hold the prospect of finding new and fresh perspectives on the objects and collections being held in the Netherlands. It is a chance to reassess certain parts of history and to right the wrongs and injustices of the past by rewriting histories and creating new intersectional histories, *herstories* and *theirstories*. It is an opportunity to start new, more equal conversations and relationships with people across the world who live and embody different histories and trajectories. It is the prospect of imagining a different, more equal future.

I notice that there is an intellectual and practical struggle that weaves through this rich conversation: The tireless work done by activists, community stakeholders, and certain museum professionals is obfuscated by, or in conflict with, a deeply entrenched and often violent notion of 'cultural value' that is perpetuated by ethnographic museums. The heart of the struggle is that repatriation debates and processes require that we adjust our notions of what can and does make culture valuable. Although repatriation claims have been made since before the 1960s, it appears that museums (as institutions) still often cannot understand the value of an object outside of its context in the museum. What museums<sup>22</sup> lack then, is a way to *honour*, that is, to value, financially remunerate, and actively seek to understand material culture, its repatriation, and its exhibition, outside of the logic of the ethnographic museum.

Henrietta Lidchi mentioned that the progress that has and is made in terms of repatriation efforts is due to an 'equation of small gestures' by community stakeholders, activists, some funding bodies, and individual curators/museum workers. These small gestures warrant more attention within our museum structure. Unless museums begin (at an institutional level) to value and recognise these small gestures as necessary and desirable labour, the move towards sustainable practice is impossible. Perhaps these gestures continue to be ignored because they do little to stimulate conventional museum 'profitability' – they do not (always) yield public relations opportunities, and they do not per se increase museum visitors. Yet, the ethical issues that the museum wishes to tackle through repatriation and provenance research cannot be adequately addressed *without* this labour.

Although museums often exhibit and perpetuate monolithic, colonial, and European standards of cultural value, it is thrilling and encouraging to see the ongoing resistance to such logic. Some of these moments are large demonstrations that demand attention and have been highly organised. They depend on bonds of cooperation, of a shared understanding of what needs to be done and what has been done wrongly in the past. Some other moments take place 'under the radar': individual visitors quietly and determinedly undermine the notion of cultural value that the museum imposes by interacting with an object in a specific way. I think of the time that I brought my mother to the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. She is not someone who thinks about repatriation, or is heavily involved in community building. She is not even particularly religious, yet when she walked by a case containing Hindu iconography, she made a gesture of obeisance before walking on. Students I have sent on fieldtrips have reported seeing similar acts related to Hindu deities. Such small actions defy the false dichotomies between art object and religious manifestation. They are also blatant examples of how cultural objects operate outside of the logic of the ethnographic museum for many people.

A powerful symbolic act that could lead a break in the struggle could be as straightforward as choosing to honour, rather than acknowledge, renewed ideas of cultural value that relate to community stakeholders and groups' understandings of material culture. To acknowledge is to judge value within an already existing hierarchy that

privileges museum-based notions. It is not unlike the problematic concept of 'inclusion': both acknowledgement and inclusion require that the terms of the conversation are already set, and those arriving to the table must be prepared to think and act in a manner that best serves institutional logic. To honour instead implies a shift in institutional thinking and self-understanding. Without that shift, sustainable practices around repatriation remain just out of reach. On the whole, this conversation reminds us that while we are faced with new urgencies around repatriation policies and claims, they often rearticulate decades-old struggles that institutions still cannot seem to adequately address.

## Notes

- 1 Recent research by NRC proved that only 2.6 per cent of the employees of art museums has a non-western background. See: Lucette ter Borg, 'Nederlandse kunstmusea: diversiteit is beleid, maar de directeur is altijd wit', *NRC*, 17 June 2020.
- 2 The 2018 forum 'Decolonisation and colonial collections. An unresolved conflict', with contributions by Jos van Beurden, Caroline Drieënhuizen, Maarten Couttenier, Ajeng Arainikasih and Hafnidar, already stressed the importance of provenance research, as well as the need for historians to become versed in provenance research. See: Jos van Beurden, 'Decolonisation and colonial collections. An unresolved conflict', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 133 (2018) 2, 66-78.
- 3 This was brought up specifically by Jos van Beurden before and during the conversation.
- 4 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 60.
- 5 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property – 1970', <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1970-convention/> (Accessed 29 March 2020).
- 6 In English, the Dutch colony is referred to as 'Surinam' (or Dutch Guiana), as opposed to the current Republic of Suriname.
- 7 The Kingdom of Kandy was an independent monarchy of the island of Sri Lanka, founded in the late-fifteenth century. It lost its autonomy to the British Empire in 1817.
- 8 Nira Wickramasinghe, 'Producing the Present. History as Heritage in Post-War Patriotic Sri Lanka', *Economic and Political Weekly* 48 (2013) 43, 91-100.
- 9 Yuliasri Perdani and Ardila Syakriah, 'Prince Diponegoro's kris returned ahead of Dutch royal visit', *The Jakarta Post*, 7 March 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/07/prince-diponegoros-kris-returned-ahead-of-dutch-royal-visit.html> (Accessed 15 June 2020).
- 10 Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable possessions. The paradox of keeping-while-giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 11 Kate Brown, 'In a Landmark Resolution, German Culture Ministers Pledge to Lay the Groundwork to Return Colonial-Era Art', *Artnet news*, 14 March 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/germany-declaration-on-restitution-1488250>. Among the key points of the agreement is a call to restitute human remains, which 'do not belong in museums', according to the document.
- 12 Marc van den Broek, 'Menselijke resten Maori terug van Amsterdam naar Nieuw-Zeeland', 25 April 2019, <https://www.amc.nl/web/nieuws-en-verhalen/verhalen/community/menselijke-resten-maori-terug-van-amsterdam-naar-nieuw-zeeland.htm>.



- 13 'Baggage and Belonging. Military Collections and the British Empire, 1750-1900.' <https://www.nms.ac.uk/collections-research/our-research/featured-projects/collecting-practices-of-the-british-army/> (Accessed 4 September 2020).
- 14 The department of Ethnography of the British Museum was called the 'Museum of Mankind' between 1970 and 1997.
- 15 'The Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme', <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/repatriation/karanga-aotearoa-repatriation-programme>. (Accessed 4 September 2020).
- 16 'Woorden doen ertoe. Een Incomplete Gids voor woordkeuze binnen de culturele sector', [https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2018-06/WordsMatter\\_Nederlands.PDF](https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2018-06/WordsMatter_Nederlands.PDF). (Accessed 4 September 2020).
- 17 The project was called *Schwieriges Erbe*. See: 'Schwieriges Erbe', <https://www.lindenmuseum.de/service-menue/presse/schwieriges-erbe/>. (Accessed 4 September 2020).
- 18 Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla. Views from South* 1 (2000) 168-169.
- 19 See: Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.
- 20 R. Vázquez, 'The Museum, Decoloniality and the End of the Contemporary', in: T. Lijster (Ed.), *The Future Of The New – Artistic Innovation In Times Of Social Acceleration* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2019), 185-188 and 191-192.
- 21 My response is located in my positionality as an immigrant woman growing up in an Indian diaspora community. Throughout my life, I have experienced some discomfort with the ways in which South Asian material culture has been displayed and valued across various museum collections. At the same time, it comes from my experience working within an ethnographic museum, as someone who cares for and works with a collection of South Asian material culture. I aim for a tone that is critical and reflective, but not accusatory: I understand my own curatorial practices are embedded in the logic of the ethnographic museum. However, my practice, and my comments here, are part of ongoing work to dismantle this logic in various ways.
- 22 Museums, as well as the government and state structures in which they are embedded.



What do we see when we look at our collective Dutch colonial legacies from a gender perspective? How are these colonial legacies reflected in our museum collections and archives? Do her stories remain hidden and are there unknown biographies to unravel? Or do we reinterpret existing master narratives? Using an intersectional perspective, the volume *A gendered empire. An intersectional perspective on Dutch post/colonial narratives* looks at the current growing Dutch interest in its own colonial legacy from a more critical and self-reflexive stance. The authors bring historical and current examples in the Dutch metropole and colonies together. Collectively they share archival silences, biographical counter-narratives and a museum world grappling with its own colonial legacy, all the while wondering: what has gender got to do with it?