

Introduction

Locating Indonesia's cultural archive Towards decolonial and intersectional histories of Indonesia

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As movements of decolonization sweep across the world, there is an urgent need to shift our gaze towards the local, peripheral, and indigenous perspectives, particularly in a place like Indonesia which bears the scars of Dutch colonial rule and has, in its diversity of cultures and divergent histories, a rich tapestry of cultural archives. We seek to explore Indonesia's "cultural archive" as outlined by Edward Said (1993) and Gloria Wekker (2016), from a historical perspective: "A particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference" which "has influenced historical cultural configurations and current dominant and cherished self-representations and culture". And, while exploring these cultural archives, we seek to shift the perspective, gaze, and experience towards a decolonial stance in a reconsideration of colonialism and coloniality in Indonesian history.

Decolonization and decoloniality are the concepts in fashion in academic and social discourse at this moment. However, these concepts generally remain vague and are usually not applied to concrete examples and case-studies. In this special issue of *Wacana*, we focus on Indonesia to understand, challenge, and dismantle the enduring legacies of Dutch colonialism which still affect Indonesian identities, perspectives, understanding, and writing of histories today. All the authors reflect on this coloniality or offer tools to escape it; concrete examples are their point of departure. Decoloniality, as formulated by Aníbal Quijano (2007) and Walter D. Mignolo (2017), is a powerful and transformative framework for understanding, challenging, and dismantling the enduring legacies of colonialism. It is not just a theoretical concept, but a practical endeavour and mindset which seeks to reshape historical narratives, cultural representations, and contemporary practices in more inclusive and equitable ways.

The articles in this special issue collectively reflect a commitment to uncovering coloniality and considering decoloniality as a multifaceted and transformative framework. They underscore the importance of recognizing, engaging with, and highlighting local, indigenous, and marginalized

perspectives, as well as challenging the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems. Museums, sites, and artefacts as cultural archives, repositories of knowledge, practices, and cultural expressions which both perpetuate and challenge coloniality play a significant role in the articles. For instance, *Adrian Perkasa* and *Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih's* article discusses the Mpu Tantular Museum in Surabaya and Museum Sonobudoyo in Yogyakarta as cultural archives of both regions, which need to be examined in the context of decolonization and decoloniality. *Joel Berends* interacts through the lens of decoloniality with heritage as objects, art, and other cultural expressions and, using poetry, explores what this means to him as a white, cisgendered man. Combining these personal experiences and ekphrastic poetry, he critically examines colonial legacies and histories. *Tular Sudarmadi* looks at two prominent Indonesian heritage sites, Borobudur temple and two megalith villages in the Island of Flores, and dissects the fabrication of Indonesian governmental narratives about these places which have their origins in colonial times. *Adieyatna Fajri* and *Rismawidiawati et al.* both highlight the Javanese Sultanate of Banten and its representation in their articles. *Fajri* addresses the omission of violent colonial history from its representation at the National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta. *Rismawidiawati et al.* highlight the local knowledge of Banten by underlining the concept and praxis “*gawe kuta baluwarti, bata kalawan kawis*”. *Laetitia Lai* approaches plaster-casts of Nias people made during colonial times by J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan and proposes to read these casts as archives in order to retrieve information about the people whose faces were cast.

The articles show a shared emphasis on the importance of centring local, indigenous perspectives. For example, both *Adrian Perkasa* and *Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih's* as well as *Adieyatna Fajri* point out the persistence of the colonizer's or colonial metropole's perspectives in exhibition narratives, to the detriment of local perspectives in Indonesia. Similarly, *Joëlla van Donkersgoed's* article on the Banda Islands argues for the elevation of contemporary perceptions and local, Bandanese reiterations of history alongside colonial documentation in order to acquire a more decolonial practice of history writing. *Hans Hägerdal* even points out the importance and influence of local Belunese (Central Timor) agency in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. *Aditya Bayu Perdana* and *Muhammad Buana* introduce the idea of counter-mapping and the reclamation of indigenous spatial knowledge when discussing a Bugis nautical chart. Besides an interest in challenging colonial representations, this represents an effort to restore indigenous agency.

From this emphasis on the need to examine the narratives and representations which have been constructed around colonial history and heritage critically and the plea for adopting a different, local perspective logically follows a balanced evaluation of Eurocentric knowledge. *Hägerdal* makes the importance of this most explicitly clear in his article, but it resonates throughout all the articles as they advocate the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, including oral traditions, local practices, and indigenous perspectives for a more inclusive and balanced understanding of history and

culture. For instance, *Van Donkersgoed* underscores that written sources about former colonial territories like the Banda Islands are products of the colonial system, and their biases need to be acknowledged.

As decoloniality is also a social practice which seeks to reshape historical narratives, cultural representations, and contemporary practices in more inclusive and equitable ways, several of the articles in this special issue highlight decolonial acts and strategies employed by communities and individuals. All the articles share a common thread of interrogating and challenging colonial narratives. In *Tular Sudarmadi's* article, the Ngadha and Manggarai megalith villagers in Flores are even described as engaging in decolonial acts and strategies to counter the colonial framework imposed on their heritage which persists to this day. These acts include mixing traditional practices with modern elements for tourist consumption. In her efforts to do more decolonial research and do justice to the voices of those directly affected, *Laetitia Lai* deliberately seeks to collaborate with source communities in her attempts to interrogate the plaster casts.

Finally, this special issue shows us how complex it is to address colonialism and coloniality, and how much this history should be approached intersectionally. Different groups in colonized communities and at different periods in history and places experienced colonialism differently. This intersectional perspective is crucial to understanding and navigating (post) colonial identities and narratives, or in Mignolo's terms "colonial matrix of power" when striving for a more inclusive and equitable future. The articles in this special issue contribute collectively to a multifaced and complex understanding of the history, coloniality, and decoloniality in Indonesia. They show how the colonial project was not merely about territorial expansion and resource extraction; it was also a project of epistemic violence. European colonial powers like the Netherlands imposed their worldviews, languages, and knowledge systems on colonized peoples, suppressing indigenous ways of knowing and subjugating local knowledge systems. In this respect, this special issue is not only about the past but also the present and the future. Decoloniality is not a just a concept, an analytical tool but also a "praxis", an attitude and mindset each and every one of us can practise to uncover, confront, and challenge ongoing systems of oppression such as racial and gender inequality, but also cultural, social, economic, and political imbalances.

The authors in this special issue underscore the need to shift perspectives and challenge dominant knowledge systems and actively engage with and highlight local and indigenous voices, practices, and experiences to address the enduring impact of colonialism. Decoloniality, in essence, seeks to decolonize the mind, challenging the Eurocentric biases which continue to shape our understanding of history, culture, and society and tries to reshape them. And this special issue makes a case for doing so.

REFERENCES

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