Between policy and practice: the impact of global decolonization on the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, 1960-1970

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Between policy and practice

The impact of global decolonization on the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, 1960-1970

Martin E. Berger

Introduction

This article examines the impact of global decolonization in the 1960s on the National Museum of Ethnology (NME) in Leiden, The Netherlands. It focusses especially on how the newly found independence of many countries around the world influenced the mission that the museum set for itself, and how decolonization impacted exhibition-making and acquisition policies. The goal of the article is to better understand how the museum saw its own role and its praxis in a period of significant global political changes that deeply affected the way ethnographic museums functioned. The choice for the 1960s as the decade of focus is based on several arguments. As Claire Wintle has argued, 'in general surveys of museums displaying world cultures the period between 1945 and 1970 is generally marked by extreme inertia […] the frantic political shifts which dominated the world map in the 1950s and 1960s are rarely seen to have affected museum practice'.[1] Nevertheless, as Wintle has suggested, decolonization had a strong influence on the way ethnographic museum functioned and, vice versa, museums themselves contributed to processes of decolonization.

1 C. Wintle, Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes, *Museum and Society*, 11/2 (2013), 185-201 (185).

A particular focus of the article will be acquisition practices. Previously, studies of ethnographic collecting have focused on the period before World War Two, especially in colonial contexts.[2] Comparatively little attention has been paid to collecting processes in the period after 1950. Research into the history of ethnographic museum collections has often focused on identifying and understanding the work of field collectors, in order to better understand the context in which these pieces were originally collected. However, as Wingfield has argued, 'while identifying field collectors accords with the twentieth-century focus of the disciplines with which [ethnographic museums are] associated, it also has the tendency of marginalizing the museum and locating it away from the action'.[3] Therefore, in this article I will focus on the acquisition policies of the museum itself and try to assess to what extent the museum had control over what was acquired and to what extent museum acquisitions were determined by outside partners such as dealers, donors and private collectors.

Another reason this article considers the 1960s is the introduction of UNESCO's Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in 1970. This convention grew out of a global concern with the large-scale looting and illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. As Prott has argued, the adoption of the UNESCO 1970 treaty was directly linked to UN Resolution 1514 (the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples), as newly independent states wished to put a stop to the looting and illicit traffic of their cultural heritage and strove for the return of important items of national cultural heritage which resided in former colonial museums.[4] While the return of items was a bridge too far for many former colonial powers, they were prepared to aid in curtailing the illicit trade in cultural heritage, resulting in the UNESCO 1970 convention.[5] At the same time, this decade saw the widespread popularization of the market for 'primitive' or 'tribal' art. The marketing by European and North American art dealers of ethnographic and archaeological pieces as art led to an ever-increasing demand (and financial value) for these artefacts, which had until then primarily be seen as scientific specimens and objects of study. As a result, the 1960s were a moment of global political and cultural transition in which archaeological and ethnographic pieces were still legally available on the market in large numbers, but the values attached to them were changing.

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2 See: M. O'Hanlon & R. Welsch, eds., *Hunting The Gatherers Ethnographic Collectors, Agents, and Agency in Melanesia 1870s-1930s* (Berghahn: Oxford, 2000).

3 C. Wingfield, 'Donors, Loaners, Dealers and Swappers: The Relationships behind the English Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum', in S. Byrne, A. Clarke, R. Harrison & R. Torrence, eds., *Unpacking the Collection: Museums, Identity and Agency*, (New York: Springer, 2011), 119-140 (121).

4 L.V. Prott, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the 1970 Convention: An Evaluation 40 years after its adoption', *Second Meeting of States Parties to the 1970 Convention* (2012), https://www.obs-traffic.museum/sites/default/files/ressources/files/Prott_strengths_and_weaknesses_2012.pdf, accessed 28 Nov. 2020.

5 Ibid.

Figure 4.1: This Classic Maya lintel is a fitting example of the 'aesthetic masterpieces' that Director P.H. Pott aimed to acquire. La Pasadita Lintel 2, RV-3939-1, Maya, ca. 766. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/783727

The NME and the annual reports

Founded in 1837, the NME is one of the oldest ethnographic museums in the world. The museum has a collection of around 240,000 objects, in addition to hundreds of thousands of photographs, as well as a large collection of ethnographic films and sound recordings. In April 2014 the museum merged with the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Africa Museum in Berg en Dal (both in The Netherlands) to form the National Museum of World Cultures. In 2017, the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam was added to this new institution. As a result, while all the individual museums remain open, all Dutch ethnographic museums now fall under the institutional umbrella of the National Museum of World Cultures.

The 1960s were a period of active collecting at the NME. Around 20,000 objects were collected from around the globe during this decade. Additionally, the 1960s were a pivotal moment in the development of a collections policy that would influence the NME until well into the twenty-first century. In 1955, Dr. Pieter H. Pott, Indologist by training, took over the directorship of the museum, a position he would fulfill until 1981. Pott's vision of ethnography and of the role of ethnographic museums in mid-twentieth century society profoundly influenced the direction of the NME in terms of collecting, display and educational work. Many of these changes were implemented and started to take effect in the 1960s, the period of main concern in this article.

Since official acquisition policies were uncommon in ethnographic museums in the period under discussion, the primary source for reconstructing acquisitions and collections policies at the NME are the museum's annual reports submitted to the Ministry of Culture. Policies were dictated by the director and many acquisitions were made by the director without consulting the curators of the museum. According to one employee of the museum active at the time, during Pott's tenure as director the acquisitions policy of the museum was never discussed during staff meetings.[6] All annual reports were based on Pott's own observations and the quarterly reports submitted by the museum's curators. In the reports Pott not only wrote about the museums' new acquisitions, exhibitions and educational work, but also reflected on current events and the influence that broader socio-political events had on the activities and mission of the museum.

Three major interconnected themes emerge from the reports that are relevant to the questions discussed in this article. These are: 1. decolonization and the mission of ethnographic museums; 2. the ethics of collecting; and 3. the changing interest in and increasing market values of 'primitive art'.

6 G.D. van Wengen, *'Wat is er te doen in Volkenkunde?' : de bewogen geschiedenis van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde Leiden* (Leiden: Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, 2002), 178.

Decolonization, display and the mission of ethnographic museums

Processes of decolonization heavily affected ethnographic museums in Europe, not only in the manners in which they collected their objects, but also in the way they positioned themselves in society. Pott's reflections in the annual report of 1960 on this process are worth quoting at length, as they succinctly summarize his ideas on the mission of ethnographic museums:

> [in 1960] the contrast between the changing circumstances in the world and the basis on which the majority of ethnological museums have directed their policies has been particularly salient. It is clear that most of the ethnological museums originated as colonial museums [...] As a result, these museums were in fact based on the idea of a community of interests; they demanded attention in their own society for the richness and diversity in these colonial regions and showed how technical progress was stimulated there. All this could give the visitor a sense of pride or satisfaction in his own society; after all, he belonged to the group [of people] that had 'achieved something great' elsewhere. Because of the changes in the global situation, suddenly there is no longer any significance attached to that great thing that has been done [...]
>
> This means that most older ethnographic museums have to change their policies. Two possibilities are then available, the first: turning an ethnographic museum into an art museum that showcases so-called exotic art, which can be approached and appreciated without any knowledge of the culture from which it originated. The second would be to establish a truly ethnographic museum, one which calls attention to the cultures of other peoples without assuming a community of interests but for which the interest can be expected on the basis of the positive values of the cultures themselves, which can be appreciated by [Western] society without violating their own norms. [...]
>
> The National Museum of Ethnology is certainly privileged in this respect. Not only can it have a decent number of staff, specialized in almost all areas of the world, it has never been a colonial museum. It has developed from the outset as an ethnological museum, where the interest for foreign peoples was prominent and not the community of interests of its own people with certain overseas territories.[7]

Pott sketches two pathways that (former colonial) ethnographic museums can follow when attempting to come to grips with their new roles in a decolonizing world. One is to become a museum of non-Western art that focuses on the aesthetic experience,

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7 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1961* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1961), 1.

the other is to become a 'true ethnographic museum' that draws the attention of the visitor to the 'positive values' of other cultures. From the annual reports it is clear that Pott aims to follow this second course for the NME. He envisions a museum that attempts to further understanding of other cultures, presenting them in ways that are not dictated by colonial interests and enterprises. Pott highlights the fact that, according to him, the NME 'has never been a colonial museum'. By doing so he contrasts the NME with the Tropenmuseum, The Netherlands' other major ethnographic museum which was formed as the Colonial Museum and was part of the Ministry of Colonies. While the main role of the Colonial Museum was to aid in the instruction and education of future civil servants in the Dutch colonies, the NME was primarily an academic institution, with strong ties to Leiden University, aimed at the study of comparative ethnology on a global scale.

Pott aims to use the museum to 'make that which was seen at first as strange and incomprehensible, into something trusted and understandable'.[8] According to Pott, in a decolonizing world, the mission of the museum should be to instill in the museum visitor 'an open and honest interest for the lives and cultures of humans in foreign lands'.[9] No longer should objects be valued as the spoils of empire and proof of colonial power. Rather, they should serve as entryways to understand the life-worlds of Others. As a result, Pott was most interested in acquiring 'ordinary' items of everyday use, which he thought best represented the daily life of people in other cultures. Through these displays, Pott also aimed to make the Dutch museum visitor more aware of the way their own preconceptions, thoughts, feelings and judgements towards non-Dutch Others were formed. This way, Pott hoped to facilitate 'honest engagement with these unknown cultures'.[10]

Of course, one could argue that Pott was relatively late to the game in his ambition to create contextual collections and displays of the material culture of other peoples in which other cultures were displayed on their own terms. This viewpoint had already been argued by anthropologists like Franz Boas at the turn of the twentieth century. [11] Still, as Pott sketches in the annual reports, it is global decolonization that forces ethnographic museums the world over to rethink their mission and role in a world after Empire, urging them to be more critical of earlier colonial ways of engaging the Other.

The exhibitions program that developed under Pott's directorship reflects this concern with context-driven presentations. Exhibitions aimed to create an

8 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1968* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1968), 4.

9 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1962* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1962), 1.

10 Ibid.

11 D. Jenkins, Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology, Comparative Studies, *Society and History*, 36/1 (1994), 242-270 (266).

understanding of how other peoples and cultures carve out a life for themselves in other locations, while also instructing visitors on how cultural stereotypes were formed and how they continue to have an impact. For instance, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the NME, Pott curated an exhibition entitled 'Naar Wijder Horizon' ('Towards a Broader Horizon') which analyzed the origins and development of cultural stereotypes about non-Western peoples. This exhibition was accompanied by a smaller display of children's drawings from The Netherlands ('Zo zien zij hen'/'This is how they see them'), in which children from around the country had drawn images of how they saw people from other cultures.

In foregrounding the importance of cultural understanding and context-driven presentations, Pott took an active stance against the creation of museums of non-Western/tribal/primitive art, as well as the non-contextualized display of ethnographic objects in art museums. In the annual report of 1962, Pott contrasts the exhibition 'Wow-ipitsj – Twaalf houtsnijders van Amanamkai' ('Wow ipitsj – Twelve wood carvers of Amanamkai'), curated on the basis of extensive fieldwork by the NME's Dr. A. A. Gerbrands, with an exhibition of Papuan art that was shown at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. In 'Wow-ipitsj' the curator aimed to demonstrate that no objective, culturally-independent aesthetic criteria exist and that, therefore, the arts of non-Western peoples can never be judged by Western standards. Meanwhile, according to Pott, the Rijksmuseum show only sought to 'evoke a vague sense of admiration for the so-called '"power of primitive art"'.[12] In Pott's words, this aesthetic approach 'testifies of a, possibly subconscious, sense of superiority, with which the foreign object is appropriated and subsumed into a system of value and classification, that only accentuates its foreignness, because of which it is impossible to come to a better understanding of our fellow man, who shaped this object according to their own values and purposes'.[13]

Naturally, this preoccupation with understanding the context of a particular object had repercussions for the way that Pott envisioned collecting practices. First of all, one could only collect objects of which the original cultural context was known. Second, this meant that, since art dealers generally were unable to supply much information regarding provenance and context, objects should ideally be acquired by specialists in the field who had direct access to the 'source' of the objects. In the annual reports, Pott repeatedly stressed the need for more funds to be able to finance collecting trips by museum staff. However, since these funds were not made available until well into the 1970s, Pott envisioned a practice in which the museum would work with a network of trusted local collaborators, who were familiar with the local situation and could acquire objects for the museum. This collaboration with locals would ensure that the context of objects was

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12 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde*, 4.

13 Ibid.

Figure 4.2: Pieter H. Pott around 1970. NMvW collection: RV-111899.

documented and thus enabled a presentation that would stimulate understanding and empathy in visitors.

While stimulating understanding and empathy for other cultures were among Pott's main goals, it should be noted that he was simultaneously convinced that there was no place for anti-colonial politics in an ethnographic museum. According to Ger van Wengen, a former curator of the museum who headed the Education Department between 1956 and 1991, Pott repeatedly complained about the political engagement of the education staff. According to Pott, ethnographic museums should focus on the cultures and arts of non-Western peoples and refrain from engaging in political debates.[14]

In sum, Pott saw the impact of decolonization on ethnographic museums primarily in terms of display (*i.e.* creating displays that promoted understanding and empathy, rather than feelings of colonial superiority). However, his insistence on understanding and empathy meant that collecting and acquisition practices needed to change as well. No longer could the museum haphazardly accept anything that was offered to it, regardless of the way it was acquired and the contextual information that was available. In his approach, Pott distances himself from acquisition policies of the past – or criticizes the lack thereof. Pott's predecessor G.W. Locher was mostly

14 van Wengen, *'Wat is er te doen in Volkenkunde?'*, 124.

interested in diversifying the museum's collections through the acquisition of aesthetic masterpieces. At the time the museum's collections consisted primarily of material from the Dutch colonies of Surinam and Indonesia, as well as important older collections from Japan and China. Earlier, pre-World War II, directors and curators seemed to have set hardly any limitations on what should enter the national collections and collected in a rather indiscriminate way. In Pott's view, however, limits to collecting were necessary to create a collection of sufficient quality.

Pott's views on collecting

In the report for 1964, Pott summarizes his views on collecting quite clearly: 'In terms of the creation of new collections, the museum strives to acquire striking elements, these can be individual objects with a high aesthetic or scientific value, or they can be collections that are well-documented and represent a complete sample [of a certain culture]'.[15] Pott's acquisition policy was oriented along two axes – collecting masterpieces of ethnographic art, on the one hand, and acquiring supposedly complete overviews of the material culture of a particular people or culture, on the other. At first sight, these two approaches might seem contradictory, as the latter is mainly concerned with contextualization while the former focuses on aesthetic qualities without contextual information. In the late nineteenth century, Adolf Bastian had suggested that ethnographic collectors focus on everyday items, rather than singular pieces of high aesthetic quality. Tools and artefacts that reflected the 'normal and average character' of communities were to be preferred over 'dazzling items' (Young 2000: 184)[16]. Everyday items were seen to be more representative and more fitting to elucidate foreign cultures. While Pott adhered strongly to this view, his acquisition ambitions also included 'aesthetic masterpieces'. Here, the influence of the market for 'primitive art', which was booming in the 1960s, undoubtedly played a role, as it was a primary marketing and branding mechanism which valued non-Western artefacts primarily for aesthetic (and financial) reasons.

While Pott's dual approach might seem contradictory at first, at the basis of it is the concept of 'completeness'. This idea of 'completeness' (possibly better translated as 'comprehensiveness') is present in many of Pott's reports. On the one hand Pott aims to 'fill in the gaps', that is acquire pieces from cultures that are not yet represented in the NME collections. On the other, he aims to acquire 'complete samples' of cultures, based on the idea that one can only truly understand a different culture through a

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15 P.H. Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde te Leiden. Verslag van de directeur over het jaar 1964* (Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeversbedrijf: 's Gravenhage, 1964), 13.

16 M. Young, 'The Careless Collector: Malinowski and the Antiquarians', in M. O'Hanlon and R. Welsch, eds., *Hunting The Gatherers – Ethnographic Collectors, Agents, and Agency in Melanesia 1870s-1930s* (Berghahn: Oxford, 2000), 184.

range of its material culture. A good example of this kind of 'complete' collecting are series numbers 4016 and 4171, which were sold to the museum by Polish anthropologist Borys Malkin (1917-2009). Between 1964 and 1966 Malkin supplied a total of 370 objects of the Ka'apor and Tapirapé peoples to the NME.[17] According to the seller, these items were 98% representative of Tapirapé material culture and 95% representative of the material culture of the Ka'apor.[18] How Malkin defined these rather peculiar percentages is not quite made clear in the correspondence, but what these numbers do show is that completeness – understood as the extent to which a collection is representative of the full range of material culture of a certain community – was a mark of quality for both Pott and Malkin.

While for the ethnographic collections, completeness was measured in percentages of artefact types represented, for the aesthetic masterpieces the acquisition policy attempted to 'fill out the canon of non-western art' that was being formed at the time. This canon has never really been defined and would merit more research into what it entails and how it was formed in the interplay between academic, commercial and museum actors. Still, it is clear that some cultures and object types were much sought-after, while others were not. For example, for pre-Columbian art, my own primary field of expertise, even a cursory glance at museum exhibitions the world over will show that certain cultures and objects types are considered to be essential. Simply put, every self-respecting display of pre-Columbian art will include at least some Classic Maya material (preferably with hieroglyphs), pieces from Formative era Western Mexico, and Moche and Chimu ceramics from the Andean region. Since many collections of pre-Columbian art were contemporaneously formed in the 1950s and 60s, there was undoubtedly some form of self-enforcing effect in which museums looked to and followed each other in building up collections of pre-Columbian art.[19]

Limits to collecting

For Pott, the best way to achieve completeness, at least for ethnographic material, was to send out small teams consisting of museum staff, trained ethnologists and photographers/filmmakers who could sketch an overall picture of a culture. Pott repeatedly attempted to attain permission to use parts of the acquisitions funds

17 M. Françozo, 'O colecionismo etnográfico no Brasil (1955-1975): entrevista com René Fuerst' Bol. Mus. Para. Emílio Goeldi. Ciênc. hum. [online], 12/3 (2017), 789-800. ISSN 2178-2547. https://doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000300007; Françozo and Caromano *in prep.*

18 A. Timmers, 'To collect or not to collect, that is the question: a story about the collections policy at Leiden's Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in the sixties', Unpublished MA Thesis, Leiden University, 2015, 50.

19 E.H. Boone, ed. *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1993); C.G. Tremain & D. Yates, eds., *The Market for Mesoamerica: Reflections on the Sale of Pre-Columbian Antiquities* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2019).

to send out these teams, but did not succeed in doing this during the first fifteen years of his tenure as director. As a result, the museum remained dependent on the aforementioned local collaborators, as well as art dealers and the generosity of donors. Pott also flagged this problem himself, arguing that the museum was dependent on 'relatively accidental offers that cross our path [...] because of which the focus lies on those pieces that have primarily aesthetic value, rather than ethnographic worth'.[20] Because of this, it was difficult for the museum to achieve Pott's main goal: to acquire those pieces of everyday use that most aptly sketch the lives of people across the globe. Pott bemoaned the fact that art dealers did not realize that pieces with solid contextual documentation are worth far more to ethnographic museums than pieces that are considered 'art'. At the same time, he complained that first-grade 'primitive art' pieces had become prohibitively expensive and that art dealers took to calling second-grade art 'typical museum pieces'.[21]

The steep increase in prices on the art market for ethnographic and archaeological pieces was a perennial concern to Pott. In the annual reports, which were written primarily for the Dutch Ministry of Culture, which funded the museum, Pott requested more money for acquisitions almost every year. For example in the report for 1963, Pott writes, 'Sadly, we have to conclude that the prices for very good ethnographic pieces are rising enormously, while the acquisition budget does not grow correspondingly'.[22] Because of this price increase, the museum could not afford to acquire all the pieces that it was interested in. According to Pott, 'in general, one sees that the prices of ethnographic objects increase more strongly than those of other pieces in the art trade. In many respects, these prices are prohibitive and acquisitions can no longer be considered; prices in the range of tens of thousands of guilders are no longer the exception'.[23]

Apart from the financial concerns, Pott also took ethical issue with some of the acquisition practices of previous generations. He particularly cautioned against the acquisition of objects which played an ongoing active role in the religious and spiritual life of local communities and which would be difficult for those communities to replace. According to Pott, 'the times have passed in which we could collect through a 'buyout policy' without any regard for the sentiments of others; such an action would only elicit strong reproach, if not aggressive opposition, in the current climate'.[24] A few years later, Pott phrases this sentiment more strongly when he says 'it is no longer ethically and morally acceptable to more or less randomly extract

20 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1968), 3.
21 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1961), 4.
22 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1963), 9.
23 Ibid., 13.
24 Pott, *Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde* (1960), 16-7.

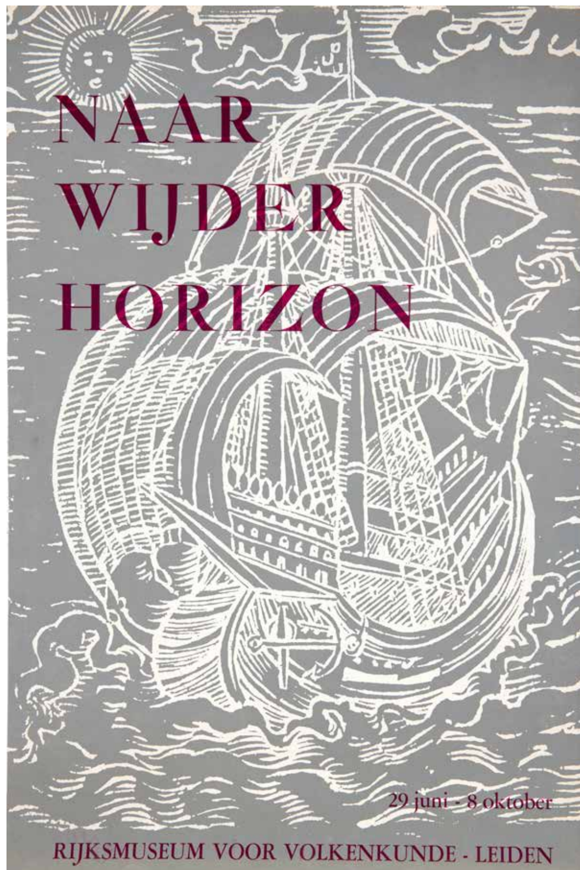

Figure 4.3: Poster for the 'Naar Wijder Horizon' exhibition, curated by Pott in 1962. RV-6235-63

objects from living cultures, if these are irreplaceable and still fulfill an essential function in these cultures'.[25]

Another obstacle to unbridled collecting was the legislation that many countries put in place – or started to enforce – on the export of cultural goods. International lobbies lead to the drafting of the UNESCO 1970 Convention, which, it should be noted, was only accepted in 2009 by The Netherlands. Because of this more stringent control on the trade in material heritage, Pott's ambition to collect 'outstanding masterpieces' was made more difficult.

While the first issue – that of extracting objects with an active 'essential function' – was given ample attention by the director and care seems to have been taken to collect ethnographic objects in an ethical manner, the UNESCO 1970 issue – related primarily to archaeological pieces – seems to have been considered of minor

25 Ibid., 9.

importance, at least not in regards to Latin American countries. The NME continued collecting pre-Columbian pieces without a secure provenance until the late 1980s. In the 1960s, correspondence concerning possible acquisitions even openly makes mention of circumventing legislation by smuggling pieces out of the country.[26] Naturally, both these ethical considerations result from processes of decolonization that gradually lead to a shift in the balance of power, as well as more awareness of problematic collecting practices.

Discussion

The research in this article represents a small and limited case study into the impact of decolonization on European ethnographic museums in the mid-twentieth century. This work forms part of a larger research project that will be developed as part of the Museums, Collections and Society research group. This larger project should answer important questions that could not be addressed within the scope of this article. Primary among these is the question of how the NME relates to other ethnographic museums around the world in the same time period. Are the developments sketched here unique for the NME, or do they represent a larger pattern? How did the global developments of the 1960s impact other ethnographic museums in Europe and North America in terms of collection formation and acquisition policies? And how do these developments map onto institutional trajectories of ethnographic museums in formerly colonized countries?

Some tentative answers to these questions can already be given, when looking at other studies of ethnographic museums in the same time period. For example, Claire Wintle has analyzed the collecting program of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. in the mid-twentieth century.[27] Wintle shows that the ambitions of Eugene Knez, the museum's curator for Far Eastern ethnology, were virtually the same as those of Pott. Knez sought to acquire comprehensive sets of objects that would depict particular patterns of behavior, rather than "luxury items for the well-to-do"'.[28] Whether Knez and Pott were in direct contact and to what extent these coinciding views were the result of larger global developments or of personal contacts is a topic for future research.

Wintle has also studied the impact of decolonization on the Imperial/ Commonwealth institute in the 1960s. She argues that 'museums and other exhibition spaces not only responded to or 'mirrored' the politics of decolonisation across the middle years of the twentieth century, but were active agents in this process'.[29] In

26 N. van de Walle, Letter from N. van de Walle to P.H. Pott, 1 june 1960 Correspondence Archive, Museum Volkenkunde, 1960.

27 C. Wintle, Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter, *The American Historical Review* 121/5 (2016), 1492-1520.

28 Ibid., 1497.

29 Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Museum', 186.

terms of cultural politics, this is arguably the case for the NME, where Pott attempted, through the introduction of less colonial (one can hardly speak of post-colonial) exhibition and education programs, to contribute to a museum practice that attempted not to exoticize the cultures and peoples on display. While it is hard to measure the actual impact of exhibitions like 'Naar Wijder Horizon' among Dutch publics, it is clear that Pott's attention to the creation of stereotypes aimed to adjust images of the Other rooted in colonial politics and presentations. Even though Pott seems to not have seen this new agenda as political himself, his focus on cultural understanding and empathy was clearly in contrast with earlier endeavors in ethnographic museums, which were primarily inspired by colonial politics.

On a more local comparative scale, Christina Kreps has argued that, in the 1960s, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam was forced to reassess its audience because new media and travel made museum visitors more aware of the cultures and lived realities of people in formerly colonized countries.[30] In addition, Kreps notes that 'people who were represented in the museum as colonial subjects in the past were now members of Dutch society'.[31] As a consequence, exhibitions were changed so as to sketch a more socially relevant image of non-Western people's lives. Since the Tropenmuseum was funded primarily by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and Development Cooperation), exhibitions tended until well into the 1990s to focus on societal issues of international cooperation, poverty/social inequality, human rights, and climate change, among others. This more politically engaged approach to exhibition-making was eschewed by Pott, who saw the NME as a place of culture, not politics (assuming that these could be neatly separated). Thus, decolonization in the 1960s seems to have had a different kind of impact in The Netherlands' two major ethnographic museums. While in both institutions the approach to foreign cultures changed into an arguably more decolonial praxis, the NME, because of its director, chose to focus on culture, while the Tropenmuseum focused more on socio-political engagement.

Lastly, this article set out to better understand the extent to which museum staff, as opposed to other actors like field collectors or art dealers, had control over what was collected and acquired. As we have seen, the museum, or rather its director Dr. P.H. Pott, set itself a relatively clear acquisition agenda, focusing on 'aesthetic masterpieces' and 'well-documented complete samples of specific cultures'. Ultimately, however, this agenda could hardly be fulfilled due to financial, ethical and practical constraints. The lack of funds to finance collecting expeditions was primary among these, as it meant that museum staff was not able to go out into 'the

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30 C. Kreps, 'Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology', in Janet Marstine, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twentieth-Century Museum,* (Routledge: London, 2011), 73.

31 Ibid.

field' and collect for the museum themselves. While Pott attempted to remedy this issue by working with 'trusted local collaborators' it should be noted that these were more often than not Dutch citizens living abroad, rather than actual locals who were intimately familiar with the cultures to be collected. An exception to this list would be the aforementioned Polish anthropologists Borys Malkin. However, while Malkin was a trained anthropologist, he was clearly also a European outsider, rather than a member of the communities whose material he collected. In this sense, one could argue that, while there may have been more consideration for the ethical aspects of collection formation, decolonization significantly impacted acquisition policy, rather than acquisition practice at the NME.