

Factors at stake in the returning process of colonial heritage.
The case of Suriname and the Netherlands.

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Introduction

This thesis proposal focuses on the different stakes involved in the return of colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname. A proposal motivated by the concern to know where Suriname stands with respect to the announcement made by the Dutch government in 2020 in which they expressed their willingness to return some 450,000 pieces linked to the former colonies. The colonial objects the government holds are under the umbrella of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures)—henceforth NMVW— an institution that covers the Tropenmuseum (Tropic museum) in Amsterdam, the Africa Museum in Berg en Dal, and the Volkenkunde Museum (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden. Along with a committee formed by the government, the return aims to repair the colonial past and provide a solution to a problem that has been pointed out for several decades. However, the phenomenon does not only affect Dutch institutions and is instead a global problem that resonates throughout the world. Take the example of the long fight for the return of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, which has recently progressed, or the long-discussed return to the Parthenon marbles from the British custody. The issue has also been faced by activist groups such as the Yankanju, which removed a Congolese funeral statue from the Africa Museum in the Netherlands in 2020, and that had previously attempted something similar at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. All to denounce the plundering perpetrated by colonization. Likely other activist groups had also confronted art institutions; take the example of North America in 2020 when the group ‘Decolonize This Place’ pointed to the Whitney Museum for colonial and racist practices. In addition, we have seen replies that have brought the debate back on the agenda, such as the declarations in 2018 by the French president Emmanuel Macrón, suggesting the return of colonial objects within French museums, although no action has been carried out yet.

In the case of the Netherlands, the issue has been taken further, with the government willing to initiate a large-scale project to return several pieces linked to the colonial past, making it the first country to consider large-scale restitution. The official government report launched in 2020 opens the possibility for the return of pieces originally from Indonesia, Suriname, and the Antilles territories (Dutch Caribbean). The words of Henrietta Lidchi, chief curator of the National Museum of Cultures, were very suggestive when noted that the process “must avoid a neo-colonial repetition of the past. In other words, it is a question of avoiding an approach in which our norms and values take precedence: not all the works will be claimed, but the return is the starting point for the recognition of injustice.” However, not all the objects will be taken into account under the same procedures, as objects that do not belong to ex-colonies or artifacts from other European countries will not be returned directly, although the door will always be open so that they can be claimed. In addition, to achieve this return, the project ‘Pressing Matter’ has been created to investigate the potential of colonial beyond return by exploring concepts of value, ownership, and the question of colonial heritage in museums. The project, which is expected to last four years, has received a budget of 3.8 million euros for research.

As this paper cannot cover the full extent of the project planned by the Dutch government, which has not yet started, the thesis focuses on a small part of the phenomenon. In this way, the thesis examines the different factors

that influence the narrative of the return of colonial artifacts between the Netherlands and Suriname. An approach motivated mainly by the notorious lack of information in the role of the Caribbean and Suriname in returning colonial artifacts from the Netherlands, with Indonesia being the main focus of research in this area. The study is also a personal and professional motivation to explore in-depth the cultural policies regarding the colonial heritage of the host country of my master's degree—the Netherlands—and also Suriname, a country I had lacked knowledge before starting this master's thesis, and which appealed to me because of its proximity to my home country.

Based on a historical, institutional, and qualitative study, the thesis intends to see how these three approaches converge in the process of returning the objects. All in order to provide an answer to questions such as: what are the various reasons that have led the Netherlands to initiate a return process? What is the role of the government in the return of these objects? To what extent is Suriname affected by these returns, and what does the return of objects implies for its community? What is the reception of these objects by Surinamese institutions? Does the the return of colonial artifacts repair the colonial past between Suriname and the Netherlands? From this perspective, the thesis is shown to be relevant in the Art and Society contemporary field since it proposes to understand a much deeper problem that connects different parts of a political, social, and artistic triangle in an attempt to make visible the hidden points in these dynamics of returning the pieces. The social sphere considers the current demands that communities have been making on museums: questioning the colonial role model it represents, the approach towards the colonial collections, the role of colonial objects, and the dimension of power that surrounds this institution. In the political sphere, the issue involves legislative questions, but also the responsibilities of governments in repairing the colonial past. Lastly, the artistic sphere brings into debate the values ascribed to colonial objects and collections and explores the change in meaning that these objects can undergo. Thus, taking into account all of the above the thesis does not claim to assert whether the artifacts should be returned or claimed, let alone speak on behalf of the Surinamese community, as the right to have a say in their heritage is theirs alone, that is to say, this thesis aims to “speak beside” and not “speak for.”

For this purpose, first, the thesis examines the historical antecedents that have brought the Netherlands and Suriname together to create the nation-states they now represent. Therefore, the first chapter examines the implications that the historical factor means for the return of colonial heritage by exploring: the common colonial history, the construction of Suriname as a nation, the impact of post-colonial migration on the Netherlands, coupled with its demands, and the colonial collections of Dutch museums with a focus on the Tropenmuseum, as well as the Surinamese collections held by the NMVW. A second chapter of the thesis analyzes policies and legal frameworks in which Suriname's colonial collections are embedded. For this purpose, the thesis examines the role of heritage in Suriname policies before, during, and after colonization. The chapter also introduces the reader to the terms and basic legal framework to understand how the procedures are carried out. In addition, a brief overview of the returns conducted between the Netherlands and the Caribbean and Indonesian territories is provided, along with an analysis of the two last main reports launched by the Dutch institutions regarding colonial heritage. Lastly, a third chapter explores experts' opinions whose sensitive voices are involved in the return of colonial artifacts, particularly of the Dutch-Surinamese relationship. For this purpose, firstly, interviews were conducted with experts in the field, discussions were held with informants, and thirdly, the various panels of the Amsterdam symposium ‘The future of the Dutch colonial past,’ on the management of Dutch colonial heritage were attended.

In this last chapter, the main objective is to seek answers beyond the literature and thus shed light from a more contemporary perspective on the return of colonial artifacts to former colonies, emphasizing Suriname.

Chapter I

Dutch Colonial history and postcolonial social and cultural legacy

This first section will try to help the reader understand the historical and social factors that play a relevant role in framing how the narrative of the return of colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname takes place. In the discussion of the return of colonial artefacts at the academic level, and in the Dutch case, there is a tendency to briefly, superficially or simply omit referring to the colonial history and Dutch involvement in the “slave” trade, and of the turnaround it brought to all the inhabitants of the country. However, for better comprehension of this complex cultural challenge, it appears to be undoubtedly necessary to trace a path under the historical perspective of colonialism, and beyond— to post-colonialism and decolonization. From this triangle emerged the formation of the Dutch and the Surinamese nations and their contemporary society; key in interpreting the factors that led to the contemporary demands regarding heritage, and without which would certainly not have brought us together to discuss the current study. The first section of the chapter —**1.1. Colonial process, chattel slavery, and abolition**— does not pretend to cover all the historical data of approximately 300 years since the Dutch started colonizing the territories, but is a necessary reminder that the historical events are a factor at stake entailing consequences that have led us to the social demands regarding heritage. Therefore, it is not a mere historical narrative but a wider necessary reflection about how the history of slavery and abolition connects the Netherlands and Suriname from past to present. The second part of the chapter —**1.2. Suriname: the creation of a nation**— focuses on the three lines that the country followed from the abolition of slavery to independence (plantation system, dependency on the Netherlands, and multicultural society), and looks at how these factors molded the birth of the nation and its development. It also attempts to answer how social and economic changes may have influenced the interest in the return of colonial collections on behalf of the Surinamese. Here once again, the chapter does not pretend to be an enumeration of historical data, but rather a co-understanding of how these historical events have shaped a conception of the way of acting and of confronting the question of returning colonial artefacts. In the third section of the chapter —**1.3. Postcolonial Surinamese migration in the Netherlands**—we will look at the organization of the Suriname’s migrants in the new “host society;” while observing the first steps on the evolution of the recognition of cultural memory of Afro-descendant populations in the country. Following that is the fourth section —**1.4. Postcolonial migration significance in the Dutch society: “We are here because you were there before”**—which covers the legacy of colonialism and slavery in the Netherlands. The name of this chapter is the phrase the 1970’s postcolonial immigrants in Britain used in their protests to remind the British of its historical, economic, and social ties.¹ In this chapter the words “you were there” will be the way to follow how post-colonial migration in the Netherlands introduced a transformation in the way Dutch society deals with their colonial history, and the creation of institutions in the matter. Finally —**1.5. The ideas behind colonial collections in the Netherlands, a description of the Surinamese colonial collections**—in this last section we will look at the the ideas that brought about the creation of ethnology museums in Europe, from private collections to the zeal of universal exhibitions. The section also attempts to analyze the nature of the Surinamese collections hold by the NMVW.

¹ Ian Sanjay, “Author Interview: Q and A with Dr Ian Sanjay Patel on We’re Here Because You Were There: Immigration and the End of Empire,” accessed October 10, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2021/04/16/Author-Interview-q-and-a-with-dr-ian-sanjay-patel-on-were-here-because-you-were-there-immigration-and-the-end-of-empire/>

1.1. Colonial process, chattel slavery, and abolition

In the problem of the return of colonial objects, history, and the colonial past plays an important role, which often leads to disputes between those who hold the actual ownership of these objects, and those who claim them. To begin the writing of this thesis with a chapter on Dutch colonial history of Suriname might seem both important and obvious. But the fact is that it's not possible to understand the current demands on colonial objects without understanding the past that led to this. And in the case of the Netherlands, it seems even more important when we see that the literature points to the fact that Dutch society has had difficulties in recognizing its colonial past and even today it has little awareness of a legacy, that has a large impact on many sectors of the country. According to Nimako and Willemsen slavery has been socially forgotten to the Dutch due to a "long process of removal from historical analysis, through distortions, marginalization, trivialization of slavery, and virtue of the dominant nationalist self-reference frame (due to the media today highlights nationalist commitment to freedom, tolerance, and democracy)."² As mentioned before, it's not a mere historical narrative, but a wider necessary reflection about how the history of slavery and abolition connects the Netherlands and Suriname from its past to its present.

The link between Suriname and the Netherlands has a colonial background that goes back to the 16th century. On the 26th of February, 1667, and that is some of the facts where historians agree, Suriname became a Dutch colony after disputes with the British Empire. The territory that was already inhabited by different native groups such as the Arawaks, Caribs, and Wayana, was first ruled by the Spanish and the British before the Dutch. The concession of Dutch sovereignty over the territory was signed in the Treaty of Breda on July 31, in which they exchanged New Netherland (New York) for the Caribbean colony. Since then, the territory was under Dutch domination until its independence in 1975, with the exception of the period between 1799 and 1816 when it was again dominated by the British. The Dutch empire was already familiar with other parts of the American territory, as it was able to rule over part of what is nowadays Brazilian territory. However, the control over these territories did not last, and in the now so-called Dutch Caribbean, they were able to establish their power extensively.

"Within a few decades Suriname was transformed into a thriving or at least rapidly growing plantation colony. Curaçao, unsuitable for agriculture, served as a trading (smuggling) centre and a repository for slaves. The remaining islands, with the exception of a few episodes, were of no particular importance. The three small colonies on the north coast of South America - Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo - were always in the shadow of neighbouring Suriname. It was not until after 1800 that these regions developed under the control of the United Kingdom as British Guiana."³

The Dutch established control over the Surinamese territory in a moment where the world, according to Nimako and Willemsen, was creating a new global organisation system in which every single territory on Earth was

² Nimako, Kwame, and Glenn F. Willemsen. *The Dutch Atlantic: slavery, abolition and emancipation* (London New York New York: Pluto Press Distributed in the U.S.A. exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 176.

³ Gert Oostindie, *El Caribe holandés El colonialismo y sus legados transatlánticos*, trans. Maritza Cristina García Pallas (La Habana: Editorial José Martí, 2014), 50.

playing a specific new role. In this new ordinance, Europe was the location of ideas, design, planning and innovations; Africa was the source of captive Africans for enslavement; the Caribbean and the Americas were the sites of production; and Europe again was the source of the consumption of goods produced by the enslaved.⁴ In that organisation Suriname was therefore a production site for Europe operated under a massive plantation system, which in turn was able to function through chattel slavery and trade in enslaved persons. As a matter of fact, the system needed the active participation of the European states, who had to decide whether to participate or not “because chattel slavery required sovereign state backing and enforcement,”⁵ and in return, the system gave rise to European sovereignty and the new world order.

The Dutch brought the plantation complex to the Caribbean by putting their technological skills, capital, to contribute to the global slavery complex “quickly became the chief suppliers of slave labor to the Spanish Americas.”⁶ They entered the playing field due to the success of the plantations they had in northern Brazil in 1630, and even after losing those Brazilian territories the Dutch remained active in the trade of enslaved people. Some of the planters who had cooperated with the Dutch fled Brazil and settled in the Caribbean, where they helped to establish sugarcane cultivation.⁷ The Atlantic slave trade was amped up due to the escalation of sugar cultivation in the 1660s, and it was from enslaved people that the pillars of the Caribbean system were built. If we examine the recorded figures, we see that as of today 554,336 enslaved were shipped from the African coast on Dutch vessels in five different cycles between 1576 and 1850. A number that rises to 12,521,337 if we include all countries’ trade combined (Spanish, Portuguese, North American, Danish, and British).⁸ This exorbitant number could only be reached due to the fact that chattel slavery was considered a legitimate, legal economic system with its own dynamics in the eyes of European society. The system came to an end after 300 years, only when the conflict of values between European societies became untenable with respect to the management of overseas territories. Society’s change in mentality was translated into real actions in 1807 when the “British abolition of the Slave Trade Act” interrupted the supply of enslaved people and the overthrow of Atlantic slave trade.⁹ According to Nimako and Willemsen “out of all the social processes transforming the world in the 19th century, none had such far-reaching social implications as the legal abolition of slavery,”¹⁰ and added that abolition came about through different ways such as: “revolution (Haiti, 1804), through legislation (British colonies, 1838; Dutch colonies, 1863) or through civil war (United States of America, 1865).”¹¹

This new reality paved the way for Dutch society to feel the pressure to take action on the practises in the colonies, which at that time became morally questionable. It is noteworthy to mention that the Netherlands was the last nation in Europe to address the matter of abolition, with British and French pressure being the main incentive to end the oppressive system (Great Britain had legally abolished slavery in 1833, and France in 1848). This fact is

⁴ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 14.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Eltis and David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (Yale University Press, 2008), accessed 12th October 2021, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=3420568.

⁷ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 17.

⁸ “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Estimates,” Slave Voyages, accessed October 24, 2021, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>.

⁹ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 87.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

not surprising if we knew that the Netherlands was characterized by a lack of a prominent anti-slavery movement throughout the 19th century. Chattel slavery was not brought to social debate at any time, and therefore did not make it to parliament but for external pressure. At the beginning of the 1860s, at a time when England and France had long since abolished slavery in their colonies, public opinion in the Netherlands had also evolved to where it was no longer possible to avoid the issue, though the anti-slavery movement was extremely small, unlike in Britain.¹² This little journey through the Dutch colonial past could end with the mere sequential historical factor of data, which is fundamental, but it would lack the human and social factor necessary for the in-depth understanding of the dynamics acquired after almost 300 years of slavery. That is why I would like to focus on the way the abolition of slavery came into the scene as discussed by Nimako and Willemsen.

Finally, on the 1863 slavery was abolished. Although abolition was later carried out in phases accompanied by a number of measures which included a period of apprenticeship. The authors point out that contrary to what one might think, the process was not about gaining freedom or total “emancipation” of the enslaved, but rather a “legal abolition,” meaning a kind freedom in principle but not in practice. While legal abolition is “an act of legislation,” emancipation is “a cultural, social, political and economic process.” Therefore, the enslaved were freed on paper but not emancipated in practice. That legal abolition led to “segregation” and not “assimilation or integration,” and thus the former enslaved became “racialized colonial subjects in the context of colonial rule.”¹³ When the law was discussed, no representation of the enslaved people was involved and neither the State Committee nor the government or members of parliament had any first-hand knowledge of the colonies. As the authors noted, “they barely had stayed at these ultra-mar territories or spoke the language of the enslaved population,”¹⁴

The period of apprenticeship lasted 10 years. During that decade the enslaved population was fully under state control while it was approved to carry out extra measures: police surveillance implementation to control possible excessive “loitering” and “idleness” of the enslaved (reactions that were of particular concern to the Dutch parliament), a ban on marriage (a very controversial rule because they were asked to follow the principles of civilisation where Christian marriage was considered one of them), compulsory education in school, religious education and application of the civil and penal code among others. The latter measure meant that “freedmen still had to do forced labour and could be brought into action by the government for jobs in the public interest, but that they also had the opportunity to perform free labour if they were in possession of a parcel of land or were capable of practising a trade.”¹⁵ Therefore, freedmen could have the possibility to own land parcels; in practice however, such an approach was practically impossible.¹⁶ The Dutch government believed that this ten-year transition period was necessary to integrate the enslaved into what they considered “civilised society” by accustoming them to “wage work.” For the authors the measures of the parliament lead to “progressive control” meaning “changes on a horizontal continuum designed to maintain the dominant–dominated relationship for which change was called for in the first place.”¹⁷ The underlying point was that “the enslaved, who were to be ‘emancipated’, should not

¹² Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 88.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

confuse freedom with equality.”¹⁸ Perhaps they were no longer slaves on paper, but that should not confuse anyone—there was still a difference and it was primarily racial. White superiority versus Black slavery.

The legal abolition of chattel slavery also brings up the question of the economic compensation given by the state to the slaveholders, a process that “140 years later would again arouse emotions.”¹⁹ It may seem morally questionable to today’s world that there was no financial contribution from the Dutch state to the enslaved, whereas there was for the slaveholders. At that time only Elout van Soeterwoude, a member of the chamber, questioned the possibility of reparations or some kind of compensation for the enslaved once they were free. That request was ignored, and “nobody in the chamber took this up and the matter of compensation for the enslaved died a premature death.”²⁰ All in all, only the slaveholders had the possibility of being economically compensated for each enslaved by registering them in the state list of freedmen. With that list, the government could have better control of its inhabitants, and nowadays these records are of special value for the descendants to trace their ancestors. Finally, and in relation to compensation, when the law was published and translated into the language spoken in the colonies, the clause on the compensation of the enslavers was deliberately omitted. This also has to do with the fact that the committee had explicitly stated in writing that it wanted the process of freeing the slaves to be carried out in a way that did not affect the slaveholders, nor put the Dutch government at risk.²¹

In the case of Suriname, it is noteworthy to mention that enslaved people were treated differently from those on the islands. In the Dutch Antilles the enslaved got their freedom right away, without being forced to work for ten years or suffer from state control. Although a motion was brought to the parliament to establish a maximum of 5 years apprenticeship period, it was never approved, meaning that differences existed between Caribbean territories. For Suriname the state control was deemed necessary for the preservation of sugar production, so as Nimako and Willemsen noted “emancipation was not an end in itself; it was a means to an end, namely, the preservation of Suriname as a Dutch colony.”²² By contrasting information exchanged between Baud and King William II, the authors conclude that emancipation was needed to keep the agriculture workers—if not, the colony could be at risk.

“Suriname could only be kept as a colony if the enslaved were emancipated...When emancipation is operational, Suriname will produce less than today, but will be preserved from complete devastation.”²³

Nimako and Willemsen’s conclusions on how slavery and abolition impacted Dutch society and cultural formation, on one hand, pointed out to the fact that history has created “parallel histories and intertwined belonging.” In other words, different experiences led to different ways of understanding the concept of emancipation and freedom, and therefore of perceiving the final episode of slavery. And on the other hand, they note it’s led to a single way of knowledge production in which the master enslavers, the white elites, perpetuate

¹⁸ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 99.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 88.

only one point of view regarding the history of slavery, the meaning, and significance of the legacy of slavery.²⁴ By doing this, “access to power and knowledge production still remains unequal in the 21st century, but the dominant view that reigned for so long, frequently one-sided and even hegemonic, is now facing fundamental challenge, as the descendants of the former enslaved write their own histories, and do so in ways that alter our understanding of Dutch history.”²⁵ It is precisely this inequality of power implanted through a process of colonisation, as the authors point out, that has led European standards of knowledge production to assign greater value and validity to knowledge produced from one scientific source while marginalising other sources. This idea applied in the case of the return of colonial artifacts has much resonance. For example, it has led to a prioritisation in restitution litigation of tangible documents to the detriment of cultural histories that go beyond paper. Although some of the current measures for claiming restitution, as we shall see in the Dutch case, have evolved, there is still a preference for the scientific and rational method. Moreover, the power of knowledge that has been established confers authority for not questioning why these colonial collections should remain under primarily Western scientific regulations and other safekeeping is not allowed. The latter idea is crucial to this thesis because it leads to questioning many of the realities surrounding the process of returning colonial heritage, such as the legal framework or the creation of committees, which we will see throughout the thesis.

1.2. Suriname: the creation of a nation

“Because of its history, language, education policies, and family networks Suriname has remained strongly focused on the country that moulded it in the colonial period, probably even more than other independent countries in the Caribbean. In this context, Paramaribo has been termed as “plantopolis” with an external orientation that overrules the internal direction.”²⁶

In these lines Ad de Bruijne, describe Suriname and its capital Paramaribo with the main feature guiding the history of the territory: its close link to the Netherlands, its former coloniser. No matter how we analyse the birth and subsequent development of the young nation (economic, political, cultural, socio-demographic), the country’s strong colonial ties have shaped its history. That past also influences the way in which the country deals with the protection of its cultural heritage and thus plays a role in the return of its colonial artefacts. According to Hoefte, the country has followed three lines from the time of slavery well into the 20th century that have forged the character of nation-building in 1975; the first is a continuation of the plantation system, while the second is the importation of a migrant population along with the consequent creation of a multicultural society. Lastly, the third line involves the tremendous dependence of the colony upon the Dutch territory.²⁷ Starting with the plantation

²⁴ Other authors such as Anfbal Quijano mention this aspect referring to it as “coloniality of power” where he points out that the dominant European epistemological axis is the one that guides our world and the way we relate to it.

²⁵ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 12

²⁶ Ad de Bruijne, “A city and a Nation: Demographic Trends and socioeconomic Development in Urbanising Suriname”, in *Twentieth-century Suriname: continuities and discontinuities in a new world society*, ed. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel (Kingston Leiden: Randle KITLV Press, 2001), 23-17.

²⁷ Rosemarijn Hoefte, “The development of a Multiethnic Plantation Economy” in *Twentieth-century Suriname: continuities and discontinuities in a new world society*, ed. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel (Kingston Leiden: Randle KITLV Press, 2001), 1-22.

system, the end of the slave system did not mean the end of the plantation system and the modernisation of the territory, but simply a change of actors whilst retaining the same basic economic system, and this brings us to the second line, multiculturalism. The new players were new migrants to whom the Netherlands had to turn to after the abolition of slavery. Workers from China, British India, and the Dutch East Indies came to replace the workforce.²⁸ The system shifted from being fueled by Africans, who were the largest labour force before the abolition of slavery, to imported inhabitants from other territories. Initially, these populations arrived in order to perform their work contracts, but they eventually settled in the country.

“Days before this period of state supervision ended, the first ship with contract workers docked in Suriname. On board were 399 British Indian immigrants who had signed a contract requiring them to work for five years on a plantation. It was the beginning of the flow of contract workers from British India and the Dutch East Indies. More than 34,000 British or Hindustani Indians would arrive between 1873 and the end of the Indian contract in 1917. In addition, nearly 33,000 Javanese day labourers entered Suriname between 1890 and 1939.”²⁹

These new settlers together with white populations of Germans, Dutch, Sephardic Jews, French, Scandinavians, and Anglo-Saxons among others, formed what is known as the most multicultural society in the Caribbean. The cultural pluralism provoked a marked ethnic distinction that has forever altered the character of the country. “Belonging or wanting to belong to an ethnic-cultural group has an important influence on a person’s behaviour, opportunities and status. Ethnicity also influences the choice of residence within the city.”³⁰ In this context the Netherlands promoted a “Dutchification programme, deterring Suriname to get realistic pictures of themselves and the world,” where the idea of “civilisation”³¹ was promoted especially among the lightskin Creole classes. This policy was translated into compulsory education from 1876, where the main focus of the curriculum was the importance of the Dutch language and Dutch culture. The ideas behind this being that “introducing Surinamese to become Dutchmen in outlook, customs and values was deemed the safest way to prolong the colonial system and turn the country into a cultural appendix of the Netherlands.”³² This programme lasted until 1933 when assimilation policies were replaced by association policies.

Regarding the economic sphere, “Suriname remained a plantation society”³³ with exploitation based on the export of tropical cash crops for three centuries, and whose management was in Dutch hands. Later on, bauxite became the main export item, making the country’s agricultural base change to a mining one in the 20th century. The companies were and still are managed mainly by Dutch entities, which have been followed in the contemporary

²⁸ Hoefte, “The development of a Multiethnic Plantation Economy,” 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hans Ramsoedh, “Playing Politics: Ethnicity, Clientelism and the Struggle for Power”, in *Twentieth-century Suriname : continuities and discontinuities in a new world society*, ed. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel (Kingston Leiden: Randle KITLV Press, 2001), 91-110.

³¹ Ramsoedh, “Playing Politics,” 108.

³² Peter Meel, “Not a splendid Isolation: Suriname’s Foreign Affairs” in *Twentieth-century Suriname : continuities and discontinuities in a new world society*, ed. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel (Kingston Leiden: Randle KITLV Press, 2001), 128-154.

³³ Hoefte, “The development of a Multiethnic Plantation Economy,” 16.

era by American companies. The result is an economy that “has been dependent on the supply and demand of the European and later American markets.”³⁴ Not owning their land, they have therefore not owned their profits either. The last line that the author points to is the massive dependency on the Netherlands. As Meel notes, “maintaining Suriname as a political entity but de facto neglecting the colony’s economic development, went hand in hand with a mission to discipline and uniform the country’s population.”³⁵ And despite the fact the former coloniser has provided a constant trickle of economic aid, it has been badly managed by the Surinamese authority, or had gone to companies where the profits have always gone back to the colonizer’s country—during the colonial period, throughout the period of independence, and even afterwards.³⁶

Independence came belatedly, but it came, and contrary to what one may think, in Suriname there were many voices against this breakaway:

“[T]he position of the light-skinned Creole elite was challenged by the so-called fraternisation policy, which involved political cooperation among non elite Creoles and Hindustani. Creole nationalism later led to Hindustani opposition. Despite the strong resistance of the Hindustani party [to independence] and the fact that the cabinet had only a small majority in the parliament, a Creole-Javanese coalition led the nation to independence on 25 November 1975.”³⁷

The literature suggests that the conditions for the independence process were created by a combination of favourable influences, but above all by a deep Dutch desire to detach itself from the country. Suriname’s nationalist elite grew after WWII, on one hand because of the growing economy that the exploitation of bauxite brought with WWII, which was greatly needed during the war, and on the other hand because of the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter, which recognised the right of self-determination. Queen Wilhemina’s announcement of a re-organisation of the whole kingdom was also a compelling fact. According to Ramsoedh, independence “was secretly prepared at the bargaining table by Surinamese politicians and actually imposed by the Netherlands, [that] has significantly undermined the legitimacy of politics and politicians in Suriname.”³⁸

Once independence was achieved on 25th November 1975, the process of decolonisation began. It is commonly assumed in the literature that decolonisation was ill-fated, and “the country became a republic in 1975, but remained deeply dependent on The Hague for a few more decades.”³⁹ As Ramsoedh, describes:

“What should have been a model decolonisation, ended up as a disillusion with the military coup of 1980. The seizure of power by the military meant a rupture in the political history of Suriname and had important consequences for its political culture and structures. With the military in the centre of power and the informal forces in their wake, Suriname started out

³⁴ Hoefte, “The development of a Multiethnic Plantation Economy,” 16.

³⁵ Meel, “Not a splendid Isolation: Suriname’s Foreign Affairs,” 129.

³⁶ Hoefte, “The development of a Multiethnic Plantation Economy,” 16.

³⁷ Ramsoedh, “Playing Politics: Ethnicity, Clientelism and the Struggle for Power,” 107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁹ Oostindie, *El Caribe holandés El colonialismo y sus legados transatlánticos*, 50.

on its runaway political, economic and social regres (...) The problem with Suriname is that an incompetent and corrupt political class behaves as the new coloniser.”⁴⁰

After independence, successive *coups d'état* destabilized Suriname devastatingly, and relations with the Netherlands were severely affected. The Netherlands stopped its link with the country and cut off aid as it did not want to be associated with a morally dubious government. The military regime led by Bouterse, which at first was welcomed by the people as an option to remove the political caste from the country, led to human rights violations resulting in the horrific so-called “December murders” episode of 1982. It was not until 2000, with the election of Venetian as the new president that relations between the two countries grew closer again. However, the presence of Bouterse’s figure behind Venetian’s powers and his reelection in the 2010 elections meant that relations between the countries were not fruitful again for a long period of time. Bouterse led until 2020, during which time he was prosecuted for the December murders.⁴¹ His presidency came to an end in 2020 with the newly elected president, Chan Santokhi, who remains the current leader.

Independence, therefore, did not mean that the nation was a free territory with a prosperous and democratic economy. This social conjuncture is also a product of the government’s instability in maintaining a balance in the country. In addition, the sovereignty process reshaped the country’s composition due to the massive exodus of the population to the Netherlands at the end of the 20th century, when the independence process took place. Nowadays, more than 75 percent of the Surinamese population have close relatives in the Netherlands, such as parents, siblings, or children.⁴² From that point on, support from across the Atlantic has begun and continued into the 21st century. As a result, those who have links with others abroad benefit on an economic and social scale, as “in general, 30 to 40 percent of the population gets support from abroad, and middle-class families are supported the most.” Those who have less access to international networks have a more vulnerable position in a generalised way which “contributes to a relative deterioration of their position.”⁴³ The most vulnerable set is represented by the Maroons (descendants of Africans in America who formed settlements far from slavery), along with the Guyanese and the Amerindians who form the lower class. The manifestation of this changing structure is seen in the fact that during the 2000s, Suriname’s population was estimated at 434,000, while around 300,000 individuals of Surinamese descent were living in the Netherlands. As Ad de Bruijne noted, “in summary, Suriname’s population development is a characteristic feature of its structure of dependency.”⁴⁴ For the time being, we will leave the dynamics of the emigrant population to the Netherlands to be discussed in more depth in section 1.3.

In conclusion, what history can bring to the problem of the return of colonial artifacts with respect to the reality of Suriname is diverse. Firstly, the incredible multi-population created by the different migrant groups that gradually arrived during the colonial era, in addition to those who’ve already inhabited the country, has always made it challenging to create a shared national image beyond the Netherlands’ imposition. This reality, together with the policies pursued in the government regarding heritage, which will be discussed in chapter 2, is likely to

⁴⁰ Ramsোধ, “Playing Politics: Ethnicity, Clientelism and the Struggle for Power,” 108.

⁴¹ “Suriname since independence”, History of Suriname, accessed November 1, 2021, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Suriname/Suriname-since-independence>

⁴² D.Bruijne, “A city and a Nation,” 44.

⁴³ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.

directly infer why the repatriation of colonial artifacts has not been a priority in the country's cultural policy. There are undoubtedly factors in this multiculturalism that indicate that there are sectors of the population that may not feel a sense of belonging to a part of national history, and this may have a bearing on the lack of interest in reclaiming artifacts from the colonial era. On the other hand, the country's poor economic management has not helped the development of institutions capable of bringing together a cultural past that would indicate a shared identity or would lead them to ask themselves where the rest of their cultural heritage might be, and whether it belongs to them or not.

1.3. Post-colonial Surinamese migration in the Netherlands

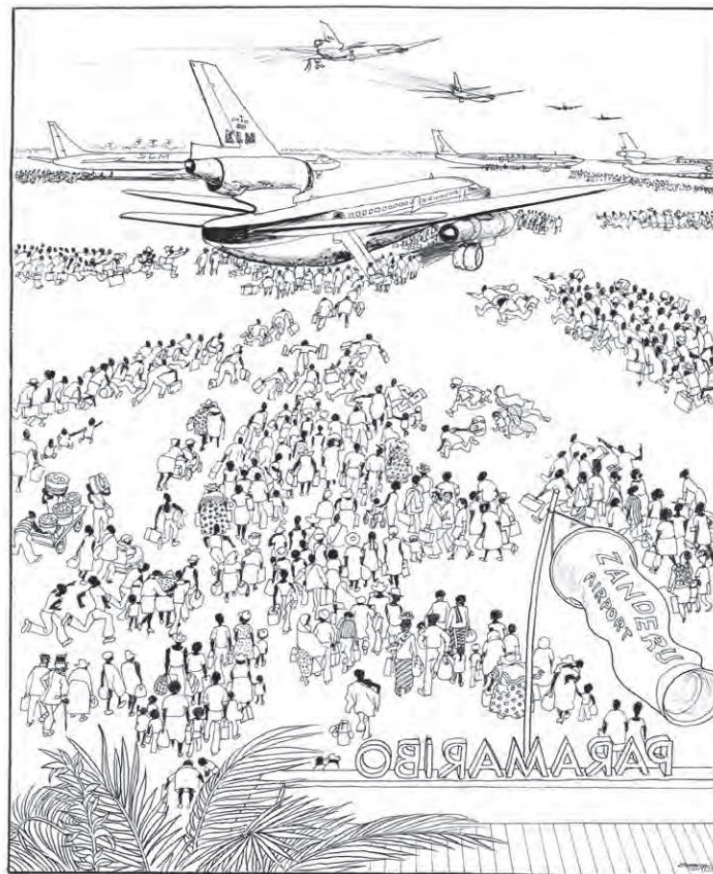


Fig.1. Around the independence of Suriname, the 'Bijlmer express' carried Surinamese people from Zanderij airport to Schiphol airport. This image represents the panic about unregulated migration from Suriname. (Eppo Doeve/Elseviers Magazine, 11-10-1975) ⁴⁵

In the return of colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname, a social reality deserves special attention, namely the wave of migration that the Netherlands underwent at the end of the 20th century (see Fig.1). That social phenomenon meant a change in the morphology of Suriname, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter

⁴⁵ Egbert Alejandro Martina, "Liveability and the Black Squat Movement," accessed November 13, 2022, <https://processedlives.wordpress.com/2016/10/12/liveability-and-the-black-squat-movement/>

and a difference in the configuration of the 21st-century Dutch culture and society. Migration, not only from Suriname but also from other territories, brought with it another conception of the Dutch past and thus another way of understanding the legacy of enslavement, leading to changes in the place of slavery in Dutch history, the modification of the cultural canon, and changes in the way history are explained in the education system, among others. The Netherlands is not an isolated case, as can be seen in the U.K., France, and the current Spanish context of Latin American migration.

The flow of migration from the former colony to the Dutch metropolis corresponds to the period of the 1970's, especially after Suriname gained its independence. The choice between opting for Dutch or Surinamese nationality caused 400,000 people to emigrate in 1975—a figure that will not be exceeded in the future, even if there were two additional peaks in the years ahead (between 1979 and 1980, and in the early 90's due to the economic difficulties the country was experiencing).⁴⁶ This exodus is known as the second wave in the Dutch post-colonial migration series, with the first wave referring to the 300,000 Indonesians who came between 1945-1962 after World War II, and the third corresponding to period in the 1980's with the Antilles and the island of Curaçao as main characters. The case of Suriname has been considered notorious since, and until a few decades ago the population of the country was around 475,000 inhabitants, while the Surinamese community in the Netherlands consisted of some 335,000.⁴⁷ That is to say, almost the same number of inhabitants in the former colony were also settled in the Netherlands after the massive exodus. The number has not been as significant for the other colonies as for Suriname, because they did not see such an abrupt change in the morphology of their country's population. For example, the Indonesian wave of migrants that moved between 1945-1962 resulted in a total number of around 300,000, compared to a population of one hundred million in the late 1940's.⁴⁸ And in the case of the Antilles, the numbers are significant only if one looks at the six islands' total population of around 280,000 inhabitants, compared to the Antillean community in the Netherlands which stood at 130,000 in 2006.⁴⁹ Today Suriname's population is around 600,000 inhabitants,⁵⁰ with half of the Surinamese Dutch population being second generation. One realises the important role of the post-colonial population on both sides of the pond after looking at the numbers:

“With an estimated one million taken together, the share of Dutch citizens with colonial or postcolonial roots in the total population is considerable. The number of Dutch people with ‘roots’ in Indonesia is estimated at just over half a million; the number with Caribbean origins at just under half a million; the number of Dutch citizens whose presence in the Netherlands has a prehistory going back to the Atlantic slave trade is some 300,000; probably half of the Surinamese Dutch are of Asian origins.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ “Half of the Surinamese Dutch population is second generation,” CBS, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2015/48/half-of-the-surinamese-dutch-population-is-second-generation>

⁴⁷ Gert Oostindie, “History brought home: Post-colonial migrations and the Dutch rediscovery of slavery” in *Post-colonial immigrants and identity formations in the Netherlands*, ed. Ulbe Bosma (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 155-174.

⁴⁸ Oostindie, “History brought home,” 156.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Suriname”, Data commons, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://datacommons.org/place/country/SUR#Demographics>

⁵¹ Oostindie, “History brought home,” 156.

Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that the great majority of the Antillean community in the Netherlands is of African origins, and according to the 2004 Surinamese census, roughly half of the Surinamese population has African roots.⁵² These numbers logically invite us to think that the population can feel identified by colonial slavery. These sectors confronted the Dutch society's way of perceiving their world. Because what for many had been a period in the past with no consequences for the future, for others the colonial past was loaded, even after the legal abolition of slavery, with racialized power relations, structures, and institution.⁵³ Or as Bosma so aptly puts it "colonial history literally came home"⁵⁴ with these successive waves of post-colonial migration. According to Nimako and Willemsen:

"It was the migration of these groups that led to social demands for acknowledgement, remembrance and commemoration of the abolition of slavery, and to discussions about reparations. Thus, just as the legal abolition of Dutch slavery was influenced by developments in Britain, so did the efforts of the Black community in the Netherlands put the Dutch slavery legacy on the political agenda. In other words, the Black community brought the discourse on the legacy of slavery into the public domain and simultaneously gave it an emotional charge."⁵⁵

The fact that the black population led the demand for historical and cultural revision upon arrival to the Netherlands correlates with the dynamics of the migrant population that arrived from Suriname in the 1970s. To understand that reality one need to know that the entire migrant population of Suriname was divided. Contrary to what happened with the new citizens arriving from Indonesia –according to Bosma, were able to overcome the possible differences they might have had previously due to a conflictive past by opting to create a united community—⁵⁶ the Surinamese dragged along differences whose origin went back to the colonial history of the country and were reinforced by migration. In the Netherlands, "The largest groups are [two,] the Afro-Surinamese, also known as Creoles, who are descendants of African slaves, and the Indo-Surinamese, also known as Hindustanis, who are descendants of contract labourers brought mainly from India to Surinam after the abolition of slavery in 1863."⁵⁷ The latter is split into a broad Hindu group and a minor Islamic one, each one of them belonging to separate organisations.

One of the signs that help us understand the composition of the populations upon arrival in the country is the support associations created by each of the groups and their respective interests. Whereas literature "has characterised Indo-Surinamese organisations as being highly religious and explicitly concerned with strengthening their ethnic and religious communities,"⁵⁸ the Afro-Surinamese organisations have been

⁵² Oostindie, "History brought home," 157.

⁵³ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 184.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 185.

⁵⁶ Ulbe Bosma, *Post-colonial immigrants and identity formations in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Floris Vermeulen and Anja van Heelsum, "Group-related or host state-related? Understanding the historical development of Surinamese organisations in Amsterdam, 1965-2000," in *Post-colonial immigrants and identity formations in the Netherlands*, ed. Ulbe Bosma (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 77-98.

⁵⁸ Vermeulen and van Heelsum, "Group-related or host state-related?," 88.

characterised “as being concerned with promoting unity among the Surinamese in the Netherlands,”⁵⁹ tending to “value highly an ongoing relationship with people in Suriname and to emphasise the importance of knowledge of the country’s history, in particular, its colonial past.”⁶⁰ That very character is reflected in the association’s interests. If we take a close look at the percentage distributions of Afro-Surinamese and Indo-Surinamese immigrant organisations in Amsterdam by the activities of the organisations between the 1970-2002, one can realise the huge difference in reference to the percentages of religious and cultural associations (see Fig.2). In the case of the Afro-Surinamese group, the percentages of cultural associations have been maintained over the years, while the proportion of associations related to religion, initially very low, increased sharply during 2000’s. On the other hand, the Indo-Surinamese group were always highly organized around religious interest, while the proportion of associations related to cultural, or country of origin were not even registered. Social cultural interest had the highest percentages among then Indo-Suriname community, but were far from the religious interest percentages.

| | Surinamese % | | | | Afro-Surinamese % | | | Indo-Surinamese % | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------|------|------|----------------------|------|------|----------------------|------|------|
| | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Interest representation | 20 | 11 | 18 | 13 | 10 | 21 | 9 | 3 | 11 | 6 |
| Social welfare | 12 | 16 | 11 | 6 | 14 | 10 | 5 | 13 | 6 | 14 |
| Religious | 12 | 23 | 22 | 28 | 6 | 5 | 24 | 60 | 58 | 56 |
| Sociocultural | 20 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 14 | 14 | 9 | 17 | 11 | 14 |
| Country of origin | 16 | 13 | 9 | 5 | 24 | 13 | 10 | | | |
| Cultural | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 11 | | | 3 |
| Sport | 12 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Youth | | 3 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 7 | | 2 | 2 |
| Women | | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 6 | | 2 | 2 |
| Political | | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Unknown | 4 | 6 | 6 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 15 | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| N= | 25 | 104 | 215 | 209 | 50 | 106 | 88 | 30 | 64 | 63 |

Sources: National Archive; Chamber of Commerce Amsterdam; for 2000 Van Heelsum and Voorthuysen (2002)

Fig.2: Percentage distributions of Afro-Surinamese and Indo-Surinamese immigrant organisations in Amsterdam, by the activities of the organisations, 1970-2000.⁶¹

These associations were particularly important in the early days because the Dutch government had a lack of experience with large numbers of immigrants, and delegated to immigrant associations to oversee social service delivery instead of it being a task of the mainstream Dutch organisations. This leads us to think in the hypothesis that only those who could be interested in the return of these colonial objects would be the Surinamese of Afro descent, since they are the ones who, even at the time of their arrival in the metropolis, were interested in cultural issues. Knowing that there was concern about the cultural world in the Afro-Surinamese sector, highlighting an interest in the preservation of the material and immaterial culture of the country of origin, suggests that perhaps the issue of the return of colonial objects was a concern for the entities. However, it remains to be seen whether

⁵⁹ Vermeulen and van Heelsum, “Group-related or host state-related?,” 78.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 89.

the return of colonial objects was indeed a concern within these circles; or whether, and this is the line that seems to be more accurate, the Afro-Surinamese community has fought for a recognition of the colonial past within the Dutch reality, though the return of colonial objects does not seem to have been a priority on their agendas. Also, it is interesting to analyze how, on one hand, the migratory flow, although much higher in the Atlantic territories, has not influenced the return of colonial artefacts. As we will see later in Chapter 2 in detail, the greatest number of returns of colonial artefacts has always been between Indonesia and the Netherlands, and never involved any of the colonies or ex-colonies on the Atlantic side until now.

To conclude, in the case of Suriname, “migration raises the question to what extent the Surinamese, regardless of the diaspora and their ethnic heterogeneity, consider themselves one community and act accordingly;” and this indeed leads us to think that the migratory factor is crucial for the understanding the colonial objects’ return processes. Is it this fact that Suriname has low demand, as we will see later, to reclaim the artifacts? Is this multiculturalism that leads to little pressure from the migrant communities in the Netherlands to bring the issue of the return of colonial objects on the Dutch agenda? Logically, however, we will see later on that these are not the only factors to be considered in the process. Likely, is the Surinamese community aware of the importance of these collections to their nation? Do they think they are significant? With those latter questions, I do not intend to draw hasty conclusions, asking whether it is necessary to return the objects even without national sentiment in the country but to reflect on how the social morphology in the specific case of Suriname plays a fundamental role in understanding the complexity of the problem.

To conclude, in the case of Suriname, “migration raises the question to what extent the Surinamese, regardless of the diaspora and their ethnic heterogeneity, consider themselves one community and act accordingly;”⁶² and this indeed leads us to think that the migratory factor is crucial for the understanding the colonial objects’ return processes. Is it this fact that there is a low demand from Suriname, as we will see later, to reclaim the artifacts? Is it this multiculturalism that leads to little pressure from the migrant communities in the Netherlands to bring the issue of the return of colonial objects on the Dutch agenda? Logically, however, we will see later on that these are not the only factors to be taken into account in the process. Likely, is the Surinamese community aware of the importance of these collections to their nation? Do they think they are truly important? With those latter questions I do not intend to draw hasty conclusions, asking whether it is necessary to return the objects even without national sentiment in the country, but to reflect on how the social morphology in the specific case of Suriname plays a fundamental role in understanding the complexity.

1.4. Postcolonial migration significance in the Dutch society: “We are here because you were there before”

As we have already mentioned in the previous section, migrant populations brought colonial history with them, which caused a change in the landscape of national identity debates among the Dutch and led to a much stronger critique of the past than before. However, it is remarkable to see that the literature points to the discord that Dutch society has with its colonial past. Bosma points to dissonances such as the questioning and collective shame about

⁶² Vermeulen and van Heelsum, “Group-related or host state-related?”, 169.

the past of the Dutch West India Company (Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie in Dutch, WIC), as well as the simultaneous celebrations of the East India Company (the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Dutch, or VOC)—processes that reveal the different trajectories that post-colonial migration had on the past.⁶³ Oostindie addresses this paradox by comparing the reality of Suriname and Indonesia in a sublime way:

“It is not difficult to link the approach to the problematic present with the anachronistic view of the history of colonial relations. The traditionally strong interest in the Netherlands in the Romantic view of the colonial past in Asia (Tempoe Doeloe) and the painful denouement of colonialism in Indonesia has until very recently had its counterpart in the complete disinterest in colonialism and its legacies in the Dutch Caribbean. Even the issue of slavery and its relatively late abolition in the Dutch territories was not discussed until about five years ago. Somehow the idea has stubbornly persisted that nothing that happened in the Caribbean can be very important. This is an ironic paradox, for it turns out that for the population and cultural representatives of the more respected Indonesia, the Netherlands is largely irrelevant, but for the populations of the Dutch Caribbean, treated much more reticently by the former metropolis, Dutch culture is increasingly important. This has been the recipe for tragicomic Caribbean misunderstandings and frustrations.”⁶⁴

As Oostindie points out in 2012, this lack of balance “reflects the contemporary framework in which colonial history is reinserted in the national narrative,”⁶⁵ and clashes with “a domestic context in which postcolonial migrant communities demand that their voices be heard in the new narrative of Dutch national history.”⁶⁶ These dissonances seem to suggest that the history of the slaveholding past and its legacy matters and carries implicit burdens much more for its descendants than for Dutch society.⁶⁷ However, here I consider it significant to quote the percentages that Oostindie pointed out from *De Geschiedeniskrant* on 26 March 2008, which details how from 2000 to 2004 there had been an increase from 7 to 16 percent of Dutch citizens who considered the most humiliating episode in the history of the Netherlands to have been the participation in the slave trade (being that the answer most frequently given to this question). Therefore, we’ve already found positive trends in acknowledging the colonial past and its consequences in the first part of the 21st century.⁶⁸ I would venture to say that the same kind of survey nowadays would still retain this episode in first place, and likely with an even higher rate, especially considering the increase of global decolonization movements have occurred in the last ten years.

Notwithstanding these ongoing controversies, the impact of this new way of looking at history in the framework of migrant voices has also led to the recognition in many areas of the slave-owning past. A first issue is the overall impact of post-colonial migration— from Indonesia and the Caribbean—on the way Dutch history is canonised. The recent version of Dutch history, made by the government and followed by primary and secondary schools, contains a vision where colonialism, according to Bosma, is not glorified and has a view that goes from neutral to

⁶³ Oostindie, “History brought home,” 158.

⁶⁴ Oostindie, *El Caribe holandés*, 50.

⁶⁵ Oostindie, “History brought home,” 158.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

a critical perspective, therefore increasing the awareness of this part of the Dutch history.⁶⁹ In addition to recognition within academia, the colonial past has also been recognized in the social sphere with the erection of commemorative monuments around the country; Amsterdam by Erwin de Vries in 2002; Middelburg by Hedi Bogaers in 2005; Rotterdam by Alex da Silva in 2013; Haarlemmermeer by Joost van den Toorn with Karwan Fatah in 2018; and the three more to be erected in Utrecht, The Hague and Vlissingen.⁷⁰ The most popular is the one erected in Amsterdam in 2002 by Surinamese artist Erwin de Vries, which, no doubt because of its national character, is constantly cited in bibliographies and articles as a reflection of the social changes the country has been undergoing. The monument was the culmination of a petition by Sophiedela (Afro-European women's movement) seeking recognition of the victims of slavery of which many ancestors of the Dutch were victims.⁷¹ However, it seems that on the day of the inauguration the many Antilleans and Surinamese who were there were not allowed to see the ceremony in the presence of the Dutch Queen, feeling left out:

“The inauguration of the national slavery monuments was experienced by many in the Afro-Dutch community as a sign of continued exclusion, showing that the wound of slavery has not yet healed. The humiliation many slave descendent experience during the official unveiling of the national slavery monument seems to have contributed to a radicalization in the Afro-Dutch community.”⁷²

Nimako and Willemsen, citing van Stipriaan, point out that celebrations across the Atlantic associated with the anniversaries of the abolition of slavery have taken place in the Dutch colonies much earlier than in the Netherlands for many years. They point out that these commemorations were a “recent” arrival in the Netherlands while, for example, in Suriname, national memorials began in 1913 for the descendants of enslaved people, 50 years after their “liberation,” the first country to celebrate. According to the authors in the Netherlands, on the other hand, celebrations had a different tone and were primarily a celebration of the status quo linked to the vision of a (white) church as a savior of the enslaved and a (white) king who gave them freedom. The authors add that this vision was modified in the early 20th century when “a new dimension” was added to this abolition and moral emancipation discourse, which eventually transformed Emancipation Day into a vehicle for anti-colonialist ideas.⁷³

Consequently, the creation of renowned institutions exclusively dedicated to the research and dissemination of the colonial past and its legacy and the transformation of consciousness have been organized mainly in the city of Amsterdam. Take NiNsee (The National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy), which, as its name suggests, is responsible for researching and sharing its publications on the colonial past and its legacy. Ulbe points out that the institute has been heavily criticized for the very nature of the institution, as it is government-funded. For some voices, this makes it a tool of the system itself, which maintains a far too central position, and

⁶⁹ Oostindie, “History brought home,” 155.

⁷⁰ “Commemorative Monument History of Slavery The Hague,” Stroom Deen Haag, accessed November 12, 2021, https://www.stroom.nl/nl/kor/project.php?pr_id=4535028

⁷¹ “National Slavery Monument, Erwin de Vries, 2002,” Public Art, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://publicart.amsterdam/en/projecten/nationaal-monument-slavernijverleden-2/>

⁷² James Oliver Horton and Johanna C. Kardux, “Slavery and the Contest for National Heritage in the United States and the Netherlands,” *American Studies International* 42, no. 2/3 (2004): 51–74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41280074>.

⁷³ Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 159.

who criticize it for being more condescending in its work and publications. I would argue that the Netherlands is an example of creating this type of institution, which does not exist in other European realities facing the same problems. Likely at an institutional research level, we find NIOD (Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies), a national and international institution that provides research on the history of world wars, mass violence, and genocides. The institutions carry out the PPROCE, the acronym that describes ‘Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era,’ for two years. The project, whose objective is to develop a methodology for research on the provenance of collections for the colonial objects, with the intention that it would be used in the future, will be discussed in detail in the last chapter together with the ‘Pressing Matter project.’ Another initiative is The Black Archives, which arose from the proposal of a group of young people known as the New Urban Collective, and which has become a point of reference “consists of unique book collections, archives, and artifacts that are the legacy of Black Dutch writers and scientists. The more than 10,000 books in the collections focus on racism and race issues, slavery and (the) colonization, gender and feminism, social sciences and development, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, South America, Africa and more.”⁷⁴

Finally, at the museum level, there’s the proposal of *Musea Bekennen Kleur* (Museum See Colours), which started in March 2020, intending to decolonize museums on small and large scales. Twelve museums have joined the proposal, including the Rijksmuseum and the Utrecht Museum, and there are 13 more on the waiting list. This eagerness of the institutions to participate is undoubtedly a sign of the change of perspective that most, if not all, of the most important cultural institutions in the Netherlands, want to work on that decolonial path. Although museum institutions can sometimes fall into the trap of competing to see who is “the most decolonial,” all these institutions function as a lobbying machine to establish new ways of looking at collections and directly influence the debate around the return of colonial objects to their ex-colonies. Recently, in November 2021, most of the collectives mentioned above met together with some other projects/collectives at a symposium organized by the Amsterdam Museum to discuss “the future of the Dutch colonial past.” The encounter will be discussed at length in the last chapter of the thesis. All the above practices prove that the debate about the colonial past and colonial collections is present in cultural, scientific, and museum circles. However, it should be noted that many of these proposals do not come directly from the government or the sporadic social conscience of Dutch society, but precisely from the sectors that have always had to fight for the recognition of that past.

1.5. The ideas behind colonial collections in the Netherlands, a description of the Surinamese colonial collections.

The history of colonial collections is not an isolated situation—from a historical perspective it connects us to the collective hunger of Europe over several centuries up to the present day, and on the other hand it tells us about the development of the first colonial and ethnographic museums around Europe, besides the universal exhibitions. The hunger for collecting in Europe had already begun long before colonialization. Yet undoubtedly one of the things that brought about a change in the way of thinking about collecting in Europe was colonialism; the so-called “new world” became a collectible subject. In general, the history of collecting had hitherto been marked by the well-to-do classes with the names of monarchs, dukes and counts at the head, and was followed by the

⁷⁴ “About us,” Black Archives, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://www.theblackarchives.nl/about-us.html>

emerging bourgeois society who increase the acquisition of pieces due to the power provided by the growing trade during the Renaissance and Baroque period. These innumerable private collections did not disappear as the centuries progressed but became a part not only of ethnographic museums but also of the most important art museums in European capitals well into the 19th century. In the words of Duclos and Veillard, one can describe that “it is impossible to dissociate the mushrooming of museums of ethnology in the nineteenth century and the development in ethnology-related sciences from the interest shown at the time by the imperial powers in their colonial possessions,”⁷⁵ In the Netherlands the peak of collecting came in the 17th century due to its prolific economic development. The Dutch in their so-called “golden age,” followed the dictates of their European forebears, and kept on collecting. They were noted for having the largest levels of buying and selling during this period. Amsterdam became an international nerve center for the sale of antiques and paintings, with antique dealers controlled by the confrerie of St Luke, exhibitions to promote the sale of works, and a sophisticated auction system.⁷⁶ However, all over Europe we can find examples of powerful and well-known private collections, some of which have helped to build what are considered to be the best museums in the world.⁷⁷

Collection and museum started to go hand in hand during the Renaissance period; it is there when the collection became part of the national heritage and gave rise to great national museums. The museum changed from being a private collection to becoming a “state initiative,” and therefore having a public character. The collection became the driving force behind the tasks that the modern conception of the museum encompasses (acquisition, conservation, research, communication, etc.). In the case of ethnographic museums, these institutions appeared in the 19th century, after taking up a collector’s tradition that had been derived from cabinets of curiosities. In addition, sociologically, ethnographic museums were influenced by folklorist movements, the process of naturalisation of the world that took place at that time, the multiplication of exploratory journeys and, of course, the great colonial conquests.⁷⁸

“The transition from the cabinet of curiosities to the ethnographic museum will involve moving from a collecting system concerned with showing the bizarre and inhuman customs of certain societies to a classification system which, like anthropology, will attempt to highlight the existence of certain cultural evolutionary stages and to demonstrate scientifically, on the basis of objects, the superiority of some cultures over others on the basis of the primitive/civilised dichotomy.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Jean-claude Duclos & Jean-yves Veillard, “Ethnographic museums and politics, *Museum International*,” *Museum International* 44:3, (2018): 129-132. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0033.1992.tb01044.x

⁷⁶ Maria Creixell, “Historia del Coleccionismo,” (Class Lecture Museography and Museology. Barcelona University, Barcelona, February 25, 2020).

⁷⁷ In France, the vast and valuable collection of Louis XVI became the basis of today’s Louvre Museum. Neighbouring England certainly did not lag behind, and the collector’s zeal stood out in the 17th and 18th centuries with the Stuart dynasty and noblemen such as Thomas Howard and the Duke of Devonshire. The three collections of these three figures form the basis of what is now the British Museum. In Spain, the collections of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have the names of the Catholic kings, Charles I of Spain, Philip II and Philip III. The basis of nowadays Museo Nacional del Prado. In Italy, outstanding names such as Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Medici, Federico de Montefeltro, Isabella D’Este, as well as the famous “studioli” (small rooms where the courtiers housed their collections and where they could retire to enjoy themselves) have a collection tradition. And so we can go on and on with a list of countries that followed a fervour for collecting even reaching Russia.

⁷⁸ Agustí Andreu i Tomàs, “Los museos de etnología en Europa: entre la redefinición y la transformación,” *ILHA Revista de Antropología* 14, no. 1, (2012): 83-114, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://xdoc.mx/preview/los-museos-de-etnologia-en-europa-5c26832db42fd>.

⁷⁹ Andreu i Tomàs, “Los museos de etnología en Europa,” 83-114.

Another vitally important factor in understanding the context in which these museums were built around Europe is the context of the universal exhibitions. During the second half of the 19th century, numerous ethnological, colonial and universal exhibitions were held in Europe, in which each of the colonies of the respective European countries was given its own space. The Internationale *Koloniale in Untvoerhandel Tentoonstelling* held in Amsterdam in 1883 was the first exhibition with a colonial theme. The event was followed by the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886, Lyon in 1894, Rouen in 1896, Tervuren (Belgium) in 1897, and so on. The exhibitions that were officially entitled “colonial” and took place particularly in Marseille (1906 and 1922), Strasbourg (1924) and Paris (1931) would be the culmination of this movement.⁸⁰ It is remarkable to note that the rise of these exhibitions of colonial boasting was constructed at the same time that anthropology and ethnography were valued as scientific disciplines. And as Demeulenaere-Douyère notes “they even played an important role in popularising them, by welcoming explorers back from their missions and providing a showcase for the exotic objects and photographs they brought back. Such was the success of these travelers with the public that they were soon joined by collectors and dealers in “curiosities”.⁸¹ The main reason for holding these exhibitions, as well as for providing large spaces within them, was to materialise the imperial power of the European countries in front of the visitors. Undoubtedly a political vision linked to both political and economic power was involved. Although it was certainly a gateway for European people to get to know the non-Western world, “it was not the place where cultures were in reality mixed,”⁸² but rather an extremely exoticised and entertaining vision from the colonies was given, increasing the idea of the inferior and “savage” characteristics of the colonised people. At the Amsterdam exhibition in 1883, Suriname had a pavilion in which a Surinamese village and 28 different ethnic groups, including the Maroons, Creoles, Caraïbes and Arowaks were represented (See Fig.3).

⁸⁰ Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, “World Exhibitions: A gateway to non-european cultures?,” *Quaderns d’Història de l’Enginyeria*, no. 13, (2012): 81-96.

https://upcommons.upc.edu/bitstream/handle/2099/12872/7_World%20Exhibitions.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁸¹ Demeulenaere-Douyère, “World Exhibitions,” 89.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 96.

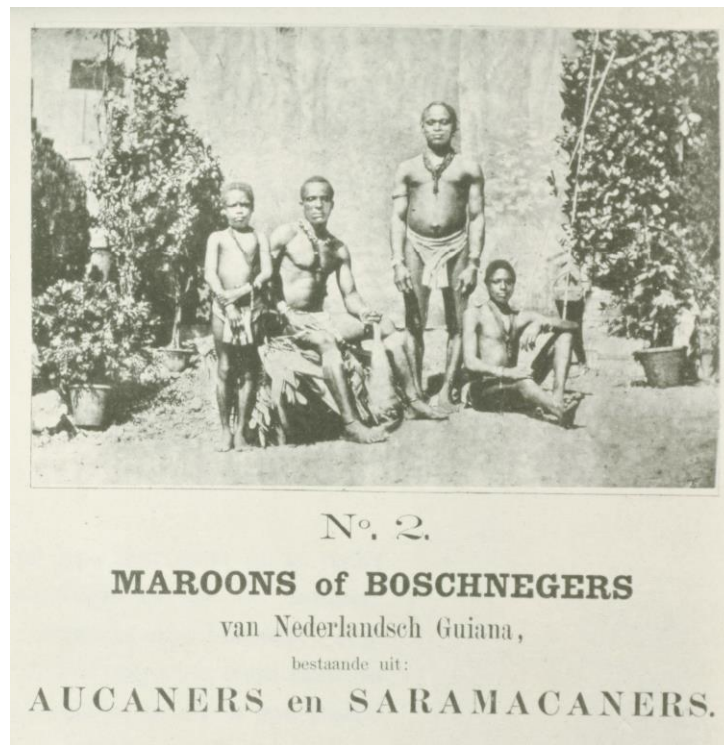


Fig.3: Group portrait of four Maroons, at the Colonial Exhibition, Amsterdam 1883, Friedrich Carel Hisgen, 1883 - 1884.⁸³

The vision of these collections evolved and by the 19th century, the triumph of the universalist perspective produced a crucial event in the history of museums, where “they ceased to be a museum of the exotic, of the heritage of other cultures, the so-called primitive cultures, to incorporate the subject of popular culture into their discourse.” This process of museum renovation came to an end in the 1970s and 1980s with the development in France of the *Mission du Patrimoine Ethnologique*, which implied that the museum would obtain the role of an institution involved in the creation of identity and consequently acquire a political sphere. This model would be exported to the rest of Europe. At the end of the 20th century, museums containing non-European collections changed their thinking about their collections, creating a vision of the museum as a “space for dialogue”, for “multiculturalism,” and for “intercultural relations.” In this way, museums do not intend to collect a single tradition, a single national identity or a vision from a single social class, but rather represent the cultural diversity of a territory, a region, a nation or the very idea of humanity.

This is the idea followed by the NMVW museums, where the approach has become much more pedagogical, taking into account more sectors of society to be represented and being more aware of their practices. However, although much progress has been made, there are still gaps, such as the management of colonial collections. Take the example of the Tropenmuseum, its history has similarly followed the lines that ethnological museums in general have experienced. It started out as a private collection to show the importance of a museum of raw

⁸³ Included in the book: *Les Habitants de Suriname; notes recueillies à l'exposition coloniale d'Amsterdam en 1883*, accessed November 23th, 2021, retrieved from: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/RP-F-1994-12-2>.

materials, natural products and craftsmanship from the Dutch Overseas possessions and colonies.⁸⁴ And later became The Colonial Museum, which was inaugurated in 1871, mainly as a product museum, continued with the idea of showing “the utilisation of local materials from the colonies.”⁸⁵ Therefore the museum was first and foremost “a museum that dealt with natural products from the colonies. Minerals, animals, plants and wood samples were its main content. A smaller part consisted of material cultural objects from the native inhabitants of the islands, mainly covering technical aspects. The main goal of the museum was to collect, inventory and study colonial riches and their uses.”⁸⁶ In the 20th century, the museum moved to Amsterdam and incorporated the ethnographic collection of the Artis Zoo, from which the most important historical objects of the museum originate, but “although more and more ethnographical objects found their way into the collection, it still remained an institution for collecting and informing overseas property, *i.e.* colonial propaganda, and for promoting all colonial endeavours of the Netherlands and the colony.”⁸⁷ In 1910 the new headquarters were opened in the big city, and its colonial institute in 1926, with the majority of the collection coming from Indonesia and to a lesser extent Suriname and which later expanded to include objects from other countries. However, due to political conflicts over the proclamation of Indonesian independence, the name was changed back to the Tropenmuseum.⁸⁸ At that time the museum “[n]o longer fell under the Ministry of Colonies but under Foreign Affairs and from then focused on tropical countries. As the collection primarily comprised items from the colonies, it had to be considerably expanded. Part of the existing collection was exchanged with or sold to other museums. Exhibitions about Indonesia were initially a sensitive matter and attention was paid, for example, to Papua, which the Netherlands ruled until 1962.”⁸⁹

In 2014 when it was decided to unite the national museums housing non-European collections under the same policy, thus, under the umbrella of the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures) are the Tropenmuseum (Tropic museum) in Amsterdam, the Africa Museum in Berg en Dal and the Volkenkunde Museum (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden. Later the museum in Rotterdam joined them, although they do not fully share the political management of the museum. From then it fell under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the collection formed part of the National Collection. This means that the pieces are now shared by all the entities and are therefore not exclusive to a single institution as before. This gives us an idea of the amount of pieces that were acquired during this period in order to create museums whose main base were colonial objects from Japan, Indonesia, the Americas, Africa, and Oceania. If it is a matter of collections, the Netherlands has a great number of collections due to its colonial role. In the case of the Tropenmuseum the museum continued with the renewal of ethnographic museums at the beginning of the 20th century in 2018 by “abandoning the geographical arrangement of the museum to focus on universal themes connecting people worldwide.”⁹⁰

⁸⁴ “History of the TropenMuseum”, Tropenmuseum, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/themes/history-tropenmuseum>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Daan van Dartel, “Universalism in Ethnographical Amsterdam – the past, present and future?,” Paper presented for the conference *The World Under One Roof: Past, Present, and Future Approaches to Universality in Ethnographic Museums*, Vienna, Austria, August 18, 19-24 2007, http://icme.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/01/ICME_2007_Dartel.pdf

⁸⁷ V. Dartel, “Universalism in Ethnographical Amsterdam – the past, present and future?,” 19-24.

⁸⁸ Tropenmuseum, “History of the TropenMuseum.”

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

As far as the Surinamese collection is concerned, it has been difficult for this thesis to describe the nature of the Surinamese colonial collections extensively. Although the collections are accessible through the NMVW museums' website, it is also true that these objects are presented individually, so it is challenging to have an idea of how they are organized within the institution, and neither is it possible to have an idea of how they entered in the museums just by looking at the website. The latter issues will be clarified through interviews with Martin Berger, curator at the NMVW, and informal conversations with Anne Marie Woerlee, a senior consultant at the NMVW. These interviews will be discussed in more depth in the third chapter. Returning to the Surinamese collections, we can say that at the bibliographical level it has not been possible to find an edited book with information only about the Surinamese collection, but rather fragments of descriptions of these collections in volumes of larger books. In conversations with the author, Wayne Modest himself, director of the Tropenmuseum added that they are working on a book on the subject, thus confirming the absence of bibliographical sources that speak extensively on the subject. These also suggest a certain lack of interest in these collections. Before merging the museums, the Surinamese collections were spread over the Volkenkunde ethnological museum, the Tropenmuseum, and the ethnological museum in Rotterdam. According to the bibliography:

“At the national level of the three major ethnological museums in the Netherlands - the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam - Volkenkunde, with its almost 24,000 objects, clearly has the largest collection of Central and South American objects. The MIZUA [Middle- and South-America collections] collection of the Tropenmuseum has a total of 20,000 objects and that of the Wereldmuseum is much smaller in number. Proportionally, the Museum of Ethnology also has the largest number of absolute masterpieces related to the Mesoamerican, Chimu and Moche pottery collection, the early Suriname collection and the Tropical Lowland baskets and feather collection.

The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam can especially rejoice in having an interesting Mexican mask collection and a (growing) popular art collection. As for their precolonial material, the Feriz and Schreuder collections are certainly interesting. With regard to their Suriname collection, especially the collections of researchers such as De Goeje and Eygenberger are of absolute top quality and can be regarded as good additions to the collections of the Museum of Ethnology. In the collection of the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, the relative subset of pre-Columbian objects is particularly striking. The museum also has an important collection of jade from Costa Rica from Central America. There are collections from Suriname (on loan from Queen Beatrix) and Peru from South America.”⁹¹

This description, found in the chapter on the Middle- and South-American collections published in 2008 by the Volkenkunde Museum, states that these collections come from, the universal exhibitions, royal cabinets of curiosities, and gifts among others:

⁹¹ Laura N.K. Van Broekhoven, “Collectieprofiel Cultuurgebied Midden- en Zuid-Amerik” in *De mens in beeld, Verzamelde collectieprofielen*, Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, 2008, 42-53. Author's translation.

“The current size of the Central and South American collection, abbreviated as “MIZUA” in the museum, is almost 24000 objects. (...) The MIZUA collection came about as a result of scientific and individual collecting expeditions and colonial exhibitions, but also largely came about as a result of individual gifts, purchases and bequests. We can therefore see a gradual accumulation of relatively small acquisitions, which have led to the collection as a whole. Whereas in the nineteenth century the collection consisted of more than 2,600 objects (divided between series 34 and 240), over a period of more than a century later, with almost 24,000 objects, it has practically doubled tenfold.”⁹²

The collections in the volume are shown divided into different subcollections:

- Surinamese wood carving collection: “Museum Volkenkunde owns in its partial collection for the period from the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century one of the most important collections in the world. Especially the collection of musical chairs is important and versatile. Given the colonial past of the Netherlands with Suriname and the large number of Dutch people with roots in Suriname, there is a good chance that the collection will grow further through acquisitions, bequests and an active collection policy. In view of the fact that the production of wood carvings started around 1850, it still seems possible to build up a fairly complete collection of them until the present time. Surinamese wickerwork, Musical instruments.”⁹³
- Surinamese wickerwork: “The collection of wickerwork of the museum, especially from Suriname and the tropical lowlands, is undoubtedly of great importance. Especially this early collection of wickerwork was collected for the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition in 1883 (series370), but also the private collections of De Goeje (series2352), Reynvaan (series2452) and Penard (series1817) are of exceptional quality.”⁹⁴
- Musical instruments: “Raging from pre-colonial to contemporary and from beats and winds, are only fragmentary represented in the museum's collection, thus lacking any system and limiting the possibilities for presentation and research, apart from a few small subseries. The collection of Surinamese musical instruments collected by DeGoeje is of exceptional quality, especially because it is so well documented, as is the much-recent collection by W.J.B. Hus. In addition, the MIZUA department’s audio collection has been expanded in recent years and it is therefore recommended that the instrument collection be strengthened.”⁹⁵
- Souvenirs: “These collection components are still, in part, of a minor nature, but they are of importance due to the age of certain collection components. In particular, the Penard collection (series 1817), which was collected around 1912 in Suriname, is of great significance in this respect (A category) and should

⁹² Van Broekhoven, “Collectieprofiel Cultuurgebied Midden- en Zuid-Amerik.” 42.

⁹³ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 49.

be examined in more detail. In addition, there are a number of smaller objects that can be regarded as souvenirs, and which have found their way into the museum's collection over the years.”⁹⁶

However, the book also pointed out that not enough research has been done on the Central and South American collections. “America, but although a great deal has been collected in the past thirty-forty years, only a small part of the collection has been truly unlocked by research.”⁹⁷ Pointing out that one of the basic principles of the museum is to research these collections and that, therefore, research must be done to increase their scientific value and social significance.

⁹⁶ Van Broekhoven, “Collectieprofiel Cultuurgebied Midden- en Zuid-Amerik.” 49.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Chapter II

Analysis of policies and laws in colonial collections, with a focus on Suriname.

After going over some of the historical aspects that have shaped the reality in which the Netherlands and Suriname coexist, it is time to delve into the problems related specifically to the return of colonial objects. Return is a process that, in addition to dragging historical data, focuses on legislative processes and moral issues—or rather the lack of them. As we will see, the return of collections and objects is analyzed on the basis of the claims that have been carried out at the local level, as part of the arduous of creating a global law in favor of the return of these objects. To this end, the first section of the chapter—**2.1. Enhancing the value of Surinamese heritage: the colonizing vision and policies to protect Surinam’s cultural heritage**—on one hand highlights the value of the country’s culture during the colonial period, while comparing the development of its policies with other colonies such as Indonesia, as well as the measures developed at that time. On the other hand, we will look at the protection measures developed after the emancipation period and analyze where these policies leave the recovery of the country’s cultural heritage. The second part of the chapter—**2.2. ‘Return’ a global rising urgency and the local Dutch response**—we’ll look at when and how repatriation starts by exploring the foundational cases; together with the discourse behind the first claims. It analyzes how the process starts locally in the Netherlands, addresses its founding cases, and gives an overview of the repatriation cases in the Netherlands from the 1970s to now, with special emphasis on Suriname. Finally, the section compares the event of returning of objects in the case of Nazi-looted art with the situation of the return of colonial objects. The third part of the chapter —**2.3. Clarifying terms: Restitution, return, repatriation, places of origin, and place of return. An insight into how the terms shape the casuistry of Surinamese collections in the Netherlands**—seeks to clarify for the reader the terms ‘restitution,’ ‘return,’ and ‘repatriation,’ along with other key concepts such as ‘places of origin,’ and ‘place of return.’ These terms are basic but necessary in understanding the realities that designate the concepts and their issues, as well as how they shape the possible return of collections back to Suriname. In the fourth section of the chapter—**2.4. International and national legal framework**—we’ll see how the return process is legislated at a global scale and lobbies for recognition. This section describes the laws that influence the decision making and claims process. We’ll see what each of them consists of and assess their framework of effectiveness in the case of the Netherlands and Suriname. Finally—**2.5. The Netherlands and its most recent measures on the restitution of objects: the NMVW report on the “restitution of cultural objects” and the guidelines of the Council of Culture “Colonial collections: A recognition of justice”** the item briefly explores the soft law elaborated by the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen and its implications for the devolution process, comments on the important data provided by the guidelines of the Council of Culture, and discusses some of the more problematic points of the report.

2.1 The value enhancement of Suriname's culture: the colonizing vision and the policies of protection of the country's cultural heritage

Suriname is a very particular case compared to other territories where there was Dutch colonialism, because its cultural heritage did not arouse the same interest as other colonies from the Dutch perspective. During the long period of colonization, the Caribbean culture, together with Suriname, was not considered 'high culture' in Dutch eyes. This can be explained by the great contrast between the Caribbean colonies and the Indonesian colonies as seen by the Dutch elite, where "no matter how convinced of their superiority the Dutch may have been, they recognized the existence of a high culture in the East Indies but not in the Caribbean."⁹⁸ This is not surprising since colonial history had shaped the two territories in very different ways. While Asia enjoyed almost entirely native populations with millenary roots, on the other side only Suriname and Aruba had native populations. In the case of Suriname, as Oostindie says, the Dutch were the ones who created "their own colonial objects"⁹⁹ by bringing in an influx of populations from different parts of the world as we've extensively commented in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Indonesian elites were able to "maintain their own high culture, even in areas where they embraced colonial culture, such as education and politics."¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, in the case of Suriname and the Antilles, the Dutch elite considered the colony and the culture of those who inhabited it to be "inferior variants of the Dutch model."¹⁰¹ This data has its own logic if we consider the number of objects that are held by the Dutch museums' collections. The Netherlands acquired hundreds of thousands objects during its colonial history; although the exact number is unknown, the thesis could know that approximately 9,000 are of Surinamese origin.¹⁰² And if we look at the return cases, the number of returns was not only much less in Suriname than compared to Indonesia, but furthermore the value of the cultural objects was not seen as the same for the Dutch. As van Beurden explains:

"Although there has also been much traffic of cultural and historical treasures from Suriname and Antilles to the Netherlands, these countries have never gone for as big a deal as Indonesia's in 1977. Why was this so? Possibly, the Dutch government and Dutch officials, plantation owners and others in colonial Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles attached less importance to the historical and cultural treasures of these colonies. They possibly considered many of the treasures found in Indonesia as 'high art,' and those from Suriname and the West Indies more as 'folk art.' They showed less respect for traditional religions, which many Surinamese and West Indians subscribed to. If someone converted to Christianity they asked the converts to get rid of all the objects that reminded them of their 'paganism.' There were fewer transfers of objects to the Netherlands."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Oostindie, *El Caribe holandés El colonialismo y sus legados transatlánticos*, trans. Author.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 46- 47.

¹⁰² In conversations with Martin Berger, curator at the NMVW.

¹⁰³ Jos van Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures: The Case of the Netherland*, (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2012), 33, https://issuu.com/kitpublishers/docs/the_return_of_cultural_lr

In addition to not bringing value to the culture of the colony, the literature points to the little effort that was made by the Dutch to contribute to what they considered as ‘civilizing’ the Caribbean territory. Examples of this can be seen in the non-evangelization attempts that were made only decades before and after abolition, with the help of German missionaries. Oostindie wrote about how the Dutch could not even impose their language at the beginning, referring to “Neger-Engelsch” (Black English), which had emerged as a language of contact between African slaves and British planters in the twenty years preceding the Dutch conquest of Suriname (1667), and evolved into a fully developed Creole. Dutch remained the language of the elite, but they had to communicate with their own slaves in Sranan Tongo. Thus, unlike the rest of the Caribbean, when emancipation came about, 95% of the Surinamese population did not even understand the language of their rulers.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, there seems to be a mismatch between what the Dutch were interested in extracting culturally and the culture that the Afro-Caribbean cultures were actually developing. As Oostindie points out, the colonial influence on the slaves did not, to any great extent, nullify the development of the traditions brought directly from Africa, which materialized in their own Afro-Caribbean culture in terms of religion, music, dance, etc.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the period of colonization and seeing in the previous chapter how the Netherlands became the measure of all things, it is interesting to wonder about the evolution of cultural value in Suriname and whether during the struggle for independence or afterwards, cultural value was put in the foreground. It seems that the protection of cultural heritage in Suriname has not been one of the main focuses at the cultural level in any of the stages of the young nation. However, during the colonial period in the mid-twentieth century, we find the ‘Act against illicit trafficking of cultural property of Suriname’ – (G.B. 1952, No. 14) ‘*Houdende bepalingen tot behoud van voorwerpen welke historische, culturele en wetenschappelijke waarde hebben*’ – Promulgated on February 7, 1952 by the Queen with the aim of prohibiting the export of cultural objects, criminalizing the transfer of objects out of the territory without a specific permit, and fining those who did not comply with the law. With regard to the elaboration of laws for the protection of the country’s movable cultural heritage during the colonial period, this is the only document that this research has been able to locate.¹⁰⁶

“**Article 2: 1.** It is prohibited to export: a. Stone tools, stone weapons, pottery, images in stone or wood and other antiques originating in the country, other than by virtue of a license; b. Furniture, carpets, vases, plates, representations or engravings and other utensils or ornamental objects that have been in use in Suriname before nineteen hundred; c. Collections of rocks, minerals, plants or animals from Suriname or specimens thereof, which are suitable for manufacture.

(...)

Article 3: 1. Whoever exports one or more of the goods referred to in Article 2, without having obtained permission to do so, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding five hundred guilders. 2. The offenses specified as punishable under the first paragraph shall be deemed

¹⁰⁴ Oostindie, *El Caribe holandés El colonialismo y sus legados transatlánticos*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

to be offences. 3. Goods which have been the subject of an offense punishable under section 1 may be confiscated, irrespective of whether they belong to the convicted person or not.”¹⁰⁷

The enactment of this law leads us to deduce that although the literature commonly suggests that in the Dutch view Surinamese heritage was not of great value, there was nevertheless some interest in certain cultural objects in that specific period, otherwise there would be no reason for a law like the latter. However, this law seems to be the exception that proves the rule, because if we take a look at the cultural policies of other colonies, Suriname was way behind. In Indonesia they created the ‘Royal Society of Arts and Sciences of Batavia’ in 1778, known in Dutch as ‘*Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*.’ The institution is considered to have “played a remarkable role in the preservation of these treasures,”¹⁰⁸ by protecting the country's heritage and ensuring that “all finds from archeological sites, temple complexes and other monuments were to be rendered to the Society.”¹⁰⁹ Although the law was clear in later times many objects ended up either in the hands of private collectors in the Netherlands, the antiquities trade, or even in the collections of a Dutch museum. In addition, Indonesia included the protection of its cultural heritage in its independence process. The new independent territory requested the return of cultural pieces from the Netherlands and set up a committee to carry out the claims but the demands did not succeed.¹¹⁰ The Indonesian case is useful in seeing how these policies were not considered in the Caribbean colonies, and serves as an example to see how even in colonial periods cultural policies could be an important matter for the colonies.

“There are several cultural treaties between the Netherlands and these former colonies, but the return of cultural and historical treasures is not part of these agreements. In these ex-colonies, relatively fewer people were involved in the return of their historical and cultural heritage. In post-colonial relations between Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, and the Netherlands, archives and shared heritage have been prominent. The Netherlands Government has supported the restoration of shared monuments in the Surinamese capital Paramaribo. The return of files, begun in 2010, was agreed upon already in 1913.”¹¹¹

Indeed, as van Beurden points out, there are no agreements to be highlighted for the return of historical and cultural heritage because Suriname's efforts have been focused on other areas. Suriname's most notorious heritage protection law revolves around the architectural heritage of the city of Paramaribo. In 2003 it became a protected area, and a plan was created for the restoration and protection of many of the buildings in the historic center. In addition to this, efforts have been made to protect monuments in 2000 and later in 2006 for archival documents. The country joined UNESCO in 1997, accepting its agreements.

Finally, this thesis would like to mention the last political guidelines that the country has followed, and the importance given to culture by looking at the Surinamese culture policy plan between 2017-2021. The last cultural

¹⁰⁷ “Wet van 7 februari 1952 (G.B. 1952, No. 14) houdende bepalingen tot behoud van voorwerpen welke historische, culturele en wetenschappelijke waarde hebben – Act against illicit trafficking of cultural property of Suriname”, accessed November 21, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/sr/laws/>, author's translation.

¹⁰⁸ V. Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

plan under the mandate of the now former president Desiré D. Bouterse contains the guidelines and objectives to be followed during those five years in the cultural sector. Although we will comment on this aspect in more detail in the thesis, the cultural section takes a rather anecdotal place in the whole document. Cultural policies are guided by three principles—‘integration with other policies,’ ‘research into and promotion of diverse cultural expressions,’ which is the foundation for increasing the production of tangible and intangible cultural products, professionalization and commercialization, and ‘adapting outdated and the adoption of missing or new laws and regulations.’¹¹² In the latter it is emphasized that the approach has to be given in areas such as ‘management and protection of cultural heritage including buildings,’ among others.¹¹³ The principles that try to cover a large number of cultural aspects use broad concepts and leave ideas rather abstract and underdeveloped. The principles are materialized into four objectives to be followed during the years of mandate.

- “1. A broadly supported cultural policy and planning increases the access of citizens to production, education and training opportunities as well as guidance for cultural activities and development opportunities in the field of art and the experience of their own culture in particular.
2. Cultural productions distributed through electronic media also reflect the social, cultural and political environment and actively contribute to the development of cultures and the formation of the next generations.
3. Adapted legislation and regulations, facilitation and guidance enable culture carriers, including professional culture practitioners, to better present and sell their products on local, regional and international markets.
4. Public-private partnership of the government and organizations of culture bearers strengthen, broaden and deepen ‘the Surinamese cultural product’ for commercial and non-commercial purposes.”¹¹⁴

One more time, the goals adopted are very broad, and focus more on so-called ‘cultural development,’ which seems to have a more commercial emphasis, where it is not very clear that preservation and conservation of cultural heritage is an important issue.

2.2. ‘Return’ a global rising urgency and the local Dutch response.

Although there is no specific case or an exact place in the world where the phenomenon of the return of objects is inaugurated, we can say that around the decade of the 1930s the first claims that have global resonance can be found, and which were developed under a framework of claims and social struggles whose main protagonists were North America, Australia and New Zealand. In these three realities, the voice of the indigenous communities led

¹¹² “Policy Development Plan 2017-2021,” Republic of Suriname. RCO in collaboration with Government of the Republic of Suriname, 05, January 2017, accessed December 14, 2021, 147, <https://suriname.un.org/index.php/en/95042-policy-development-plan-2017-2021-republic-suriname>

¹¹³ “Policy Development Plan 2017-2021,” 147.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

the demands towards the museum institutions, where the main objective was the return of the human remains of the ancestors of the indigenous groups, as well as sacred ceremonial objects housed in the collections of some of the museums. In doing so, they criticized curatorial practices and the role played by museums as allies of colonial history.

“Australian Aborigines, Native Americans and, increasingly, indigenous peoples from other parts of the world, have campaigned for the right to determine the future of the human remains of their ancestors. (...) In particular, this campaign has contested the ownership of human remains housed in museums and other institutions, and has commonly demanded that such material be returned to the cultural group in the area from which the human remains originated for final disposal. (...) In the past it was often standard procedure for indigenous remains to be automatically assigned to museum collections, whereas ‘white’ bones would be taken away to be buried immediately.”¹¹⁵

The global conjuncture changed after World War II, when relations between European nations and those they had dominated and exploited during the colonial era took another direction. In this post-colonial era there was an upsurge in social demands. In this period, as many of the colonies claimed their independence, many minorities also followed the wave of demands, among them the indigenous cultural minorities in the western nations. From North America the phenomenon spread to Australia and New Zealand. In the United States, many of the minorities had not seen their basic civil rights recognized, and they shared “intense cultural activity, political fervor, and the emergence of an irrepressible determination to fight for political representation and the preservation of the identity of minority cultures as a distinct part of American society.”¹¹⁶ Thus emerged “black power groups” such as the Black Panthers, the Mexican-American group “El Movimiento,” as well as other indigenous groups that organized themselves into Pan-Indian organizations.¹¹⁷ In this reality “museums came under increasing criticism for their Eurocentric approach towards the representation of cultures.”¹¹⁸ Different actions towards museum institutions were carried out, some of them from criticism in protests, activities of political activists, and in some cases even violent actions. Along with the strong criticism of museums in the late 20th century, Simpson summarizes it well when he states that:

“In Europe, the tradition of museums and institutions both reflecting and serving a cultural elite has been long established and, in many, is still maintained. The museums, the “cabinet of curiosities,” are the storeroom of a nation’s treasures, providing a mirror in which are reflected the views and attitudes of dominant cultures in which museums are rooted. The colonial origins of the museum remain an enduring influence upon these institutions and upon public perceptions of them. (...) Yet despite the history of colonialism in which museums are inextricably enmeshed, museums are now undergoing a radical change in the

¹¹⁵ Jane Hubert and Cressida Fforde, “Introduction: the reburial issue in the twenty-first century,” in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, ed. Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, Paul Turnbull (London New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

¹¹⁶ Moira G. Simpson, *Making representations: museums in the post-colonial era* (London New York: Routledge, 1996), 8.

¹¹⁷ Simpson, *Making representations*, 7-8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

way that they function and their relationships with the cultures represented in the collections; a change which reflects shifts in the relationship between dominant western cultures and those of indigenous, minority, and suppressed cultures everywhere.”¹¹⁹

This widespread concern culminated in the creation in 1993 of the First International Conference on the Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples, held in New Zealand. Out of the conference came the Mataatua Declaration which contained “a series of recommendations to states, nations, and international agencies concerning human remains and cultural objects held in the collections of museums and other institutions. The recommendations that they included were focused on the return of human remains and burial objects of indigenous people, and the request to create inventories of any indigenous cultural material for the traditional owners and the creation of an inventory of any indigenous cultural objects to be given to those who traditionally owned them.”¹²⁰ There were also professionals who were deeply moved by the ethics of their work, and who raised these issues and created policies that served as a guide for other professionals, by adapting them in the USA, Canada, and Australia. Important legislation has emerged, such as The Vermillion Accord that acknowledges “the legitimate concerns of communities for the proper disposition of their ancestors, as well as the legitimate concerns of science and education,”¹²¹ and that was followed by the First Code of Ethics which was a creation of the World Archeological congress (WAC) which states that “the people related biologically, culturally or spiritually are equal with scholars in the research enterprise.”¹²² In the USA, for example, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), was created in November 1990. NAGPRA places ownership and control of human remains with the Native American population and ultimately decides who makes decisions concerning dispositions and research, whereas before the law, the cooperation of museums depended upon the policies of individual museums and the attitudes of individual members of staff.¹²³ Thus we see that the problem had repercussions first in the return of ancestral human remains and from there it progressed to other objects. From “continued with the debates about the return of Nazi spoliated art [reaching] a phase in which return also covers other categories such as cultural and historical treasure taking during colonialism, archeological excavations, and violent conflicts.”¹²⁴ Subsequently, the shifting global landscape brought the issue onto the international agenda and further influenced these debates change in the dominant policies of the planet, emergence of other powers, new elites more conscious of the protection or purchase of their cultural heritage; change in the values of superiority and inferiority between cultures, development of technologies, better connection between countries, new museum models, rise of the decolonial movements...).

When we look at the Dutch reality, the country does not escape the repercussions of these global social and cultural movements, which have been modifying the DNA of its society over the past decade. These social transformations have been extensively discussed in the first chapter with the post-colonial migration impact on the Netherlands. In the Dutch territory, however, “[i]n comparison with the USA, Canada, and Australia, the Netherlands has no (well organized) native groups and here the debate about the fate of human remains started later, around the year

¹¹⁹ Simpson, *Making representations*, 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹²⁴ V. Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 27.

2000.”¹²⁵ According to van Beurden, one of the main experts in this field, there are three initial and controversial episodes that opened the arena for the debate on the return of human remains in the Netherlands, most of which came from territories where there had been Dutch and West Indian companies. The first case was at the Kunsthall museum in Rotterdam, when the remains of an Inuit hunter and his Kayak from Greenland were exhibited in 1998/1999. The discussion of the return of these objects was settled without any solution and with the uncertainty, as van Beurden pointed out, of “whether the remains at the Dutch exhibition were really of an Inuit.”¹²⁶ The second claim was made in 2002 when the National museum of Ethnology in Leiden was asked to return a mummified skull figure. The piece was first given as a long-term loan but finally the country of origin was granted full rights to it with unconditional return. Finally, in 2009, there was the return of an Aboriginal’s skulls and bones to Australia, and in Ghana, the return of King Badu Bonsu II’s head, which was claimed by the government of the African country. For van Beurden the process demonstrated how the people in charge of the custody of these pieces in the museums had to set aside their privileges in favor of the claimants; the creation of new links with the communities, changing the reality of the institutions as the only voices in these processes; and finally a more favorable stance on the Dutch side when facing the return of human remains.¹²⁷

When van Beurden conducted his research on the number of returns that have been carried out between the country and its ex-colonies between 1970 and 2011, the author concluded that the returns have been “rather marginal.”¹²⁸ Van Beurden came to this conclusion after conducting a study in 2012 where he collected the number of return cases by Dutch government institutions or heritage institutions. According to the autor, 34 returns were carried out, not only in Suriname but to other territories including Dutch ex-colonies during the period of 41 years. This means that less than 1 piece per year was returned, and that the number did not grow during the period mentioned above. Regarding specifically the return of pieces to Suriname, the numbers are even less significant. In van Beurden’s list, only two returns to Suriname are recorded, the first in 2006 when 45 pieces were returned from the Tropenmuseum to the ex-colony, and the second in 2010 when archives were transferred from the National Archive of The Hague to the National Archive of Suriname.¹²⁹ The highest number of returns occurred between the Netherlands and Indonesia in 1970’s, but the country has never reached the peak of the 1970’s again; Indonesia is also the former colony with the highest amount of pieces collected in the Netherlands.¹³⁰

The study becomes even more salient when we compare the data on the return of colonial objects with the number of returned Nazi-looted art pieces. The author explains how the Netherlands created for the restitution of Nazi looted art the Dutch Restitution committee in 2001, with a group of well-prepared professionals with the mission of “investigating and assessing applications by individuals for the return of works of art,” of which they had relinquished possessions involuntarily.”¹³¹ As a result, what appeared to be an institution that would function for a short time and expect a moderate response of claims turned out to be extended in time and received many more claims than expected. During the period studied by van Beurden (2002 - 2011) there were 99 returned objects, *i.e.*

¹²⁵ V. Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 31.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

the number of Nazi art objects returned in a period of 9 years was more than double the number returned to the former colonies during a period of 41 years. Although without the desire for comparison, the author analyzes those factors that favor the return of the pieces and some notions that could be useful to contemplate in the debate on the return of colonial objects. On one hand, there's the shorter period of time since the transfer of the objects took place, which makes it easier to obtain documentation or testimonies; and on the other hand, there's the organization of the claimants, who in general had legal support to carry out the return of the objects "Its members are less focussed on mediation and more claim-oriented.," notes the autor.¹³² There's also the existence of lobbies that protect their interests as UNESCO 1978 Committee, and finally, "the use of alternative forms of dispute resolution outside the regular judicial procedure for Nazi spoliated art and the liberalised restitution policy of the Netherlands Restitution Committee can be interesting points of discussion, ..."¹³³ The author also adds one of the most lucid reflections on this comparison of restitution modus operandi:

"The suffering of the Jewish people during and around World War II has been widely documented. Without wanting to start a discussion about who has suffered more, the question arises as to why other groups of people who have suffered do not have similar rights. Why does a country like Korea - also a victim of World War II - not have the right to recover the 100,000 objects that Japan took between 1910 and 1945? Why can't the former colonial countries claim the treasures that were taken by the colonial powers? What is the difference in the forced sale at prices well below the market of precious family jewellery, ritual objects or religious manuscripts when the victims are from the Jewish holocaust, famine or violent conflicts that I observed in Ethiopia during the drought in the last decade? 1980s, or what happened in the Sudanese refugee camps in northern Kenya in the 1990's?"¹³⁴

Undoubtedly van Beurden's position invites us to think about the double morality that seemed to exist in the return of objects; while some cases were looked at quickly and an institutional infrastructure was created to solve the problem, others had not been looked at with the same urgency at the time of the author's writing. As we will see in the following points, it was not until 2019 that the first steps were taken on a general and institutional level to address the problem together with the NMVW report on the 'restitution of cultural objects,' and the 2020 guidelines of the Council of Culture 'colonial Collections: A recognitions for a justice'. However, to understand the machinery that surrounds these objects, it is necessary to take the first steps in the definition of concepts and the legal framework surrounding them.

2.3. Clarifying terms: 'restitution,' 'return,' 'repatriation,' 'place of origin,' and 'place of return.' An insight into how the terms shape the casuistry of Surinamese collections in the Netherlands

One of the questions at the beginning of the elaboration of this thesis was to know if when we spoke of return, repatriation, or restitution we were referring to the same kind of reality. In general, 'return,' 'restitution,' and

¹³² V. Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 24.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

'repatriation' are commonly used in the literature as a general way to explain the movement of objects from point A to point B—however, the legal nuances under which the objects were obtained are what distinguish them. Recognizing the similarities and differences in the terms helps us to understand the complex reality surrounding the collections. As Forrest points out: “Essentially, the problem addressed is the movement of cultural heritage from one entity to another where the entity that has lost possession of the cultural heritage claims it as a manifestation of its culture. That entity may be a State, a group, or even an individual. This necessarily raises not only complex notions of cultural identity, but also legal issues of ownership, possession and control. It also raises issues of the right of a State over groups or individuals claiming cultural heritage from other entities, whether other States, groups or individuals.”¹³⁵

Restitution: When we talk about restitution we are talking about those cases in which there has been an illegality at the time of removing the objects. The concept was developed from the international law of war with respect to cultural heritage.¹³⁶ As Kowalski explains, technically speaking restitution occurs when there has been a “violation of the prohibition of theft and pillage imposed by the binding law.”¹³⁷ The definition has taken on more nuances over time, so we refer to “the restitution of indentified cultural heritage back to the territory from which it came”¹³⁸ without the need for there to be a wartime reality. Or we speak of ‘restitution in kind,’ “by which the cultural heritage of one State was to be transferred to the opposing belligerent States as compensation for lost, and essentially irreplaceable, cultural heritage.”¹³⁹ However, the focus when talking about restitution is always on the illegality surrounding the change of location of the object. As Forrest explains, “this use of the term however, can be expanded to refer to any violation of a legal norm or prohibition. It might include not only prohibitions relating to acts done in times of armed conflicts, but any acts which are contrary to a State’s laws, including theft and illegal export.”¹⁴⁰

Return: The concept of restitution is distinguished from the term return because the latter “is based upon a moral or ethical obligation to restore the cultural heritage rather than an obligation which arises from a breach of some legal norm.”¹⁴¹ According to Forrest, Kowalski uses the term first, to refer to situations where cultural heritage left the State of origin during a period of colonial occupation, and second, to cultural heritage illegally exported from a State.¹⁴² In the first case it applies to territories that have been occupied in the past, but where apparently there was no imposed rule that has been broken. However, in the second case the term adopts a fuzzy boundary with the term restitution, given that the 1995 UNIDROIT convention speaks of return while linking it to a framework of illegality. As Forrest stated in reference to the latter: “Nevertheless, given the qualified use of the

¹³⁵ Craig Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage* (London New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2010), 136, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=995625>

¹³⁶ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 141.

¹³⁷ Wojciech Kowalski, “Claims for Works of Art and Their Legal Nature,” in *Resolution of cultural property disputes: papers emanating from the seventh PCA International Law Seminar, May 23, 2003*. (The Hague Zürich: Kluwer Law International Schulthess, 2004), 31– 51.

¹³⁸ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 142.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 142.

term ‘return’ in these instruments, an unqualified term would allow it to be used in a general sense to refer to the restoration of cultural heritage that was removed lawfully, though perhaps unethically, from another territory.”¹⁴³

Repatriation: According to Kowalski it has been used as a ‘subcategory’ of the more general term ‘restoration,’ using it when “there has been a change to the territorial dimensions of a State resulting in the displacement of cultural heritage.”¹⁴⁴ Where there has been “a change in territorial boundaries between existing States, the emergence of new State when a multi-national State, such as Yugoslavia, broke apart, or where parts of a State were ceded to another State.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, objects falling into this category are returned within their own States. The word also adopts another usage when it designates those cases in which the State itself returns objects to communities within its own territory, “the restoration of cultural heritage from a central government to a minority or indigenous community, often from a national museum and restored to the community from which it came.”¹⁴⁶

The place of origin: Origin of the objects is another factor to note when considering return. On one hand, this factor involves two difficult points, the first “simply identifying the territory or place an object came from,”¹⁴⁷ the second seeking to know “what culture can actually claim to be embodied in the heritage in question.”¹⁴⁸ Identifying the physical origin, according to Forrest, falls under the responsibility of the group, person, or state claiming the object: “The burden of proof usually lies with the claimant so that if the claimant cannot show, beyond a balance of probabilities, that the object did indeed come from the claimant’s land, the claim will fail and the possessor will be allowed to continue possessing the object.”¹⁴⁹ They must have sufficient evidence of the origin of the piece, otherwise it is very likely that the piece will remain where it is. Sometimes it is very difficult to perform this task, especially when the objects were extracted illicitly.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, when looking for the cultural origin of the objects, there are difficulties in knowing how to locate geographically to whom it belongs. “Conversely, cultures move, and leave the physical manifestations of the culture in places subsequently settled, conquered or occupied by other cultures, which in turn might impose their culture on the physical remains of previous cultures.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, an object can have the same cultural importance for the place that retains it as for the place that claims and this fact “has arisen in a number of instances as an argument against restoration to the culture of origin.”¹⁵² Furthermore, as Forrest reflects: “Within an international system that is based on the concept of the nation State, the return, repatriation or restitution of cultural heritage is further complicated by States acting as proxies for a culture, and claiming the restoration to the territory of the claimant State, and not necessarily to the claiming culture.”¹⁵³

A reflection on this point, is that although it is necessary to establish the place of origin of the objects—because there is no point in repatriating a piece without knowing its provenance, and this is something on which the experts

¹⁴³ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 143.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 148.

seem to agree—it is important to know that many times this premise has been used with the will to retain the object in the countries where they are held in custody. This happens because, as Forrest said, the obligation to prove the origin of these objects falls on the claiming parties, causing this evidence to be judged not by them, but by the institutions and governments that hold the objects. Here again lies not only the responsibility of the claiming party, but also of the party that houses the object not to veto the evidence solely for documentation, but rather to place requirements on the cultural value of the piece for the community. We'll talk more extensively about these controversies later when we look at the Dutch national laws' framework.

Ownership: Forrest points out the difficulty of this parameter, because determining exactly who the owner was in the past—and therefore providing proof of ownership—is hard, especially when indigenous people or ethnic groups are the ones who made the claim rather, and especially when providing evidence is required to show how a possession was actually lost.¹⁵⁴ Generally in international law, “an owner of cultural heritage will therefore be able to enforce his ownership rights in cases where the heritage has been stolen and exported to another State.”¹⁵⁵ But the problem can be caused when the laws respecting ownership of one state differ with the ownership laws of the other. In these cases it is up to the claimant and the law applied to determine the final verdict, but:

“As a basic principle of international law, no State is required to recognise and enforce the public laws of another State. This includes not only penal and revenue laws, but also exportation laws, including those that prohibit the exportation of cultural heritage. As such, no State is required to declare illegal the importation of cultural heritage illegally exported from another State.”¹⁵⁶

Thus, giving priority to the legislation of states. It was precisely to try to mediate between these jurisdictions that the 1970 convention was elaborated. We will comment in more detail on this convention in the following point 2.4. However, we can say that the convention does not fulfill its purpose, and one of the factors that make this possible is that, although developing countries “[H]ave strict laws on cultural heritage, their implementation is at best incomplete, and at worst completely non-existent.”¹⁵⁷ This makes it difficult for them to protect their own heritage, not to mention the cultural objects that were taken out in the last centuries.

According to Forrest's definitions found above we could say that the case studied in this thesis, the movement of the colonial Surinamese collection from the Dutch museums back to Suriname; and taking into account that the objects in the national collections we are interested in are those acquired during the colonial period, we would be talking about a case of return as the objects were taken out in a legal manner. As noted by Martin Berger, who had until recently been the longstanding curator of the Central American and Caribbean collections, where the origin of almost all the objects is known with precision thanks to the documentation they hold in the NMVW.¹⁵⁸ And we could talk about repatriation once these objects are handed over by the Surinamese government

¹⁵⁴ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 150.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Martin Berger, (Curator at the NMVW institution), in conversation with the author, 20th July 2021, Utrecht.

to the indigenous communities to which they belong. The objects, as the definition of return above indicates, would be returned for moral or ethical reasons, but not because there is a legal obligation to do so. That is why the government's announcement of being open to returning pieces to the ex-colonies may therefore seem significant, since there is no violation of the law in having these objects in its possession. Regarding 'place of origin' and 'ownership,' we find that these factors in the case of Suriname at first glance may seem 'easy' to resolve. If there is indeed a willingness on the part of the Dutch institutions and ultimately the Dutch government to return the objects, it would only be a matter of willingness to return these pieces. However, when discussing specifically where the objects in the collection should be housed, questions of cultural origin are raised. Should these objects be returned to the Suriname museum, or should they be returned directly to the communities to which they belong? And why one and not the other? On the other hand, when Forrest pointed out that an object can have the same cultural importance for the place that retains it as for the place that claims it, and this being used as an argument against restoration, it must be considered that this may be the case in Suriname. As we know, a large part of the population within the Netherlands with Suriname's roots has a strong power vis-à-vis their place of origin –providing a high level of economic support, as well as being the closest to the culture of the country of origin– and this perhaps is a reason for them to not be willing the return of the pieces to Suriname.

Yet, there is another factor that deserves to be mentioned. On countless occasions, cultural objects have been part of political interests, which have been used as bargaining chips by politicians in diplomatic meetings. Sometimes it has been the developed countries who, have returned an important piece back to the country they were visiting, as a present. Take for example “in May 2012, when during a visit to China the Dutch Deputy Prime Minister returned a rare 18th century iron incense burner. It has been in the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Beijing since 1911. The Chinese hosts were very visibly pleased.”¹⁵⁹ On this occasion, although the gesture is a positive one, the value of the 'gift' rather than the 'right' to return the piece to its place of origin always prevails, and creates an image of good and bad that is far from the ethical and moral values that should be paramount for the return of these pieces. On other occasions, and in a unwisely way, it has been the rulers of developing nations themselves who have given away heritage objects in an negligent manner. As we can see: “In 1973, for example, on a State visit to England, Nigerian president Yakubu Gowon presented Queen Elizabeth II with a rare Benin bronze head. In search of an appropriate gift, the president had simply gone to the National Museum and chosen a gift despite the protestations of the Museum Director.”¹⁶⁰ Advocating further reflection I would like to point out one of the descriptions regarding this political reality in which the objects are found, which was written by Susan Legêne, and included in one of Van Beurden's publications:

“No government puts international cultural policy at the top of its foreign policy agenda. No minister for development cooperation makes it a priority. If culture figures are on the foreign policy agenda, they are generally a tool to promote political and economic interests rather than an aim in itself. If culture is part of foreign aid and is regarded as essential to

¹⁵⁹ V. Beurden, *The Return of Cultural and Historical Treasures*, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 156.

development, there is often more talk of policy than coherent implementation on the ground. The Netherlands is no exception.”¹⁶¹

Political and personal interests distort the value of the object, which changes its status according to the reality in which it is involved. It becomes a bargaining chip from being a cultural object, turning to have a political or even a diplomatic value. Nevertheless, institutions and conventions have tried to create containment measures to retain their cultural value above all else, as we will see in the next point.

2.4. International and national legal framework

The legal context under which cultural objects are protected is extensive. From the World Heritage Convention, passing through the famous UNESCO 1954, UNESCO 1970 and UNIDROIT 1995 conventions, continuing with the laws in effect in the European Union, and ending with the respective laws of each country. Undoubtedly, the legal framework is a factor of vital importance, of which there are doctoral theses, dissertations and nearly encyclopedic books. This extensive material makes sense if you think about the fact that objects are moved from developing countries to the global north, and that not only has this already happened, but continues to happen. Therefore, these laws are implemented, leading to changes and acts on the objects in one way or another according to their location, adopted law, convention, or demanding party. It is of singular importance to add that once cultural objects are commodified they change their status. As Campfens explains, “for as long as demand exists and profits are high, cultural objects continue to be looted, smuggled and traded. At some point, their character tends to change from protected heritage in an original setting to valuable art and commodity in the hands of new possessors.”¹⁶² Due to the nature of this work, we cannot discuss all the laws and cases where they apply, but we will present the most relevant ones as far as the case of the Netherlands and Suriname are concerned. One of the first things to be clear about when dealing with the legal framework is the definition of cultural heritage. This definition is contemplated in the World Heritage Convention where cultural heritage is defined as:

“In art .1 as monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

¹⁶¹ Jos van Beurden. Partnerships in Cultural Heritage. Amsterdam: KIT Tropenmuseum, Bulletin 364, <https://bibalex.org/baifa/Attachment/Documents/113678.pdf>

¹⁶² Evelien Campfens, “Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims,” *Netherlands International Law Review* (2020) 67:257–295, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-020-00174-3>

While art. 2 defines natural heritage as: natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view; geological and physiological formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of science and conservation; natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation, or natural beauty.”¹⁶³

In the present thesis, as we focus on the cultural heritage integrated in the Suriname collection, the objects were found within the Sites category of article (1). The convention itself “addresses, first and foremost, the States Parties’ responsibility to protect their cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, it is up to the countries themselves to decide what falls into these categories and to conduct inventory, manage, and protect the heritage. Suriname has not included the heritage of indigenous communities in any list, having listed tangible objects such as the historic center of Paramaribo (2002) and the Central Suriname Nature Reserve (2000). But the story takes a different turn when we look at it from the prism of international laws that are the most important in these matters, knowing that:

“Prior to the development of international law to prohibit such action, which only took any concrete form at the end of the nineteenth century, any removal of cultural heritage before then was deemed legitimate. Neither the removal of cultural heritage by the armed forces representing the State, nor looting by soldiers and government officials in their individual capacities was regarded as illegal. As such, though some material may be found in State collections and museums, much of this material entered the legitimate art and antiquities market, and since good title could be transferred, continues to circulate freely.”¹⁶⁵

Forrest’s words in the case of Suriname tell us that there was no possibility of illegality at the time when the transfer of the objects from the former colony to the Netherlands took place. However, because there was a generalized problem due to the lack of an international legal framework and with the intention of finding a meeting point between states to fight against the trafficking of cultural property, the 1970 convention was created by UNESCO. The convention was accepted by Suriname only 25 years ago in August 1997, in the Netherlands in 1992 with extension to Curaçao, and with respect to the other member states it was adopted but in different ways (ratification, acceptance, accession, or of the notification of succession).¹⁶⁶ The convention is criticized precisely because of this variability in the acceptance of the convention. Because it has little impact on the obligation placed on the member states where these objects are currently housed, they ultimately continue to use the state laws that grant them ownership. The international law “has no direct effect on the domestic laws of States, it is weakened

¹⁶³ Campfens, “Whose Cultural Objects?,” 117.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁶⁵ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 161.

¹⁶⁶ “States parties,” UNESCO World Heritage Convention, accessed January 5, 2021, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/>

by the territoriality principle of laws—or *lex rei sitae* (the law where the property is situated).¹⁶⁷ In the case of the Netherlands, “for disputes concerning artefacts that were misappropriated before that time—*i.e.* nearly all of today’s cases—the rule applies that a new possessor gains valid title after a good faith acquisition or merely by the passing of time.”¹⁶⁸ Forrest points out that the convention has some very ‘vague’ principles in reference to enforcing these precepts both for states that host works from other states, as well as for states that seek to protect their own heritage from being illegally exported. He adds that the convention is also very ‘vague’ when it refers to the institutions, museums, libraries and archives looking for ways to “ensure that their collections are built up in accordance with universally recognized moral principles.”¹⁶⁹ The author stated:

“In an international convention which directs State’s actions, this call directly to the cultural institutions is unfortunate, since the nature of the Convention can do nothing more than suggest that they adhere to some set of moral guidelines. The preamble ought to be confined to the principles that will underpin State action, and call on States to ensure that these institutions adhere to such a body of moral guidelines, or preferably, require that normative provisions in this respect be introduced.”¹⁷⁰

However, other voices say that the convention goes further the theoretical terms and that “it would be a mistake to limit the 1970 Convention to a strictly legal and mechanistic interpretation of its provisions. The theoretical contribution of this Convention goes beyond its mechanical inadequacies.”¹⁷¹ This point of view points out that the convention has gradually imposed “the doctrine on the legitimacy of the return of cultural property.”¹⁷²

“[I]t effectively lays the foundations for the principles of solidarity and collective responsibility to protect the heritage of peoples (...). It is these principles of shared responsibility and cultural equity that mark the international instrument’s contribution to the right of peoples to enjoy their own culture. (...) Cultural property constitutes one of the basic elements of civilization and national culture, and that its true value can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding its origin, history and traditional setting.”¹⁷³

UNIDROIT 1995: created subsequently to implement the 1970 convention, which in some points gave rise to different interpretations. The text resulting from the work contemplates: (1) The law of the country of origin - the *lex originis* - must determine the (il)legality of a transfer. (2) Extension of limitation periods for claims of ownership, (3) Invalidation of a transfer of ownership to a new possessor, who may be entitled to compensation to the extent that he proves to have been duly diligent at the time of acquisition.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ “The 1970 Convention: Cultural diversity before the letter of the law,” UNESCO, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2020-4/1970-convention-cultural-diversity-letter-law>

¹⁶⁸ Campfens, “Whose Cultural Objects?,” 259.

¹⁶⁹ UNESCO, “The 1970 Convention: Cultural diversity before the letter of the law.”

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Campfens, “Whose Cultural Objects?,” 262.

“While the latter is essentially a public law instrument, requiring State action by way of the implementation of legislation or adoption of appropriate administrative procedures by States Parties, the UNIDROIT Convention deals with both stolen and illegally exported cultural property, establishing a system for the return of objects to the true owner in the case of stolen objects, or to the State of export when the cultural property has been illegally exported.”¹⁷⁵

However, as Campfens notes “neither the existing legal framework for the art trade, based on the 1970 UNESCO Convention, nor regular ownership concepts appear particularly suited to solve title issues over contested cultural objects.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, he states that the problem should be viewed from a human rights point of view, “the notion of ‘heritage title’ in a human rights law approach can act as a bridge in that regard.”¹⁷⁷ In this way, the original owners “should still be able to rely on a ‘heritage title’ if there is a continuing cultural link,”¹⁷⁸ relying on the lack of international norms where cultural heritage and human rights converge.

“This would support a smooth and licit international art trade in the future. However, Western ‘market countries’ mostly did not accede to the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention (precisely because it deals with ownership) and have only recently become party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention (that is implemented in different ways), and today’s restitution claims deal with past losses. As a result, the fragmented situation continues.

To retroactively declare that the lawfully acquired ownership title of a new possessor is invalid is problematic—mostly for civil law countries where ownership over stolen goods may pass—, as that would implicate expropriation. It is unlikely that States would ever change their laws in that way, hence the preference for the extralegal ‘ethical’ model and alternative dispute resolution for claims to Nazi-looted art.”¹⁷⁹

UN 2007: Another law that plays an important role is the UN 2007, which the Netherlands adopted in 2007. The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples aims to provide a guiding vision to ensure the fundamental principles of the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the indigenous communities of the world.¹⁸⁰ It notes that “states shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution (...) with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.”¹⁸¹

Washington Principles 1998: The Washington Conference Principles on Nazi Looted Art of 1998, “in developing a consensus on non-binding principles to help resolve issues related to Nazi-confiscated art, recognizes that different legal systems exist among the participating nations and that countries act within the context of their

¹⁷⁵ Forrest, *International Law and the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, 197.

¹⁷⁶ Campfens, “Whose Cultural Objects?,” 257.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ “Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”, Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 23, 3, <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/indigenous-en.pdf>

¹⁸¹ “Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” 25.

own laws.”¹⁸² In accordance with the eleven principles that govern the conference, an attitude that promotes “pro-active provenance research, the importance of transparency in terms of collections and archives to allow third party research, and the need for just and fair solutions to claims.”¹⁸³

The Heritage Act (Erfgoedwet): Finally, in the national framework, it is worth mentioning the Heritage Act whose main objective is “to stop the fragmentation of Dutch cultural heritage through legislation and to promote a comprehensive protection regime for cultural heritage, with shared definitions, procedures, and protection measures for immovable, movable and intangible cultural heritage.”¹⁸⁴ What is important here is that the act “identifies the Dutch State as the owner of the national collections. Any recommendation for return and thus permanent transfer of ownership (alienation) of cultural object(s) in the national collection out of the custodianship of NMVW will require the assent of the Dutch State through the Ministry and Minister (under articles 4.17-4.21 of the Heritage Act).”¹⁸⁵

The result of looking at each of the convictions that inflict these objects is that there is global machinery, which tries to protect these objects but in many cases still fails, partly because there is no standard agreement and the countries end up adopting their laws in addition to being conventions that, in the case of colonial objects, have occurred after looting, with principles that not all countries adhere to, and therefore diminishing the possibility of returning artifacts to the country of origin. In the case of the Surinamese collections, as they were not acquired illegally, it would be interesting to contemplate the path developed by Campfens when he states that the problem should be seen under the notion of ‘heritage title’ where the owners should be able to continue to reclaim the objects if there is a continuation of a cultural link. Because as we will see, there are entities interested in recovering parts of that heritage in Suriname. As we will see in the next point, there is widespread use among cultural institutions to apply soft law to avoid more complicated legal litigation and to establish agreements that go beyond showing who has the authorship of these objects, but also seek to create a link with the claimant party (institutions and communities).

2.5. The Netherlands and its most recent measures on the restitution of objects: the NMVW report on the “restitution of cultural objects” and the guidelines of the Council of Culture “Colonial Collections: A recognition of justice”

If we look at the last policies that have been developed in the Netherlands, we will encounter two main reports. The first is one from the Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen (National Museum of World Cultures), created in 2019, in a willingness to initiate a return policy open to any claiming parties. The second one is the Council of Culture report, “Colonial Collections: A recognition of justice,” launched in 2020, commissioned by the government to assess the problem and know how to take the first steps to return for the returning colonial looted artifacts.

¹⁸² “Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art,” U.S. Department of State, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/washington-conference-principles-on-nazi-confiscated-art/>

¹⁸³ “Return of Cultural objects: and principles”, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/about-tropenmuseum/return-cultural-objects-principles-and-process>

¹⁸⁴ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, “Return of Cultural objects: and principles,” 5.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

The NMVW report on the “restitution of cultural objects”: Sometimes museums transfer the objects by agreeing on conditions between the two parties and avoid the diplomatic whirlwind that awaits them if they do not use a soft law. However, museums also have the bureaucratic apparatus behind which the objects are subjected. The NMVW document can be found on the website of any of the museums that make up the institution and is very easily accessible. The report, which does not occupy more than 13 pages, includes an introduction that makes two essential points clear: the willingness they had at the time of writing this statement and the legal framework in which they are developed. Regarding the first part, the process is governed under the principles of “respect, cooperation and timeliness,”¹⁸⁶ confirming that the claims are made with the desire for “consultation and open dialogue and clear communication by all parties.”¹⁸⁷ In addition, the report clarifies that the institution is willing to help the claimant obtain all the information they’d need about the parts and guide them through the claim process.¹⁸⁸ As noted in the document:

“*Return of Cultural Objects* expresses the overall mission of NMVW to address the long, complex and entangled histories that have resulted in the collections the museum holds. It is part of a larger commitment made by NMVW to the role of collections in national public life; a commitment that includes researching and making publicly accessible its collection; addressing provenance issues arising from colonial appropriations; developing new ethical possibilities for collections; putting contemporary communities on an equal footing as national collections and engaging in dialogue with communities and nations of source, nationally and internationally, who have particular attachment to the collections.”¹⁸⁹

In terms of laws the document states that it is governed by the UNESCO (1954; 1970) and UNIDROIT (1995) Conventions, as well as UN Declarations (2007), amongst others. And as far as the national level is concerned, it is legislated by the Heritage Act (Erfgoedwet) 2016. However, as the paper “all national collections in the Netherlands are property of the Dutch State and therefore any decision to permanently transfer these out of the national collection requires assent of the Ministry and Minister for Education, Culture and Science.” In other words, ultimately the Dutch government has the final veto, which directly affects some of the points that the report takes into account. The report contemplates that the claimants need the support of an institution to proceed with the request, which in the words of Martin Berger, was a necessary premise because they knew that otherwise the government would not approve the process.¹⁹⁰ The report contains all the steps that need to be followed by the claimants to claim the pieces in its collection, how the management is developed within the legal framework, as well as the response times.

The most significant sections to analyze in this report are: –4. Criteria for Claims for Return– which contains the categories that are taken into account when returning the objects –5. Guidelines for Claims for Return– which

¹⁸⁶ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, “Return of Cultural objects: and principles,” 2.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Martin Berger, (Curator at the NMVW institution), in conversation with the author, July 20, 2021, Utrecht.

contains the criteria that are taken into account when reviewing the requests –Appendix 2– which provides an outline of what is required in the claim, and section –8. Successful claims–, and –9. Further processes–

- 4. Criteria for Claims for Return: the categories are: –4.2. Questions of legality– 4.3. Involuntary separation– and –4.4. Heritage value– At this point, as we have mentioned throughout the paper, the Surinamese collection according to Martin Berger is well documented. So, in the case of a claim, there would be little possibility of claiming the objects in the collection due to legality issues, and therefore the claim for ‘involuntary separation,’ or ‘heritage value’ would remain. These last two premises in the case of Suriname are not so easy to investigate, due to the moment in time when the collections entered the state coffers, and because the importance that the country of origin assigns to these pieces is not known. A big number of pieces belong mainly to the indigenous communities, but we do not know if the government shares the same opinion. This thesis has not been able to find out how important the objects housed in the museum may be for each of the indigenous communities that still exist, or even if they are aware of all the pieces in the collections.

Within the same point category 4.4. Heritage value and item 4.4.2 contemplates the claim for those: “whose relative national historical significance outside the Netherlands or influence on continuous cultural wellbeing outside the Netherlands outweighs all benefits of retention by the national collection in the Netherlands.”¹⁹¹ This point can be problematic if there is not the same way of looking at the benefits that a particular object brings to the public. The calculation of the “benefits of retention” of the pieces seems pretty abstract, and, paradoxically, it is the claimant who has to prove their value when these objects have been taken out of their contexts. However, the museums are very concerned that the government will look at these criteria when accepting or not accepting a return. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the claimant museums to be the ones that comply with adequate measures to conserve these objects, and perhaps if it is a community that makes a claim, it is more difficult for them to prove it is worthy to return a specific piece.

- 5. Guidelines for Claims for Return: Section 5 – Guidelines for Claims for Return– together with appendix 2, provides an outline of what is required in the claim. It shows under which aspects the cultural value is subject, *i.e.*, the lines that must be validated to prove the cultural link between the claimant and the object. These are set out in the sections –5.3.2 Cultural heritage and identity– or –5.3.3 Cultural continuity/genuine link– and in the appendix mentioned as ‘statement of connection between claimant(s) and cultural objects’ or an ‘assessment of cultural significance of cultural objects being claimed (for claimants).’ In other words, the document takes into account for the return not exclusively scientific values that prove that the claimants are the owners; however, we do not know to what extent one criterion will have more value than another in the eyes of the committee or how the importance of each of these points is quantified.

¹⁹¹ Museum van Wereldculturen, “Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process Nationaal,” 6.

On section 5.3.1–Standards of continued custodianship– it is said that: “The benefits of safeguarding cultural objects to ensure as far as possible they are used for cultural and heritage purposes when returned to the nations and/or communities of origin.”¹⁹² A notion that is also contemplated in Appendix II called “Projected custodial responsibilities on return: identification of public/cultural role of return cultural object(s).”¹⁹³ Regarding this petition on one hand, it may seem right to demand the protection of the object, since in some cases the final place of return of the pieces has been for individual use. But on the other hand, one might think to what extent does the country that has custody of the piece have the right to demand what the final destination is? Shouldn’t it be exclusively up to the country of origin to discuss the place where these pieces will be housed? Isn’t this a form of paternalism in the institutions?

On section 5.3.4 – Just and fair solutions– it is said:

“This may include recommendations for models alternative to return that are acceptable to all parties – these might be exhibitions, loans, and sharing of information and knowledge on a number of platforms. This may include strategies for ongoing collaboration/relationship building.”¹⁹⁴

This point might cause one to also wonder why cooperation is usually required by the plaintiff at the end of the exchange. And if they simply want to keep the works, would this not be a valid option as well? In the case of Suriname, its strong dependence on the colonizing country makes us think that cooperation is something that, in a hypothetical return case of a colonial object, would occur though precisely due to this difference in power and resources between countries.

- Appendix II: A comment on the point included in Appendix II deserves some reflection when it is noted that in order to claim, it will be taken into account “Statements of support by national cultural institutions/national government form claims made by subnational polities or individuals.”¹⁹⁵ It is discussed that in the case of Suriname this can be a conflicting reality. Where will these collections return, to the original communities or back to the government and be housed in the national museum of Suriname? If the claimants are indigenous populations, would the request have to be endorsed by a government institution? It is not clear to what extent there is a good relationship between the government and the indigenous communities in Suriname. No doubt we should also ask why the backing of a government institution should be an essential premise for the return of the pieces.

- 8. Successful claims, further processes:

¹⁹² Museum van Wereldculturen, “Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process Nationaal,” 7.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

“8.1 Each party will bear its own costs in relation to the processing of the claim under these NMVW- principles and process.”¹⁹⁶

Here it is made clear that the burden of costs falls on the party making the claim. However, it does not take into account the economic benefit that the MNVW may have had by housing these objects during all these years and of course it does not mention an economic compensation for the countries for having.

- 9. Periodic review:

“9.1 These NMVW principles and process will be periodically reviewed, and draw from precedent allowing it to be adapted and improved. Equally, national developments in state policies regarding return may have to be taken into account and could lead to alterations over time.”¹⁹⁷

Suggests that the measures taken are not fixed but will be reviewable and adaptable according to the progress of the laws. Without therefore assuring either party that the return of the objects will be the end of the litigation on the piece.

The document opens the possibility of returning the pieces but waits for the Dutch former ex-colonies to come and get the pieces. However, the institution developed its own policies before the government had; knowing which are the keys points the government would ask for in order to accept a return. As Martin Berger noted in the interview the process seems difficult because they know there are some demands the government would require. This reinforces the view that professionals within these sectors are on one hand aware of the social problem that these collections cause and develop resources to address them, though on the other hand their effectiveness is questionable. Together with this document the NMWC has digitized all the pieces that are in its collection, so that in principle anyone who requires it can access it, and this act of transparency on the part of the institution opens the possibility of claiming. However, it would be beneficial to implement a search engine function because, to find those pieces that only belong to the colonial collection of Suriname, it is necessary to know the registration numbers, otherwise all the pieces that have been acquired will appear without any filter. The pieces are shown separately, so there is a lack of an overall picture of the collections, and a lack of implementation of the descriptions of many of the pieces.

Guidelines of the Council of Culture “Colonial Collections a recognition of justice”: The second document to be taken into account is the guidance the Cultural Council of the Netherlands developed in 2020, for colonial collections named ‘Colonial collections a recognition of justice.’ The document stands out in several aspects, the first being its extensive and complete guide which takes into account many of the aspect of this conflict, –2. The Netherlands as colonizers, 3. Colonial collections, 4. Past returns, 5. Developments in other European countries,

¹⁹⁶ Museum van Wereldculturen, “Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process Nationaal,” 8.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

6. Opinions in the countries of origin, 7. Issues of importance for the treatment of colonial collections, 8. The legal framework, 9. Guidelines presented to the Minister on the treatment of colonial collections, and 10. Concluding remarks. The report demonstrates a receptive attitude towards the return of colonial artefacts and an awareness of the importance of the problem in many respects.

An important aspect to be highlighted appears in point 3 – Colonial collections – because it provides one of the most relevant data in the guide. In point 3.3– Provenance research by museums– the report shows the result of a survey conducted by the committee in museums in the Netherlands that house colonial collections. The survey results show that only 10% of these museums have a good overview of the provenance of their colonial collections. While “43 percent carry out exploratory research, 13 percent carry out systematic research and 34 percent do not yet have provenance research fully on their agenda.”¹⁹⁸ (See Fig. 4) The results are a significant sample of an overall reality where “much remains unknown about the way in which colonial cultural heritage objects came into Dutch possession,”¹⁹⁹ and thus the ownership of these objects. The result is frightening; something must have been done systematically wrong to reach such low percentages in the provenance knowledge of their collections. Certainly, Dutch museums are not known for having precarious budgets or a non-self-sufficient infrastructure in cultural institutions, even if they have suffered from policies that are not very favorable to culture over the years. However, this data leads one to think of a way of systematically averting one’s gaze from a question.

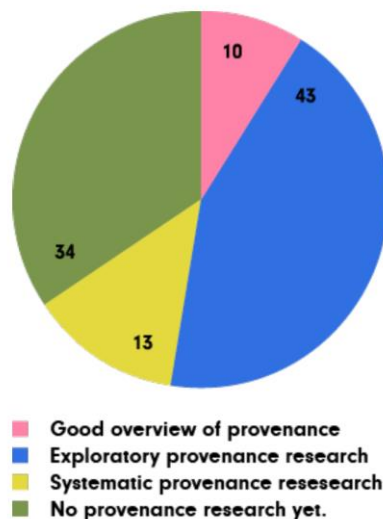


Fig. 4.²⁰⁰

It is quite logical then that the main Dutch proposal to solve the return of colonial objects has as its main objective knowing the provenance of the objects in the museum collections. This project called ‘Pressing Matter’ has the financial support of no less than 4.5 million euros, in a program that seeks to be “the next step in dealing with

¹⁹⁸ “Colonial Collection recognition of injustice. Guidance on the way forward for colonial collections,” Raad voor Cultuur, Council for culture, The Hague, January 2021, 38.

¹⁹⁹ Summary of report of Advisory Committee on the National policy framework for colonial collections, 1.

²⁰⁰ Image. “Colonial Collection recognition of injustice. Guidance on the way forward for colonial collections,” Council for culture, Raad voor Cultuur, The Hague, January 2021, 38.

colonial collections.”²⁰¹ The plan is to discover in a period of five years the authorship of these pieces that are currently under the Dutch state.

“The Pressing Matter project is in line with the Council of Council’s advisory report focusing as it does on research into colonial collections and on the development of research methodologies to do so. Also in line with the report, the researchers in Pressing Matter will develop tools in dialogue with the countries of origin, on how to deal with objects in colonial collections that are not spoils of war, but that do have important socio-cultural value.” Modest said: “we will not only consider looted objects, but also focus on other collection histories; importantly this will include investigating possible solutions for human remains in the collections.”²⁰²

The project was to be developed between 2021- 2025, but in 2021 was kept on stand-by, and as of today’s date in January 2022 there is no evidence that it is fully underway. In the same way, it is not known which will be the first pieces to be studied, as noted on the web portal: “The initiators cannot yet say how many objects will be investigated precisely. The collections will be examined thematically, according to their collection history. This includes items collected during military actions, during missionary work, through trade relations or through scientific expeditions.”²⁰³

Another point to consider is section 7 – Issues of relevance to the management of colonial collections – This part discusses the issues that the committee believes need to be taken into account when actually dealing with the return of colonial heritage. Some of the concerns included may again be considered controversial, as was the case in the NMVW 2019 report. For the application, the future location and role of the object will be taken into account, proposing that:

“Of primary importance is that the object is put into ‘safe hands’ and is not, for example, at risk of being destroyed for internal political reasons. A judgement following a request for return may be different if the request concerns a cultural heritage object held in store in the Netherlands and which, upon return to the source country, will be on public display as opposed to a cultural heritage object removed from a public space in the Netherlands in order to be stored away from view in the source country.”²⁰⁴

One can wonder again, won’t it be up to the country to which the objects really belong to decide where these objects are to be taken? As seen in the NMVW report of 2019, it is noteworthy to care for the welfare of the object because their value is immeasurable, but are we not seeing a paternalistic attitude before the location of the object?

²⁰¹ “Pressing matter: ownership, value and the question of colonial heritage,” Research Center for Material Cultureen, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://www.materialculture.nl/en/research/projects/pressing-matter-ownership-value-and-question-colonial-heritage-museums>

²⁰² Research Center for Material Cultureen, “Pressing matter: ownership, value and the question of colonial heritage.”

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “Colonial Collection recognition of injustice,” 57.

I would go so far as to say that this measure could be a hindrance rather than a help. To continue, another of the premises that again appears to be considered in the refund process is the willingness of the claimant to cooperate:

“[O]ther considerations include the permanent availability of the cultural heritage object for scientific research, together with the possibility of entering into cooperation agreements with the source country. The management conditions at the location in which the cultural heritage object would be kept after return may also play a role in the assessment of the request for return.”²⁰⁵

This view can also denote paternalism and colonialist principles. Why should be cooperation of the other party be one of the reasons for agreeing to return the objects? Shouldn't it again be up to those to whom the objects belong to decide whether they want to cooperate or not once they have their artifacts? If the Netherlands sets the terms, when and how to do things and communities and countries after waiting have to mold themselves into Dutch principles, it does not seem to be a relationship of equals but rather a relationship of power.

Another important notion to comment on is in point 6 –Views in the source countries– In this point it is stated that: “The discussion partners in Suriname and the Caribbean consider that the museum’s infrastructure must be brought up to standard before objects are returned to them.”²⁰⁶ The document does not specify who Suriname’s partners are or which entity or person has been spoken to, but as we will see in the interview with the director of the principal museum in Suriname, he hasn’t been reached after the government announcement. As we do not have answers to this question, we can offer a critique because even if we are looking to safeguard the pieces, it is clear that asking the countries to have the means to place the pieces in the museums will postpone this reality in which the object is returned.

The penultimate point to be considered is the legal framework under the Netherlands’ current policy on inlay. The report mentions:

“The benchmark for the importance of a cultural heritage object for the Netherlands can be found in Section 3.7 of the Heritage Act on the criteria for protection and retention of cultural heritage objects for the Netherlands. This article describes an object as worthy of protection when it is: ‘a cultural heritage object which is of particular cultural historical or scientific importance or exceptional beauty and which should be considered irreplaceable or indispensable for Dutch cultural heritage.’ An object is irreplaceable if there are no (or hardly any) equivalents or similar objects in good condition in the Netherlands. A cultural heritage object is indispensable according to the explanatory notes to the Heritage Act if it clearly recalls persons or events that are of compelling importance to Dutch history and/or of compelling significance to academic practice (including cultural history) in the Netherlands,

²⁰⁵ “Colonial Collection recognition of injustice,” 57.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

and/or makes an essential contribution to research into, and knowledge of, other important cultural heritage objects.”²⁰⁷

It does not seem easy under these laws to contemplate any return to the countries of origin if all objects are considered under the parameters of not being ‘considered irreplaceable or indispensable for Dutch cultural heritage.’ Undoubtedly, when the return is shown under this law, either the objects that are being removed are so numerous, or something is not being made clear. In the case of Suriname, this would be utensils, weapons, and instruments, so we do not know how these objects would be considered. Finally, one point that the report does not appear to touch on is financial compensation. Concerning the above, this idea is strictly related if we consider that the Netherlands ensures that sufficient measures are put in place for the return of the objects but does not propose the necessary economic aid during this process (transport, creation or improvement of infrastructures in the country of origin of the pieces, among others). It is difficult not to think that these pieces have been providing a benefit since they have been visited in the museum, and those who contain them also create research flows of objects that do not directly benefit the country of origin of the pieces, but the country that houses them. Then again, isn’t this another form of neo-colonialism? Shouldn’t we be looking for new ways to repair the consequences of the extraction of these pieces? In chapter 3, we will see more perspectives on the latter point of view in the interviews. As Campfens noted, “such cases highlight a tension between cultural objects as heritage—symbolic of an identity—and cultural objects as possessions—representing economic interests and exclusive rights.”

²⁰⁷ “Colonial Collection recognition of injustice,” 56.

Chapter III

Contemporary approaches to the return of colonial artifacts between Suriname and the Netherlands.

The third chapter is the result of a search for experts whose sensitive voices are involved in the return of colonial artifacts, particularly of the Dutch-Surinamese relationship. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with experts in the field, along with discussions with informants, and the various panels of the Amsterdam symposium ‘The future of the Dutch colonial past,’ on the management of Dutch colonial heritage were attended. All in order to seek answers beyond the literature and thus shed light from a more contemporary perspective on the return of colonial artifacts to former colonies, emphasizing Suriname. Concerning the interviews, five meetings were conducted with professionals linked to the return of colonial artifacts from different fields –Martin Berger and J. van Putten work inside museum institutions, Jos van Beurden, is an independent researcher investigating return cases around the world since the 1990s, and Thomas Polimé is an independent research and anthropologist with Suriname’s roots as he is part of the maroon community– All interviewee’ responses were obtained through online conversations, except for J. van Putten, who answered the questions through an online questionnaire. From the interviewees’ perspective, we attempt to address various crucial topics generated throughout the thesis such as ownership, legislative framework, entitlements to restitution, and other unexplored factors, such as the role of economics in restitution, from the perspective of the interviewees. Respondents’ answers are analysed at the end of each questionnaire to summarize the answers key points, see which issues are confirmed or remain unresolved, and compare respondents’ positions.

In addition, the chapter brings together contributions from ‘The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past,’ a symposium held in Amsterdam on the 26th-27th of November 2021. The conference, which included the presence and opinions of several leading national experts, such as Wayne Modest and Susan Legêne helps us to see how Dutch institutions are approaching the problem of colonial heritage currently in some of their museums. A description is given of the panels and explains in depth one of the panels that resonates most with the return of colonial artefacts between museums and ex-colonies along with the role assigned to Suriname in this matter. The chapter incorporates the author’s analysis and perspectives as we move through the panel Finally, we have had informal conversations with two informants for this third chapter. Andrea Kiescamp, a cultural consultant and a member of the ICOM Ethics committee, and who has collaborated to create the Saramaka museum in Suriname. And Anne Marie Woerlee, a consultant for the NMVW for more than two decades. Both are closely connected to the field, and although their interviews will not be collected, their conversations were relevant in providing texts for a more rigorous understanding of the different Surinamese collections held by the NMVW and helping to make links with some of the interviewees, respectively. With Kiescamp, we also reflected on the topic globally through the IC-Ethics Meeting Room on ‘Coping with Colonial Heritage: questions on ownership, power, and inclusion,’ which we conducted to explore the issue of the return of colonial artifacts from different perspectives.

3.1 Interview with Martin Berger

Martin Berger studied archaeology at the University of Leiden and subsequently started working as curator of the Latin American collections at the Volkenkunde Museum (Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden in 2010. He has worked as a curator for 12 years —four years before the merger of the Volkenkunde with the rest of NMVW museums and the other seven years after the merger— The Surinamese collections formed part of his work until 2017 when Wendelind Flores was appointed curator of the Caribbean and South American collections of all the museums of the MNWC. In discussions with Berger, he noted that although the Volkenkunde had more significant collections of Surinamese material, there was no tradition of work or research on this material, “since the mid-1920s, all the curators of the Central and South American departments were specialists in Mexican or Peruvian archaeology; therefore they worked mainly in Latin America and not so much in the Caribbean. And at that moment, museums merged; there were quite a bit more questions of the “Decolonial” in the Tropenmuseum than in the Volkenkunde. And so that also became more part of my job.” He curated an exhibition called ‘Afterlives of slavery,’ which was at the Tropenmuseum, which was in his words, “the top job I did with, let’s say, transatlantic slavery and Suriname and colonialism.” He also contributed in another project with an indigenous organization in Suriname, which was centered in a manuscript that was in the institution’s library around 2009-2010. He concluded that “this is mostly the worked on Suriname. The rest he primarily worked in Mexico and the United States with indigenous Mexican migrants and looked at transnational migration from Mexico to the US and how that impacts indigenous traditions and for people living in California primarily.

Do you know if all the Suriname pieces the NMWC houses have been exposed over the years? If not, approximately how many of them have been exhibited?

It depends on the institution that you analyze. But Suriname’s collections at the Volkenkunde, for instance, were not exhibited for a long time because there were not part of the research interests of the curators. It is hard to give a percentage, but between 5 and 10% of that has been displayed in the past 120 years. The Tropenmuseum is slightly different because it was founded as a colonial museum, so they emphasize, primarily in Indonesia and Suriname. Many pieces were on display, especially at the beginning of the 20th century, when the museum was founded. But one can say that it was more quantitative than qualitative, in that they full walls and complete materials as they did back then. Through time, Tropenmuseum has had a strong relationship with Suriname and has always displayed a lot of material at the permanent exhibition. But still, in terms of material, a lot of material that we have from Suriname —I will say maybe 8000 to 10,000 pieces for all the museums together— a lot of this is relatively repetitive, *i.e.*, tree basket, the ‘staff’ you used to make cassava bread. All these kinds of things from 1850 to 1950 and collected by different people by different circumstances, etc, a lot of this is a relatively similar material, leading to only a selection of this being presented because they all look alike and then choose the best-looking pieces.

Do you know the provenance research of the Suriname collections?

There is an essential registration, which is primary, a name and a date of who collected it and when. In the case of Suriname, I would say it is more straightforward than in other cases because in the case of Suriname, 90% if not more of the people that supplied material to the museums were either people who worked for the colonial administration or Dutch people who spent an amount of time for whatever reason in Suriname. That is maybe not true for the latest part of the collection, so after independence in 1975, those are more contemporary art and development projects and questions like this. But as for the Volkenkunde collection collected before that moment, it was primarily brought in by colonial officers. Instead of generally in circumstances that we associate with colonial violence, they were souvenirs, a sort of 'tourist art' bought and brought to the Netherlands.

As a curator of Suriname's collection, have you received any claimants' solicitude during your years at the NMWC and the Volkenkunde museum?

Not really. I personally haven't encountered that, except for this manuscript that was found and that I worked with this indigenous collective. The community, at some point, raised the question of whether or not we will be willing to send the piece to Suriname. While we said that in principle, yes, we would be ready to do that, in the end, it never materialized. Simply because in the internal organization, there were some struggles, and it started to fall apart, and as a result, nothing happened.

One of the issues with Suriname is that there is little organization in terms of culture and cultural heritage. So there is that Surinamese museum, which is 'kind of the National Museum, but it is a private entity, not a national museum. It is founded by the state but is a private entity, and I think it is significantly underfunded; I believe two people work there, and then they have volunteers. So this is the one heritage organization that we usually talked to in these circumstances, and then there are sort of lost organizations of peoples/ethnic groups, such as the Maroon and the indigenous communities.

Now that I talked about this, we have a family exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, and that is in Suriname. As part of the research for the show, my colleagues went to a Maroon village in Suriname, and I think during that visit, some concerns were raised about whether something could be repatriated to specifically that community. Also, they have their community museum, so they have the space to house those objects. But a request came in, but it was not clear from who the request came in, and one of the problems is that we officially do not own the collection. However, the ministry of culture that holds it decides on this kind of matter, so we know that if we don't present ourselves to the minister with a counterpart in Suriname wherever we worked, that is seen as 'serious' by the ministry is very difficult to repatriate. And, in general, 'serious' means a national organization, part of the federal state.

In my experience, let's say in the last ten years, very little of this kind of demands or almost non have come in. I am curious if that would change now that you know these guidelines about return have got publicity, and also because there is this sort of movement in the Netherlands in achieving that the minister corrects provenance research.

What which would you say is the paper of the museums in this return process?

It doesn't necessarily go for the whole world, but it's my impression that that would be the case in Suriname. One of the issues in Suriname is that the diplomatic relationships between the Netherlands and Suriname for a long time were in trouble. Because of the president and the episode of the December murders, the civil war that lasted from the '80s... So they had no political relationships; they expelled the Dutch ambassador, etc. So that complicated the process bit more because a lot of this goes through governed channels.

So I would say the role in the museum is one in which now we are trying to be more proactive than we were in the past in the sense that we now thought the 'Pressing Matter' project and some other initiatives from the last years are doing proactive provenance research to identify those arts in our collections that we may have gotten in very problematic ways. But in the past, return was not seen as necessary, and the museum was more waiting for someone to come to them to ask for something.

I was also wondering about the 'value' of the collection. How important do you think it is the Surinamese collection for the NMWC when it seems there are few objects, 'only' around 8,000 items? What is your opinion on that aspect?

Well, if you look at how big Suriname is on the map, and you see, we have quite a few objects compared to other countries. And obviously, one of the reasons for that is the colonial history we have. At least here in the Tropenmuseum, Suriname's collections have always been considered one of the museum's core collections with Indonesian material. In the case of the Volkenkunde Museum is more Japanese material and China. I think Suriname's collections have been and are still one of the core collections of the museums, and they are very valuable to the museum.

One of the reasons that have become more prominent during the past years is that the museum is trying to change itself into an institution that is more open to the Surinamese diaspora. The museum was not seen as a place where these people were represented. In the past 5-10 years, depending on the museum, we have tried to use those collections. To talk about colonial histories from a new perspective, the colonized perspective rather than the colonizer's perspective. So the museum is closed to those collections because they were seen as a new way to reach new audiences that we could not get in the past. Besides that, some 'highlights' in the collections have been defined primarily by how unique they are, i.g. a banjo.

Can we tell the objects have any importance for the Suriname community nowadays?

More precisely, some iconic objects that heritage institutions in Suriname have been very interested in, such as the banjo and the diorama made in the early 19th century. But they are also very canonized objects like they are essential because there are in the canon of 'Surinamese art,' but to what extent are they important for the individual people or the Surinamese community? I found that hard to judge.

One of the complicated factors is that, in general, there tends to be a perception that everything we have in our museums was stolen. And that obviously is pleasant to repatriations debates, but that is simply not true for Suriname's collections. That is demonstrably not true. A lot of the things in the collections were made as sort of 'tourists art,' even if they were made in the 19th century. It's also from diaries we have, with the person who did expeditions in the 20th century, to the interior of Suriname, in the amazon basically. We have his journals where he writes: —I wanted to take 'this,' 'this' and 'this' piece, but I couldn't because they wanted to keep it, but I could get 'this,' 'this' and 'this'... because I offered them 'this other thing'—So it was evident, I read them, and he was not in a position of power.

However, we know that the position of the people outside is very different. And, I understand why it is different because we have a complex history, and we have a lot of stolen pieces. But interestingly enough, that is not much the case for Suriname. That is the case on much Indonesian material, but I would say the provenance of Suriname's material is widely different.

Even if the pieces were not stolen, do you think they should return or be claimed by Suriname's community?

I definitely think that things can be repatriated even if they were not acquired under difficult circumstances, especially when the pieces have been in our store for a long time and we never take them out. I have to say that I am very much in the role of a relativist regarding cultural ownership. I feel like we have so much material here that we might as well repast some of it and that if we receive some requests for repatriation, we should return them. I agree with you that it is not only pieces that were robbed or stolen that should be available for repatriation; I think this category should be broader.

It is interesting to know that only 5% - 10% of Suriname's collection objects have been exposed over the years, especially in the Volkenkunde Museum, as previously mentioned. Reflecting on that later data, do you think they would be valuable and more necessary if Suriname's collection remains in the place of origin? Shouldn't people have the right to their heritage?

One of the reasons that those objects have never been exhibited is because they are sort of 'everyday objects.' Furthermore, I wonder and doubt if those are the kind of objects that would be requested for return by the Surinamese state. Because those are the objects that they would also be in Suriname's storages, and no one would like to look at them basically. However, if there is an object with historical importance, then it is a different story. But I might guess that a lot of the objects that we have in stores and that we never show, Suriname would not be interested in repatriated.

The other side is that you are right in saying that people should have access to their heritage. But the exciting situation in Suriname is that there are four hundred thousand people who live in Suriname. But the surnames community if we can speak of such a thing, is spread in over two countries. There are as many people who are 'Suriname's' here, even if they are Dutch as there are in Suriname. So one can also wonder where are those things

more profitable, but not in the monetary sense, but in the sense of as many people can benefit from it, as many people can see the pieces as possible; and I think this is a unique situation if you compare it with other countries, because most of the people live here.

Do you think economics plays a role in the return process? or is it just symbolic?

In a general perspective, yes, maybe in Suriname's case not so much, because these are not necessarily the pieces with the highest economic value. That is different; for example, when one talks about Colombian archeology, you talk about Muisca gold. Because those very clearly represent a traditional monetary value that impacts how they are seen, they are gold. They have a considerable insurance premium because they are generally accepted as economically valuable. Suriname is not the case; the objects are wood, ceramics, baskets, etc. So they do not present that same kind of apparent economic value. In the specific case of Suriname, I do not think economics plays such a significant role. On the other hand, our entrances are not cheap, so even if we try to be an accessible museum institution, we are not an accessible institution in terms of money because we are simply an expensive museum, and not everyone can afford it.

Furthermore, about the economic benefit that the institutions take from exhibiting those objects?

I think that would be the case if the Surinamese collections would bring in most of the people they do in the museum, but I do not think that is the case. I do not think the people come to our museums only to see the surnames objects.

What would you say is the reason for the government to be willing to announce what they called a 'massive return' process to the ex-colonies?

In the international context, *i.e.*, when Macron talked about returning pieces to Africa, Germany said they would do the same, and so did the Netherlands. I think people inside of the museums were more willing to discuss repatriation or return objects, not always, but let us say over the past two decades in the Netherlands, but since there was not a political will to do that, we all knew that repatriation discuss would be very challenging. Ever since this became more prominent in the international agenda, there is now more of a proactive attitude, whereas before, everybody was extremely defensive when it came to these things. However, now there seems to be a race to know who can be more open and more progressive. So it is a fascinating dynamic in which I think postcolonial politics, and multicultural societies in which people started to realize "oh wait there are not just white people in the world" add to this ever growing pressure and then for some reason explodes, to the situation.

From a personal point of view, do you think this is a step that the Netherlands has to take?

Yes, I do think so. Mainly because our museums live with this colonial burden; every ethnographic museum in the world has a colonial burden that it carries with it because it is part of the colonial system. I think if we really want to take decolonization seriously, if we really want to take equality and equity seriously, the only way we can

do that is by sort of humility and humbleness about ourselves and saying okay ‘we are one institution among many that could display this material but are we the best institution to display this material, or are there other places where this can be displayed?’ So yes it is a necessary staff.

What is the consensus among the professional people you work with? Is there any ethical concern about the origin of the objects for the professionals from the NMW? Are they proactive in having a policy of return?

It depends on where you are, so there is a broad concept at least for the curators in my institution—a positive development rather than if you go to other museums in other countries. For instance, I am not that sure that happens in British museums. It’s also partly a generational fight and the younger curators. Although I am not saying that the older curators *per se* are opposed to this, not at all. But in general, the way that the younger and our generations are educated differs from the older ones.

Conclusions

The conversation with Martin Berger gives us, first, a better understanding of the Surinamese collections that the NMVW houses: knowing what the Surinamese collection looks like, the value it has been given within the museums, as well as the clarification of its provenance, helps us to understand this rather complex reality. A crucial issue is the place of provenance of the collections. From the curator’s point of view, the origin of these collections is clear. Moreover, according to the curator, these collections were acquired legally and not obtained in power imbalance circumstances between colonists and colonizers. He points out that the tendency to say that everything in museums has been stolen is not valid, although he understands why such ideas are unfounded, given the amount of material that has been stolen. However, this is not the case in the Surinamese collections. Therefore, knowing that the origin of the collections is not problematic might lead one to think that the Surinamese collections will either not be a priority in the ‘Pressing Matter’ project or, in the worst scenario, that the researchers will not investigate the pieces. Surely Suriname will not face a massive return immediately, as one might think from reading the government’s media reports on the return of colonial artifacts to former colonies. In the next four years of the ‘Pressing Matter’ project, it remains to be seen which artifacts will take part in the project and what conclusions researchers will draw from them.

It is significant to know around 8,000 and 10,000 objects constitute Suriname’s collections of the state holds. A data that is not easy to honestly know on the bibliographic or museums’ websites searches. And in addition, it is notorious how problematic this particular collection is when the curator points out that quantity was more important than quality when these objects were acquired. This fact leaves us in reality in which, on the one hand, these objects occupy a space in the storages, but it seems that they do not awaken a great enthusiasm either on the part of the researchers or curators (given the repetition of their pieces, and the character of their construction: everyday utensils, and not very valuable materials). Also, knowing that in the Volkenkunde Museum in the last 120 years, only 5 to 10% of the objects have been exhibited, one can doubt the purpose of those objects there.

On the other hand, even though one may think that their proper place then is not in the museum, these objects have lost their original function. So, we can even doubt whether they are considered valuable for museums in Suriname, precisely because of this repetition that the things create, or if communities can keep these objects without having the necessary safeguards required by the institutions. Museums cannot simply “get rid” of these objects. It seems that they will end up being of no value, either for one or the other. It is interesting to wonder if this problem is repeated in the museum’s other collections, knowing there is a similar echo in different European museums' experiences when dealing with colonial collections. However, it is paradoxical to know that, as Berger also points out, the Suriname collection is considered by the Tropenmuseum as the heart of its collections along with Indonesia.

The interview with Berger confirms that many objects were taken out of the country; as he said, if we compare the number of artifacts that the national museums hold with Suriname’s size, the number is considerable. A fact that leads us to think that although in this debate, the case of Suriname is always compared to Indonesia, saying that the latter is much more critical because of the numerous and valuable objects that were taken out; equally crucial was the removal of objects in Suriname. It is another matter how much value the Dutch have placed on the pieces.

A third conclusion is the number of requests the curator has received. Berger explains he has encountered no claims for the Suriname collection in the last twelve years. However, a couple of projects have been mutually worked carried on. And the curator attributes this, on the one hand, to the possible lack of organization of Suriname’s institutions, which is fundamental for a possible return by the Dutch government; on the other hand, the complex political relations between both countries. However, he is hopeful about the Dutch government’s new report on colonial heritage.

When it comes to returning objects that have not been acquired under complicated circumstances, the curator is proactive in saying that the category of objects eligible for return should be broader. Although, he points out that this is problematic in the case of Suriname as half of its population is settled in the Netherlands. Our research found this population tendency has changed a bit over the last years. The latter leads us to think about the uniqueness of the return of colonial objects in the case of Suriname and makes us wonder what are the thoughts of Suriname’s diaspora in the Netherlands, are they in favor of keeping the collections? When we examine the forthcoming interviews, we will see how this section carries further considerations.

Finally, for Berger, the economic aspect is not a significant aggravating factor, as he believes Suriname’s collections are not the ones that attract the majority of the public. However, this does lead us to think that the economic factor in museums does play an essential role in other collections. And therefore, this leads us to believe to what extent should these institutions make financial reparations to the claimants’ countries according to the benefit they had taken all those years from them? Also, should compensation be only related to the economic benefit institutions might have taken from them?

3.2. Interview with Jos van Beurden

The second interviewer Jos van Beurden is a Dutch independent researcher, writer, and moderator/trainer. Beurden had published different books such as ‘The return of cultural and historical treasures: the case of the Netherlands (2012),’ or ‘Treasures in Trusted Hands – Negotiating the future of Colonial Cultural Objects (2017),’ that have been essential for the elaboration of this thesis. He has recently published the book ‘Ongemakkelijk erfgoed. Koloniale collecties en teruggave in de Lage Landen,’ in English (Uncomfortable heritage. Colonial collections and restitution in the Low Countries), although no translation to the latter has been done yet. His background studies are in law but his interest for the return of colonial objects began when he traveled to Bangladesh (1973) and Mali (1990/1991). There he had the opportunity to talk to the director of the museum, who expressed his concern about the amount of heritage that had disappeared during colonialism and after Independence.²⁰⁸ From that point on, he turned his attention to the illicit trade in arts and antiquities. Beurden explained that he made some discoveries, the most important in 1995 in the port of Rotterdam, when a Dutch dealer arrived with two celestial nymphs from Cambodia and some thirteen bronze Buddha heads from Thailand, both from heritage sites. The event became a major scandal, and there was a widespread outcry in the Netherlands claiming that “no objects should be taken from heritage sites.” The scandal reached the Dutch parliament, where a motion in favor of the UNIDROIT convention was tabled, and from there, the country began to “enforce” compliance with a series of international conventions to combat illicit trade. In 2009, the Netherlands acceded to the 1970 Unesco Convention, which meant that if the officer suspects that a person is engaging in illicit trade, he can demand that the dealer proves that the object was acquired correctly. Whereas before, it was up to the official to prove that the person had acquired them incorrectly. After that, he started to think that for illicit trade in the Netherlands, there was the 1970 convention plus a state implementation, but for colonial objects, there was “really nothing.” Along with this, at that time, he began to understand that for Nazi-looted art, there was no hard law but principles to help Nazi victims to get their claims satisfactorily. And so, from these two facts, he concentrated on colonial objects, traveling and researching on the matter.²⁰⁹

What do you think is behind this government shift when suddenly it seems they are proactive in returning the pieces, building up policies, and providing a budget to start a provenance research plan. In one of your publications from 2012, you said there had been a ‘change of thinking, but that was untranslated into practices,’ concluding that the return cases seem to be marginal. Do we see here a change?

I think there are general conditions as the global power shifts. If you look at the 1970 convention, at the time that was created, China was asking for a retroactive clause on it to cover colonial collections, and it was refused. If China came with such a proposal nowadays, there would be much more powerful to get it accepted, the same as South Korea, the same as Indonesia; there is a global power shift. Moreover, there is an economic need for a country such as the Netherlands and for European countries, in general, to get new markets in those countries, and they just need them, so they have been more dependent upon them. At the same time, these countries have developed their cultural policies where restitution is a part. I remember, for instance, in the first decades of this

²⁰⁸ Jos Van Beurden, (researcher, writer, and moderator/trainer), in conversation with the author, July 29, 2021, Utrecht.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

century, China was still paying money to get some of its heritage back and then stopped and decided they were not going to pay for something that was taken. However, to claim it is challenging because in the legal system in Europe is almost impossible to do that, so the biggest thing that happened was the scandal a couple of years ago with the auction in Paris (...). Another example is Nigeria and the Benin Bronzes. They have been talking for ten years, and not much has come about it, and the Nigerians are sick of it, but they have not left a choice because they do not have the power as, for instance, China. So they have to be polite and talk with us and hope that something will get back to them.

In the meantime, the ethics of our museums (Belgium, France, Germany ...) are changing. Because these museums cooperate a lot with the partners in the global south, it is difficult to keep the distribution of the cultural heritage. If most objects are in our places and a minority are with them. So, ethics are changing. And then you have the Diaspora. Africa Diaspora is most strong spoken, and they have helped a lot in putting the matter on the agenda. I know that Diaspora in Cameroon and Namibia in Germany are very active. Moreover, Germany is very willing to return objects and maybe even pay reparations and so on. So, the influence of Diaspora has grown.

In the Dutch Culture for culture report, the committee that wrote the report was Dutch but had roots in the former colonies. So they knew the point of view on both sides, so that is why it is a surprising report. The chair lady has roots in Suriname, and she pointed out that everything that had been stolen has to come back, and she said it to the Dutch National TV, and that was a new sound. A few months later, the Dutch minister for the culture accepted all these suggestions and said, “we have committed injustices, and injustice has to be undone as far as possible in that time, and we have to develop active policies on that.”

Was this a necessary step for the Netherlands to start a returning project and a provenance research project?

On provenance research, I am especially critical of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam for extending and controlling it. In my opinion, if you have complex objects, one has to go to the country of origin, find out who can be a counterpart, and put the objects on the table saying “we have a problem here,” and see how we are going to solve it. Sometimes they start the research by investigating if the wood from the object is the same one on the other side... For works of art that we are sure to have been looted, return them, and then, of course, you can investigate the type of wood or so. On the other side, museums do not want to be bothered about those nuances because they have other things to do and other priorities.

In my last book ‘Ongemakkelijk Erfgoed,’ I raised three important issues. One is “trust,” and you know that trust has been violated in colonialism and that it is up to the colonial powers to establish the first steps in restoring that trust. In addition, there is “inequality,” and this is a very complex method because it cannot be known. Sometimes museums say, “we have cooperation, and we are so equal,” and then I think, “I would like to go to the other side and hear from them how they live it.” In terms of the means they have, the agenda-setting, the decisions that are made, the knowledge they have... And then you have the “injustice,” where there is restitution at a certain point. These are the key points to measure whether we are making progress. So, as far as the King of Kandy’s treasure

is concerned, we are not making progress because we are setting the agenda, we are deciding how long it will last, Sir Lanka has not been requested; so it is not expanding trust, and it is not decreasing inequality.

Do you think this new approach will solve the voices claiming of return of colonial heritage?

I was thrilled when the government's report came out. It was new and fresh and opened up new possibilities. But it also makes me nervous. When I was working in Bangladesh in 1970, I was thinking a lot about international cooperation, and you see that most of or important part of the international aid was going to western aid to western consultants, etc. I am worried that restitution will sometimes become business, and much funding for provenance research will not go to the global south but stay here because our interest is to continue in the problem and not solve it.

This reminds me of when you talk in the 'treasures' book about how the object became even a political tool. Maybe in this example, you are talking about, we can say the object becomes a tool to perpetuate injustice.

You are right. Doing provenance research in the global north and the global south will help let things go. Because sometimes there is a psychological reason for the return. Occasionally there is an attachment of these pieces to the curators. I have seen professionals almost cry; many of these curators have a very emotional attachment to those pieces, I do believe it. Curators love those pieces, and they really take care of them.

What do you think is the consensus among the professionals working in the sector? Do you think they are proactive in having a return policy? Are they proactive in a return policy?

I think so, at least in the Museum of World Cultures. It partly has to do with the incorporation of people of color in the research staff, and it is all related to the new era we live in, things are changing, globalization. Although sometimes you see conservatives among curators and researchers.

In Belgium, the Africa museum has pointed 1% of their museum as war booty, and they will surrender that into the property of the democratic republic of Congo. That is a radical change because, in our Dutch policy vision, we say 'what has been stolen should go back,' but the country of origin has to ask for it. I know why they do it, because sometimes in Indonesia, for example, the current people in charge in the ministry of culture are not so much interested in getting back war booty, but they have just have launched a policy to find out where the gaps in their collections are, and what is needed to fill them. Take the example in 2013, when the city of Delft offered 15,000 objects to Indonesia, and finally, they only took ten percent of it. So that is another approach. I respect it also.

I think the professionals have changed or are changing. However, it is also a matter of discovering the joy of working together with these colleagues from the south. And this happens in a level of the national museums but does not occur in the private ones and missionary organizations. They are also quite reticent to be open about the provenance of the objects and partly because they are scared to be dragged in this decolonization debate. They do

not understand it; they do not want to be bothered or share gossip of the fathers and the sisters; it's a loyalty question. I do not see it this way, but I understand, although I do not share it. All the confiscations from missionaries' organizations, protestants, or catholic remain hidden. Also, private collectors and owners are very reluctant to share information, they are few exceptions, but in general, they are quite reluctant. We do not know which has more pieces from which side if the state or the private collectors and missionaries' organizations (...)

There is an undeniable change, but I am not sure how successful it is or the outcome. We will see it in ten years. For instance, in 1970, the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed that the Netherlands would help make in context with private owners of collections to reconsider these possessions. But the Dutch government did not do it. That never happened, and they could have done it now, but I have never heard it. Even in the yellow report, there is no single suggestion around it, the same happens with missionaries' collections.

What do you think is the consensus among the professionals working in the sector? Do you think they are proactive in having a return policy? Is he proactive of a return policy?

I think so, at least in the Museum of World Cultures. It partly has to do with the incorporation of people of color in the research staff, and it is all related to the new era we live in, things are changing, globalization. Although sometimes you see conservatives among curators and researchers. In Belgium, the Africa museum has pointed 1% of their museum as war booty, and they will surrender that into the property of the democratic republic of Congo. That is a radical change because, in our Dutch policies vision, we say 'what has been stolen should go back,' but the country of origin has to ask for it. I know why they do it, because sometimes in Indonesia, for example, the current people in charge in the ministry of culture are not so much interested in getting back war booty, but they have just have launched a policy to find out where the gaps in their collections are, and what is needed to fill them. Take the example in 2013, when the city of Delft offered 15,000 objects to Indonesia, and finally, they only took ten percent of it. So that is another approach. I respect it also.

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happened, and they could have done it now, but I have never heard it. Even in the yellow report, there is no single suggestion around it—the same with missionaries' collections.

What is your opinion on repatriation to places that are not former colonies? The return of objects to former colonies and not former colonies.

It surprises me that they make a distinction between those two. It cannot explain why in Sri Lanka they have a different position from Indonesia. The main argument for the advisory committee and the minister is that “Sri Lanka’s boss is the US, so we should follow them.” But from the point of view of the communities of origin is a very weird position. Of course, they smell they are tented objects.

And even the ones that are not tainted? Do you think they should return?

Even the objects that were acquired in a proper way, it should be possible that you can negotiate. By saying, “well, you need them more than we do.” I think they should go through an agreement. It should be opened for these questions, but yeah, why not?

How a possible a whole scale return would it affect the NMVW institution. And particularly the Tropenmuseum?

They will not be a whole-scale return. Cos, nobody is waiting for it. Theoretically is thinkable, but for instance, Indonesia has said, ‘we do not want all those objects back from the Netherlands because we do not know where to store them.’ Even this could be seen as an implicit criticism of our greed in past centuries, ‘more, more,’ that is why our storerooms are so packed. There is not a single country asking for everything back, and at the same time, in the case of Indonesia, collections are so prominent in the Netherlands that even if ten thousand objects go back, there are so many lefts over.

Will the diaspora voices ever be fully satisfied with the process?

I am not sure because the diaspora sometimes made political statements by saying “everything has to go back,” but you have to discuss. A museum has to discuss with another museum or institution in the places of origin. And then the discussion changes, because if a museum says: “I will return 10.000 objects,” then the place there will say: “10,000! where do we store them?” For example, some objects would disappear with that considerable humidity in two years in Jakarta. So in practice, when it comes to negotiations, countries of origin have to develop priorities; “what should come first,” “Which objects from the collections should come first?” I know Indonesia is doing it, Congo, Senegal, Nigeria... And the whole process will take years, another ten, twenty, thirty years.

I know that the director of the national museum of Suriname said: “We first want to know what is there in the Netherlands” and secondly he said: “We have to strengthen our museums’ structure and then we can request.” I do not see much involuntary loss in Suriname as in Indonesia. But this would take at least five years, I am sure.

There is not as much pressure in Suriname as in other countries, such as Indonesia, to return objects. What is the explanation for this?

Because Suriname has to develop a policy, that is the point. And in reaction to the new Dutch policy Indonesia has set up a restitution committee, for instance. They have to do something like that and then come up with clear proposals.

Do you think it is also related to the strong dependence that Suriname has with the Netherlands, or maybe the relatively short time they have been independent?

I am sure it has to be related to that, but I also think the new policies from the Netherlands encourage them to develop their own cultural policy, including restitution. It is very hard to come to a general conclusion, to say if we are making progress or not, there are challenges, but these challenges have to be utilized on both sides.

Maybe it is also difficult to ask for the return of those colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname, as there is a big amount of population living in the Netherlands with colonial roots?

Well, in that case, you have to find creative solutions. For instance, regarding dioramas, let's say three years one goes to the Netherlands, and then it goes to Suriname, and then you change. There are all sorts of options.

Do you think the Netherlands should provide financial help?

That is not easy. If the country of origin asks for it..., but because of my experience in development cooperation, you also create new dependencies and new power relations. It is difficult. In the case of Suriname, it is difficult to know if we create new dependencies. I do not know whether it is conscious, but they have interests in close relation with Suriname, which we control. It all has to do with power. For instance, Indonesia is less dependent on the Netherlands; they focus more on the US and South Asia, which is a very healthy condition to negotiate. With Suriname, it is much more difficult.

Conclusions

The interview with van Beurden helps us understand the relationship between the museums and the places of origin. The first point of reflection is given when he talks about the possible business resulting from the return of colonial objects. Although on the one hand, he affirms that there have been changes in many ways that promote a proactive attitude for returning —nations new relations, professionals changing mindset, rise in collaboration North-South institutions, etc.— on the other hand, he stresses that sometimes there is no interest in solving the problem but to keep talking about it. Beurden's opinion gives a new insight in which we can think why the topic has been escalating in the Dutch media, leading to a project with a high economic investment such as 'Pressing

Matter.’ A project planned to start in 2021 but it did not. Does this apply to the kind of business that van Beurden points out?

In the same way, he is critical of provenance research projects, especially that of the Rijksmuseum, mainly because they can lead to precisely enlarging the situation and not solving it, as mentioned earlier. A problem that leaves the affected countries with no choice but to respect the terms of the country that has more power. He also points out that the Netherlands does not react on multiple occasions unless there is a call at its door. For Beurden is better to negotiate with the countries with an equal power position. Van Beurden is very clear about the relationship between the two parties and how a massive return is not possible; a different view from what the media and government news might suggest. Theoretically, it is possible, but many other factors tip the balance to a no, mainly the ability and willingness of the country of origin to accept the objects. However, the news media can function as a suitable propaganda medium to show an advanced view of the Netherlands. As van Beurden has said, “There is not a single colony that wants to take back all its objects.” Van Beurden, agreeing with Berger’s opinion, is in favor of contemplating the return of so many objects, so we can think that in the future, the problem will not only be considered under a point of view where the artifacts can be returned but one under the point of view of opting for more social justice.

On the other hand, Beurden’s view opens up the scope of the problem when he points out that returning colonial objects concern also private collectors, private institutions, and religious institutions. These bodies have no record, and their attitudes tend to be far more closed. As we will see in the interview with Thomas Polimé, he is aware that many of the objects of his community are under the ownership of religious entities. Concerning Suriname, van Beurden’s view is in line with Berger’s, in the sense that Suriname does not have a problem with its collections because the objects with a tainted history are either unknown or minimal. He notes, however, that to progress in the return of colonial artifacts, the country has to develop its own policy to know which pieces they want to return. Based on what we have seen in point 2.1, this does not seem to be a national priority. He agrees with the author’s opinion that one of the possible causes of this lack of progress is Suriname’s dependence on the Netherlands. Unlike Berger, van Beurden believes that it should not be a problem in terms of possible devolution that half of Suriname’s population is now part of the Dutch community. Regarding the economic aspect, van Beurden sees that the financial part does influence the process of returning colonial objects, as museums want audiences, and these come for their artifacts. Regarding the economic aid to colonial artifacts, van Beurden is reluctant because this might merely create an additional dependency problem instead of solving it.

3.3 Interview with Thomas Polimé

Thomas Polimé: the third interviewee is a cultural anthropologist researcher specializing in Suriname and French Guiana. As noted in his website “has provided his services to the Smithsonian Institution as guest curator and has been involved in the realization of several major Maroon exhibitions in the Rotterdam Wereldmuseum and the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum. He has also worked as a curator in Cayenne and St Laurent in French Guiana.” Polimé explains his link to the two countries as he is originally from the Netherlands when Suriname was still a colony and emigrated in 1980 to the Netherlands shortly after the military coup in Suriname. In Holland, he came to study social work and then returned to Suriname to do his internship there. Shortly after finishing his studies, he went back to the Netherlands to study anthropology, and after completing his studies in 1987, he worked as a researcher. He had lived in French Guiana and Suriname, but he is currently living in the Netherlands, where he had worked for 25 years. He has published on Maroon refugees and has helped preserve his community’s cultural heritage for many years. He is a member of one of the six Marron communities in Suriname.

Can you explain your relationship with Suriname and the project you are working on there?

I have been the president of the Maroon organization since 1984 until one year ago when I tried to give to the new generations. The Maroons are in every country in the Americas, the Caribbean, and the continent itself. So the people that worked in the plantations scaped to the interior to build one society there, also in New Mexico. In Suriname, there are six groups, so they make a society 100 years before emancipation. So I am a member of one of these groups, and they are independent because they have their policies. Suriname’s Maroon group is about one hundred thousand in total. My group is located in the east of Suriname, and the paramount chief/leader of my community leads a group of 10,000 people. So six years ago, I went to my homeplace, so I spoke with the leader, and he asked me if I could help save the culture. And the first thing they wanted to do was opened the museum to save their culture.

When I returned to the Netherlands, I talked with some friends and RCA (department of education) to ask for help. So together, we wrote a report to help develop the museum’s policies. So, the report consists of what they need and want to build a museum. They want to do two parts, to build two houses in the village. So, we tried to find money, but they told me I could not only do it only with money. They told me, ‘one part we will help you with the materials for the houses,’ and that is what we are doing now, working on the houses. And when they finished the two houses only, later we will have to put the texts and so on, and the history of the objects.

Now we are visiting museums to see where the objects of our community are, or photographs (some of them are collected in the Utrecht museum). So, we want to see in the museums here: The national archives and the churches. Because we know one part is in a Christian organization called the Moravian church, from Germany. But we have to have facilities to construct something in Suriname because if not, the pieces would be destroyed.

And to carry on this community museum, are you collaborating with the museum or institutions there in Suriname?

Yes, we are working with a place called 'Foor New Amsterdam' in Zelandia, and we work together with the paramount chief to save the objects. And some objects in Germany too. But the leader also has a lot of those objects. So, when I would go to Suriname, I would classify those objects and begin to put those objects in one of the houses. In the s, the organizations said that we are starting to talk to the Tropenmuseum to ask about one object in September. So, I like to begin step by step.

Have you heard about the news in the Netherlands regarding returning?

Yes, but it is not clear to me. If I give my advice, you need good conditions in Suriname. You have to talk to people in the diaspora because one part of the people from Suriname lives in the Netherlands, and another part lives there. So, it is part of a shared history, is the history of the Netherlands too. We need to go step by step. For instance, when they returned the archive, they gave facilities, a nice building, good conditions, etc. So step by step is better.

Do you think the Netherlands should return the objects to the former colonies?

Yes, but the half, because it is the same history, step by step, not all the objects and not all the collections. Many people in Suriname live in the Netherlands, which is part of their history too. There is only one colonial history. You can't compare Suriname, Indonesia, or Africa. Because many of the objects from Suriname that they have in the Netherlands, they have them because they were part of a gift or bought. The Netherlands really knows what they took, and a lot of those things are objects that the people use daily. If I give them one chair or a spoon, they use but... In the museum, you can find your story back so that you can find the history in the objects. That is why they have to take a part of these objects, but another must stay here. Why do they have to take the objects back if it is a part of the history of this country? You have to keep your history.

Is that the first time you have worked with the Tropenmuseum? or have you asked them pieces before?

It is the first time, but I know the Tropenmuseum well, their pieces, and I have seen the photographs.

Do you still feel there is a big dependence from Suriname to the Netherlands?

I do, but after two or three generations after my generation, my children's children will stop their dependence on the country. They will not be attached, so they won't be able to work together. Now that I've been forty years out of the country, I see the difference between me and my brother from Suriname. For my children is big differences and their children too. That also happened in other countries in Indonesia. The conception of the country and the relationship changes because of the generational gap.

And don't you think precisely, the objects should return because of this generational gap that will be broader during the coming years. As people maybe won't have as a strong connection with the objects in the Netherlands rather than in Suriname?

My children know their roots because they have visited the place or because I cooked for them the traditional dishes. So they know that. But as to go back to Suriname, they will do that like if they would go to visit another country. They don't speak my language, they understand a little bit, but they don't speak it. But people like me, I visit museums, and when I see the objects, I recognize my culture, so if you take all the objects back to Suriname, it is not correct.

That last idea reminds me of the conversation I had with Martin Berger, who had been curator of the Latin America and Caribbean collections, for the last years. He told me only between five to ten percent of the objects of entire Suriname's collections have been exposed during the previous 120 years in the case of the Volkenkunde museums. At the Tropenmuseum, maybe the number is higher. Is not that a very low number of exhibit objects? One can wonder if the objects are achieving your purpose.

I don't know why those pieces are or are not exhibited. But for instance, when you search documents, or photographs of Maroon people before they talked about the Marron as 'difficult people' or 'bad people,' and now they don't talk like this...

Definitely, things are changing. Why do you think we have experienced changes regarding these topics?

Because now you work together, think together, and talk about it. Before, they never talked together, Dutch and Surinamese people, about this problem. It was more like, "It is your problem, not mine," so they never knew, for instance, what I have seen... They saw documentaries of 1935, or 40 until 60, so it was films and documentaries that were made by Dutch people talking about the Maroons. But the Maroons did not talk about themselves, but the Dutch people, and so on... Or for instance, now no one can take photographs of women as before, as the people from the Netherlands did. If you see the pictures, they were 'objects,' and now everyone talks about ethics and so on, so you can't do it. Or nowadays if I send a letter complaining maybe you have to take the picture from the exhibition. But 40 years ago, when I came here, it was normal. So there is a big change.

Do you think it is a generational change then?

I think people from the Netherlands now go to Suriname and the other way around, or the National monument of slavery. They cannot do things alone by themselves; they have to work together.

I also feel that sometimes the first world countries put their limits and their times, and where and to who the objects should or should not be returned. Do you feel the relationship is like that?

Well, I think it is group work. But you have to work by yourself, if you wait they will come, well, they won't come.

What do you think about the provenance research project 'Pressing Matters' that the government wants to carry on?

I think it is good, but Suriname people should participate actively too. As I said, one part of the object should stay, and the other part should go, of all the objects, looted or not. You cannot let go of the objects because it is part of Dutch history. If not, they would just send all the objects and say "it's your problem" and wash their hands.

Do you think there is a consensus of the people around the Surinamese diaspora around returning colonial objects?

I don't know now, before I used to go to many conventions, but now I don't know. For instance, I know one anthropologist from Utrecht who worked there for 50 years, and he wrote only one book for the university, and one college wrote about his messages, and he talked about the big work that the man was doing there, all his knowledge, but not the knowledge of the people there. What happened is that the immaterial knowledge was taken from the people, and their name was only referred to as their friends of him (...) For me, the immaterial material is bigger than the material objects in Suriname, so for me, it is more important the immaterial one than to take one object back.

Conclusions

The interview with Thomas Polimé brings different points to bear in mind between the dynamics of Suriname and the Netherlands concerning the return of colonial artifacts, which sheds new light on this narrative. On the one hand, the one that seems to be the most important is the view on the management of the Surinamese collections in the Netherlands. For Thomas, there is only one history, and therefore the collections belong to both the Netherlands and Suriname. Consequently, he suggests that the collection should be divided into two, half Suriname and half in the Netherlands because these collections are also part of the Dutch community. His point of view reflects how important it is for him, and perhaps for his generation, to have access to these objects in museums. On the other hand, he states it is not so valuable to return the object because it is much more precious and even more challenging to preserve, which is his culture's immaterial value. Therefore, he feels that cultural institutions can better use artifacts and help explain the history of Suriname and its communities. In his interview, we were able to see how aware he is of the objects housed in Dutch museums, and he pointed out that the artifacts were acquired in the right way and that the institutions carefully know what is in their collections. However, it may be that his opinion differs from some people who still live in Suriname or from his community. The conversation with the anthropologist leads us to think that the Surinamese generation that emigrated to the Netherlands in the 1980s have the will to establish themselves as mediators between the two continents; this might not be the case for future generations. As Polimé points out, "In the future, they will not work together." Perhaps this situation reflects why no concern is expressed from the Surinamese diaspora in the Netherlands about the

colonial artifacts in the hands of Dutch museums. We will have to see in the future if the willingness from the populations with roots in Suriname but who have grown up in the Netherlands will be different.

The interview also reveals that it is crucial for his community to recover the objects, and there is a willingness and awareness to create spaces where the objects can be placed. However, In the case of Polimé, it seems to have a very accepted concept that one has to ask for things little by little. We don't know if this is because they want to establish a stronger link with the entities or because they rely on the financial support of these entities. As for the progress made by the Netherlands in recent years, he is pretty satisfied, pointing to significant actions: the change in the way the Dutch look at his community, the difference in references when describing the maroon community, the ethical concerns when working in the field of anthropology, the construction of the monument to slavery in Amsterdam and, finally, how they have dealt with the return of the national archives to Suriname. When it comes to Provenance research, he is in favor of it. However, he points out that the institutions should work with the former colonies. We can draw a last conclusion from talking to the anthropologist, the role religious institutions play in this problem. As Polimé pointed out, some religious institutions own community objects. However, until institutions, researchers or communities help put more pressure, it would be challenging to shed more light on this area that seems to enjoy a low level of research. On the position of the religious entities and the objects they housed, van Beurden also made notes in his interview.

3.4. Interview with J. van Putten

J. van Putten is the current director of the “Stichting Suriname museum,” which functions as a national state museum. This interview has different characteristics than the previous ones, as it could not be conducted by video call, communication was established by email, and the interview was conducted through a written questionnaire. Therefore, the following discussion does not have immediate feedback on the answers obtained. Thus, some relevant questions, such as the interviewee's opinion on the role of the economic factor in the Suriname-Dutch problem, remained unanswered. Likewise, it would have been remarkable for a better conclusion if more information could have been obtained on some of the answers. As van Putten points out in the correspondence, we had, “in reality, all the questions ask for a more refined answer. I am aware of this, but I don't have time for it.” In the written conversation with van Putten, he noted his background was in anthropological studies, which he studied in Leiden. And that he shortly Worked in Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden before leaving for Suriname for being director of the Suriname Museum.

I would like to start by knowing your background as a professional. When you started working in the museum, whether you had previously worked in other museums in Suriname or the Netherlands, and the position you currently develop within the museum.

Studied cultural anthropology in Leiden. Worked shortly in Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden before leaving for Suriname. Currently director of the Suriname Museum.

I would also like to ask you a bit about the functioning and history of the museum: the number of people working in the museum and when was the museum inaugurated. How did the idea of making the museum come up (was it a national necessity or a demand from the population...?).

Foundation Surinaams Museum, founded on April 29, 1947. At the moment around 10 persons are on staff, but it has been around 30 in better times. (Mainly due to Covid-19.) It was a demand from a group of 17 people who thought that during and after World War II too much heritage was carried out of the country.

For the thesis, it would be important to know about the collection that the museum has, as well as the different themes that compose it. I know that you have different pieces of different origins but I would like to know which are the pieces that predominate in numerical terms and the origin of these collections (how they entered the museum).

Different collections: archaeology, ethnography (maroon, amerindian, Hindustani, Chinese, Javanese, Jew), 'western', art, photos, furniture, textiles, library. Maroon and amerindian dominate in numerical terms regarding the ethnographic collections, but also textiles (from different groups), photos, archaeology are quite big in number. After all the Surinaams Museum is a broad cultural historic museum and not specialized in one theme.

Do you have any relationships with other museums in Suriname? And if so, can you explain a bit about it. Also, I would like to know if there are collaborations with the Saramaka museum and collaborations with the indigenous communities in any way. If so, how is it? Lastly, I would like to know if there are collaborations with museums in the Netherlands. Have there been any relationships with these entities till the day? (Only a couple of times, or has it always existed?); if so, how is that relationship?

The Suriname Museum is the oldest one in the country. Relationships with other museums are good, cooperation is possible but not common. Good collaborations with museums in the Netherlands but always project wise not on a structural base. (Tropenmuseum, Teylers Museum, Museum voor de Verpleging, Volkenkunde Leiden, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam.) Furthermore, we had/have good relationships with museums in Cayenne (French Guyana) and Belem (Brazil).

I would like to ask you if you know about the announcement that the government gave in 2021 together with the report of the Dutch Raad Voor Cultuur about the presence of hundreds of thousand objects in Dutch museums that were taken during colonialism and the predisposition to return those objects that had been stolen. Has anyone from the government contacted you? Or has anyone from any entity contacted the museum to find out about your interests? If not, what do you think is the reason? (I leave here the link to the news so you can get more information). Also, what do you think is behind this shift of the government when suddenly it seems they are proactive in the return of the pieces, building up policies and providing a budget to start a research plan.

Yes, of course, we know. Nobody has contacted us. Only newspapers were interested. I don't see any interest from the side of the Surinamese government. I can only think of mainly political reasons. Stealing of heritage during wars is inherent to it through times, returning stolen property is a must.

Has the Suriname museum been interested in reclaiming any pieces in the collections of the Dutch museums? If so, which are the pieces that would be good to recover, what is the value of these pieces for the museum? If not, why (lack of means, lack of interest, both...)?

Up till now, I am not aware of any stolen object. The two examples given in the report of the Raad voor Cultuur were in my opinion not correct. More important seems the fact that as well in Suriname as in the Netherlands important gaps in collections can be filled up with pieces from "the opposite party". Not only literally by the exchange of artifacts but also the exchange of knowledge.

Do you know if there are any Surinamese' pieces in the Dutch museums that have a dubious origin? And from any other place in Europe?

No, I don't know. Which does not mean that certain pieces in foreign (not Surinamese) collections can or should be returned to Suriname.

Is there any knowledge among the museum's professionals in the country about this announcement and if so does it generate social interest? Do you know of any entity in the country that would be interested in the return of the pieces from Holland to Suriname? Perhaps another museum?

I don't think there is much knowledge about it. Of course, some persons from the Ministry of Education or a private entity react in an impulsive way that stolen property has to be returned, but I don't think they are thoroughly aware of the subject at all. Besides that, I don't think they can mention any stolen object that has to return.

One of the novelties of the Dutch Raad Voor Cultuur report is that there is a good percentage of objects whose origin is not known. That is why the Netherlands will work with the 'Pressing Matter' project to find out the origin of these objects. Do you think that in the case of Suriname, provenance research contributes something to the conflict over the return of the objects? What do you think about the investment of money in a project of this magnitude?

I conclude there is no conflict between Suriname and the Netherlands over the return of objects. But I do think provenance research might help in general to contribute to know the pedigree of artefacts in general. And furthermore, it can help in deciding which objects can possibly returned to fill the gaps in collections in Suriname. But also, the other way around as we are speaking of common heritage which regards a large Surinamese community in the Netherlands too. Money has to be invested of course.

Beyond whether the provenance of these objects can be traced, do you think that the return of the objects (stolen or not) from the MVWC collection (mainly pieces from indigenous communities) should be contemplated? If so, where do you think these pieces should be returned to? Why?

Not only from the MvWC collections but some other collections too (*e.g.* Leiden, Rotterdam, Rijksmuseum) the return should be contemplated. They have to be handed over to the Suriname Museum, being the oldest museum in the country, the museum with the most diverse and large collections, the museum with national status, the museum with the best experience in storing collections, etc. Certainly not only pieces of Amerindian provenance, not at all!

In a previous interview, one of the experts told me that the collection in the Surinamese Museum is practically the same as the one in the museums in Holland, and I would like to know your thoughts on the matter. Do you think this is a good reason for perhaps not claiming pieces from Suriname?

Stating that collections are practically the same can only refer to amerindian and maroon collections, and maybe the historical photo collection too but is certainly not fully true. That's why it is important to make a thorough inventory and fill the gaps on both sides.

To use the word 'claim' is in my opinion not correct as long as it is not clear which, if any, object is stolen. In other cases you can discuss the return of objects, not claim it.

In the Netherlands, there has been a project in place for the past two years "PPROCÉ" which has been responsible for setting up a principle of returns to Indonesia. Why do you think it was decided to take the first steps in returns to Indonesia and not to Suriname or another Caribbean territory?

Not applicable I think, as for Suriname it is not clear which, if any, objects are stolen at all. Comparison with Indonesia is not possible I think.

Many times one of the reasons given for not returning the pieces is that the institutions of the claimant country are not prepared to receive the pieces. Do you think that Suriname or the museum could suffer the same problem? If so, why? If not, what is missing and how do you think this could be achieved?

It's easy to react in an emotional way and state that pieces have to be returned. But if Suriname is not ready for it, just leave them where they are! There is a lot missing, first of all the awareness on the side of the Surinamese government. Although article 47 of the constitution states that Suriname must take care of its heritage, the contrary is the case. It has always been private initiatives to take care of heritage, nothing else and not at all the government. An exception can possibly be made for built heritage as the historic inner city of Paramaribo is now on the World Heritage List, as is a nature reserve as well. It does not count for the numerous collections of material/immaterial culture in museums or private collections. In general, there is a great lack of knowledge regarding heritage.

Conclusions

In the interview with the director of the Suriname museum, we can again discover new hidden points that only come to light in the conversations. On the one hand, it is interesting that the museum was built to protect any heritage that might escape from the territory. We know that there was massive looting of the colonies, which correlates with a growing European collectionism. Therefore, we see signs that there was indeed an interest in the Surinamese objects and not what the literature seemed to suggest. On the other hand, the director points out that no one from the Dutch government has contacted him since the government announced its willingness to return a large number of objects to the colonies. However, van Putten also notes, echoing the other interviewees, he does not believe there is a conflict between the Netherlands and Suriname because they are any stolen objects. Van Putten's position on objects' return is clear: the artifacts should remain in the Netherlands. For van Putten, it is more important that there are significant gaps in his collections and could be filled with objects and knowledge from the Dutch counterpart. This idea seems to align with the strategy that van Beurden explained Indonesia was following, first getting to know the Dutch collections and then deciding which pieces they wanted to fill the gaps in their collections. However, the museum has not made any request on these pieces that it seems they might be interested in.

The museum director also noted that a factor to be taken into account is that the collections are shared heritage, and as far as provenance research projects are concerned, he supports those kinds of projects. Regarding the information that this thesis had been able to obtain about the possible similarity of objects in both collections, the director states that it only refers to Amerindian and Maroon collections, and perhaps the historical photo collection, but that it is not entirely true, commenting that "that's why it is important to make a thorough inventory and fill the gaps on both sides." The previous idea confirms that more collaborative work between the institutions would help resolve these disparities based on partial knowledge of the Surinamese collections. Regarding the knowledge among the museum professionals in the country, his view is not very positive and suggests that he does not believe that the government knows the context in which Suriname is operating.

3.5. Comments on the Symposium 'The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past'

The last part of this chapter aims to show the visions of the different professionals in the sector who met at the symposium 'The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past,' held in Amsterdam in November 2021. The meeting aimed to explore the current management of the colonial past from different perspectives, focusing on museum exhibitions, provenance research projects, artistic reflections, curatorial practices, and archival management. Interdisciplinary approaches were sought to provide answers and critiques of how cultural institutions, academic thinkers, and practitioners deal with their colonial past and their proposals for the future. For this purpose, the event included seven sessions —Session 1: Dutch Colonial Heritage in a Global Context, session 2: Repair and Redress (NMVW & NIOD), session 3: Iconoclasm: Toppling Statues, Changing Street Names, Challenging Dominant Narratives (The Black Archives), session 4: Curating Contested Heritage (Rijksmuseum), session 5: Decoloniality in Academic Research, Activism and Artistic Practice (ASCA), session 6: Artistic Practices and Reflections (Amsterdam Museum), and finally session 7: Rereading the Archive (New Narratives &

Stadsarchief)— The symposium will also form the basis of a publication launched later this year, 2022, along with an additional six essays by both new and established scholars and practitioners in the international field of Dutch colonial heritage.²¹⁰ Due to the scope of the thesis, we will discuss in-depth **session 2: Repair and Redress** (NMVW & NIOD), which Wayne Modest moderated, and will provide an overview of the other sessions highlighting the most relevant perspectives provided by the multiple participants

Session 2: Repair and Redress (NMVW & NIOD), focused on the notion of repair and redress. Repair is defined as “engaging with the colonial past in ways that actively acknowledge the deep impact on contemporary societies and individuals in terms of past and present violence,” while redress is described as “agreeing on acts that in a concrete sense contribute to changing current relationships to this past.”²¹¹ The talk, moderated by Wayne Modest, director of the Tropenmuseum and one of the most influential figures in the shift in perspective that Dutch museums are carrying out, began the session with a thought-provoking speech. His view on the reparation problem points out that the problem has to be approached “not from the thing we have done, but what we are not doing there. And this is reparation.” Noting that “we are here because Black people are not still taken into account, and this is an invitation to struggle.” The words of the Tropenmuseum’s director are essential because he straightforwardly addresses the conflict, there is still much to be done. His opinion seems noteworthy because although steps have been taken, such as creating the lecture itself, I believe that one must realize the problem of the colonial collections, and in general, the problem that the Netherlands suffers from its colonial vision is just beginning. As another participant mentioned, “ten years ago, this did not happen, but we are just beginning to see how these actions are working.”

Modest, on the other hand, on the ‘Pressing Matter,’ jokingly described that some voices called the project ‘(De)Pressing Matter.’ Yet he approaches the subject with positivism. And said the project wants to understand the failures by asking, what does repair look like? Or what is the most important thing to repair? He reflected on the concept of ‘availability,’ on which he points out colonialism is based. According to Modest, colonialism has educated us under the thought that “objects should be available to us,” as well as bodies or territories. Colonialism has taken the word away from some and has given it to others and invited us to ask ourselves how we should enter into the question of availability? Summing up that “to decolonize the museums is to decolonize the world.” He also mentioned that the voices that point out that the law of the past was different and cannot be criticized or compared, that it must be remembered the law itself was colonial. Finally, he concludes that although one has to be critical, one also has to be caring. No doubt Modest’s words are a tremendous invitation to reflection since although more work has indeed been done, one can wonder if everything has already been achieved. In my opinion, the answer is undoubtedly no; there is still a long way to go in the institutions and at the social level.

The second topic of this panel, ‘Redress,’ was carried out by PPROCE, the acronym that describes ‘Pilotproject Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era.’ A project under the umbrella of NIOD, Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, a national and international institution that provides research on the history of

²¹⁰ “Call for Papers: The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past”, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.aup.nl/en/articles/call-for-papers-the-future-of-the-dutch-colonial-past>

²¹¹ “Symposium: The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past,” Amsterdam Museum, accessed January 5, 2022, www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/activities/symposium-future-dutch-colonial-past

world wars, mass violence, and genocides. The project also counted with the collaboration of two other institutions, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the National Museum of World Cultures. The project's goal was to develop a methodology for research on the provenance of collections for the colonial objects, with the intention that it would be used in the future. The two-year project focused on Indonesia.

Klaas Stutje, a historian on the project, explained that the team, following proposals from Germany and France, thought that the Netherlands should do the same research that has been done in the institution for the restitution of the Nazi-looted Art. As he explained, the process was to set up a committee to carry out the process, research the history of the chosen objects, and decide on a methodology. Currently, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are trying to look at those objects. The speaker says their research results do not try to dictate whether or not to return the artifacts but rather to help describe much of the politics and the socio-political aspects involved in these objects. The recommendations will be written up in a report published later. However, briefly outlined some of the suggestions or problems they encountered. The first is that they recommend a short desire and demand to involve everyone in the process. They have seen that when dealing with this issue, they have to go across three levels of people (official level, institutional level, and personal level). Another is that while they were doing provenance research, Indonesia decided to start carrying out its provenance research. And finally, that two years is too short a period to make the process viable since the individual level takes time. In response to a question from one of the participants about Suriname's place in the whole research process, since Indonesia was always mentioned, Stutje's answer was straightforward; they chose Indonesia because it was much easier to contact, and without much further explanation, the question stopped there.

It is encouraging to see that such a project is being carried out at one level because creating a more general and simplified guideline could increase knowledge exchange, increase collaboration between institutions, and facilitate returns by avoiding bureaucratic processes, even if each object is going to be examined individually. However, I doubt it can be applied to every country or former colony in the same way. First Indonesian heritage protection policy is highly developed, second the establishments are willing to that the process and, third and more importantly, it is prepared for such a process, whereas Suriname's situation is not the same. As for Stutje's response to selecting Indonesia because it was easier to establish communication, I find it incredible that it is more difficult to contact a colony whose independence was considerably more recent and whose population represents a greater transcendence in the country.

Nevertheless, such an answer is not surprising, given the complicated relations that Suriname has had with the Netherlands in a political sphere. In addition to the fact that the looting of Indonesia by the Dutch was more severe, combined with the global influence in the worldwide sphere concerning the return of looted art that the country holds, and as we have discovered throughout the thesis, Suriname does not seem to have a looted art problem and if it does it is of minimal value, according to the voices of the experts. Without attempting a competition as to which country should be chosen first, we find again that the balance for the predominant role in the return of colonial artifacts goes once again to Indonesia. It also seems necessary to reflect on Suriname's position among the mainly academic audience. Because even if the interviews with the experts previously exposed tell us there is

no problem about the legality in which these collections were acquired, it certainly shows a lack of knowledge or mistrust towards this fact.

Modest replied by saying that the Caribbean had been undervalued for a long time, even materially, because it was thought it was not primitive enough to be collected, all based on the difficulty and ignorance within the specialties such as ethnography of the time. Modest concluded the panel by saying that they did not know the answers to the problem and that there were always challenges when facing the different ways, but it was a matter of commitment.

Final conclusions

This research aimed to find out the factors that played a role in returning colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname and their dynamics in the process. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis of the factors - historical, institutional, legal - was chosen, accompanied by interviews with professionals in the sector who were directly involved in some of the spheres surrounding the process. This work aimed to carry out a qualitative analysis to trace the current state of the narrative of returning the pieces between the Netherlands and Suriname. A process that had been put back on the table after the announcement by the Dutch government in 2020 where it launched a first step towards the return of the looted colonial objects acquired during its colonial period. After the completion of this thesis and based on the analysis provided, it can be concluded that each of the factors analyzed has a direct influence on the return of looted colonial objects from the Netherlands to Suriname and that each of these factors sheds light on the part of a puzzle that is formed by the sum of all these realities.

The first point analyzed was the historical one, where it was concluded that several factors directly or indirectly impact the return of colonial objects between the two states. The first factor is the shared colonial history of the two nations. A shared history has led to different perspectives on colonization and its legacies. This factor reveals that a large part of the Dutch population has not developed a consciousness of the Atlantic colonial past until relatively recently, nor has it developed a concern to repair it, albeit steps have been taken in the last decade in this respect. On the Surinamese side, together with the migrant populations of the Dutch Caribbean, this factor reveals that the Dutch colonization closely marks their history. Chattel slavery and the question of reparation of this past is still an open wound that has led to the criticism by the migrant sectors of a political, social, and economic model where the Western way of thinking dominates and one part of the history is marginalized. In this context of exclusion, there are calls for a change in Dutch museums as they continue to be seen as a prolongation of the colonial system and the retention of the colonial collections. Both sides of the problem lead to a lack of consensus regarding the heritage collections and measures to tackle the problem.

On the other hand, the second historical factor reveals that Suriname's independence did not fully develop the country but a relatively strong dependence on the Netherlands. The colonial process was also accompanied by changing morphology and the growth of a multicultural population, a reality in which it has always been challenging to create a shared national image even after independence. This chapter also reveals that these cultural differences existed once the populations migrated from Suriname arrived in the Netherlands. People from Suriname were the second most substantial wave of migrants in the Netherlands in the 20th century. The Afro-descendant population that settled had a cultural interest in the country of origin that was not as present in other population groups that arrived from Suriname. Such heterogeneity helps to understand why the Surinamese diaspora as a whole in the Netherlands has not had the return of colonial artifacts as the main objective in its demands.

Moreover, the historical analysis emphasizes a paradox when political disagreements between the two countries' governments did not help develop diplomatic relations. Therefore, Dutch and Surinamese authorities could not develop joint policies, much less cultural ones, due to the political differences in the last 20 years when Bouterse

was the country's leader. But on the other side, Suriname has experienced a direct economic and social influence from the wave of Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands due to a very high percentage of Surinamese having relatives in the Netherlands. In addition, the chapter highlights the ever-present cultural value of the Afro-descendant populations from all the Caribbean territory, who have organized themselves throughout the country to give visibility to their claims. These organizations collaborate, share decolonial ideas, and fight for their recognition in the Dutch society, although there is no group exclusively for returning colonial artifacts.

Finally, the first chapter shows that the history of collections in the Netherlands follows the same lines as the history of collections in Europe as a precedent for the creation of the ethnographic museums, which are deeply linked to a colonial period. Alongside this, we see how the influx of objects from the former colonies is closely related to the looting that occurred in the former colonies during the 19th century, whose values linked to exoticization and colonialism affirmed a colonizing vision that perpetuated racism and inequality between nations. However, although efforts have been made to change the image of these institutions, which in the Dutch case are more focused on pedagogy and gathering different narratives in order to include all the voices in the history, as in the example of the Tropenmuseum, we see that society still has doubts about the continued existence of western museums as the owners of those collections.

Concerning chapter two on the policies and legal frameworks affecting the return of colonial artifacts, we have seen several factors that affect the narrative of the return of colonial artifacts, particularly in the case of Suriname and the Netherlands. The thesis concludes that enhancing the value of Surinamese heritage has always been put aside by both states. On the one hand, the colonizing vision did not have a high appreciation of art during colonization. However, there was nevertheless some interest in particular cultural objects because there was a displacement of objects during the 20th century coinciding with the collecting dynamics of Europe. On the other hand, the policies to protect Suriname's cultural heritage have been the priority in the country neither during the independence period nor at present. The measures taken have been insufficient, with broad objectives that emphasize more commercial interest in culture than a possible return of colonial heritage. Furthermore, the development of large-scale state cultural infrastructures beyond the Stichting Suriname museum remains embryonic.

Likewise, the second chapter reveals that in terms of 'Return' as a rising global urgency and the local Dutch response, we see that the first echoes of the problem globally come from reclaiming human remains from indigenous communities at the end of the 20th century. Yet, in the Netherlands, it did not start to be seen until the beginning of the 21st century because there was no solid indigenous community impact. That was also driven by the changing global conjuncture where decolonial values were put on the table leading to the realization of international policies. The study presented by van Beurden suggests that in the Netherlands, returns of colonial artifacts in recent years have been scarce, especially in the Surinamese case, while Indonesia has been the country with the highest returns. It also reveals how the Netherlands has developed a good policy for the return of Nazi-looted art but has not developed a clear policy for the return of colonial artifacts, as it is only in 2020 that the first lines of future action have started to be drawn.

The thesis shows how the terms 'Restitution,' 'Return,' and 'Repatriation' indicate the legal framework and historical process under which objects were removed from one territory and taken to another. It also proves that boundaries between concepts are sometimes blurry because of the usage they have adopted in some international conventions. The term that would best describe the movement of colonial artifacts from the Netherlands to Suriname is 'return,' as it is the one that has ethical implications and does not imply illegality when taking the artifacts out of the country. On the other hand, the concepts of 'country of origin' and 'ownership' bring the discussions and controversies in the exchange between countries and within the countries themselves as to who has the right to host the objects. In addition, the thesis has shown that the legal factor is also conditioned by the political interest factor, as the objects play a role in diplomatic issues in which the cultural value of the objects is not always put above personal interest.

As far as the legal framework is concerned, we have seen in the thesis that international law proposals have been developed in an attempt to bring together the different laws of the countries and the recognition of minorities for the rights of communities. However, despite the attempts to reach the countries into the same deal, we have seen that they have not been effective. In the Netherlands, the law protects the heritage from being taken away, and therefore it is complicated for the claimants' parties to carry out the claim processes. In addition, the lack of political development in the ex-colonies made it difficult to push over those developed state laws, as in the case of Suriname. In the same way, international law has developed late, which has meant that the objects were unprotected, and this reality has not been attacked until relatively recently. In general, to avoid these bureaucratic issues, institutions often opt for soft law.

Concerning the recent soft law measures that The Netherlands has taken on the Restitution of colonial objects, the first step was taken by NMVW with the report on the "Restitution of cultural objects" in 2019, and was followed by the Council of Culture with the guide "Colonial collections: A recognition of justice." Each of the documents reveals, on the one hand, how the institutions, if they have the will, can start to take the first steps to return their colonial heritage pieces. On the other hand, the thesis analysis reveals that many points cause controversy showing how again the Netherlands sets the terms for these returns without counterpart when, perhaps, creating these policies in a more collaborative approach would have been fruitful.

Lastly, through the interviews and the symposium analysis in the third chapter, we have seen that other factors have come to light in the narrative of the return of colonial artifacts between the Netherlands and Suriname. Thanks to the interview with Martin Berger, the thesis has discovered that there is evidence that the Surinamese collections do not have a looted origin and that the Surinamese collections have not enjoyed a high profile in museums, which has led to a low interest in their research, and a low level of the exhibition due to the repetitive nature of the pieces. We have also found that this condition causes the pieces to lose their scientific value in the Dutch territory and their original function, resulting in an emptiness where they seem to be of no interest on any side. In the interview, the curator also stated the absence of requests from Suriname when working for the NMVW. The latter confirms the little interest in the Surinamese community in these pieces, although he explained that interest in these objects increased when the museums carried out projects with the communities. Berger's position is an example of a proactive professional returning colonial objects.

The second interview with van Beurden brought to light how a massive return is not possible; a different view from what the media and government news might suggest. Theoretically, it is possible, but many other factors tip the balance to a no, mainly the ability and willingness of the country of origin to accept the objects. In the conversation, van Beurden fears that the return processes become some sort of “business,” in which research funding might last long without providing a concrete solution to the problem. His approach brings global awareness to a problem as he pointed to private collectors and religious entities as also part of the problem. Finally, for van Beurden, if Suriname wants to make progress on this problem, it has to create its policies to defend the heritage, and thus from a position of equals, it would be better to enter into the discussion. Finally, he points out that the economic factor does play a role in returning these objects because they are demanded by visitors and are a source of profit for the museums that exhibit them.

The interview with Tomás Polimé brings to the surface a new way of managing Suriname’s colonial heritage, as he proposes a division of heritage in which both parties can have part of the objects. The interview confirms how Polimé’s generation is linked with the country of origin but questions whether this mediation will exist in the future. The interview also showed that the value of the intangible culture of his country and his community is of greater importance to him than the objects, meaning that the return of the pieces is not a priority. Nonetheless, he agrees with the provenance research measures, which, above all, should be carried out jointly between the two countries. The talk with Polimé also brought that communities are interested in the artifacts, although the lack of means slows down the process. Finally, the interview with J. van Putten revealed that the Stitching Surinamese museum has a clear approach towards colonial objects in Dutch museums as the director thinks objects have to stay in the Netherlands. Van Putten is not interested in claiming pieces because there are no tainted objects. However, he does agree that there are objects that could fill gaps in their collection and that not only pieces but also knowledge from Dutch scholars could both be useful. Moreover, he confirms that there is little knowledge of these processes among professionals and the government in Suriname.

To conclude, we can say that the return of colonial heritage is a very complex process in this particular case and a broader view. It implies first to have good knowledge of the history of the country of origin and earlier exchanges between this country and the former colonizers. Second, we can now state that for a return process to be done properly; it would be needed a lot of time, funding, and human resources. Also, we have seen that a legal framework exists and must be considered when designing return processes, although soft law seems to be of prime importance. Last but not least, it is fundamental to create a trustful way of communication that really takes into account both parties.

This study opens up future research lines in the return of objects and collections, especially those that have to do with a deeper investigation of the social value of collections in society, both in the Netherlands and Suriname. Indeed, a qualitative analysis of the responses would help find out where these collections could play a better role and move away from thinking of ownership but to consider where they can be most beneficial for the people. Moreover, there is a lack of exhaustive work on documenting the pieces of the Surinamese collections in the Netherlands. A compilation of the origin and past of these pieces would help spread the heritage of the Surinamese

people because, beyond the question of ownership of the pieces themselves, people have the right to have knowledge of their heritage. Finally, this is not a line of research but rather a project proposal, as it would be interesting to consider a project at the European level that deals with the return of colonial artifacts on a broader level, as while the Netherlands is taking steps forward, other countries such as Portugal and Spain are far from getting involved in these talks. Thinking globally and acting locally is a win-win situation and necessary to build a fairer society.

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