Sites, Bodies and Stories

The Dynamics of Heritage Formation in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia and the Netherlands

Summary
The research programme “Sites, Bodies and Stories” investigates cultural heritage formation in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia and the Netherlands since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It analyses the emergence of a colonial canon of Indonesian culture, and its impact on the dynamics of appropriation and belonging, inclusion and exclusion, during the process of (post)colonial state formation.

Three case studies, focussing on different heritage domains, will be the prisms through which the political dimensions and colonial threads of heritage formation across the colonial divide will be investigated. The case studies concern: (1) archaeological-historical sites; (2) human remains and physical anthropological data; and (3) contemporary performing traditions and performance practices.

Each of these heritage domains implicitly refers to an ‘authentic’ indigenous past. Each domain has been incorporated in a Western scientific body of colonial knowledge, and has been regulated and preserved through the intervention of cultural institutions in Indonesia and the Netherlands. In these three domains cases have been selected which are connected with sensitive and often contested political and religious interests. They touch upon national, religious or ethnic identity issues, while they are framed in discussions concerning national and world heritage, postcolonial relationships between former colonizer and colony, and the moral underpinnings of keeping and investigating human remains.

The use of the three cases allows the programme to follow three different approaches to the dynamics of heritage formation: focusing on state interventions (Sites), on international professional agendas (Bodies) and on individual local cultural productions (Stories). The aim is, by following these three approaches to arrive at an analysis of the operation of processes of heritage formation in colonial, postcolonial and international arenas, drawing its power and legitimacy from, respectively, the state, international norms, and local tradition. In a broader sense the programme opens the possibility of a critical evaluation of the political dimensions of the concept of heritage and the practice of heritage studies.

Senior and PhD research will result in academic publications; a mid-term international seminar in Jakarta will strengthen the international comparative context of the research, with a focus on Indonesia, the Netherlands, India and England. Indonesian postgraduate students will be involved in research, whereas the programme aims to reach a wider audience as well, through an exhibition, performances, documentary films and public debates on ethical guidelines.

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Sites, Bodies and Stories - Full project description

Aim of the project
The research programme Sites, Bodies and Stories aims to investigate the dynamics of cultural heritage formation in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia and the Netherlands since the early nineteenth century. It analyses the emergence of a colonial canon of Indonesian culture, and its impact on acts and feelings of appropriation and belonging, inclusion and exclusion during the process of (post)colonial state formation. The central questions are: (1) How and to what extent did the focussed attention to ‘cultural heritage’ by scholars, authorities, community leaders contribute to the making of a (post)colonial cultural canon in (and of) Indonesia? (2) How, and to what extent did the emergence of such a canon contribute to essentialize notions of cultural, ethnic and religious identities and multiple identifications in Indonesia and the Netherlands? (3) How did heritage formation contribute to processes of inclusion and exclusion in (post)colonial Indonesia and which sites of contestation can be identified in this respect? And (4) what was the impact of heritage awareness, identification and belonging on postcolonial nation building in Indonesia as well as on Indonesian-Dutch relationships?

Three case studies, related to different heritage domains, will offer various approaches to these questions. These case studies concern: (1) archaeological-historical sites; (2) human remains and physical anthropological data; and (3) contemporary performing traditions and performance practices.

Each of these heritage domains implies specific notions of temporality, implicitly referring to both an indigenous and a colonial past; each is associated with specific sites; ever since ‘Raffles’ the three heritage domains have become regulated and preserved through the intervention of newly developing cultural institutions in Indonesia and the Netherlands; and each has been the subject of scientific investigation that sought to form overarching theories relating to issues like authenticity, the nature and origin of Man, his place in history and ideas about society. And today, the cases under investigation have in common that they are both locally situated and globally relevant. They are connected with sensitive and often contested political and religious interests which touch upon national, religious or ethnic identity issues. As such they are framed in new discourses concerning national and world heritage, postcolonial relationships between former colonizer and colony, restitution questions and the moral underpinnings of keeping, investigating and de-accessioning of human remains.

Background and scholarly importance
The relationship between historiography and (post)colonial state formation forms a central issue in discussions on Indonesian nation building. Recent studies refer in general to a colonial body of knowledge, as well as to cultural aspects of nation building processes (Barnard 1997, Davies 1996, Glover 2003, Purwanto 2006, Reid 1979, Sears 1996, Wood 2006). It is, however, important to focus more in particular and more critically on processes of heritage formation and its effects in the context of (post)
colonial nation building in Indonesia and in the context of postcolonial Indonesian-Dutch relationships.

The relevance of such an approach can be illustrated with the government supported exhibition of ethnographic and archaeological masterpieces from all over Indonesia, presented in 2005 in Jakarta and in Amsterdam in the context of the celebration of 60 years of Indonesian independence. On display was a national Indonesian cultural canon which was firmly rooted in colonial collections, c.q. heritage formation. In Jakarta this exhibition was presented as a celebration of Indonesian identity, expressed as ‘unity in diversity’. In the Netherlands, public attention was directed at the history of collecting in the context of colonial conquest and rule, as a necessary step to ‘liberate’ these collections from their colonial connotation and to reposition them under a new title as the “shared heritage” of universal beauty for citizens all over the globe (Sri Hardiati and ter Keurs 2005; Ter Keurs 2007; Soebadio 1992). In both the Dutch and the Indonesian context, the exhibition first and foremost seemed to celebrate the classic Hindu-Buddhist nature of Indonesian culture. An effect of this approach was the near ‘denial’ of Islam in Indonesian culture (cf Ricklefs 2007).

These divergent Indonesian/Dutch interpretations of heritage in the context of citizenship, ownership and belonging, illustrate the need to connect questions concerning Indonesian and Dutch cultural heritage to a wider international academic discourse on the politics of heritage formation and processes of signification in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The long near absence of Dutch and Indonesian voices in this international forum is mainly due to the reluctant and late responses in the Netherlands to the international ‘orientalism debate’ which followed after Edward Said’s Orientalism was published (1978). Apart from that, during the New Order regime (1966-98) few opportunities existed in Indonesia for a critical international academic exchange of views about the relationship between the colonial past and the nature of the nation-state. By now this situation has changed and many initiatives have been taken to intensify academic collaboration and international exchange. The programme Sites, Bodies and Stories aims to take up the challenge, and contribute to a repositioning of Indonesian and Dutch (post)colonial history and cultural studies in international debates on ‘the rule of colonial difference’ (Hall and Rose 2006:19; Chaterjee 1993; Legêne 2004). Therefore this programme finds its strength in the collaboration between Dutch and Indonesian researchers in academic and in cultural institutions, placed in a wider comparative framework with colleagues from India and Great Britain.

Theoretical perspectives

Theoretically the programme is inspired by the seminal works of Anderson (1991) and Cohn (1996) on the relationship between musealization of archaeological and ethnological collections, and (post)colonial state formation in Indonesia and India. Heritage – kept on sites and gathered in tangible objects in museums, canonized in books and performed and remembered as an ‘intangible’ heritage in cultural productions – is approached as a source for, and an organizer of, processes of identification in conceptualizing notions of (trans)nationality and citizenship. The focus on heritage formation and the colonial canon will contribute to Gyan Prakash’s central question as to ‘how the history of colonialism and colonialism’s disciplining of history can be shaken loose from the categories and ideas it produced’ (Prakash 1995:4-5).

Prakash’s search for new perspectives on colonial categories focused primarily on a reinterpretation of the written sources from colonial times. In Sites, Bodies and Stories, cultural heritage formation will be approached as a set of clues for these written sources, offering specific perspectives on the agency involved (cf. Bloembergen 2006;Edwards 2001; Gosden 2001; Legêne 2005). Starting from the three selected case studies, this research programme will investigate the dominant academic knowledge about Indonesia: how and by whom it was produced, how it helped to include, classify, and exclude particular groups of people, how it exists today in heritage institutions, how these institutions form sites of contestation, and how it is reproduced and re-interpreted in academic and public discourse. The relevant academic disciplines and their authors, many of whom also played an active role in colonial administration, will be approached.
'as part of history and not simply as neutral observers’ (Cooper 2005:47; Stoler 1995:39; cf. Fasseur 1994).

The focus on heritage formation since the early nineteenth century and the role of an academic colonial canon will be connected to recent theorizing about other forms of agency in processes of classification and signification in visual and material (museum) collections, in performing arts and cultural heritage institutions (Kirshenblatt-Gimbllett 1998; Maxwell 1999, MacKenzy 2001, Edwards et al. 2006). Furthermore, the programme builds on historical-ethnicological theories of signification and appropriation (Frijhoff 1997), the historical-ethnological theories of multiple contextualization (Stocking 1987) and on pre-historian Hodder’s analysis that sites are places of ‘conflict in the construction of multiple pasts’ (1998). This notion of a ‘site’ will be broadened, as to include secular and religious places that acquired a heritage status in recent processes of state formation, museum depots, theatre stages, (museum or artists’) websites, and laboratories.

**Coherence**
The three case studies are closely connected. They investigate the dynamics of (post) colonial heritage formation in Indonesia and the Netherlands – starting around 1800 or starting from today – from three different angles, pertaining to different disciplinary practices (archaeology, physical anthropology and performing arts). The different domains are connected through their shared genealogy as disciplines that were strongly connected to the colonial project, and still are employed in the context of the state. Collectively, the researches will result in an analysis of how heritage operated in colonial, postcolonial and international arenas, drawing its power and legitimacy from, respectively, the state (*Sites*), international norms (*Bodies*) and local tradition (*Stories*). The first case study on *Sites*, investigates the continuities and changes in the emergence of a canon which is related to a political geography of archaeological excavations, but also to twentieth century historical sites, and explores the implicit and explicit hierarchies of cultural knowledge and control involved in heritage politics. The second case study, *Bodies* – on human remains – focuses on the cultural heritage of the Western academic discipline of physical anthropology. This offers a starting point for an analysis of ideas about racial science and modernity, and racial inequality and citizenship in the colonial period and their impact on contemporary society. The third case study on *Stories* focuses on contemporary performance practices in the ‘intangible’ theatre tradition of wayang. This performing practice, with its own non-scholarly cosmology rooted in classical epics, is the starting point for research into the dynamics of cultural identification, in which Javanese-Indonesian identity politics and Dutch colonial nostalgia are the extremes of the spectrum.

The three case studies jointly address issues of state formation, national identity, ethnic and religious differences, and morality. Each places a different emphasis on the continuities and changes between the colonial past and postcolonial society, as well as on the interaction between local, national and international processes of signification, including the complex postcolonial relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The coherence will be enhanced by the mid-term seminar in Jakarta (see §12). In a synthesis based on these case studies, and with reference to relevant Indian/English historiography, we expect to propose new approaches to the multiple connections and fault lines of colonial and post-colonial history.

**Sites: postdoc research project**

*Sleeping Beauties, Hidden Forces – Archaeological and historical sites and the dynamics of heritage formation in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia 1778-2007*

This sub-project studies the dynamics of archaeological knowledge production and heritage formation in colonial, postcolonial and contemporary Indonesia. The main question is: what was the impact of archaeological research and knowledge on colonial and national identity formation and perceptions of (trans)national citizenship? What notions of time and space, of history and political geographical borders, of self and other
have been connected to archaeological and historical heritage and what is their meaning today in academic/museological and state-based discourses?

These questions will be approached along three lines: (1) focusing on the endeavors, motivations and results of the cultural agents (institutions, parties and individuals) who were and are involved in archaeological knowledge production, heritage formation and its forms of representation; (2) focusing on archaeological and historical heritage formation ‘on the spot’, and on the effects of archaeological and historical knowledge production related to specific sites on local or national identification processes; (3) focusing on selected archeological and historical sites that currently are subject to active heritage politics in Indonesia.

Scholarly and scientific relevance
Archaeological heritage formation can have tremendous effects on perceptions of the past and on identity formation, both as sites of conflict in the construction of multiple pasts (Hodder 1998), or uniting different groups (Trevithick 1999). The interaction between archaeological knowledge production, heritage formation, cultural identifications, state politics and processes of inclusion and exclusion, has been researched in the context of (post) colonial India (cf Guha-Thakurta 2004). Earlier, Anderson, in the second edition of his influential study Imagined Communities (1991), propounded his compelling theory on the connection between colonial archaeology, cartography, musealization and state formation. Through the creation of archaeological heritage, the colonial state, and later the postcolonial state could legitimize its ancestry, mapped within specific borders (cf Cohn 1996; Glover 2003; Miksic 1984). The state centered perspective of this argument, however, left little room for the effects of the multiple identifications with and interventions concerning archaeological sites. This project will therefore explore the dynamics of archaeological knowledge production and dissemination concerning sites in the Indonesian Archipelago, as focus point of multiple processes of significations.

Methodology
The research combines a cultural-historical approach of part 1 and 2 with historical- anthropological fieldwork in part 3.

Starting with the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1776, the first part focuses on cultural agents and investigates (following Guha-Thakurta 2004) the practice of archaeological knowledge production and the involvement with archaeology of institutions like the national museums in Batavia/Jakarta and Leiden, the colonial and postcolonial Archaeological Services, and transnational institutions like the Ford Foundation and Unesco. Based on a selection of prominent scholars and politicians in this field, it will analyze to what extent their academic work, archaeological practice, collecting and exhibition practices and administrative interventions since the early nineteenth century, contributed to dominant state-centered views about the nation and its supposed origins.

The second part of the research focuses at heritage effects ‘on the spot’. It analyzes the transition of site-related knowledge (newspapers, travel guides etc), and indigenous, local and transnational appreciations. The selected sites and sources, like the Borobudur, Hindu-Buddhist sites, the Kingdoms of Majapahit and Sriwijaya, reflect various concepts of periodisation and historical relationships in the context of state formation, referring to archaeological knowledge production in the early and late colonial era, the discussion on the ‘Indianization’ of Indonesia, and the emergence of Indonesian national icons, in relationship to, for instance, the Unesco World Heritage List.

The third part of the research broadens the notion of heritage sites to historical locations that refer to the more recent past, like VOC sites, mosques and buildings that represent highlights in nationalist history. It will analyze knowledge production and heritage formation in the context of present-day Indonesian and Dutch heritage politics (cf. Barendregt 2002).

Historical analysis of academic key publications in the tradition of colonial and postcolonial archaeology will be combined with a critical analysis of the museological history of excavated archaeological artefacts and photographs of sites in museums in and
outside Indonesia. The fieldwork will contribute to the analysis of the contemporary meaning of selected archaeological and ‘new’ historical sites. This fieldwork will be conducted in collaboration with post-graduate students from the archaeological and history department of Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta.

**Contribution to ‘Sites, Bodies and Stories’**
The three-tiered approach to sites – with a focus on the emergence of a colonial canon of sites as institutionalized heritage, on perceptions of sites and on the discourses and heritage practices surrounding sites in postcolonial processes of state formation – contributes to the analysis of the operation of heritage formation in colonial, postcolonial and international arenas, drawing, in this case, its power and legitimacy from the state.

**Bodies: PhD and Postdoc research project**

*Physical Anthropology, Colonial Practice and Cultural Policies*

Point of departure in this sub-project is the collection of human remains, physical anthropological photographs, and the reference library of the Department of Physical Anthropology of the Colonial Institute/Royal Tropical Institute between 1915 and 1965 (Van Duuren et al. 2007). These collections will be approached as a cultural heritage collected in the context of the twin discourse of physical and cultural anthropology. Two sets of questions emerge: (1 ) What has been the relationship between physical anthropology and its discourses on race, and colonial practice and ideas of citizenship and belonging in the Netherlands East Indies and the Netherlands; what was the academic, moral and religious discourse about man and society in the Dutch-Indies/Netherlands connected to collecting anthropological data? (2) Whose heritage is this today? Is it scientifically relevant to reposition certain human remains in new biomedical research; and if so, who is entitled to decide about the ethics at stake?

*Scholarly and scientific relevance*

Between 1915 and 1965, the Colonial Institute / Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam has been an active *trait d’union* between researchers based in Europe, the USA and the (former) colonies. In the Netherlands East Indies explorers and medical doctors based in the army and in modern medical institutions (laboratories, medical schools like STOVIA, hospitals) were actively engaged in data gathering in the field of physical anthropology. Physical anthropology was part of an international research agenda concerned with the boundaries between ethnicity and culture; it referred to eugenics, and complemented an ethnographic discourse on cultural diversity. Its visualizing techniques have played a most powerful and contested role in political discourses and the formation of essential cultural canons. In the Netherlands East Indies this happened within a context of an enlightened colonialism which had to cope with an emerging anti-colonial nationalism, within a society that was organized along racial categories (Stoler 2002; Legêne 2007); whereas in Europe and the USA colonial physical anthropology played a role in an academic discourse that gradually more and more had to relate to nationalism and to the explicit racial science of the Nazi’s (Schafft 2004). After the Second World War physical anthropologists worked for some years on the Unesco Statement on Race, as to distance the science from the political abuse. Colonialism was not addressed in this context, as is the case in recent historiography on Dutch anthropology (*cf*. Eickhoff et al 2000; Legassick 2000). Today, indigenous people, supported by ICOM, reclaim provenanced and unprovenanced human remains in public collections, implying as well to reclaim a certain control over the past and future of their own communities (Lohman et al. 2007).

Apart from its relevance as sources to this past academic discourse and practices of categorization, the historical collections of human remains from the colonial past in Dutch cultural institutions are relevant for a contemporary international research agenda. In this sub-project the question is raised whether the collections of human remains from Indonesia would offer possibilities for current pathogen DNA research in the context of the worldwide DNA bar coding project. Such research implies their repositioning from a cultural heritage context into a biomedical laboratory context. This raises ethical
questions related to perceptions in Indonesia and the Netherlands, of these human remains as well as to meanings which people today attach to the past colonial context of (data)-collecting. Addressing these issues in relevant forums inside and outside Indonesia, in connection to the historical research on the colonial context of collection formation may provide new ways to discuss the presence of the colonial past in contemporary society, and contribute to a better understanding of the various ways people relate themselves mentally and culturally to modern biomedical techniques.

**Methodology**

The first part of this sub-programme will be a PhD research, based on historical research and discourse analysis in Dutch and international sources. Collections will be documented, academic networks analysed, with a special focus on the position and views of the relevant collectors and researchers, and their institutions in the changing political contexts of the twentieth century. The second part, on the ethics of a biomedical re-study will be performed by an Indonesian postdoc medical ethicist, in the context of an active dialogue with medical ethical committees in Indonesia and the Netherlands, possibly resulting in draft guidelines for biomedical research.

**Contribution to ‘Sites, Bodies and Stories’**

The approach of attitudes towards human remains as a cultural heritage of past academic discourses on classification strategies, and at the same time as potential sources for new biomedical classificatory research, connects notions of heritage, ownership and belonging to the ethical considerations of an international professional research agenda drawing its power and legitimacy from international norms. Exploring considerations of human rights and public benefit is at the heart of the dynamics of cultural heritage politics.

**Stories: PhD research project**

*Performing Identity, Shaping Heritage— Wayang puppet theatre and the dynamics of heritage formation in contemporary Indonesia*

This sub-project studies the relationship between a performance practice, the creation of heritage and the notion of ‘intangible heritage’ as a signifier in the cultural canon of contemporary Indonesia. It focuses on the well-known performance tradition of the wayang puppet theatre, and on the dalang, the puppet master in particular. The main questions are: how, to what extent and in what social arenas does the dalang construct and shape heritage? What is the impact of local traditions on his art, how is this perceived by various audiences and influenced by heritage policies and practices?

These questions will be approached along three lines: (1) an artist’s biography; (2) a study of modes of identification with wayang puppet theatre among different audiences, in Indonesia and the Netherlands and the meaning of current policies and practices of heritage institutions; (3) an analysis of colonial scholarly writings and the practice of collecting, presenting and interpreting wayang puppet theatre.

*Scholarly and scientific relevance*

Wayang puppet theatre is a story telling medium and a major vehicle for the transmission of the Ramayana and Mahabharata tales in Indonesia. The stories may be religious, excorctic, political, or purely entertaining, but dalang always turn stories into lakon (formulaic plots) in oral performances. In addition to ritual purposes, the shadow theatre is regarded as a vehicle of social teachings. Important points of Javanese history and mythology are emphasized in performances, illuminating and interweaving mythical and political discourse. (Arps 1993) If art is both a reflection and distortion of daily happenings, artistic expressions serve to communicate how people feel, think, embrace, or resist forces that impinge upon their lives (Fabian 1996). In this sense, various studies have analyzed how wayang performances re-enacted power relations in order to negotiate the terms under which those relations are recorded in memory (Sears 1996, Weintraub 2004). The meaning of wayang puppet theatre for various (post)colonial audiences outside of Indonesia is not part of such studies.
Written texts have both documented and influenced wayang puppet theatre. Colonial ethnographers have explored cultural expressions and positioned themselves in the colonial knowledge system as academics with historical understanding that was superior to the intuitive local artists (cf. Anderson 1991; Cohn 1996; Prakash 1995). Moulded by colonial paradigms wayang puppets in museum collections, together with the sound of the gamelan, became icons of ‘authentic’ Javanese culture, rooted in a pre-Islamic past (Mellema 1954). Today, the Indonesian state, by placing the Wayang Puppet Theatre on the Unesco List of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible heritage of Humanity, confirms that connotation of authenticity in the context of the nation (Proclamation of 2003). The long term loan by Rotterdam to Jakarta, in 2005, of a set of wayang revolusi puppets from 1958 by Raden Mas Sayid, also suggests this connection with Indonesian national identity.

Investigating contemporary performances in Indonesia and the Netherlands, as well as past performance practices as documented in writings, photographs, wayang puppets collections and audiovisual recordings, will enable an analysis of discrepant views on identification and belonging, both in a regional, national, transcultural and international perspective.

Methodology
The research combines a cultural anthropological approach framed in the discipline of cultural studies, with a cultural-historical approach of tangible and (audio)visual museum collections. Fieldwork will be done together with post-graduate students from Gadjah Mada University, who also will be invited for fieldwork in the Netherlands on perceptions of wayang and ‘Indonesia’ in the context of the ethnographic museum and the pasar malam.

The first part of this sub-project focuses on one dalang. Puppet masters like Asep Sunandar Sunarya are superstars in contemporary Indonesia. This is also the case with dalang Ki Enthus Susmono from Tegal, whose specific style, ideas, wayang characters and performing practices might offer a good starting point for a telling artist’s biography, both in the context of Indonesia and the Netherlands, where he probably will perform in 2009. In the second part, this will be confronted with a historical analysis of academic key publications on wayang in the Indonesian/Dutch colonial and postcolonial context and museum practices where performing arts have been separated into objects, words and sounds without a dalang. The third part of this study on the construction of a cultural canon in contemporary Indonesia investigates the notion of intangible heritage among different heirs, and the role of institutions such as the Indonesian government, UNESCO, Indonesian and Dutch museums, universities, dalang schools and theatres.

Contribution to ‘Site, Bodies and Stories’
This approach of contemporary wayang puppet theatre as a cultural practice with many associations, contributes to the analysis of how heritage dynamics in the postcolonial and international arena are linked or break with a colonial past, drawing its legitimacy from local tradition.

References

Other relevant literature

Selection of publications of the research team


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**International literature**


Cohn, B.S., Colonialism and its forms of knowledge. The British in India. Princeton 1996.


