

# Deaccessioning colonial collections The case of Museum Nusantara (Delft)

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Sources: <https://nusantara-delft.weebly.com/>, museums mentioned,  
heritage magazines, Dutch, Indonesian, French and German newspapers, wikipedia



## Colonial collections

Museums have colonial objects that were part of a massive one-flow. They can be subdivided into:

- 1. objects acquired in a win-win situation
- 2. objects collected in violence (war booty; smuggling and theft; confiscated by missionaries, scientists, dealers, etc.)
- 3. grey area in between

There is increasing uneasiness, especially about 2.



# A shifting debate? - 1

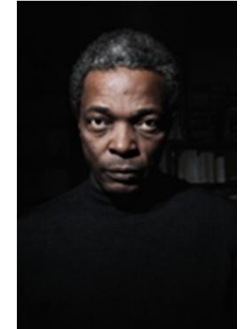
## } French President, Emmanuel Macron:

- 'I am from a generation of the French people for whom the crimes of European colonialism are undeniable and make up part of our history.'
- 'In the next five years, I want the conditions to be created for the temporary or permanent restitution of African patrimony to Africa.'
- 'African heritage can no longer be the prisoner of European museums.'
- A French and a Senegalese scholar prepare his new policy.



## A shifting debate? - 2

- } Hermann Parzinger, President Prussian Culture Foundation:
  - Germany lags behind in research into the provenance of colonial objects. Cooperation with researchers in the countries of origin is needed. Needed are also an international recognized framework and guidelines and an international conference.
- } Kwame Opoku/Louis-Georges Tin/Simon Njami:
  - Finally justice! Although: no concrete commitments, first see, then believe!



# The Nusantara Museum

## 1. Start & End

1864: Set up of the Indische Instelling (Indian Institution) for officials who went to work in the Dutch East Indies. Objects were a tool in the education.

2013: Closure due to municipal budget cuts, lack of visitors and loss of function.

## } 2. Collection

Objects 18.000 - Media library 15.000. - Books 8.000.

## 3. De-accession order

Delft municipality orders Museum Nusantara and National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) to de-accession the collection and will pay for its storage during one year.



# Approach of de-accessioning

## } Rules in the Netherlands:

- Guideline for De-accesioning Museum Objects (LAMO)
- Heritage Law 2015
  - Certain objects are worth to be kept for Collection Netherlands.
  - The remaining objects are to be offered first to museums in the Netherlands.

## } From the start, repatriation to Indonesia was in the air, preferably to regional museums in Indonesia.



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- } LAMO accepted that the closed museum did not approach all other museums in the Netherlands.
- } An agreement was reached with Indonesia that some 14.000 objects would be transferred per 1 April 2016.



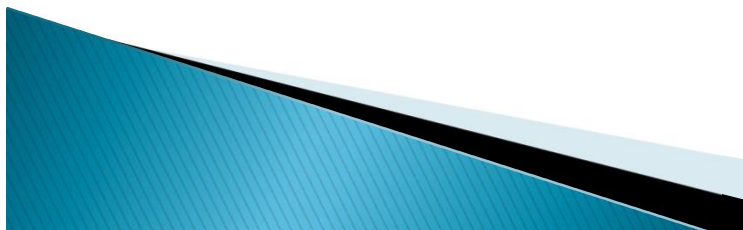
## But - 1

- } New Director-General Hilmar Farid at the Ministry of Education and Culture, informs that the transfer will not go on.
- } Why this change?
  - Practical objections
  - Cultural objections
- } Disappointment in the Netherlands.
- } In the meantime storage costs in Delft increase.



# New developments -1

- } Museum Nusantara and NMVW look for new options:
  - In the Netherlands (other museums than the ethnographic ones)
  - In Europe (Austria, Germany, Sweden)
  - In Asia (via the Asia Europe Museum Network)
- } By then they can consult a de-accession website with the full Nusantara collection.
- } There is much interest, and soon the Museum Nusantara makes commitments about the transfer of thousands of objects to these other museums.



## New developments - 2

- } DG Hilmar Farid allows the Museum Nasional Indonesia (MNI) to make a small selection.
- } An MNI delegation selects 1.500 objects.
- } The two sides agree about the transfer of these objects.
- } On 26 November 2016, Dutch PM Mark Rutte hands over the first of these object, an ancient Buginese keris (dagger), to Indonesia's President, Joko Widodo.



## But - 2

- } Dutch people with close relations with colonial Indonesia claims that, in addition to the 3.500 objects, another 1,100 objects should be earmarked for the Collection Netherlands.
- } The de-accessioning process is interrupted immediately. The Nusantara Museum has to put its commitments to museums in Europe and Asia on hold.
- } A session is organised and the claim is rejected.



# Present condition

## } Nine museums in the Netherlands

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam - Museon, Den Haag - Museum Bronbeek, Arnhem -  
Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden - Poppenspeelmuseum, Vorchten - CODA, Arnhem -  
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## } Two museums in Europe

- } Weltmuseum, Vienna - National Museum of Worldcultures, Sweden



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## } Three museums in Asia

- } Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore - Sarawak Museum, Malaysia - Asia Culture Center, South-Korea



# Lessons

- } De-accessioning of a large collection takes time and money, especially when repatriation is involved.
- } For the time being, superfluous colonial collections are a European problem. Former colonies have their own policies and priorities.
- } The Dutch had not set up a real partnership with the Indonesians, based on equality.
- } There is need for an international framework for dealing with colonial collections.

