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A personal and poetic inquiry into Dutch coloniality

JOEL E. BERENDS

ABSTRACT

The following personal and poetic inquiry examines Indonesian objects, art, and cultural expressions through the lensing of coloniality (A. Benítez Rojo 1992; A. Quijano and M. Ennis 2000; W.D. Mignolo 2011). The inquiry interacts with the objects, art, and cultural expressions through the creation of ekphrastic poetry – poems which describe works of art. Specifically, this inquiry examines my experiences with Dutch coloniality as a white cisgendered man with a Dutch heritage/inheritance who was born and raised in a predominantly Dutch immigrant community in West Michigan in the United States. Building from the work of Gloria Wekker and given my positionality, I am interested, “in the landscape that underlies the question, the cultural archive, and what it tells us about the continuities of the imperial construction of a dominant white Dutch self” (2016: 74). The personal, poetic aspects of this work engage the practices and experiences which have led me to where I am both in my professional and personal life. These aspects of my life within and beyond the academy allow me to examine histories critically and consider my entanglements with whiteness and within the matrix of coloniality of power through ekphrastic poetry.

KEYWORDS

Coloniality, poetic inquiry, ekphrastic poetry, documentary poetics.

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Since 2019, I have lived and worked in West Michigan, USA. Throughout the Covid pandemic, I have done my best to be a little bit better than the worst as a parent, husband, teacher, and graduate student. I often do my barely bettering from a makeshift office which shares a wall with a makeshift classroom for my now five- and seven-year-old children. We live in Grand Rapids, where my partner, Amanda, and I were born; we live within a stone's throw of the school where I met Amanda in the fourth grade while standing in line to drink from the water fountain. Amanda and I, like many of our fourth-grade classmates, come from a community predominantly comprised of white, Dutch, Christians of the reformed tradition in West Michigan.

The following is a personal and poetic inquiry which stems from my expanded sense of place and relationship to Dutch coloniality since leaving West Michigan and living and working in Indonesia – where I lived – for the better part of a decade. As such, the following inquiry examines Indonesian objects, art, and cultural expressions through the lensing of coloniality (Benítez Rojo 1992; Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2011) and engages with Indonesian artefacts through the creation of ekphrastic poetry – poems which describe works of art. More specifically, this inquiry examines my experiences with Dutch coloniality and then moves into contemporary creative scholarship which exposes Dutch coloniality in Indonesia through Sandeep Ray's (2021) film archival research and R. Rizaldi's (2020) film, *Tellurian drama*. Throughout this inquiry, I employ techniques of documentary poetics. P. Metres (2018) provides that documentary poetics arise "from the idea that poetry is not a museum-object to be observed from afar but a dynamic medium that informs and is informed by history". From this follows that I can approach my own work as a poet informed by histories who then can engage readers with histories through research-creation.

Aside from being a foundational aspect of art and culture for generations, globally, research-creation through poetry has increased in popularity. According to M. Prendergast (2009), in prior decades, poetic inquiry has been used as research-creation in forms such as poetic transcription (M. Freeman 2001; C. Glesne 1997; S.L. Whitney 2004), field note poems (M. Cahnmann 2003; T. Flores 1982), poetic portraits (Djanna Hill 2005), research-generated poetry (J. Rath 2001), and poetic representation (C. MacNeil 2000; L. Richardson 1997; D.D. Waskul and P. van der Riet 2002). Sandra L. Faulkner's (2019) work provides that the craft and method of poetic inquiry have recently become a method for engaging with histories in new ways, and I believe poetry as method and art evokes and educes contemporary engagements with histories past and "allows researchers to create data and present findings in a more powerful and emotionally poignant form" (L. Apol 2021: 19). Furthermore, I believe, like Faulkner (2019: 30), that "Poetry is political" and "can be an active response to social inequities" as exemplified in Claudia Rankine's work, *Citizen; An American lyric* (2014) or *Just us; An American conversation* (2020). This is why I situate my inquiry in ways which interrogate colonial histories and my part in them. The inquiry which follows includes the poems "The

Grand River's cul-de-sac", "Where allspice is one spice", "Film as kindling", "Mount Malabar radio station", *Ria Rago* – a film, directed by Father Buis, Reporting for *Bali-Floti* and a description of the research-creation process to serve as an entry point for further engagement with the flows of coloniality and its histories.

I came to this inquiry from a distance. In 2019, I dreamt of being a critical scholar-artist who developed criticality through travel and translation – movement to different localities, as in the field of anthropology, with commitments to transcription and the translation of ideas (A.L. Tsing 2005), most notably with commitments to teaching and learning more about translated literature, especially Indonesian poetry – the poetry of Chairil Anwar, of Sitor Situmorang, and others. I had ambitions to learn alongside Indonesian colleagues and scholar-artists once again. But alas, a global pandemic grounded something of my dreams.

In my previous scholarship, I have investigated something of these colonial histories through art and poetry, including a series of poems and images which feature the Dutch colonialism in my hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan. To situate where I am from and who I am in this work, I have included the poem originally published in *Tiny Seed Journal*, titled: "The Grand River's cul-de-sac" (Berends 2021, see Figure 1).

The Grand River's cul-de-sac

A Norway Maple nods to a Ginkgo
 who laughs with a Kousa Dogwood
 at a teenage Eastern Redbud who
 in angst spits seedpods on a
 sewer plate stamped 1948 where
 immigrants are a blessing and
 hate has no home because science
 is reeling and Black lives matter
 in brick bungalows built between
 rows of streets formed in the 1920s
 that were bought from farms and
 stolen from Nations and the ancient
 Oak Hickory Black Walnut Maple Ash
 forests and the far away river
 The river that once was grand



Figure 1. "The Grand River's cul-de-sac"
 (in: *Tiny Seed Journal*, tinyseedjournal.com).

For me, it took leaving this community to learn more about my whiteness, my Dutchness, and colonial pasts. In the summer of 2009, my partner and I got married, and within 36 hours, we were on a plane to Indonesia to begin our marriage and report for work in our respective careers. This was a terrible way for us to begin a marriage and a new job. But there I was on-time and in the Greater Jakarta Area, eager for the orientation to my new job as an English teacher in an international school.

Ever the resourceful teacher of language and literature, I would sneak

away to the library during coffee and tea breaks between sessions. This kept me focused on preparing for the early days of teaching and averted any potentially awkward small talk with new acquaintances. In the library, Pak Setiawan graciously stood sentinel of the space, and he allowed me to roam the stacks freely to get a feel for what was immediately possible for my curatorial debut in syllabi form.

One afternoon, however, Setiawan was out, and, since the library lights were on, I presumptuously invited myself to the stacks in the back. After some perusal and dusty investigations, I heard a grave or gravelly voice – I cannot recall which it was – calling out in English, “Who -- is in my library?” I have no idea what to say in moments like this, so I replied, “I ... am?” and, feeling somewhat summoned and something of an intruder, I walked towards the indeterminable voice. There I first saw Ibu Tessa the school librarian, and I was in her library. As I moved towards her, I noticed she wore a ring that weighed her wrinkly hands down, yet her posture and demeanour were rather upright. She seemed to know she was summoning me and addressed me with “Young man, what are you doing here?”

Again, I never know how to respond. Like, where is here? The office, the library, the school, Indonesia? So, I replied with something which probably came out as, “um...Pak Setiawan...I like books...”. What an introduction. I could feel Ibu Tessa’s scepticism growing between us. Ibu Tessa asked me for my name, and – feeling a little more accustomed to this social script – I introduced myself in English, first name and last. “My name is Joel Berends”. My introduction changed what was growing between us because, thereafter, Ibu Tessa spoke to me in Dutch. I was confused because, Dutch as my last name might be, I did not speak any Dutch-whatsoever.

I later discussed this interaction with a colleague, naively asking why Ibu Tessa spoke Dutch. My colleague, Ibu Siti, who taught Bahasa Indonesia and who was Javanese, explained to me how Ibu Tessa was “Chinese Indonesian” and was educated in what she described as “special Dutch schools” where she learned to speak Dutch.

From such conversations, I eventually came to study the construction of the Dutch-Chinese Schools or Hollandsch-Chineesch Schools (HCS) in 1907. My curiosity led me to the scholarship of J.M. van der Kroef (1953), L. Suryadinata (1972), D. Kwartanada (2007), C-Y. Chang (2010), W.Y-W. Chan (2014) as well as to images from the Dutch Tropenmuseum, such as the photograph by I.A. Ochse (before 1943). These studies, supported by the work of C. Antons and R. Antons-Sutanto’s (2017) and through further poetic inquiry (Berends 2023, manuscript forthcoming), led me to consider systematic segregation in *Kota Tua* (old town) in Jakarta, formerly known as Batavia. The inquiry was centred on an image of a map from J.F. van Bemmelen and G.B. Hoover’s (1897: 16) *Guide to the Dutch East Indies*. For me, these images, artefacts, and literature rendered visible how the Dutch-Chinese Schools were colonial constructs meant to create and maintain segregated people groups, or *bevolkingsgroepen*.

Now, I am still not entirely sure where Ibu Tessa went to school, but I do know that this encounter in the library had a lasting effect on me because – in

hindsight – it introduced me to Dutch colonial constructs in Indonesia and globally with the sort of salience that can only be cemented through experience, through genuine human interaction, a conversation, and subsequent education.

Since my early days in Indonesia, I have come to learn more about being a white, Dutch person, about how my ancestors settled – read colonized – West Michigan in the US. This means white-settler colonialism is my heritage, my inheritance. More specifically, while my dad's side of the family is mostly comprised of recent Dutch immigrants to the US, my mom's side of the family dates back generations and consists of some of the earliest white colonizers and settlers of the lands of the Anishinaabeg tribes in what is now an area where many white, ethnically Dutch people maintain political and economic power. As such, I was born and raised amidst a small, predominantly Dutch immigrant community within West Michigan, and I began to understand where I was from the moment I left. When I left, my relationship to coloniality changed because while living and working in Indonesia, my Dutchness and proximity to Dutch coloniality was amplified.

Where I was raised, the histories I learned, informally, included echoes of stories which vaguely noted religious persecution of the Dutch as a cause for migration to the US, likely referring to those who settled in West Michigan, most notably in what is now the city of Holland, formed by seceders from the Netherlands Reformed Church in the middle of the nineteenth century under the leadership of Dr Albertus van Raalte (C. Moore 1915). Such vague histories are well-encapsulated in this excerpt from a webpage from the Holland Area Visitors Bureau:

The history of Holland Michigan is a classic American tale of hard work, resilience, and triumph. From its very beginnings, Holland provided a refuge for those seeking freedom of expression and a more vibrant economy. Persuaded by religious oppression and economic depression, a group of 60 men, women, and children, led by Albertus C. VanRaalte, prepared for their 47-day trip from Rotterdam to New York. VanRaalte intended to purchase land in Wisconsin, but travel delays and an early winter caused the group to layover in Detroit. After hearing about available lands in west Michigan, VanRaalte decided to scout the territory. They reached their destination on February 9, 1847 on the banks of Black Lake – today's Lake Macatawa. (Holland Michigan 2019).

Formally, however, the histories I learned in school were devoid of conversations about critical considerations of colonialism, whiteness, white supremacy, and religion – the church was a sort of hub for the maintenance of such systems. These absences in my formal and informal education operated as form erasure of all other histories, especially histories which diverged from Dutch immigrant narratives of persecution, most notably the histories of native peoples who preceded Dutch white-colonialism in West Michigan. Note how in the excerpt above there is no mention of history preceding the arrival of the Dutch, and this is the opening paragraph of a page entitled "Our History".

Furthermore, the community and discourse in which I was raised conveniently preferred to engage with identifications of "ethnicity, culture, and

culturalization, supposedly softer entities", but did so to not only circumvent discussions of race, especially whiteness, but also ascribe the supposed softer entities and aspects of cultures in "hardened ways" (Wekker 2016: 22), as in the use of labels in the grocery stores I frequent where food aisles are labelled "salty snacks", "baked goods", and "ethnic" or "world food" aisles. Here the use of "ethnic" and "world food" represents stances of othering, well-distanced from whiteness, where the foods of the world are deemed ethnic and are physically separated from the baked goods aisle or Betty Crocker's instant mashed potatoes.

My upbringing in West Michigan was one in which the "dominant representation" was "one of Dutchness as whiteness and being Christian" (Wekker 2016: 7). A phrase which immediately comes to mind from my childhood is "if you ain't Dutch, you ain't much". This phrase was most often used in jest and solely within West Michigan Dutch company, but at what cost? The phrase further distanced a white, Dutch, reformed Christian majority from all other ways of being, and particularly since most of the folks no longer maintained ties to the Netherlands or the Dutch language, it begs the question: how Dutch are we? And when we say "Dutch", do we really mean the conflation of Dutchness as whiteness as Christianity? The examples of such dominant representation abound.

I frequently visit Holland Public High School, a racially diverse school in a Holland, Michigan, to support teaching interns placed in English language arts classrooms. The school's mascot is simply "The Dutch" despite efforts to change it (M. Frick 2020), and, while the mascot no longer resembles a blonde warrior, the name is still used in conjunction with an "H" for Holland and often coincides with the image of a windmill. I think of the young people who walk and live among such signs and symbols, often; where such a dominant representation embraces one specific group of people, language, and culture, erasing and othering any identifications and ways of being that are: not Dutch-white, Christian. I think it is no coincidence that the county and political climate in which this school operates, as of 4 January 2023, is "eliminating its department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" and "changing the county vision statement from 'Where you belong' to 'Where freedom rings'" (D. Dwyer 2023). Embracing the "coloniality of power" (Quijano and Ennis 2000) where, through cultural maintenance, freedom reverberates for a white, Euro-American nation-state.

My awareness of the forces of colonization and my proximity to coloniality and whiteness was heightened while living and teaching in Indonesia. And my time spent in Indonesia deepened my interest in Indonesian studies, Bahasa Indonesia, and the study of Dutch coloniality. To find my way in such studies, I have drawn from my personal experiences and work as an instructor of language and literature, writer, and researcher to consider the histories excluded from my upbringing. In doing so, I have spent time with the work of elders, including C. Reznikoff (1975) and Coste R. Lewis (2015) who, as muses and poets, have immersed themselves in complex histories through

documentary poetics. In their work, they critically examine documents and artefacts to be represented as poetry. Their work has helped me find purpose in mine. And given my positionality as a white Dutch person and scholar, the more I learn the more I am interested, as noted by Wekker (2016) “in the landscape that underlies the question, the cultural archive, and what it tells us about the continuities of the imperial construction of a dominant white Dutch self and the implicit or explicit way in which whiteness is bound up with it” (p. 74). As such, with my scholarship and poetry, I seek to interrogate Dutch colonialism, cultural maintenance, and cultural erasure in Indonesia, West Michigan, and globally. And, since my dreams of travel and translation have been somewhat grounded because of a global pandemic, I have been pressed to think, feel, work with the material aspects of Dutch coloniality from a distance by examining the “flows” (D. Held et al. 1999) – “movements of physical artefacts, people, symbols, tokens, and information across space and time” – as well as from up close, where I live in West Michigan.

FRAMING THE PROJECT

To frame my poetic inquiry conceptually, I have considered the work of Benítez Rojo (1992), Mignolo (2011), and Quijano and Ennis (2000) to engage with concepts of “Coloniality” by delineating logical representations of objects, art, and cultural expressions which were created throughout modernity by and through prior Dutch colonial curations and archival work. Where, for example, Benítez Rojo’s (1992) concept of repeating chaos, illuminated an island of repeating paradoxes which embody an archipelago of complexity and enmeshments with coloniality. Such concepts have informed how I engage with coloniality in the quotidian, or through what Edward Said (1996) describes as the extraordinary in the ordinary, or *infra-ordinary*. What follows is a poem entitled: “Where allspice is one spice” which flows through the *repeating chaos* of West Michigan and Indonesia – objectifying Dutch coloniality from my time spent making Dutch baked goods with my Aunt Lois at her home in West Michigan to my experiences in Indonesia, where in Jakarta, fresh produce was sold in the morning markets and not so fresh produce was sold in Hypermart, Carrefour, Food Gourmet, or at the Circle K, Alfamart, or any other store deemed convenient.

This poem also connects to my time spent in Baltimore County, Maryland, where I used to teach at a boarding school in horse country – just down the road from the Belmont Stakes and the McCormick’s spice factory. I could smell spice in the air when I ran along Fall’s Creek, or a nearby rail trail. The smell I most readily associate with this time is Old Bay – the seasoning used to spice boiled crab on Reisterstown Road or for tourists visiting the inner harbour. Through further investigation, I learned that the McCormick’s factory was set ablaze, and as such, this poem features McCormick’s flammable qualities and thus frames or foreshadows poetic inquiry that follows.

Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Dutch East Indies were once referred to and have always been resourced as the Spice Islands, an object of desire for western

colonial powers. And as global imperial structures persist (Quijano and Ennis 2000; Mignolo 2011), for me, the over-priced powdered McCormick's brand spices from the U.S., stocked in Indonesian supermarkets evoked a *critical nostalgia* (Wekker 2016) which "demands inquiry and work that confronts ignorance and innocence as it relates to the dominant Dutch white self" (Berends 2023, manuscript forthcoming) rather than an *imperial nostalgia* (R. Rosaldo 1993) which "is so effective because it invokes a register of innocence; the responsible imperial agent is transformed into an innocent bystander, masking his involvement with processes of domination" (Wekker 2016: 109). Meanwhile, on supermarket shelves throughout Indonesia, imported McCormick's spices are smugly situated above whole chillies (*cabe-cabe*) or seeds (*biji*) or actual fruits or bark from trees of the region.

Where allspice is one spice

for Aunt Lois's apple pies
made from islands of holy
bits exchanged for precious
gifts like 3 in 1 *kopi Nescafe*:
sugar, glucose syrup, powder-
palm oil shelved with its spine
backing the aisle at Hypermart

stocked with McCormicks
that scents the woods along
the rail-trail, north Baltimore.
But here there is no Old Bay
or rebuilding from fires only
nutmeg or cinnamon

an absence of allspice all
stout and resolute in spheres
of influence fire stand
next to goopy sachets
bumbu Instan above bags
of less instant *cabe biji*
an under armory protected
from institutions more real
than they are hyper – markets

Since my early days in Indonesia, I have made a concerted effort to learn Bahasa Indonesia (affectionately referred to as "BI" hereafter). After my orientation and first weeks of teaching in an English-medium school, it was 17 August 2009 – Independence Day. This was the first assembly, ceremony, and formal engagement of mine with the language as the events for the day were held entirely in BI. I listened to recordings of speeches from founding heroes, I sang what I could of songs of independence. This began my education in another language. I have since practised, studied, and learned the language – even translated poetry about heroes, such as "In this time of building / you

live again / And the embers of admiration are kindling/" (C. Anwar 1943). This excerpt from Anwar's poem, "Diponegoro", has helped me kindle my own poetry situated in Dutch coloniality. In 1943, a world war became the kindling for Indonesian independence. And my looking back, through the colonial lensing of Dutch films prior to independence and under a colonial regime, has become a sort of kindling of its own.

Sandeep Ray's (2021) *Celluloid colony; Locating history and ethnography in early Dutch colonial films of Indonesia* (Figure 2) has helped me work through a pandemic and examine coloniality through what Benítez Rojo (1992: 3) describes as *repeating chaos* which "looks toward everything that repeats, reproduces, grows, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes". My conceptual realization of repeating chaos in relation to coloniality has invigorated my writing and working from a distance. As an entry point into Ray's historiography of Dutch ethnographic films from the archipelago, I have created a poem about film, about celluloid and its flammable qualities. I have drawn upon the influences of Anwar, whose poetry documents and sets coloniality ablaze with commands, the capitalization of words, and the capitalization of people pondered.

Film as kindling

Celluloid brittle plastic

catching fire to propagate

FATE

and more

of silent film splicing to roll and move

FAITHS

the bases faces

of mountains – their valleys

destinies

manifesting

[FIRES]



Figure 2. Image from *Celluloid colony* (Ray 2021).

Bukan maksudku mau berbagi nasib, / nasib adalah kesunyian masing-masing – Chairil Anwar

Through my recent work, I have sought to become a critical scholar who bears *empathetic witness* – described by A. Veprinska (2017: 307) as the poetic “choice to imaginatively open to the words and experiences of others”. To me, “art has always been about more than conceptual clarity” (J. Rosiek 2018). And, without conceptual clarity for things such as the pervasiveness of coloniality, and without closeness to Indonesia as a space and place, without the ability to travel, I have been drawn to what J. Bennett (2010) describes as “Thing Power”, to examine the vibrance of materials and to consider objects and cultural expressions as subjects for studying and storying histories. And, in examining these films, these objects as subjects, I wonder, what powers, what stories do these objects hold? As a poet, I wish to evoke experiences with these objects and the power of the stories they hold.

For guidance in this area, I was directed by my former student from my days teaching in Jakarta, Megan Nugroho, who is now an established artist, based in New York who explores “themes of wildness, the natural and the alien body as a way to question the human connection to the environment” (2020). Megan directed me to the work of Rizaldi (2020), *Tellurian drama*, a film featuring the construction of Mount Malabar Radio Station near Bandung (Figure 3). The film uses *tellurian*, or earthly, ancestral, and Indigenous relations to the land amid and beyond the Dutch colonial era to speak back to contemporary neoliberal efforts of technocrats. Rizaldi’s work, for example, examines the colonial architecture drafted and constructed in mountains to disrupt and work with the natural landscape. While examining the construction of the radio station, Rizaldi renders visible the power of the mountain as well as the power of the indigenous ancestral through the concept of *tellurian* which is embraced by the artistic choices of Rizaldi from the music featured to the cinematic choices which depicting the power of the mountain landscape. These artistic and conceptual articulations to evoke engagement with critical histories, lensed my investigation into the timing, purpose, and construction of broadcast media led me to write the poem “Mount Malabar Radio Station”.

1



Figure 3. "Malabar Radio Station on Mount Malabar" (before 1952; source: Collection of Tropenmuseum, part of the World Museum of World Cultures).¹

Mount Malabar Radio Station

The company sees
 the mountaintop
 as the bedrock
 to transmit
 radio
 waves
 vibrating
 from greening
 capital that groans
 across the valley and
 casts music to Bandung

My present inquiry concludes with the poems: *Ria Rago* – directed by Father Buis and reporting for *Bali-Floti* based on films accessible through the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. Sandeep Ray's (2021) book, *Celluloid colony*, concludes with a careful examination of what he refers to as "films with a mission", a chapter devoted to the analysis of films created by Christian missionaries in the archipelago. One such film is *Ria Rago* (1930), a film described as "ethnographic fiction", one of the earliest fiction films in existence which assumes the stance of ethnographic films of the time but does so by staging local actors. The project was both staged and filmed by Father Buis, a Catholic Priest of the Societas Verbi Divini which "was founded in

¹ Retrieved from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Malabar_radio_station.

1875 in Steyl ... by Arnold Janssen" (Ray 2021: 148). Father Buis was also a former superintendent of Catholic schools in Flores. He was obsessed "with the theme of forced marriage" (Ray 2021: 179). This obsession became central to the creation and direction of *Ria Rago* one of the earliest fiction films in existence (Figure 4). Another film, *Bali-Floti*, visits "exotic sites" which had been documented in travel diaries (Figure 5). What follows is poetry which accompanies these film projects. I was inspired by the Shiv Kotecha's (2015) *Extrigue*, which sets a noir film to poetry by cataloguing and examining body language and non-verbals, so for these last two poems, I write through the silences of the films to critically examine their production and centre the convenience of editing, erasure, and fiction. The first poem considers the creation of the film as well as the plot. The second poem considers the consequence of filming with a mission.



Figure 4. Poster for *Ria Rago*, a film of actuality (Collection of University of Westminster Archives).

Ria Rago – directed by Father Buis*

Father Buis directs
Ethnographic fiction

A Christian girl, Ria
is forced to marry Dapo,
a Muslim boy.

The deal is brokered
and pleases her father.

Ria refuses
and escapes to a nunnery.

Her family finds her
and binds her
to the bed
for Dapo.

Ria escapes again,
but Father Buis
directs her forgiveness
and subsequent death.

Dapo never knew he'd play a rapist
Ria didn't know she'd die repenting

Reporting***Bali-Floti***

once housed in homes
overlooking the sea
ancestors' skulls
were cared for
polished held
in ceremonies
as companion
to life and sea

Father Bernardus Bode:
*Five years after arriving
only one heathen remains,
ancestors' skulls are buried
their sacred stones
now found the church*

Figure 5. Ancestor skulls. Still from the film *Bali-Floti* 1926
(Courtesy of Eye Filmmuseum).

As I seek to combat the aggressive complicity of the past and present from where and who I am as a white, Dutch, cisgendered male, and Christian, I cannot help but envision priests who travelled and filmed with the latest and greatest of technologies, as colonists, businesspeople in places where the native people and their practices are only as exotic as they are exoticized; and the implications of such films as missions, rendered for white, Christian, Dutch audiences. The films were created and consumed by the public in the Netherlands as imperial fantasies in which Christianity is a saviour and the catalyst for rape and the eventual death of Ria, all while fulfilling Father Buis's obsession with the theme of forced marriage.

My inquiry concludes with "Reporting *Bali-Floti*". I chose not to include a still or stills to accompany "Reporting *Bali-Floti*". Instead, I crafted the poem as a partial image of the homes which housed ancestors. The homes rest on top of Father Bode's report that one heathen remained (R.H. Barnes 1996), with a reclaimed foundation of the sacred stones which were briefly featured in *Bali-Floti* but eventually became the foundation of a church (Barnes 1993). The poem features an incomplete home to provide an image of the absence and erasure but also to depict the incomplete nature of this story, leaving room for fugitive stories, experiences, practices, and rituals in the outline of an image, symbolic of the incomplete accounts of histories.

The inquiry included in this article has stemmed from my personal and poetic engagement with Dutch coloniality – from Dutchness as whiteness as Christianity, and from the many ways my identity and scholarly identity are bound up with such things (Wekker 2016). As a poet and poetic inquirer, it is difficult to disentangle such things. The poet Carl Leggo (2008: 91) notes, "there is no separating the personal from the professional". Yet, while I may not be able to disentangle such things as poet and inquirer, I can, however, make a concerted effort to centre these positionalities in my work and in my approach to my work while challenging myself to do so with the sense and approach of critical nostalgia, as suggested by Wekker (2016). As a person of Dutch colonial heritage/inheritance, I believe approaching work in such a way develops critical nostalgia, particularly as it relates to research-creation from critical studies of history and the cultural archive. My hope is that such work moves beyond a sort of auto-ethnographic solipsism toward an invitation to others, especially to those who presume a sense of imperial nostalgia and innocence (Rosaldo 1993; Wekker 2016), toward and orientation of active, critical, and personal engagement with histories, presently.

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