


Colonial Sedimentation in Museum Collection Repatriation: A Critical Discourse Analysis on the Repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris and Other Indonesian Historical Artifacts

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INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Submitted: 17-09-2024, Revised: 26-08-2024, Accepted: 03-09-2024 Available Online: 09-07-2025</p> <p>Copyright ©2024 by Journal of Judikultura (s) This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.</p>  <p>Keywords: <i>Repatriation, Post-colonialism, Cultural heritage</i></p>	<p><i>This research explores the discourse surrounding the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris and other Indonesian cultural artifacts, using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze media texts from Historia.id. The study investigates how colonial power dynamics persist in the representation of repatriation, revealing the influence of Dutch authority in shaping the narrative even in post-colonial contexts. The findings indicate that while the return of cultural heritage is celebrated as a diplomatic success and a reclamation of Indonesia's national identity, the discourse is still heavily influenced by colonial perspectives. Euphemistic language, reliance on Dutch sources, and the portrayal of Indonesia as a passive recipient all contribute to the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations.</i></p> <p><i>The study also examines the socio-cultural and political implications of the repatriation. On a national level, the return of the keris is a significant step in restoring Indonesia's historical consciousness and cultural pride. Politically, it serves as a tool for strengthening diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands, although challenges remain in addressing the lingering colonial legacies that influence these interactions. The research underscores the complexity of repatriation as a decolonizing process, where the return of physical artifacts does not fully dismantle the historical power imbalances that continue to shape the discourse on cultural heritage.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

The historical relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands is complex, rooted in centuries of colonial domination and struggles for independence. One of the significant unresolved legacies of this period is the repatriation of cultural artifacts, many of which were taken by colonial powers during their rule. The return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris in 2020 after almost two centuries symbolizes a broader decolonial movement, aiming to restore cultural heritage to its rightful owners and address the historical injustices of colonialism (Carey, 2020; Boonstra, 2020).

Repatriation of cultural heritage has become a crucial issue in post-colonial societies, as it pertains to the recovery of cultural identity and memory. For Indonesia, the return of such objects is not just a legal or diplomatic procedure but a symbolic act of reclaiming its historical narrative from the colonial powers (Protschky, 2020). These items, such as Diponegoro's keris, hold deep cultural and historical significance, representing the fight against colonial oppression and the quest for sovereignty (McGregor, 2020).

Despite the symbolic success of these repatriations, the process is fraught with difficulties. The power imbalances that existed during the colonial period often persist, with former colonial

powers maintaining control over the documentation, research, and interpretation of these artifacts. The continued dominance of Western institutions in shaping the narrative around repatriated objects reflects the lingering effects of colonialism (Boonstra, 2020; Protschky, 2020). In many cases, the return of these artifacts does not fully transfer the authority to interpret and understand these objects back to the colonized nations (Taylor, 2013).

This research seeks to explore the discourse surrounding the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris, as represented in the Indonesian media, particularly focusing on the critical analysis of texts from *Historia.id*. By employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, the research examines how colonial power dynamics are reflected in contemporary discussions about repatriation and how these dynamics continue to shape historical memory and identity in post-colonial Indonesia (Fairclough, 2010; Breske, 2017). The research also delves into how the process of repatriation is framed within a post-colonial context and what this reveals about the ongoing struggles for cultural sovereignty (Purwanto, 2020; Reid, 2020).

The research aims to address several key questions related to the representation and dynamics of the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris and other cultural artifacts in Indonesian media. The primary research question explores how the discourse surrounding the repatriation is framed in media platforms such as *Historia.id*. It seeks to uncover the narratives and ideologies presented in these representations, particularly in the context of power relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands. Additionally, the research will examine what colonial narratives and power dynamics are reflected in the repatriation process, as depicted in these media outlets. This involves investigating how postcolonial perspectives, as well as socio-political and economic factors, influence the discourse and perpetuate or challenge colonial legacies.

The objectives of this study are to critically analyze how the repatriation of cultural heritage is represented in the media, with a specific focus on *Historia.id*. It seeks to explore the power dynamics between Indonesia and the Netherlands, considering the lasting impact of colonialism on cultural heritage repatriation. By employing postcolonial theory, the study aims to understand how historical colonial narratives are maintained or subverted during the repatriation process. Additionally, the research will examine the role of media in shaping public perceptions of repatriation, cultural identity, and the broader decolonization movement. The ultimate goal is to assess how media discourse influences societal understanding of national identity and the complex processes of decolonization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of cultural heritage repatriation has gained significant attention in postcolonial studies, as countries seek to reclaim artifacts taken during periods of colonial rule. Repatriation is more than the return of objects; it is a symbolic act tied to identity, memory, and historical justice (Logan & Reeves, 2021). The return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris from the Netherlands to Indonesia in 2020 exemplifies these broader discussions on the decolonization of cultural heritage. This literature review explores key themes, including colonial legacies, critical discourse analysis (CDA), postcolonial theory, and the global trends in repatriation.

1. Colonial Legacies and Repatriation of Cultural Heritage

The removal of cultural objects from colonized territories was a common practice by colonial powers. These objects were often taken as symbols of victory or trophies and have since become embedded in the collections of European museums. The Tropenmuseum in the Netherlands, for example, holds many Indonesian artifacts taken during the Dutch colonial period (Boonstra, 2020). Scholars argue that the process of repatriation is not only about returning physical objects but also about addressing the imbalances of power and the cultural domination that persisted through colonialism (Protschky, 2020; Smith, 2012).

The return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris, which had been held in the Netherlands for almost 190 years, highlights the continued relevance of colonial legacies in contemporary Indonesia

(Carey, 2020). For Indonesia, the return of this and other objects is seen as a necessary step in reclaiming its cultural sovereignty and redressing the historical injustices inflicted during Dutch rule (Purwanto, 2020).

2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Media Representation

Media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of repatriation, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been a valuable tool for examining these representations. Fairclough's (2010) model of CDA, which looks at the relationships between language, power, and society, is particularly useful in understanding how media reports on repatriation reflect and reinforce colonial power structures. *Historia.id*, an Indonesian digital media platform, has been instrumental in covering the repatriation of Diponegoro's Keris, but CDA reveals that the narratives often replicate colonial biases by relying on Dutch sources for verification and historical context (Breske, 2017; Subagyo, 2018).

The reliance on Western narratives in framing these artifacts reflects broader trends in postcolonial media, where the power dynamics of the colonial past continue to influence how cultural heritage is understood and represented (Boonstra, 2020). This tendency highlights Spivak's (2013) concept of "cognitive failure," where postcolonial societies continue to defer to colonial interpretations, even when reclaiming their own heritage.

3. Postcolonial Theory and Decolonization Movements

Postcolonial theory provides a framework for understanding the broader implications of repatriation. Scholars like Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (2013) argue that colonialism's effects extend beyond political control and into the realms of culture, knowledge production, and historical memory. The return of cultural artifacts, such as Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris, can be seen as part of the broader decolonization movement that seeks to dismantle these colonial legacies (Smith, 2012; Kreps, 2020).

The act of repatriation is often portrayed as a victory for postcolonial nations, reclaiming their cultural property from former colonizers. However, scholars caution that the process is far from straightforward. The narratives surrounding these objects, as well as the control over their interpretation, often remain in the hands of former colonial powers. This reflects the continued dominance of Western institutions in shaping the discourse around repatriation (Boonstra, 2020; Protschky, 2020).

4. Global Trends in Repatriation and Restitution

The return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris aligns with a broader global movement toward the restitution of cultural artifacts. The demand for repatriation has been especially strong from countries like Egypt and Greece, where iconic objects such as the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon Marbles remain housed in Western museums (Vrdoljak, 2013). This global conversation has been influenced by movements like Black Lives Matter, which have brought attention to the historical injustices of colonialism and the ongoing legacies of racial inequality (Protschky, 2020).

In Europe, there has been a growing recognition of the need to return these objects as part of a larger process of historical reconciliation. France's Sarr-Savoy Report (2018) marked a significant moment in the global restitution debate by recommending the unconditional return of African artifacts taken during the colonial era. Similarly, the Netherlands has been proactive in returning Indonesian artifacts, reflecting a shift in how former colonial powers manage the legacy of their imperial past (Boonstra, 2020; Stutje, 2020).

5. Challenges and Critiques of Repatriation

Despite the positive steps toward repatriation, significant challenges remain. Critics argue that the return of artifacts is only the first step in addressing colonial legacies. The control over the narrative surrounding these objects often remains with former colonial powers, who continue to frame the repatriated artifacts within a Western-centric context (Boonstra, 2020). This reflects

deeper epistemological issues in the way history and culture are understood and presented in museums and academic institutions (Kreps, 2020; Protschky, 2020).

Additionally, the practical challenges of repatriation must be considered. Some scholars argue that postcolonial nations may not have the resources or infrastructure to properly conserve and display these returned artifacts, raising questions about whether these nations are fully prepared to manage their cultural heritage (Logan & Reeves, 2021). Moreover, the involvement of local communities in the repatriation process is often minimal, leading to concerns about whether these efforts truly serve the people from whom these objects were taken (Smith, 2012).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris and other Indonesian historical artifacts was represented in media, particularly through the platform *Historia.id*. The methodology followed the framework developed by Norman Fairclough (2010), focusing on three levels of discourse analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation. This framework was selected to uncover the power relations, ideologies, and historical narratives embedded in the media texts related to repatriation.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from a selection of articles published on *Historia.id* between 2020 and 2022. A total of twelve articles that specifically discussed the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris and other Indonesian cultural artifacts from the Netherlands were identified and curated. These articles were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions and the richness of their content in terms of discourse on colonialism, repatriation, and decolonization efforts. The articles were accessed and downloaded from the *Historia.id* website, and full texts were analyzed to ensure comprehensive data coverage.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure involved multiple stages aligned with Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model. First, a textual analysis was conducted to describe the linguistic features of the articles, including word choices, metaphors, and sentence structures. This step focused on identifying how the repatriation discourse was framed in the text and how specific lexical choices contributed to the construction of colonial and postcolonial narratives (Fairclough, 2010).

Second, an interpretative analysis was carried out to examine how the discourse practices, including media production and audience consumption, influenced the representation of repatriation. This phase involved identifying the intertextuality within the articles, particularly how they referenced Dutch and Indonesian sources, scholars, or governmental statements. The goal was to reveal the ongoing reproduction of colonial perspectives in Indonesian media discourse (Breske, 2017; Protschky, 2020).

Lastly, the study conducted an explanatory analysis to explore the socio-political and historical contexts that shaped the discourse of repatriation. This step analyzed how the media discourse reflected broader social practices and power relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands. It also explored how colonial legacies continued to influence the interpretation and narration of historical events, particularly in terms of national identity and cultural sovereignty (Purwanto, 2020; Spivak, 2013).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study utilized triangulation by comparing the media narratives from *Historia.id* with academic literature and historical sources. This cross-referencing helped to verify the consistency of the themes identified in the articles and ensured that the interpretations were grounded in multiple data sources (Smith, 2012; Logan & Reeves, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Context of Repatriation

The repatriation of cultural artifacts from Indonesia, particularly those taken during the colonial period, has been a long-standing issue since the country gained independence. Discussions about returning such cultural heritage began as early as the Round Table Conference in The Hague in 1949, where it was agreed that artifacts with historical and cultural significance taken during the colonial era should be returned to Indonesia. This was part of a broader effort to recognize Indonesia's sovereignty and address colonial injustices. However, the process faced numerous delays due to diplomatic and political challenges between Indonesia and the Netherlands throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Sri Margana, 2020).

While early repatriation efforts, like the return of the Prajnaparamita statue in 1978, were viewed as small victories, the issue remained largely dormant until the late 20th century. The repatriation process gained renewed momentum in the post-Suharto era when Indonesia's democratization and cultural revival heightened the urgency to reclaim lost heritage. During this time, international attention on the restitution of cultural properties taken during colonialism also grew, influencing Indonesia's push for repatriation (Sri Margana, 2020).

A significant milestone in these efforts was the return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris in 2020, which had been held in the Netherlands for nearly 190 years. The keris, a symbol of Indonesian resistance to Dutch colonial rule, had long been sought after by the Indonesian government. According to I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands, "Riset dokumentasi yang dilakukan menunjukkan kearah keris ini. Sehingga pakar kita dan juga dari pihak Museum Volkenkunde yakin semakin-yakinnya bahwa ini adalah keris yang dicari-cari" (Historia.id, 2020). This reflects the rigorous research and international collaboration involved in confirming the artifact's identity and historical significance.

The return of the keris was not just a triumph of diplomacy, but a symbolic act of reclaiming Indonesia's cultural identity and restoring a key piece of its national history. As Peter Carey stated, "Mulai ada arus yang mau menguak sorot Diponegoro," reflecting the growing efforts to uncover and reclaim the legacy of Diponegoro and other important historical figures through the return of their artifacts (Carey, 2020). The event marked a new chapter in the relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands, where both countries recognized the importance of repatriation in addressing the legacy of colonialism.

Textual Analysis of Repatriation Discourse in Historia.id

The textual analysis of the articles from Historia.id concerning the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris reveals a consistent use of language and narrative techniques that both reflect and reproduce existing power structures between Indonesia and the Netherlands. Applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the texts were analyzed at the level of their linguistic structure, discourse practices, and the socio-political context that surrounds the narratives.

In the articles, euphemistic language is frequently used to describe the actions of the Dutch during the colonial period and the repatriation process. For instance, the term "disimpan" (stored) is often used to describe how the Dutch handled Indonesian cultural objects, rather than more critical terms like "diperoleh" (obtained) or "diambil" (taken), which would directly address the colonial context of these acquisitions. Such euphemisms minimize the exploitative nature of the original acquisition, creating a softer narrative that downplays the violence and cultural loss involved (Sri Margana, 2020). Furthermore, passive constructions such as "keris itu dikembalikan" (the keris was returned) obscure the agency and responsibility of the Dutch in taking these artifacts in the first place.

A notable finding from the analysis is the dominance of Dutch sources and expertise in the repatriation discourse. Many articles in Historia.id rely heavily on Dutch historical records and

research to authenticate the significance of the keris. This reliance on Dutch narratives reinforces the lingering power imbalance where colonial powers continue to shape the interpretation and validation of cultural heritage, even in the context of repatriation. I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands, noted the involvement of Dutch institutions, saying, “Riset dokumentasi yang dilakukan menunjukkan kearah keris ini,” indicating that Dutch authorities played a central role in identifying and verifying the provenance of the keris (Historia.id, 2020).

Moreover, the articles frequently invoke metaphors like “perjalanan panjang” (long journey) to describe the keris's return. This metaphor frames the repatriation as an inevitable conclusion to a historical journey, rather than a rectification of historical wrongs. Such language creates a narrative of closure and resolution, while sidestepping the deeper colonial injustices that underpinned the original acquisition of these artifacts (Carey, 2020).

In addition, the analysis revealed a tone of neutrality and detachment in the reporting, with Historia.id often refraining from taking a critical stance on the Dutch role in the historical acquisition of Indonesian artifacts. The use of objective, neutral language, while seemingly impartial, inadvertently perpetuates the colonial narrative by failing to challenge or interrogate the underlying power dynamics of repatriation. Peter Carey pointed out that Dutch research on Diponegoro had historically been slow, with efforts to highlight the significance of his legacy only gaining momentum in recent years (Carey, 2020).

Power Relations in Repatriation Discourse

The analysis of power relations in the repatriation discourse, as reflected in the articles from Historia.id, reveals a continued asymmetry between Indonesia and the Netherlands, even in the postcolonial context. The repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris is framed as a benevolent act by the Netherlands, rather than a necessary restitution for colonial exploitation. This section examines how these power dynamics are maintained and reproduced through media representations and discourse.

One of the key observations from the textual analysis is the dominance of Dutch narratives and expertise in the repatriation process. The articles frequently cite Dutch sources, institutions, and researchers as the primary authorities in verifying and authenticating the provenance of Indonesian artifacts. For instance, I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands, acknowledged the pivotal role played by Dutch researchers in identifying the keris, stating, “Riset dokumentasi yang dilakukan menunjukkan kearah keris ini” (Historia.id, 2020). This reliance on Dutch expertise reinforces a power imbalance where the former colonizers maintain control over the narrative, even in the act of returning cultural heritage (Sri Margana, 2020).

The use of passive language in the media coverage further reinforces this power asymmetry. Phrases like “keris itu dikembalikan” (the keris was returned) obscure the agency of the Dutch in taking the artifact during the colonial period and frame the repatriation as a voluntary and generous act, rather than an obligation to correct historical wrongs. The articles avoid confronting the colonial violence and exploitation that led to the removal of these artifacts, instead focusing on the present-day diplomatic efforts to return them (Boonstra, 2020).

Additionally, the portrayal of Indonesia in these articles often presents the country as a passive recipient of Dutch goodwill. The media tends to highlight Indonesia's reliance on Dutch institutions for the verification of its own cultural heritage. For example, the articles mention how Dutch experts conducted much of the research and authentication necessary for the return of the keris, positioning Indonesia in a secondary role within the repatriation process (Purwanto, 2020). This portrayal reinforces the colonial-era dynamics of intellectual and cultural dependency, where former colonized nations are depicted as needing validation from former colonizers.

Moreover, the media's neutral tone in discussing these power relations contributes to the

reproduction of colonial narratives. By refraining from critically engaging with the historical context of colonial exploitation, the discourse in *Historia.id* avoids addressing the underlying power imbalances that persist in the repatriation process. As Peter Carey noted, the return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris was a result of diplomatic negotiations, but it also highlighted the slow acknowledgment by Dutch institutions of their colonial legacy (Carey, 2020). This delayed recognition further exemplifies the ongoing dominance of colonial powers in controlling the narrative around cultural restitution.

Socio-Cultural and Political Implications

The repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris holds significant socio-cultural and political implications, both in Indonesia and internationally. On a socio-cultural level, the return of such artifacts symbolizes the reclaiming of national identity and the restoration of cultural pride. Indonesia, as a former colony, has long sought to reclaim its historical artifacts as a way to restore its cultural narrative that was disrupted by colonialism. The return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris in particular, as a symbol of resistance against Dutch colonial rule, plays a crucial role in reinforcing national pride and strengthening Indonesia's historical consciousness (*Historia.id*, 2020).

The repatriation process also reflects broader political relationships between Indonesia and the Netherlands. The Dutch government's willingness to return cultural artifacts signals a shift towards reconciliation and acknowledgment of colonial wrongs. However, this process also reveals persistent power imbalances. The fact that Indonesian institutions must rely on Dutch authorities for the verification and return of these artifacts highlights ongoing asymmetries in cultural and political power (Purwanto, 2020). Cynthia Scott discusses how repatriation is often framed as an act of goodwill by the former colonial power, while for the receiving nation, it represents the final step in a long process of decolonization (Scott, 2013).

Politically, the return of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris serves as an important diplomatic milestone. It exemplifies how repatriation can be used as a tool for improving international relations. In the case of Indonesia and the Netherlands, the return of cultural heritage has been part of broader diplomatic efforts to heal the wounds of colonialism and strengthen bilateral ties. According to Peter Carey, the event marked a significant step towards "decoupling" the colonial legacy from modern relations, allowing both nations to move forward with a more equitable and respectful relationship (Carey, 2020).

The socio-cultural impact of this event also extends to how national history is presented to future generations. The return of artifacts like the keris allows Indonesia to reassert control over its historical narrative, providing future generations with a fuller understanding of their cultural heritage. As Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff argue, such artifacts play a vital role in constructing collective memory, and their return helps to reshape how post-colonial nations like Indonesia view themselves and their place in the world (Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2020). The repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris has both socio-cultural and political implications that reach beyond the physical return of an artifact. It symbolizes a reclaiming of national identity, contributes to post-colonial reconciliation, and serves as a diplomatic tool to strengthen international relations. However, it also highlights the ongoing challenges of addressing the deep-rooted power imbalances that persist in post-colonial contexts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the repatriation of Pangeran Diponegoro's Keris marks a significant milestone in Indonesia's ongoing efforts to reclaim its cultural heritage and confront the legacies of colonialism. The analysis of media discourse, particularly through *Historia.id*, reveals the persistence of power imbalances between Indonesia and the Netherlands, where colonial narratives continue to shape the process and representation of repatriation. Despite the symbolic success of returning the keris, the discourse often emphasizes Dutch expertise and control, reflecting deeper, unresolved tensions in post-colonial relations. The language used in media narratives frequently downplays the

colonial exploitation that led to the removal of these artifacts, framing the return as a benevolent act rather than a necessary correction of historical wrongs.

The socio-cultural and political implications of this repatriation are profound. On a national level, it allows Indonesia to reconnect with its historical identity and empower future generations with a fuller understanding of their cultural heritage. Politically, the return of the keris has been a tool for diplomacy, strengthening ties between Indonesia and the Netherlands, while also highlighting the challenges of addressing colonial legacies. However, the ongoing reliance on Dutch institutions for validation and the reproduction of colonial narratives suggest that repatriation alone cannot fully resolve the complex power dynamics that still exist between former colonizers and the colonized.

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