Indigenous cultural heritage held in museums around the world has become a matter of concern over the past decades for both institutions and previously colonised peoples. The contested nature of cultural objects contained in these institutes has been, and continues to be, linked to notions of colonialism. Consequently, there is considerable pressure from both indigenous peoples and advocates to redress the wrongdoings and injustices perpetrated against their communities during their conquest. This is evident in multilateral conventions including the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention and UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transport of Ownership of Cultural Property. At a national level it is enacted in legislature such as the USA’s Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990, New Zealand’s Protected Objects Act 1975, and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. Therefore, many museums and cultural institutes have begun to pay attention to issues of repatriation due to growing external pressure, carefully considering not only the ethics of curation and display, but also the objects within the collections themselves (Van Beurden, 2012, p.6). Such intentions can be seen in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’s 2003 government mandated programme for the repatriation of kōiwi- and koimi tangata24, Karanga Aotearoa.

This paper will critically evaluate current shifts in cultural repatriation. To achieve this, I shall specifically focus on examples of West Papuan indigenous cultural heritage, particular representations of ancestor figures currently held by the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I have elected to investigate this museum due to my interest in the long history of Dutch imperialism. I shall investigate the agency of cultural patrimony in my assessment of the necessity of restitution of cultural heritage. By considering the agency of objects we develop an insight into the significant spiritual and social roles that objects hold in indigenous people’s lives outside of the context of the museum. This will be developed in reference to Alfred Gell’s concepts explored in his work Art and Agency. Gell’s argument is that ‘things’ are invested with “social agency vis-a-vis other social agents” (Gell, 1998, p.18). As such, indigenous cultural patrimony not only have their own “personhood” as heritage objects. They also acquire secondary agency through a reflection of the “personhood” of the owner or creator. For instance, when a computer has a system failure when working to a critical deadline, we may feel as if it has personally betrayed us during our hour of need. This attribution of anthropomorphic personality is irrational. Our response is not to blame the computer’s manufacturer, but to blame the machine itself. In doing so we have thus provided the machine with agency in this social context. We imbue it with personhood through how we interact with it. The agency imbued within cultural objects differs from that held by individuals, which is innate rather than prescribed. In this way, we contest and manipulate the meaning of objects over a wide range of contexts (Gell, 1998, p.21).

My focus on ancestral representations in the context of this paper is to demonstrate how personhood and agency are attributed to cultural objects. Through the example of Papuan korwar25 from Cenderawasih Bay,26 in the northern Province of Papua and West Papua, I will explore agency

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24 Māori and Moriori ancestral, skeletal remains
25 West Papuan ancestral statues that originate from the Cendrawasih and Doreh Bay regions
26 Teluk Sarera, formerly Geelvink Bay
as an impetus for restitution. This is of particular significance in the case of West Papua due to its complex experience of colonialism. Colonised first by the Dutch, it experienced a period of liberation only to be subsequently further subjected to Indonesian control. As an internal minority within Indonesia, West Papuans are subject to both colonial oppression and restrictions of sovereignty over their indigenous lands. This iconoclasm of culture by Indonesia, and the abundance of Papuan patrimony within Dutch museums, serves as a foundation through which we can consider the restitution of Papuan heritage from the Netherlands. Following this, I shall assess why culturally relevant items from West Papua held in Dutch museums have not been repatriated, and whether or not they should be. This shall firstly be explained through a brief history of Papua and the Tropenmuseum. Secondly, I shall provide a background to the Tropenmuseum’s repatriation policies, as well as an analysis of the object agency of korwars as a rationale for restitution. I will then assess issues of repatriation from the Tropenmuseum to West Papua, defining these problems of restitution in their relation to socio-politics, legality and finance. Finally, I offer potential solutions to these issues and the problem of equitable representation in colonial museums. This is exemplified through the case studies of the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme for the respectful resocialisation of Māori ancestral tūpuna27, and the Australian Museum’s training of indigenous Papua New Guineans and other Pacific Islanders in the technical and provenance aspects of museums, which serve as potential guides for the future repatriation of indigenous heritage globally (McManus, 2016, p.50). The paper concludes that whilst the damage created by imperialism can never be fully redressed, measures can, and must, be found to amend the historical injustices of the colonial museum.

Keywords: West Papua, cultural heritage, colonialism, the Netherlands, museums

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Clash within ‘Civilization’: Understanding Politic of Diversity in Indonesia by Tracing Genealogy of an Epistemic Community**

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This paper examines the struggle for freedom in Indonesia just before and after the ‘Reformasi’. It would be seen from the perspective of an epistemic community namely Utan Kayu Community, a community which later established Salihara Community. The story of the community begun in 21 June 1994 when Tempo magazine was banned along with Detik and Editor media. This created one of crowds that brought Soeharto government into end in May 1998. The community continued

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