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### Making and unmaking Indonesian Islam

*Legacies of colonialism in museums*

Shatanawi, M.J.

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# **Chapter 1**

Introduction:  
the making and unmaking of Islam in museums



**Fig. 1** Daeng Pabarang's songko, collection National Museum of World Cultures inv. no. RV-3600-6087, and reporting in *Indië: geïllustreerd weekblad voor Nederland en koloniën* (1917).

## 1.1 The durabilities of colonial epistemologies

'Can I have Pakistan back?' It was my first week working as a curator for the Middle Eastern and North African collections at the Tropenmuseum, and my colleague, the curator of South Asia, had asked me a revealing question.<sup>1</sup> Until then, February 2001, Pakistan had been assigned to my predecessor, who oversaw the museum's collections of the Islamic Culture Area (*islamitisch cultuurgebied*).<sup>2</sup> And now it was being asked that the country be 'returned'. 'Will you also take Afghanistan?', I replied, feeling somewhat uncomfortable by this request, and hoping to hit a light tone. 'No, my cultural zone is British India, so Afghanistan belongs to you', was the answer.

That the legacies of colonialism permeated the Tropenmuseum at all levels was not news to me. My first big job at the museum had been to curate an exhibition about the relationship between the Netherlands and Islam (see Shatanawi 2012a; 2012b). I soon learned that in my position as the curator for the Middle Eastern and North African collections, Islam was at the centre of attention. The requests directed to me, both internal and external, often concerned Islam in many of its aspects. Besides, many of the objects collected by my predecessors had a direct connection to the Islamic faith (see Shatanawi 2014). At the same time, and much to my surprise, I discovered that Islam did not feature prominently in relation to the Indonesian collections, which at the Tropenmuseum made up the largest share of the collections. There were several curators for the Indonesian collections at the time, and none had much knowledge of nor interest in Islam.<sup>3</sup> It did not take long before questions about Southeast Asian objects relating to Islam and Muslims were directed to me.

The overall lack of interest in Indonesian Islam at all levels of museum practice (collections, exhibitions, research) left me puzzled, since Indonesia had been the prime colony of the Netherlands. The National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW), of which the Tropenmuseum today forms part, has one of the largest and most prominent collections of art and material culture from Indonesia, most of which was collected during the colonial period.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite this long

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1 Excerpts of this chapter were published in Shatanawi, Macdonald, and Puzon (2021), Shatanawi (2021) and Shatanawi (2022).

2 I started at the Tropenmuseum in 2001, when I was appointed associate curator for the exhibition Urban Islam. In 2004, I was appointed curator of the Middle Eastern and North African collections. I negotiated a change of job title; previously the position was named curator of the Islamic Culture Area, but I found the rubric of Islam too narrow to describe the Middle East and North Africa, the region that was the focus of the position, and too broad because it suggested a larger focus area, including other Muslim-majority regions in Africa and Asia.

3 This changed in 2005 when Pim Westerkamp was appointed curator of the History and Cultures of Southeast Asia.

4 The National Museum of World Cultures (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, abbreviated NMVW) was founded in 2014 as an umbrella organisation that serves the collaboration of a number of ethnographic museums: the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Africa Museum in Berg and Dal and (since 2017) the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam.

history, few objects in the collection have been identified as 'Islamic' and there is no terminology to denote 'Indonesian-Islamic' artistic styles. Equally important, Indonesia was widely known as the country with the largest number of Muslim inhabitants in the world. Moreover, my curatorial career started in February 2001, just seven months before Islam would be propelled to the forefront of public debate, as well as in museum practice.<sup>5</sup> For a curator for the Middle Eastern and North African collections, Islam was the number one topic requested, followed by queries relating to Turkish and Moroccan culture, the countries of origin of the largest Muslim communities in the Netherlands. Yet the events of that time did not seem to have a similar impact on curatorial practice related to Indonesia. Museums in the Netherlands continued to present Indonesia as a country largely devoid of Islam and Muslims. In the Tropenmuseum gallery of Southeast Asian cultures, Islam was relegated to one case displaying a small number of objects. The Rijksmuseum did not even bother to include a single Islamic object from Indonesia in its dedicated Asian Pavilion (Westermann 2015; Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2014).<sup>6</sup> Situations like these kept me wondering: is this simply a matter of colonial amnesia, the act of forgetting colonial histories, or are we witnessing colonial aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge, 'a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things' (Stoler 2011, 125)?

My increasing anxiety about this matter was made productive in a curatorial practice that combined work on the ground with the investigation of the historical practices of collecting and presenting Islam at the Tropenmuseum, resulting in several books and articles (Shatanawi 2014; 2012a; 2009c; Vos 2008). These publications laid the foundation for this study. I also reflected on my own practice in the context of the epistemological legacies of the Tropenmuseum (Shatanawi 2012a; 2012b; 2009a; 2007). I wrote about othering as the museum's core business, because 'it only represents half the globe', enforcing a distinction between 'the West and the rest'. The museum's anthropological outlook, and the emphasis on cultural traits as markers of difference, meant that essentialism was woven into the organizational structure, with a 'compartmentalized world of cultures', each with its own curator and collection. As long as the ethnographic museum functions as a distinct entity, I concluded, I cannot counter curate my way out (Shatanawi 2007). Yet somehow, despite my attempts to write 'against culture' (Abu-Lughod 1991), I did not manage

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5 Publications about museums and Islam commonly start with the observation that after the events of 9/11 and the rise of Islamophobia, museums have shown increased interest in presenting Islamic art and material culture. Across the globe, museums have invested in new galleries, or their existing collection displays have undergone a major overhaul (for a partial list see Shaw 2019a).

6 Another example of the marginal position of Indonesian Islam in Dutch public culture is the publication by Poorthuis and Salemink (2011), *Van harem tot fitna: beeldvorming van de islam in Nederland 1848-2010* ("From Harem to Fitna: Images of Islam in the Netherlands 1848-2010"), a voluminous book of more than 700 pages, promising to be a comprehensive overview of the modern history of the connections between Islam and the Netherlands. In this study, Dutch imperialism and its relationship to Indonesian Islam are reduced to mere footnotes.

to get a grip. I felt a deeper investigation was needed in order to be able to understand the entanglements with the past, and ultimately to undo some of its effects in the present.

In December 2015, I embarked on the journey which produced this thesis as the final result. The overarching question of this study is directed to why and how 'Islam' was collected, categorised and exhibited in museums in the Netherlands, tracing the colonial legacies in today's practice. I use the notion of 'framing' to examine the historical conditions in which Islam was shaped in museums (see section 1.3). The main focus in this study is on collections from colonial Indonesia. However, to be able to investigate the divergent framings of Islam, I also look at the principles that organised Islamic collections from other regions, notably West and Central Asia, North Africa and South Asia. In this respect, the notion of 'Islamic art', which governs representations of Islam in many European museums, draws attention. Islamic art is often defined as 'the visual culture of any society where Muslims were or are dominant', and the category also includes the art made by or for Muslim groups in societies where they constituted minorities, and made by or for religious minorities in Muslim-majority societies (Watenpaugh 2017; Blair and Bloom 2003). Despite departing from the inclusion of 'any society where Muslims were or are dominant', the field of Islamic art history initially focused on the so-called central lands of Islam (and early and medieval Islamic history), expanding over the course of the twentieth century both geographically and temporally.<sup>7</sup> However, with a few exceptions, Indonesia remains outside the category of Islamic art.

The study of Islam has a long history at Dutch universities, dating back to the seventeenth century. Yet, whereas in neighbouring Germany philological and archaeological interest developed into the study of Islamic art (Marchand 2009), this largely failed to materialise in the Netherlands. This deviatory trajectory is partly related to the situatedness of colonial rule in Indonesia, so I argue in this thesis. Contrary to most European countries, in the Netherlands, Islam is mostly represented in ethnographic museums, and like elsewhere in Europe, Indonesian Islam is absent from Asian art galleries (Bloembergen 2021). Islamic art as a category of scholarly and curatorial inquiry has hardly gained any ground (Shatanawi 2014; De Hond 2011). Hence, the principal mode of museum presentation focuses on Islam's sociocultural aspects rather than artistic expressions. This type of representation currently can be found in five ethnographic museums, where objects are usually presented under geographical headings like the 'Middle East' or 'North Africa'.<sup>8</sup> In the Netherlands, the overwhelming majority of objects relating to Islam are found in the museums operating under the umbrella of the National Museum of World Cultures.

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7 These expansions of Islamic art history grouped regions outside the central lands and later periods under the heading of Islamic art; for example, parts of India under Deccani and Mughal rule (1526-1857), and Qajar Iran (1799-1925).

8 Besides the museums operating under the National Museum of World Cultures, this includes the Museon (a popular science museum) in The Hague.

## Decolonising museums

At the peak of European imperialism, the British, Dutch, French and Russian Empires each governed more Muslims than any Muslim-ruled state, including the Ottoman Empire (Motadel 2014). One of the consequences was the large-scale movement of works of art, objects, and even entire architectural structures from the colonized Muslim lands to the European metropolises. The Islamic art collections in France, Britain and Russia were largely formed in colonial contexts, as were the Dutch collections from Muslim Indonesia (Giese, Volait, and Varela Braga 2019; Shatanawi 2014; Vernoit 2000a). Museums in countries without colonies in Muslim regions, such as Germany, also benefited from the steady stream of objects coming out of the colonies (Gierlichs and Hagedorn 2004).<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, the restitution and repatriation of colonial collections have become an area of increasing debate. Remarkably, Islamic art and heritage has thus far remained relatively in the shadows (Shatanawi, Macdonald, and Puzon 2021).<sup>10</sup> Regarding Indonesian heritage in Dutch museums, several steps have been undertaken towards repatriation, notably the publications of *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process* (National Museum of World Cultures 2019) and *Advies Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* (Advice on colonial collections and the recognition of injustice, Raad voor Cultuur 2020). In the past, Indonesia has asked for the return of several items, also from Muslim-majority regions, such as the regalia from the South Sulawesi sultanate of Luwu and objects related to important historical figures, including Pangeran Diponegoro, hero of the Java War (see Van Beurden 2017, 142–43).<sup>11</sup> Recurrent requests were made for the repatriation of Acehnese manuscripts, in particular the looted manuscripts that were in the possession of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and currently are part of the library collections of Leiden University.<sup>12</sup> In chapter 4, I discuss the looting of manuscripts during the Aceh War (see also Witkam 2019).

Decolonisation of museums in the Netherlands goes in many directions, including the repatriation of collections, resisting and rewriting colonial vocabularies, sharing authority with so-called source communities, and reflecting the cultural diversity of Dutch society in the museums where the collections are currently housed.<sup>13</sup> The arrangement of collections of Middle Eastern art and culture, and more broadly of the Islamic world, is a prime example of

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9 This paragraph and the first two lines of the next paragraph were also published in Shatanawi et al. (2021, 8).

10 For example, the report by Sarr and Savoy (2018b) did not involve North Africa, because of the region's different histories of collecting and appreciation, which are, in fact, closely tied up with European imperialism.

11 The whereabouts of the Luwu regalia are unknown. Minutes of the Council of Ministers, 20 August 1976. National Archives / Inventaris van de archieven van de Raad van Ministers [Ministerraad], 1823-1995 2.02.05.02/1930. See also: Brief report on the mission of specialists to Indonesia, 10-22 November 1975. Archive Pieter Pott, jaarverslagen. Archives of the Museum of Ethnology, no inventory number.

12 Various memorandums on the return of cultural objects to Indonesia. National Archives / Inventaris van het archief van het Ministerie van Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk, (1910) 1965 – 1982 2.27.19/4193.

13 A modified version of this paragraph was published in Shatanawi et al. (2021, 9).

how colonial paradigms still live on in museums in the Netherlands, and elsewhere in Europe. As chapter 6 of this thesis explains, the nineteenth-century arrangement of collections broke up Middle Eastern history and heritage into three time periods (pre-Islamic, Islamic, and modern). Each of these time periods was studied in a different disciplinary tradition (archaeology, art history, and ethnology respectively) and the corresponding collections became part of dedicated museums. The taxonomies and conceptions of these collections (including definitions of the 'Islamic') have remained largely unchallenged since the early twentieth century (Graves 2012; Flood 2007). Likewise, artefacts from the ancient Near East remain not only geographically but also epistemically dislocated and detached from the region where they were once excavated (Brusius 2021). Moreover, the different time periods were, and still are, appreciated and appropriated differently; generally, Near Eastern archaeology and Islamic art were valued more, and seen as closer to Europe, than the art and material culture of modern and contemporary Muslims. In addition, colonial concepts did not lead to the appreciation of Islamic art everywhere in Europe, as we see in the case of Indonesia where Dutch colonial conceptions of art disavowed Islam as a source of artistic creation.

This situation is mirrored in the former prime colony of the Netherlands, Indonesia, where museum displays, like in the Netherlands, often continue to reflect colonial ideas and uncritically present colonial sources (Arainikasih and Hafnidar 2018). In addition, museums sometimes present anticolonial positions, without offering alternative conceptions of Indonesian art and culture. As Ajeng Arainikasih and Hafnidar (2018, 106) put it, 'decolonising in the Indonesian context therefore means that museums may present narratives from the local perspective, challenging colonial legacies such as social segregation and deconstructing writing on Indonesian postcolonial official nationalist history, which remains embedded in Indonesian society.' This thesis sets out to provide a contribution in line with their plea to do more in-depth research on the histories of colonial objects.

In Southeast Asia more broadly, a number of museums have extended the field of Islamic art to include Southeast Asian art. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (Muzium Kesenian Islam Malaysia) in Kuala Lumpur opened in 1998, and is privately owned. The Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore has collected Islamic art from West and Central Asia since the 1990s. In 2015, it transformed its West Asia gallery into a gallery dedicated to Islamic art, now including Southeast Asian objects.<sup>14</sup> Both museums start from the stylistic features found in Islamic art from the so-called central lands, such as calligraphy and natural motifs, and prioritise finding similar forms in Southeast Asian arts, rather than emphasising their unique features. A similar connection to global Muslim heritage, at the same time implying a non-controversial definition of the 'Islamic', is made at the Bayt al-Quran and Istiqlal museums in Jakarta (Zilberg 2011).

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14 Noorashikin Zulkifli, Re-presenting Southeast Asian Art as 'Islamic Art'; presentation at the conference *Kampung Kaji to the Holy City: scholarship and stories of the hajj*, Malay Heritage Center (Singapore), 2 March 2019.



In anthropology, attempts to theorize and conceptualize Islam following postcolonial critique date back to the 1970s, resulting in influential concepts such as Talal Asad's Islam-as-a-discursive-tradition (Asad 1986).<sup>15</sup> As Shahab Ahmed (2016, 114) points out, anthropology seemed to be more engaged with the question of definition than other scholarly fields, such as Islamic studies based on historical and textual sources. In the field of Islamic art history, engagement with this overwhelming body of work only seemed to arrive after Ahmed published his critique (2016) on the basic premises of the notion of Islamic art. The rudimentary conceptualisation of Islam in art history, which was rooted in early twentieth-century Western notions of religion, was long taken for granted. Only in the past few years has work appeared that applies postcolonial approaches to Islam to art history (e.g. Shaw 2019b; 2012).

A similar gap exists regarding the study of the representation of Indonesian material culture in museums. Although the colonial context in which the established narrative of Indonesian art and culture emerged has been well-researched, its impact on the collecting and exhibiting of Islamic-period material culture, thus far, has been overlooked. Critical engagement with colonial practices of collecting and display has been the subject of scholarly work since the 1990s. Following seminal works such as Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* (1991) and Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), there has been a steady rise of research on the histories of collecting and exhibiting in the contexts of European imperialism. This includes studies of the relation between colonial collecting and the formation of museological regimes in the context of the Netherlands East Indies (e.g. Drieënhuizen 2012; Ter Keurs 2007a; Bloembergen 2006; Hardiati and Ter Keurs 2005; Schefold and Vermeulen 2002b; Legêne 1998a). Likewise, following the pioneering volume *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850-1950* (Vernoit 2000a), there has been rising interest in the histories of collecting Islamic art and material culture in Europe. These publications often focus on one collector or museum, or they take a national approach, and have in common a descriptive focus (e.g. Dolezalek and Guidetti 2022; Giese, Volait, and Varela Braga 2019; Kadoi and Szántó 2013; Gierlichs and Hagedorn 2004). In these publications Muslim Indonesia has been largely overlooked. With the exception of Aceh (Arainikasih and Hafnidar 2018; A. Bosma 2018; Broos 2010; Stevens 2007; 2005), studies of collecting and exhibitionary practices regarding colonial Indonesia tend to focus on the non-Muslim and pre-Islamic heritage of Indonesia. Thus, even when the individual studies are decidedly critical in outlook, the combined narrative of this total body of work unintentionally replicates the colonial trope of disregarding Islamic heritage. There is, for example, hardly any research done on the collecting of Islamic-period material from Java, and, as far as I know, none that includes an approach from the perspective of Islamic heritage. This thesis partly fills this

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15 For an overview of the history of the debate, see Lukens-Bull (1999) and for a critical review see Schielke (2010) and Ahmad (2016).

gap, as the empirical data unlock detailed histories of Indonesian objects from Muslim-majority regions and the collecting practices which brought them to the Netherlands.

Drawing on the vast body of research on museums, collecting and colonial Indonesia, I bring in Islam as a focal point. Shifting the gaze to Islam, a subject of preoccupation of the Dutch colonial government, will shed new light on the triangle of colonial governance, material culture and museums. Moreover, the intermediate position of Islam – in-between the ‘primitive’ cultures and the ‘high’ civilisations that often were the subject of previous research – adds to analyses of colonial discourses, and the involvement of Indonesian actors. On a theoretical level this thesis contributes to critical engagement with notions of Islamic material culture, in particular the scholarly and curatorial field of Islamic art. Finally, the analysis across museums will contribute to the debate on the role of colonialism in ethnology, art, archaeology and universal museums and the academic disciplines from which they developed. In particular, the position of Islam within the construction of disciplines is explored with an eye on the implications for museological discourses today.

### **Focus of research**

‘Islam’ is a contested term. In the field of museums and heritage, such contestations principally take place around the question of whether a separation can be made between culture and religion, and whether Islam is characterised by singularity and uniformity or by difference and diversity (Shatanawi, Macdonald, and Puzon 2021; Jouili 2019; Ahmed 2016). For the purposes of this study, I have chosen not to opt for a particular definition of ‘Islam’, but rather investigate the divergent meanings given to Islam in settings of museum collecting, classification and display. This means that I explore the notion of the ‘Islamic’ from a wide angle, including all kinds of objects made or used by Muslims in these various regions and time periods, as well as objects produced under Muslim rule. Such a broad perspective makes it possible to investigate in detail how objects generate multiple meanings as they move through different regimes of value (Appadurai 1986), and if and how these meanings relate to the origin and nature of the object. Looking at objects through the lens of Islam inevitably means invoking a particular frame, yet the objects of this study are not confined to any one frame, be it ‘Islamic’ or ‘colonial’, as I will emphasise throughout.

In studying the framings of Islam, and following Clifford (1997), this study takes the museum, first of all, as a contact zone, a staging area for negotiation, in this case between colonial perceptions and Indonesian cultural expressions. This contact zone extends to the sites from which museum objects were extracted. Through close reading of the objects themselves as well as the study of their biographies using archival sources, I investigate the various meanings attached to the objects by their Indonesian makers and users and their re-appropriation in the hands of collectors and museum staff. The central question is how ideas of the ‘Islamic’ are expressed

in and mediated through the object, and then framed in practices of museum collecting and interpretation. Given the involvement of the large community of mixed Indo-European descent in these practices, such interactions were often cross-cultural in more than one way. Drawing on the work of Talal Asad (2003; 1993; 1986), this study sets out to explore the meanings that can be derived from the objects when they are understood as zones of connection between different cultural, historical and political forces. Asad, borrowing from Foucault, sees Islam as a discursive tradition, a set of discourses embodied in Muslim practices that address themselves to conceptions of an Islamic past and future (1986, 14). Central to Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition is the question of power, particularly with regard to the production of knowledge. Looking at Islamic artefacts as sources of knowledge, which are produced within certain power relationships, as Asad's approach implies, fits in with Clifford's focus on the museum collection as a site for 'a power-charged set of exchanges' (1997, 192) of ideas between individuals and groups of people. A 'radical inequality' (Pratt 1992, 8) is implied because of the ambiguous relationships between colonial discourse and Muslim knowledge.

The second angle that will be explored is the museum as a contact zone for two academic narratives about the role of Islam in the Muslim world's arts and material culture. In order to do so, I will go back to the original use of the term 'contact zone' by Mary Louise Pratt as 'the space of imperial encounters ... where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect' (Pratt 1992, 8). The formulation of a Western canon of Indonesian art and the emergence of the field of Islamic art simultaneously took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the two academic fields were geographically separated – Indonesian art history being dominated by Dutch scholarship, while Islamic art primarily was studied and collected in other European countries and the US – they had a number of theories and conceptions in common, which framed their outlook on Islam. An example of such a shared concept is the notion of cultural zones (*Kulturkreise*), which influenced museum framings of Islamic material culture in the domain of ethnology as well as art history.

The starting point of this study is objects from the majority Muslim regions of colonial Indonesia, especially Java, Sumatra and South Sulawesi, that were removed from Indonesia between 1800 and 1949 and are now part of museum collections in the Netherlands. The objects fit a variety of current and historical definitions of the 'Islamic', including those deployed in the domains of anthropology and art history. The objects are, for instance, associated with the Muslim faith or they fit the aesthetic and historical criteria of Islamic art.<sup>16</sup> The broadest definition of the Islamic defines Islam as a cultural and civilizational zone. Islam is then explained in the sense of 'Islamicate cultures', a term coined by the American historian Marshall Hodgson

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16 In the field of Islamic art history, the boundaries between arts and crafts are subject to debate, on the basis that the distinction is grounded in Eurocentric norms (Milwright 2017, 8–9).

(1974). Hodgson's (often-criticized) model differentiates between Islam, defined as the religion proper, and Islamicate, by which he meant the cultural layers of the regions ruled by Muslims, which are influenced by Islam but not necessarily religious in themselves.<sup>17</sup> In the context of the museum, this translates into all objects that were produced or used by Muslims, in a Muslim-majority area, or under Muslim rule. The total number of objects from Islamicate cultures in museums in the Netherlands ranges between 130,000 and 150,000 objects, the vast majority of which are located in the NMVW collections.<sup>18</sup> Studying this large body of objects allows me to discover the instances in which museums invoked the frame of the Islamic, when they did not, and when they did, which framings they deployed, and why. Thus, in this way it will be possible to uncover where and when absences and presences of Islam are located.

In this thesis, I argue that the occlusion, the state of being hidden, of histories of Dutch imperialism with Islam is possible due to the continued presence of colonial ideas about Islam, with a focus on Indonesian Islam. My premise is that such occlusions occur in fields and subjects in which Islam was occluded during the colonial period, such as art history, ethnology and material culture, and, in fact, that we are dealing with durabilities of imperial epistemologies. Building on the work of Ann Laura Stoler (2016), I use the term durability to describe how colonial thought can become stabilized in the practices of museum collecting, classification and display. Stoler explores the notions of durability and duress to examine the capacity of colonial or imperial ideas to endure and take on new forms in the present. Three principal features of colonial histories of the present, she writes, are 'the hardened, tenacious qualities of colonial effects; their extended protracted temporalities; and, not least, their durable, if sometimes intangible constraints and confinements' (2016, 7). She analyses the ensuing duress as a condition, 'a relationship of actualized and anticipated violence' that does not end with the formal closure of imperial rule (2016, 8).

Stoler's arguments seek to address the 'colonial presence', the ramifications of colonialism that continue to shape the present conditions of people's lives (2016, 25; 33). In line with this, the aim of this study is to look at the discursive mechanisms, produced under Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, that induce particular perceptions of Islam in museums today. Which lexicons and categorisations did colonialism employ? Under which circumstances was Islam seen

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17 For a contestation of Hodgson's model, see Ahmed (2016).

18 The exact number is impossible to determine, given the lack of data about the geographical origins of objects in many museums. My calculation takes the collections of the National Museum of World Cultures (as well as the Wereldmuseum) as a starting point: it includes approximately 70,000 objects from Muslim Indonesia and 24,000 from West and Central Asia and North Africa. Add to this around 20,000 objects (rough estimate) from other Muslim majority regions, for instance in East and West Africa and South Asia. Museon has approximately 9,000 objects from Islamicate cultures and Museum Bronbeek has 10,000 objects from Indonesia that cannot be accessed by geographical region, but predominantly originate from Java and Sumatra. Numbers in other museums are considerably smaller, and in most cases, the exact number is unknown.

and acknowledged and by whom? And, under which circumstances was Islam obscured or ignored, and why? What is the 'colonial presence' of museum representations of Islam in the Netherlands? This study examines these questions through a detailed examination of colonial practices of collecting, classifying and representation, with the eventual goal of uncovering how imperial ideologies became materially durable in museums, and continue to affect Muslim communities today. By studying the effects of these practices on museum memory, I explore why and how gaps and emphases are made and in what ways they, in turn, have clouded the memory of Islam in museums.

A special focus in this study is linked to the almost total absence of Indonesia in the narrative of Islamic art history. In most European countries, Islam is chiefly presented in museums through Islamic art, a category of art that was created by European art historians around the turn of the twentieth century, grouping together objects from Central and West Asia and North Africa on the basis of stylistic similarities. Major Islamic art collections can be found in museums across the continent (for an overview see Ådahl and Ahlund 2000). In the Netherlands, the category has been deployed by several museums, including the Rijksmuseum, Kunstmuseum Den Haag and Wereldmuseum. Until today, virtually all European presentations of Islamic art exclude Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> Just like 'Islam' is neglected as a category for Indonesian objects in museums in the Netherlands, Indonesia is ignored in most survey books, exhibitions and museum collections of Islamic art and architecture (Bloembergen 2021; Formichi 2016). Both ethnology and Islamic art emerged as fields of enquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when European scholars and museums started to study the artefacts that were extracted from Muslim regions. To what extent, and in which ways, can the exclusion of Indonesia from the field of Islamic art and material culture be traced back to this period of formation?

This research project, thus, fits within a wider trend of critical engagement with the notion of Islamic art. In recent years, a number of publications have been dedicated to rethink the concept of Islamic art (Shaw 2019b; 2012; Ahmed 2016; Necipoğlu 2012; Junod et al. 2012). Subsequently, a number of museums have renamed their Islamic galleries (e.g. Metropolitan Museum of Art in the US, Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum in the UK). Yet despite the renewed interest in exhibitions, research on how Islam is transmitted, displayed and framed through museum representations remains relatively scarce (e.g. M. Berg and Grinell 2021; Guidi 2021). This is remarkable considering the interest of critical museology in issues of social justice, and the focus on museums as spaces to counter prejudice and to confront racial discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

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19 An exception is the *Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World*, which opened in 2018 at the British Museum (see Porter and Greenwood 2020). Not coincidentally, this gallery was sponsored by the Malaysia-based Albukhary Foundation that founded the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

20 A modified version of this paragraph was published in Shatanawi et al. (2021, 12).

## 1.2 The museum as research site

I started this research project in December 2015, working as a curator for the National Museum of World Cultures, while having received a grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to conduct one year of full-time research. Working in a museum shapes your identity in such a way that you become a 'museum person'. Doing research as a member of the museum community has a number of advantages, in my case exemplified by full access to the research material, assuring a free flow of information, as well as a great familiarity with the archive and the organisation. It also comes with certain ethical implications and challenges. In my situation these were largely related to positionality. In classical social science theory, researcher position was conceived within a binary model of insiders and outsiders, a model which has long been criticized and nuanced (Narayan 1993; Abu-Lughod 1991). When I left my job at the museum in 2018 and my position formally changed from insider to outsider, I often felt rather a 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod 1991), being both inside and outside the community at the same time. My halfie position influenced the data I collected. From 2018, my position was that of a research affiliate, and being so, I had the capacity to make changes to the museum database. This meant that I could add the data I collected to the collection system of the National Museum of World Cultures. So, as part of my research, I wrote collector and curator biographies as well as object descriptions, linked people to objects, and objects to archival sources and exhibitions. I found new connections between people and objects and made these visible in the system. I researched the provenance of large scores of objects and entered the results. I enhanced the cataloguing when I corrected mistakes, for example when I found thousands of objects originating from Java, Sulawesi and Sumatra that were not registered as such. By doing so, I ensured that the data from my research are publicly accessible and retrievable. I also insisted on this working method for another reason; having been inside the museum for eighteen years, I noticed that information resulting from academic research is often not processed in the organisation. For my findings to make some impact on decolonisation processes, my research data needed to enter the core of the museum: the collection system. At the same time, I am aware that I was not only studying the archive, but also *creating* and *co-constructing* the archive. At times, this meant that personal implication, in the sense of simultaneously being the researcher and object of research, was unavoidable. This is the case with the research sample I collected from Indonesian objects that are currently and historically classified as Islamic in the collection system (see chapter 2). Between 2001 and 2018, the identification of these objects, and their classification as 'Islamic', happened under the supervision of Pim Westerkamp and myself.<sup>21</sup> In chapter 7, I discuss and problematize these practices of classification, including my own.

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21 Willem (Pim) Westerkamp works as curator of Southeast Asia, first at Museum Nusantara, from 2005 at the Tropenmuseum and National Museum of World Cultures.

The main research site of this study is the collection system of the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW), which comprises the archives of several museums and collections. Besides the NMVW, research involved other museums that have (or had) Islamic objects: the Rijksmuseum, Museum Bronbeek, Museon and the National Museum of Antiquities (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden). Researching a broad range of museums allowed me to follow epistemological formations as they developed across different institutions. The different histories and organisational emphases have resulted in unevenness in the archives today. The Tropenmuseum, for example, has excellent archival records of exhibitions, whereas exhibition archives are mostly lacking at the Museum of Ethnology and the Rijksmuseum, due to the stricter focus on objects. Conversely, the latter museums have better preserved archival records relating to object acquisition, which, in the case of the Tropenmuseum's predecessors are more often missing, dispersed or have been destroyed. The resulting gaps and disparities have left traces in the chapters of this thesis, which rely sometimes more heavily on one archive than on another.

In the period of colonial rule, the museums in the Netherlands were part of an imperial space, which they shared with museums in Indonesia, such as that of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (*Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*). Frequent exchanges of knowledge and objects between museums in the various locations of the imperial space occurred. Despite the fluency of boundaries, the scope of this thesis is limited to museums in the Netherlands. Museums in colonial Indonesia had a slightly different dynamic, partly evolving out of the more direct involvement of Indonesian actors. More importantly, the trajectories they followed after independence were different, which leads to dissimilarities in the durabilities to the present (Arainikasih and Hafnidar 2018). A comparison of the role of Islam in museums in the Netherlands and Indonesia could be an interesting line of follow-up research. In this thesis, I focus on curatorial framings of Islam through exhibitions. Another line of follow-up could be the apprehension of these framings and the creation of new ones by museum audiences, especially during the colonial period.

The methodology I deployed was inspired by the principles of archival ethnography, which approaches the archive as a site of fieldwork (Decker and McKinlay 2020; Stoler 2009). Just as an ethnographer spends lengthy periods of time at the field, I spent several hours a day, during years of research, immersed at my site of fieldwork: the collection system. I approached the object records as 'interlocutors', which by their historical nature are no longer accessible to direct observation, but would give me access to elements of the worldview of the people who created, collected and interpreted the objects. Inspired by the work of Ann Stoler, I set out to read the museum archive 'along the grain'. I went through countless records 'to explore the grain with care and read along it first' (2009, 50) and to see where the flow of the archive would bring me. Accordingly, I focused on the small archival events that reveal 'moments that disrupt (if only

provisionally) a field of force, that challenge (if only slightly) what can be said and done, that question (if only quietly) “epistemic warrant”, that realign the certainties of the probable more than they mark wholesale reversals of direction’ (2009, 51).

At the same time, I moved in the completely opposite direction by scrutinizing the archive for patterns related to acquisition, provenance, classification and interpretation. For instance, I looked for patterns in the relationships between the type of object and the type of collector; were particular types of objects brought to the museums by people with a particular type of profile? Another example of such a pattern is the relationship between type of object and period of acquisition; when did particular types of objects enter the museum collection and which changes occurred over time? Searching for patterns allowed me to tease out particular narratives of colonialism from the archive, such as the changes in collecting over the course of the Aceh War. Through the interrogation of the archive in two directions, I was able to trace some of the large events of colonialism in the collection but also to find out what was not being said, thus, to locate the silences and absences.

### **Approaching objects**

This thesis takes a biographical approach to objects, drawing on work on the social life of things, a concept made popular through the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. A biographical approach means to ‘follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories’ (1986, 5). Appadurai (1986, 5) argues that ‘it is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things ... Even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context’. Looking at objects as having life histories that can be recorded as biographies, just like those of human beings, as Igor Kopytoff (1986) has suggested, is a particularly fruitful method in the museum context (Alberti 2005). One reason is the central place provenance occupies in museum work, another is the informative nature ‘of what we can learn from the lives of the most common of specimens’ (Alberti 2005, 560). Thus, objects appearing to be trivial or mundane and having little scientific or aesthetic value, may reveal a wealth of information when approached from a biographical angle.

Following Appadurai’s 1986 publication the biographical approach to objects has been employed in different fields, ranging from the history of medicine to archaeology. In the field of the anthropology of Islam, it has been widely used to study contemporary popular culture, such as Somali toothbrushes (Laird et al. 2015), “I love Islam” bumper stickers, posters, and other objects in Washington DC (D’Alisera 2001), and religious paraphernalia in Cairo’s markets (Starrett 1995). Less frequent is its application to Islamic works of art and architectural buildings, although recent examples are indicative of a growing interest in this direction. These include



Marie-Jeanne Berger's analysis (2017) of the negotiation and construction of object value at Cairo's Islamic Art Museum and Nina Macaraig's study (2019) of the Çemberlitaş Hamamı in Istanbul, while Elisabeth Lambourn (2018) departs from a single merchant's list of baggage to explore the medieval Indian Ocean trade. Even rarer is the biographic study of objects as a method to tease out histories of image-making related to Islam or Muslims. Yet as Alberti (2005) has argued, the biographical approach to objects is a particularly useful method to study the history of science. In this thesis, I am above all interested in the relationship between objects and public and scientific knowledge about Islam and Muslims. Objects from Muslim regions became part of different museum collections covering different fields of scholarship, such as archaeology, natural history, ethnology and art history.

The biographical approach to museum objects generally distinguishes three stages in the life cycle of objects. The first stage is when production takes place; the procurement of raw materials, the design and manufacture of the artefact. This is followed by consumption; it is used, gifted or sold or otherwise circulated and finally discarded. The third stage is the 'afterlife', the (usually final) stage of musealisation; once in the museum, the artefact is catalogued, described, put into storage, displayed or otherwise presented. Only in rare instances will I follow the objects that are the protagonists in this thesis through their entire life cycle. In a few chapters the focus is on the moments when objects are taken out of their context of original use and ownership shifts from Indonesian to Dutch hands. In other chapters the main emphasis is on the afterlives, when the objects are musealised and subject to processes of meaning-making in diverging contexts. The heart of the study will be the moments when 'things are in motion', as they transfer from the maker or user into the collection or when objects move from one collection to the other, in line with Appadurai's argument (1986, 4) that things move through different 'regimes of value in space and time'.

Obviously, taking the museum archive as a point of departure means engaging with perspectives that are largely European-made. As we will see, the majority (but not all) of those collecting and curating for the museums had European ancestry. The collections were shaped within the political, societal and legal framework of Dutch colonialism. Previous research has argued that through the presence of the objects in museums in the Netherlands the populations of colonial Indonesia are also present, but 'only as silent witnesses' (e.g. Drieënhuizen 2012, 7). It is certainly true that in the accounts of those collecting in colonial Indonesia the makers of the objects are only present in the background. Their names have rarely been documented. The same is valid for the thousands of Indonesians who contributed to the collections as informants, or by searching for objects 'in the field'. Through the act of collecting, objects as well as their makers were appropriated and given new meanings in the form of adding scientific or other descriptions (or, by omitting any description at all). Approaching the archive from this angle runs the risk, as Ann Stoler points out, of only looking for structure with the colonizers, and

locating human agency with the colonized in 'small gestures of refusal and silence' (2009, 47). Indeed, I have encountered such gestures of resistance, both small and large, throughout my investigation of the archive. Yet, I argue for a broader approach by not only locating agency in people, but also in the objects themselves.<sup>22</sup>

In the acts of collecting and interpreting, people 'make' objects by creating meaning. And, inversely, objects make people as much as they are made by people (Geismar 2018, 19). According to Janet Hoskins (2006), objects are made to act upon the world and on other persons; that is the main reason why they are created. Therefore, objects do indeed 'possess an innate agency given to them by humans that allows them to affect change' (Hoskins 2006, 75). Drawing on these ideas, throughout this study I not only examine how the actions of makers, collectors and museum curators shaped the Islamic in objects, but also, the other way around, how the Islamic in objects shaped the people dealing with them. In doing so, I show how, at times, the agency of objects has challenged and disturbed the colonial order of things. Islamic objects, because of their in-between nature, continually undermined attempts of the museum to order, classify and draw disciplinary boundaries, and they continue to do so.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term 'in-betweenness', a concept developed by anthropologist Tim Ingold (2015), to describe the position of Islamic objects in the museum. In-betweenness, so Ingold postulates, has no fixed location; it is midstream, 'an interstitial differentiation' (2015, 147), or as Paul Basu (2017, 8) suggests, 'a middle space, a contact zone, a borderland.' Museum objects are in-between in the sense that they are all 'entanglements of ongoing social, spatial, temporal and material trajectories and relationships, dislocations and relocations' (Basu 2017, 2). To look at things as 'in-between' is to understand them as being transitive and in motion.

In addition to looking through the lens of in-betweenness, theories of transculturality and transculturation can also be applied to these objects. The concept of transculturation, the convergence of cultures, was originally defined by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s and elaborated in the 1990s within postcolonial theory by scholars like Mary Louise Pratt. She recounts how ethnographers have developed the notion of transculturation to describe 'processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant metropolitan culture' (Pratt 1991, 36). While acknowledging that the notion in this meaning has sometimes been criticized for putting an emphasis on the dominant cultural group, that is Europe, and marginalizing indigenous perspectives (Knickerbocker and Truong 2017), I am using the term in another definition, developed by the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, who puts less emphasis on (un)equal power relations and stresses the internal complexities and constant variations in cultural expressions. Welsch (1999) recognizes

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22 Regarding colonial Indonesia, such an approach is also taken to objects (Drieënhuizen 2018a) and heritage sites (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020).

that cultures are inseparably linked with one another, to a degree that one can no longer speak about separate cultures:

It's just that now the differences no longer come about through a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures (like in a mosaic), but result between transcultural networks, which have some things in common while differing in others, showing overlaps and distinctions at the same time. The mechanics of differentiation has become more complex, but it has also become genuinely cultural for the very first time, no longer complying with geographical or national stipulations, but following pure cultural interchange processes. (Welsch 1999, 203)

Looking at the world through the lens of transculturality means leaving the notion of cultures as homogeneous, self-contained entities, emphasizing instead how culture transgresses borders, overlaps, and intermingles (Jurić Pahor 2017).

### **1.3 Frames and framings**

In examining the acts of collecting, interpreting, categorising and presenting Islam at the museum, I deploy the notion of 'framing'. The concepts of frames and framing are most widely recognized for their application to media and communication studies, where they generally refer to 'the structures of expectations that enable individuals to construct meanings and viewpoints about their environments, along with the related process of foregrounding particular structures over others' (McNamee 2017, 1). This understanding of frames, following Goffman (1974), often envisions framing as a process of co-creation in which frames shift and are continually shaped in social interaction. In other words, frames are not just located in the media that communicate, but also within 'receivers, and cultures and therefore are subject to different interpretations' (McNamee 2017, 2). Judith Butler (2016) points out that framing relates to what is silenced, restricted, or available for apprehension, not only to modes of interpretation.

Frames and framing are also frequently deployed in research on museums, when museums are seen as producers of public knowledge and sites of informal consumption of knowledge. It is not surprising, considering the high prominence of Islam in media discourses, that there is also a considerable body of recent work referring to the concept of framing to discuss contemporary presentations of Islam in museums, especially in relation to exhibitions and other types of display (for a partial list of these publications, see Macdonald et al. 2021, 202). Although they often lack a theoretical elaboration of framing, these publications use the notion of frames 'to draw attention to the contexts or narratives within which Islam is presented' and 'to refer to many ways in which knowledge or expectations are structured' (Macdonald et al. 2021, 202). Valerie Gonzalez (2018, 5), for instance, speaks of the discursive framing of Islam as

aesthetic-phenomenological, whereas Klas Grinell, Magnus Berg and Göran Larsson (2019) argue that including the word Islam in exhibition titles means invoking different frames with different publics.

In this study I draw on the work of Judith Butler (2016) to look at the framing of Islam in museums in the Netherlands. Butler's conceptualisation of framing draws attention to the societal implications, and has a wider applicability than the media with which it is primarily concerned. According to Butler, framing is a performative act:

The frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality [...]. Although framing cannot always contain what it seeks to make visible or readable, it remains structured by the aim of instrumentalizing certain versions of reality. This means that the frame is always throwing something away, always keeping something out, always de-realising and de-legitimising alternative versions of reality, discarding negatives of the official version. (Butler 2016, 14)

The framing of Islam in museums need not necessarily be instrumental or instrumentalized (Macdonald et al. 2021). Indeed, framings can also be inadvertent and collateral rather than intentional (2021, 203). This aligns with Butler's argument that 'the frame does not quite contain what it conveys' because it 'depends upon the conditions of reproducibility to succeed' (2016, 34).

Colonialism inevitably involved a process of crafting images, and of 'selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality' (Butler 2016, 14). The subjects of Dutch colonialism, in this case Indonesian Muslims, were framed and presented in particular ways. Museums circulated (and continue to circulate) such framings in their capacities as institutions communicating colonial knowledge, next to their functioning as producers of colonial knowledge. In the museal chain of knowledge production, frames were produced and enforced, enacting and legitimising certain versions of reality, while keeping other versions away. Thus, by studying frames as they 'organise visual experience' and 'generate specific ontologies of the subject' (Butler 2016, 29), we can find out what is emphasised and de-emphasised, and what is remembered and what is silenced. Evidently, colonial frames were not set in stone. Like any frame they were prone to change, as they were shaped by different actors, who in the process fortified or changed existing frames or invoked new ones. Moreover, multiple frames can exist simultaneously, and they might overlap and reinforce each other or operate in tension: frames can collide or they may contradict other frames. Indeed, as we will see throughout this study, in the museums of the Netherlands there were multiple framings of Islam, deployed by different agents, and they shifted over time.

## Making and unmaking heritage

Framing and the selective production of what counts as reality, entails the making of memory. The notions of memory and heritage are interwoven. If memory consists of 'acts of recounting or remembering experienced events', then heritage cannot exist without memory and memory work (Sather-Wagstaff 2015, 191). Museum anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (2013, 6) uses the term 'memory complex' to designate the 'assemblage of practices, affects and physical things' involved in making memory. To think of artefacts held in museums as part of a memory complex allows us to get a fuller picture of the emergence of frames and framings. The memory complex of Dutch imperialism in Indonesia, in the period of colonial rule, that is, consisted not only of museal collections and displays, but also of the popular press, works of art and literature, mass-circulating photographs and films, antique shops and auction houses, private collections, academic publications, and official state-sanctioned commemorations. Moreover, this memory complex was situated in a wider 'imperial space'. The act of making memory through museum objects formed networks between people and institutions in different locations; between the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia and between the people of different positions in these places (Drieënhuizen 2012; Legêne 1998a). The networked notion of empire emphasises the movement of people, ideas and objects between the metropole and the colonies and beyond to other places (Lambert and Lester 2006). Thus, memory work not only took place in this imperial space, it also created and shaped this space. While the motivations of individuals to contribute objects to museums may have been personal, on many occasions museum directors and curators did position the objects coming from the colonies in the context of colonialism, for instance when they described collections as important for the mapping of populations, thus facilitating colonial rule.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the networks surrounding heritage shaped Dutch imperialism, the colony itself and the Dutch nation as an imperial power (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020; Drieënhuizen 2012; Bloembergen 2006; Legêne 1998a).

Today's memory work is equally engaged with current societal needs. Critical heritage studies defines heritage, including museum collections, as intrinsically linked to the present. Heritage is 'a set of attitudes to, and relationships with, the past', and 'a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present' (Harrison 2013, 14; Smith 2006, 44). The definition of heritage as present past-making ties in with Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition (1986) and Shahab Ahmed's conceptualisation of Islam as a process of meaning-making (2016). 'An Islamic discursive tradition', Asad (1986, 14) writes, 'is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.' Similarly, according to Ahmed, Islam takes shape through the present engagement

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23 See, for instance, the remark of the committee advising on the future of the Leiden Museum of Ethnology (Boeser et al. 1903, 57; 63). For other examples, see Bosma (2018).

with meanings that have been historically generated. In these approaches, heritage is a quality that is continually negotiated, rather than intrinsic to things. As such, it has only temporary status and objects of heritage require constant re-evaluation and testing by social practices, needs and desires, in order to remain to be seen as heritage (Harrison 2010, 26). Both heritage and the Islamic are therefore qualities that arrive through active processes of meaning-making rather than being based on intrinsic values; this implies that both can be made and unmade.

In my research I have encountered the making and unmaking of heritage – by museums and in museums – on multiple occasions. The making of heritage is closely related to moments of collecting; when objects are collected, ‘in the field’ or otherwise, and become part of private or public collections, they are turned into heritage. As the museological literature discusses in detail, acts of selection are central to processes of meaning-making in museums (e.g. Pearce 1994). Evidently, objects could have meaning as heritage before they were musealised. This is, for example, the case with the Southeast Asian category of *pusaka* objects, heirlooms that owe their special status to the connection to ancestors, and frequently form part of family collections (Kreps 2007; Trigangga, Sukati, and Ismail 2006; Soebadio 1992). Another moment of heritage-making is when objects enter museum collections, and thus become part of the heritage of, for instance, national or regional importance. Yet when heritage is defined as an active process of meaning-making *in the present*, if it is ‘past-presencing’ (Macdonald 2013), this implies that objects do not necessarily remain heritage once they are situated in the museum. The object is heritage at moments of motion, for example when it enters the collection, and when it is exhibited, studied or published. Yet it can also be deheritagised when it is no longer used, when it is ‘buried’ in storage, and has lost its meaning for the present (Brusius and Singh 2018). Indeed, many of the objects I studied sank into oblivion after their entrance into museum collections, and were, perhaps, only reheritagised through this research project.

Take the example of the *songko* (headgear) of Sulawesi resistance leader Daeng Pabarang, which is briefly discussed in chapter 4 (Fig. 1).<sup>24</sup> The headgear was made into military heritage in 1907, when officer of the Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) Herman Kooij (1868-1950) captured it as a trophy and added it to his personal collection, and again, in 1938, when Kooij donated the *songko* to the Royal Military Academy (KMA) in Breda. Like so many objects, it was quite famous in its afterlife as a trophy object. The *songko* even became the subject of an article in the popular press (Van der Lijke-Prins 1917), as well as featuring in the youth novel *De gouden kris* (The golden keris, 1908) by Kooij’s wife Marie van Zeggelen, but was forgotten in its postcolonial musealised life. In museum representation the link to Daeng Pabarang was lost, thereby severing the connection with colonial violence and the resistance to it. Likewise, the ‘Islamic’ of the *songko* was made and unmade during its lifecycle. Daeng Pabarang, so the article

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24 Headgear (*songko*), Boni, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Collection National Museum of World Cultures inv. no. RV-3600-6087. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/776594>

mockingly writes, 'pretended to be a messenger of God' (Van der Lijke-Prins 1917, 297). Yet the message, subtly woven into the *songko* by its maker and invoking God eighteen times with the words *ya Allah*, was overlooked by Kooij as well as the curators of the successive museums that held the headgear. Moreover, the Dutch authorities attempted to defuse Daeng's appeal by dismissing his religiosity. In 1908, Daeng Pabarang was still on the loose, and the governor of Sulawesi, H.N.A. (Henri) Swart (1863-1946), signalled to a local news agency:

Daeng Pabarang and his followers are not Mohamedans; they confess to a teaching that is, for a minor part, of Hindu origin, but which is mostly the product of their own fantasy. They completely reject the tenets and pillars of Islam. It is precisely the small religious foundation and the pure egoistic materialism of their teachings that brings them much support. (*Algemeen Handelsblad* 1908)

The *songko* followed a pattern that I have encountered in many variations: the transformation from spiritual heritage into trophy object into ethnographic sample; the erasure of colonial violence and resistance from memory, and the making and unmaking of the Islamic in this process - often through contestations of its authenticity. As the examples in this thesis show, in some instances, the unmaking of the Islamic in museums was intentional and meant to disable the powers ascribed to the object. In other instances, it was inadvertent, and the result of framings of which Islam was not, or barely, the focal point, such as the conceptions of religion and art in Dutch museums, which are the subject of chapters 7 and 8.

Another aspect of heritage-making considered in this thesis is heritage as an act of crafting and articulating identities in museums, which is intrinsically tied up with processes of inclusion and exclusion. In the period of colonial rule, museums in the Netherlands 'summarized and reinforced Europeans' sense of having a hierarchically more advanced culture, even in the guise of celebrating the cultures of other peoples whose objects were assembled' (P. M. Taylor 1995, 106). The hierarchisation of cultures gave rise to several binary frames, including European/non-European and ethnology/art, as well as the ranking of Indonesian ethnic and cultural groups on the sliding scale of primitiveness. However, despite these binary frames and hierarchical layers, objects regularly challenged the colonial structures.

In Europe today, positionings of Islam in heritage occur in different ways; for example, as a historical force in shaping Europe's culture, a foreign presence in the present, or the denial of Islam ever being part of Europe's history. Heritage is not only a mode of inclusion and exclusion; it is also a driving force behind feeling included:

As heritage is an especially powerful mode of inclusion – a format with widely acknowledged legitimacy and value – this allows for Islam to be historically situated within Europe

rather than simply accepted as being present in the here and now. As heritage, in other words, Islam becomes a valued cultural form, and as part of European heritage, it gains the potential to become *of* rather than just *in* Europe. It becomes part of 'where we have come from' and not simply 'what we are now'. Therein, however, lies heritage's 'rub'. That very past-orientation of heritage also allows for making a distinction between the past and today in which 'where we have come from' might also potentially be 'what we no longer are' or even 'what we have left behind'. Thus, considered as part of heritage, Islam may be seen as having contributed to shaping Europe but that does not necessarily mean that Muslims living in European countries today will feel included. (Shatanawi, Macdonald, and Puzon 2021, 7–8)

Therefore, how Islam is framed in museums matters. Even though it is impossible to undo the colonial formations of heritage and Islam, museums are in a position to redirect the 'colonial presence', and to address the injustices derived from them in the present day.

### **Silence and memory**

Like any act of selection, heritage-making in museums creates memory as well as silence. Here I draw on the work of anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Trouillot looks at colonial histories to explain how the combined acts of remembering and forgetting produce silences. Trouillot's notion of silence does not equal the absence of speech. Rather, in the examples in his book silence is the result of an active and transitive process of selection. Taking the Haitian Revolution as his main case, Trouillot shows how different processes of narrating the events created different silences. He emphasises that these silences occurred as part of the act of narration. 'Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences', he concludes, and thus, 'the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly' (Trouillot 1995, 27). This links to Ann Stoler's notion of colonial aphasia as a discursive silence rather than the absence of speech; 'in aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence' (2011, 125). In other words, colonial silences around Islam did not only occur when Islam was ignored, but also when Islam was discussed but privileging certain aspects of it while others were pushed to the background. In this study I look at these moments as well as the moments when Islam was brought to the fore, in line with Trouillot's argument (1995, 48) that mentions and silences, or presences and absences, are both part of the same active process of history making.

Trouillot distinguishes four constitutive moments in the production of silences in the writing of history:



Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). (Trouillot 1995, 26)

Translated to the context of the museum, these moments render to the individual objects and the act of collecting (*sources*) and the creation of collections (*archives*), exhibitions and publications (*narratives*) and the making of history in museums today (*history*). The boundaries between these domains are fluent; for instance, the re-arrangement of objects to create collections, not only produces archives but also entails the making of narratives. Trouillot's framework has been adapted in relationship to museums and archives, and employed in several case studies (for examples see Mason and Sayner 2018). A useful addition is suggested by Mason and Sayner (2018), who conceptualise silence in museums as 'in motion', pointing to selection as a key mechanism in the making of collections as well as museum presentations, such as exhibitions and catalogues. This makes the creation of silences an inescapable reality of museum work. Yet, what or whom is being silenced changes over time, as displays and exhibitions are replaced and collections continually change through new acquisitions, loans, transfers, de-accessioning as well as new classifications (Mason and Sayner 2018, 7). Therefore, the question is not only what and whom are being silenced at a particular instance, and by whom, but if and how this relates to the silences present more widely in society.

### **Colonial framings of Islam**

In this study, I proceed from the constitutive moments of history making identified by Trouillot to uncover the memories and silences in museological framings of Indonesian Islam in the Netherlands. These moments largely align with the stages in the lifecycle of objects (Appadurai 1986). From my investigation of the museum collections and histories in the Netherlands, three frames of Islam emerge as dominant during the colonial era; they are connected to expressions of the Islamic as religious, political and artistic.

A common theme running through all these frames is the idea of the Arabian Peninsula, and more broadly West Asia, as the heartland of Islam. This view is partly founded on Islamic theology, in which the beginnings of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula represent the ideal for later generations. European scholars, who developed this perspective in the nineteenth century, saw Arab cultural and religious traditions as the model for Islam's outlying provinces. The model they developed was grounded, in a fashion typical of nineteenth-century scholarship, in the search for a pure origin of culture (*Urkultur*). In the field of Islamic studies, the German philological tradition and its emphasis on the origins of Islam, located theologically in its founding texts (the Qur'an and *hadith*) and geographically in the Arabian Peninsula, set the tone, influencing Dutch

scholarship as well (Vrolijk and Leeuwen 2014; Schulze 2010). The heartland/periphery model defines two broad and distinct areas. At the centre lies the Arabian Peninsula, where Islam originated, and the regions that were part of the Islamic Empire in the initial period of Islamic conquest: the rest of the Middle East and North Africa. The Islam of this region was seen as a religion that was internalised and which displaced previous cultures. Further afield lies the periphery: the areas in Africa and Asia which adopted Islam in later centuries, and under the influence of traders, Sufi preachers, and migrants. The heartland/periphery model pervaded all other frames; it assigns a 'pure' and 'unblended' Islam to the centre and a 'less-than-pure' and 'syncretist' Islam to the peripheral areas (Ahmed 2016, 451). This model was implemented in museological interpretations of Islamic art, religion and politics, and, as we will see, its effects on the reception of Indonesian Islam were immense.

In governing the Muslims of the colony, the policy line of the Dutch authorities aimed at maintaining peace and order. The government advised to meet acts of worship with interest and respect, but, apart from that, not to interfere (Buskens and Kommers 2002). The growing concern about political Islam in the late nineteenth century prompted the colonial government to seek expert advice, in the form of the Office for Native Affairs (later: Native and Arab Affairs), colloquially known as *Kantor Agama* or office for religion (Trouwborst 2002, 685). The office played a crucial role in shaping the context in which the collecting of objects occurred. The advisors were tasked with research and advice on specific aspects of Muslim life, varying from the migration of Arabs to the pilgrimage, Islamic dress and the use of talismans. In practice, the job focused strongly on the alleged threat of Islam. Most of the advisors were trained as orientalists at Leiden University, and some were known for their specialist knowledge in the field of arts and culture, such as B.J.O. (Bep) Schrieke (1890-1945), who would become director of the Colonial Institute (the current Tropenmuseum), the well-known philologist Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886-1960), the first Indonesian to obtain a PhD from a Dutch university in 1913, and, of course, their teacher Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936). The office also employed several Indonesian advisors, such as Sayyid 'Uthman ibn Yahya (1822-1913), the mufti of Batavia, who was of Arab descent. Before the establishment of the Archaeological Service in 1913, Islamic monuments and sites had to be reported to the Office for Native Affairs in order to evaluate their significance and issue recommendations for restoration. The office could only carry out its duties in collaboration with Indonesian Muslim communities, on whom the advisors relied for information. As experts of Islam, they felt often placed between a rock and a hard place; faced with what they saw as ignorance and anxiety emanating from the colonial administration, they were increasingly put in a position of having to defend Islam (Laffan 2011, 223). Various cases in this study show the different reactions of advisors, such as Karel Holle and Godard Hazeu, to this tension.

The most famous and influential of all advisors of the Office for Native Affairs was the Leiden scholar of Islam Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who was appointed as personal advisor to the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies in 1889 (Van den Doel 2021).<sup>25</sup> His contribution to the colonial system went further than any other Advisor for Native Affairs: he authored the *korte verklaring* (Brief Declaration), the new contract of subjugation local rulers throughout Indonesia had to sign (Locher-Scholten 2004, 201),<sup>26</sup> sketched maps for the military forces (*Koloniaal verslag van 1902: Nederlandsch (Oost-)Indië* 1902, 12), accompanied KNIL troops during military campaigns,<sup>27</sup> and identified the dead bodies of Acehese opponents after they were liquidated by the *marechaussee* (the KNIL's special forces), all of which were quite unusual tasks for an academic advisor. In 1891, the colonial government sent him to Aceh to work out a strategy to bring the region under full Dutch control. Snouck Hurgronje became the main architect of the government's Islam policy. Based on his experiences in Aceh, Snouck Hurgronje advocated a policy based on the distinction between two kinds of Islam: a 'good' Islam of worship and a 'bad' Islam of politics (Gedacht 2015; Bowen 2003, 48). The first type of Islam was to be left untouched as a genuine source of piety, but political Islam had to be strongly discouraged and neutralised. This dual approach to Islam became the backbone of the policies and practice of the colonial administration. One of the consequences, however, was a strong focus of the administration on Islam as politics while Islam as a cultural force was downplayed or ignored.

Compared with his views on political Islam, Snouck Hurgronje's ideas on the interplay between Islam and culture were less influenced by the needs of the colonial government, and concerning this subject matter he was far ahead of his time. In contrast to most of his contemporaries, Snouck Hurgronje did not look at Islam as a fixed set of dogmas, but rather as a flexible and dynamic system. In several publications he outlined his line of reasoning. Everywhere Islam went, Snouck argued, it absorbed pre-Islamic practices as well as foreign influences. If we accept this for the Arabian Peninsula, why not for Indonesia? Islam was always subordinate to local traditions, an idea Snouck expressed in his famous statement that *adat* (local customs) are the mistress and Islamic law her obedient slave (Snouck Hurgronje 1906a, I:153). So, he wrote, 'let us not make greater demands to them who began to convert to Islam five centuries ago than to those who converted more than twelve centuries ago' (Snouck Hurgronje 1883, 20).

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25 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's record in the Register of the Civil Service. National Archives / Stamboeken Burgerlijke Ambtenaren, 1836-1936 2.10.36.22/922.

26 Brief Declaration, left blank. Aceh, 1898-1936. Collection National Museum of World Cultures inv. no. TM-1016-8b. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/43641>

27 Photographer unknown, Snouck Hurgronje with Colonel J.B. van Heutsz and military staff of the Pedir expedition in bivouac Koeta Meuntroë, 1898. Collection National Museum of World Cultures inv. no. TM-10001948. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/16155>

Without a doubt, Snouck Hurgronje was the most influential figure in the Netherlands when it came to object collecting in Muslim regions and throughout this study his name will appear. He singlehandedly made sure that large numbers of objects from the regions he studied – Western Arabia and Aceh – made their way to the collections of Dutch libraries and ethnographic museums in order to facilitate the study of Muslim cultures. He urged the military and civil authorities to preserve and study ancient Islamic sites, encouraged KNIL officers to assemble collections of objects, to hand over spoils of war to museums and libraries, and take photographs during military expeditions; all with an eye on the benefits for philological and ethnographic research. As the chair of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, he allocated objects to the various museums. He himself put his ideas into practice by gathering objects, and making sound recordings and photographs (Mols and Vrolijk 2016). Curators of the various ethnology museums made ample use of his publications to write object descriptions. While museum inventory cards would often copy the ethnographic details, Snouck's broader-reaching and much more political conclusions were ignored. Thus, as we will see in the final chapters of this study, the presence of these collections hardly led to the intensification of the study of Indonesian Islam in museums.<sup>28</sup> Nor did his novel ideas about acculturation find their way into the interpretation of these objects.

## 1.4 Outline of the thesis

The rhythm of this thesis follows from the biographical approach. Part I (chapters 2 to 5) looks at the collecting of objects from Muslim Indonesia, or following Trouillot, the moments of fact creation and assembly. Starting with a mapping of the objects that were classified as Islamic, in the past or present, chapter 2 analyses patterns in the histories of collecting. I also look at common typologies of collecting in Indonesia, and to what extent they apply to Muslim-majority regions. In chapter 3, I then follow a number of these patterns to understand the historical conditions leading to the divergent valuations of Islam. I examine why percentage-wise Sumatra occupies a larger share than other regions in what counts as Islamic, and why certain types of objects, such as those related to the hajj or magical practices, are more present than others. Furthermore, I delve deeper into the motivations of collectors to collect or not to collect Islamic material. Focusing on different types of collectors, such as army officer G.C.E. (Frits) van Daalen (1863-1930) and civil administrator F.W. (Willem) Stammeshaus (1881-1957), I explain the emphasis on certain regions and object types when Islamic material did make its way into museum collections, as well as to account for its absence in other domains. This investigation is

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28 This was different at Leiden University, where Snouck's collection of manuscripts, which contained many that were taken as loot during the Aceh War, was studied by his students and was the basis of several PhD theses.

followed up in chapters 4 and 5 which examine in detail the collecting histories of several types of objects that were collected under the heading of Islam: manuscripts, amulets and talismans, objects related to the hajj, and gravestones. Illustrated by a number of cases, I discuss how the collecting of these types of objects happened in the context of colonial policies of conquest, control, surveillance and benevolence.

Part II (chapters 6 and 7) considers the making of archives through practices of classification and categorisation. Classification is the ultimate 'moment of fact retrieval', when narratives are made (Trouillot 1995, 26). Chapter 6 examines the taxonomies of Islamic and Middle Eastern collections that developed in the nineteenth century and continue to inform museum praxis today. During the afterlives of the objects as museum holdings, a process unfolded dividing them between different museum disciplines: archaeology, art history and ethnology. I investigate the drawing of boundaries between three museums: the Museum of Ethnology, the Museum of Antiquities, both in Leiden, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Chapter 7 looks more closely at the information infrastructure that was - and is - employed in the ethnographic museums of the Netherlands and its systems of classification. I examine the position of Indonesian Islam as religion and art within this structure, in order to understand how knowledge of Islam was organized in the museum.

Part III (chapter 8) investigates framings of Islam through exhibitionary practices. Two framings in particular are considered: Islam-as-religion and Islam-as-art. The findings deal with one of the overarching questions of this thesis: the exclusion of Indonesia from the field of Islamic art. Although in the Netherlands Islamic art never received as much attention as in neighbouring countries, its narrative had a continued presence in museums, with Indonesia playing a minor role. The end of colonial rule in Indonesia was reflected in dwindling interest in representing Indonesian Islam in museums in the Netherlands. Islam as religion and art briefly found a place in museum representations of Indonesia, notably in the 1930s to 1950s, but from the 1960s onward it was relegated to the backseat. Following geopolitical events and migration from Muslim-majority countries, Islam became increasingly equated with the Middle East and North Africa.

The intentions of this research project are not merely descriptive. Following Susan Legêne and Henk Schulte Nordholt (2015), my point of departure is the premise that the colonial entanglements involved in collecting and interpretation do not signify an end point for understanding the significance of the objects concerned, and that reframing constitutes an essential part of decolonisation processes. As Judith Butler (2016) maintains, to evaluate and understand the historical conditions that enable framings is to begin to oppose their ramifications in the present. In the Netherlands, the debate on the decolonisation of museums emphasises issues of repatriation. Yet, it is to be expected that the majority of the colonial collections will stay. If so, what will be the role of Islamic objects in a future decolonial Europe? The concluding chapter of

this thesis deals with 'colonial presence', that is, the durabilities of the colonial epistemologies discussed in the preceding chapters. To inform debates about decolonising museums, I argue that the narratives of Islamic collections in museums in the Netherlands constitute a structural injustice which requires reparation beyond repatriation and re-interpretation of individual objects. To this end, I draw on the work of philosopher Catherine Lu, especially her application of the concept of structural injustice to colonialism. My conclusions suggest that the effort to rethink collections should be coupled with the decolonisation of museum disciplines. These epistemic reparations, I suggest, should include re-framings of Indonesian Islamic material culture. Shahab Ahmed's influential book *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2016) provides a useful framework for such disciplinary (re)interpretations of Islamic artefacts. To provide an example of decolonising practices, chapter 8 makes some suggestions towards application of his framework to Indonesian artefacts. Finally, I argue that undoing the dichotomous exhibitionary frameworks that underpin the presentation of these collections, or to 'undiscipline' them (Förster and Von Bose 2018), is an essential step to make museums more fit for justice.