Research Article

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Decolonising Museum Practice in a Postcolonial Nation: Museum's Visual Order as the Work of Representation in Constructing Colonial Memory

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Abstract: The study of colonialism and its legacies have mostly left the category of memory studies. However, for the colonised subject, what they experienced in the past inevitably forms their present and future discourse. This study focuses on how the museum's visual order articulates colonial memory. By looking at the work of representation, in this context museum's visual order, this study investigates how memory lives on through the circulation of colonial memory that the museum simulates. Museum's visual order translates how colonial memory should be remembered and celebrated as public knowledge. Although research on how museums affect society knowledge have been part of both memory and museum studies, those two studies barely touch upon museums' role in translating colonial memory in the post-colonial nation. Memory lives on through its circulation in media forms. However, premeditation and mediation are made possible through articulating social and cultural sites, in this case, museums practice. In order to achieve its purposes, this research investigates public museums in different parts of Java, Indonesia which have colonial memory objects. The combination of field observation, document review, and visual method followed by focus group discussion between stakeholders and researchers are conducted to propose the research conclusion. This research argues that the museum's visual order translates interrelated colonial memories to be accepted as a part of the history that forms the "existence" of the nation and to be appreciated as public knowledge that is shared and forms the national identity. In doing so, museum practice roams into the area of political visibility which decides the legibility of the narrative related to colonial memory. In addition, as museum practice is basically a colonial legacy, this research concludes that it is essential to deconstruct the practice from the perspective of the colonised.

Keywords: museum studies, decolonisation, visual order, the work of representation, visual method

Introduction

From the coloniser's perspective, decolonising museums requires acknowledging the dark past of their nation's history. In a postcolonial nation, decolonising museums requires challenging the *status quo* by acknowledging that their entire museum practices are embedded with colonial legacy. Arainikasih and Hafnidar's article on decolonising *Museum Aceh* illustrates the complexities of decolonising museums in a

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previously colonised nation. According to them, in the Indonesian context, challenging colonial legacies, deconstructing Indonesian official national history, and presenting narratives from local perspectives are the strategy for decolonising museums. Considering that, this article questions the traces left by colonialism on Indonesian museum practice.

As a postcolonial nation that has been colonised for more than two centuries, in Indonesia, museum practice plays a significant part in the narration of national identity and colonial memories. Museums are the place where people learn and recall their history. Tracing back its origin in Western nations, museums function to classify, categorise, and represent other cultures (Turner; Lidchi; Coffee; Macdonald) that plays a role in colonial strategy by constructing meta-structure between the West and the rest (Wiryomartono; Lidchi; Macdonald). In doing so, museums are the work of representation that produce specific knowledge. Their visual orders construct and instil meaning by interaction that relies on gaze. This article sees museums as a fundamental social process instead of simply collections of things.

Moreover, engaging museum practice as the work of representation requires the use of a visual method of analysis. It will allow one to see how power/knowledge incorporates into the politics of visibility. Lidchi looks at museum practice as a system of representation that produces meaning through the display of objects. Rose's study examines museums' technologies of display and layout form specific ways of seeing that influence knowledge production. Emmison and Smith consider museums part of the visual culture where social and cultural interactions occur.

Hence, museum practice is not an innocent practice but is embedded with discursive formations that produce specific knowledge. Museums work as an institution that aim to shape specific discourse in society. Seeing museum that way, we used the Foucauldian concept of discourse. According to Foucault, in order to build their discourse, institutions work using two tools: apparatus and technologies. Elaborating Foucault's concept of apparatus and ideologies, Rose explained apparatus as the forms of power/knowledge that constitute the institutions while technologies are defined as the practical techniques used to articulate particular forms of power/knowledge. In this article, the institutional apparatus in the museum practice refers to the museum function in constructing colonial memory, while the institutional technologies are any work related to museum's visual order that we will elaborate on later.

In a detailed review of the history of art museum education, Terry Zeller (cited in Hein) distinguishes three categories of museums: those that primarily provide an aesthetic experience, those devoted to education, and others that take on a social role. In that account, museums articulating colonial memory falls within the category of education and social role. Research conducted in several of Europe's national museums by Dodd et al. reported that most visitors and minority group participants see national museums as having cultural and historical authority, an important political role. They also described national museums as having political gravitas, representing the nation and its history. They were a symbol of national independence and an essential source of information about the national history. Museums enable the creation of a shared, collective identity, a place to understand "who we are" and "where we come from" and shape the ideas of the present and the future citizens.

Indonesia has a lot of museums dedicated to preserved Indonesian colonial history. According to *Asosiasi Museum Indonesia*, a non-governmental organisation that works as a government partner in managing museums in Indonesia, there are 428 museums in this country and around half of it are dedicated to Indonesian colonial history. However, the existing museum studies in Indonesian context pay little attention to the relation of museum practice and colonial memory.

Rothberg mentioned that the study of colonialism and its legacies have mostly left the category of memory studies. Memory lives on through its circulation in media forms. However, premeditation and mediation are made possible through articulating social and cultural sites, in this case, museums practice. In his article on how both Indonesia and The Netherlands forgot colonial memory, Bijl reported that most writings on Indonesian cultural memory seemed to be devoted to the last moments of mass violence in Indonesian history, namely 1965–1966, with little attention to the longer earlier colonial period. Therefore, this research will focus on how the museum practice translates colonial memory in a postcolonial nation in order to be remembered and celebrated as public knowledge.

To expand the issue of decolonising museum practice in the postcolonial nation, this article will discuss museum culture in postcolonial Java by (1) looking at the issue of museums as the work of representation; (2) defining the role of museums in the process of nation-building; and (3) investigating the embedded colonial legacy as an inevitable issue in a postcolonial nation.

Another issue important to note is using Java as the focus of studying colonial legacy in the postcolonial Indonesian museum culture. Indonesia is an archipelago with diverse characteristics. The Dutch colonisation of Indonesia did not start at once at the end of the sixteenth century. Instead, it took more than 200 years for the Dutch coloniser to reach the territorial boundaries of present-day Indonesia (Vickers). The island of Java was the first island in the archipelago to be conquered. In 1619, they established a headquarter city in Java, formerly called Batavia or presently known as Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Accordingly, it can be said that the island of Java is the centre of the Dutch colonial residue, so that museum practice in Java is heavily fuelled by colonial legacy.

Research Methodology

To find out how the museum's visual order works in constructing colonial memory, we mainly employed a discursive analysis using a visual research method. In this research, images are used actively in the process, alongside other evidence generated by interviews and field observation. We worked with images that are made as part of the research project.

During the first phase of data collection, we employed performative research by conducting a series of webinars involving museum directors, museum communities, curators, researchers, students, and communities interested in museums. On the second phase of data collection, different museums, monuments, and cultural sites articulating colonial memory located in East Java, Central Java, West Java, and Jakarta were studied. During the fieldwork, photo-documentation was used to collect data. In photo-documentation, a researcher takes a carefully planned series of photographs to document and analyse a particular visual phenomenon (Rose). Methodically, it is a way of understanding visual aspects of social relations and identities in contemporary urban spaces, including museums.

Photo-documentation assumes photographs are accurate records of what was in front of the camera – a precise record of material reality – and takes photographs in a systematic way in order to provide data which the researcher then analyses (Rose). Furthermore, a shooting script was used to prove the careful conceptualisation of the link between the research topic and the photographs being taken.

The following is the list of questions guiding photo-documentation process (shooting script):

- What kind of information is offered by the museum collections?
- What kind of collections is displayed by the museum?
- In which part of the museum building the collection is installed?
- How visible are the collections displayed in comparison to the entire installation setting by the museums?
- What kind of visual order is available in the museums concerning the collection articulating colonial memory?

Field notes of each photo were used to develop a shooting script. The notes would include date, time, location, and a commentary paragraph responding to the shooting script questions.

Defining Museum Practice

Museums are the dominant feature of the cultural landscape that frames our past, the history of humankind. Their existence is important as they present a medium for conservation, education, administrative systems, entertainment, and commercialisation as well as their function to represent and shape our

memories (Desvallées and Mairesse; Macdonald). Our attention to the museums can shift from what was originally only as an entertainment or an educational medium to a work of representation. As a work of presentation, politically, museums produce and define knowledge, or extremely, they have the capacity to determine the nature of knowledge itself. The museum can direct visitors to what is called "right." By their policies, missions, architectural styles, catalogues, exhibitions, wall texts, educational programmes, and conservation, museums justify claims. Thus, museums are not neutral, value-free or even with the best knowledge.

Various objects/collections are shown and exhibited to the public inside the museum. Both artefacts and other visual objects are considered to represent things of pure and "authentic" meaning. However, museums do not only represent meaning, but they also produce it through framing. In this case, the object's meaning changes from one institutionalisation context to another. Traditionally, museums frame objects and audiences to control the viewing process, to suggest a tightly interwoven narrative of progress, an "authentic" mirror of history, without conflict or contradiction (Marstine; Rose). Furthermore, Marstine (5) points out, the frame is challenged, fragmented, and made transparent when the museum declares itself to be an active player in the creation of meaning. The framing and the production of meaning are formed as a work of representation through the governance of museum practices.

We approach museum practice as the practice of collecting, structuring, and managing collections that allow a knowledge value to be produced and consumed by visitors. It is a process that begins by organising a collection, putting together text and materials, and then professionally managing these as a practice of governing (Bennett et al.; Bennett et al.). It is also to say that the practice of museums is "the application of museology" (Desvallées and Mairesse 52) and has become a part of modern museum performance (Casey). According to McCarthy, museum practice includes professional work performed in museums and art galleries of all kinds, including the core functions of management, collections, exhibitions, and programmes.

The museum practice comprises two works: visible and invisible (Bennett et al.). Visible practices include displays, installations, and exhibition practices. Invisible practices are hidden works, such as marketing campaigns, designing exhibitions, catalogue making, fundraising, compiling missions, and handling repatriation claims. We argue that museum practice is a process of how power coexists and interrelated with museum governance (Lidchi). Therefore, it is important to note that museum practice is political in many cases. As examples presented in this study, since the creation, practice (installation, display, ordering, and governance), the definition of museums, and the architectural building itself, they are the colonial residue, full of contestations and struggles for the power/knowledge.

Museum Practice as A Colonial Legacy

The idea of how museums work in the West defines relationships between colonial powers and subject peoples has been shown by different scholars working on museum studies (Turner; Wiryomartono; Vawda; Lidchi). Barringer and Flynn, to mention some, edited a book titled *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and The Museum*, in which the entire chapters demonstrate the influence of colonialism, its ideologies, and power relations on how objects are understood. As also argued by Turner, museum work is a crucial site in the production of continued colonial legacies, and it is both contextual and historical. The definition of a museum as an institution that makes records related to society's history can be considered museums' privileges in producing knowledge that is often taken to be neutral.

According to Vawda, museums arose out of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century industrialism and colonialism. It housed collections extracted from European voyages of exploration and the colonies. By the late nineteenth century, museums functioned to support the imperial project, simultaneously serving as informal educational institutions consolidating the idea of human progress and the universal rights of humans. Nevertheless, alongside these ideas, attached the colonial perspective: the uncivilised, inferior characteristic of the colonies and the civilised and superior characteristics of the coloniser. This argument is

supported by Lidchi, whose work demonstrated museum practice as an instrumental means of knowing and possessing the "culture" of others.

It can be said that European society used the museum as a showcase of their achievements during colonisation. The opinion is also shared by Indonesian scholar Bagoes Wiryomartono. His lecture "Colonialism, Architecture, and Racialism: Museum of Anthropology and Monuments in the Western World" in 2020 explained how European imperialist used museums to compete for pride of domination and a sense of superiority over otherness. Their collection of artefacts from formerly colonised countries or conquered territories implies that.

As mentioned earlier, studying museum practice in a postcolonial nation should consider the possibility of unpacking colonial residue. The idea of undoing the colonial legacy is the centre of postcolonial scholars' position who believe the abolishment of colonialism does not necessarily free the colonised people from its "afterlives," as echoed by Fanon's canonical work, The Wretched of the Earth. The co-curators experience of Kassim when she was invited to set up an exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is the evidence of the challenging task of decolonising museum practice (Kassim). According to other scholars (Ariese; Van Bockhaven; Buikema), decolonising museum practice from the coloniser perspective deals more with acknowledging that the act of suppressing and overshadowing fragments of the past in the context of the colonial museum is achieved through politics of curation and cataloguing. Therefore, contextualising museum collections – using the word from Kassim – as "souvenirs of traumatic histories" and acknowledging that the history was written from the coloniser narrative are the coloniser's effort to decolonise their museum practice.

Decolonising museum practice from the colonised perspective works in two layers; the first layer addresses the issue of deconstructing the colonial legacy existing between the coloniser and the colonised, and the second layer focuses on how inclusion and exclusion influence the narrative of national history existing between the ruling regime and the citizen. In the next following section, we will approach the museum as a work of representation that could create conventional and dominant narratives around *sejarah perjuangan bangsa* or the history of the national struggle against colonisation to achieve its independence. Indeed, as a postcolonial nation, Indonesia's history is complicated, even controversial. Therefore, the purpose of decolonising museum practice in this country is to promote the idea of inclusivity and diversity. In doing so, museums work as a space for simulating different knowledge around the nation.

Museum's Visual Order and the Politics of Visibility

The more practically oriented literature on museum and exhibition design often treats museum practice ideologically neutral and unproblematic. However, the extent to which the practice of display is always political is made abundantly clear in accounts that demonstrate how collections and methods of display are indeed the work of representation that is fragmentary and subjective, as has been explained in the preceding section.

Since collecting and exhibiting practices are powerful activities, an analysis on the relationship between power and knowledge should be incorporated. We translate this into the way we look at the museum's visual order as the work of representation that roams into the politic of visibility. Acknowledging the work of Seppänen on visual literacy, we use the term "museum's visual order" in order to refer to the structure of visual entities in museum practices that are accessible via the gaze. It involves the choices made by the museum – to foreground certain artefacts/objects, or to employ a specific installation layout utilised to build their narrative – or indeed, any material that is used to articulate this narrative through visual means.

The interconnection between power and visibility is outlined by Foucault's work on his analysis of power and knowledge (Rose; Rajchman). According to Rajchman, Foucault argued that the manner in which objects and subjects were "shown" or the phenomena of "being seen" was neither an automatic nor a natural process. Visibility is inimical to power and involves perception and sensibility. It is linked to

what power/knowledge – in this research – the museum's visual order guides one to see. The analysis then explored the various ways in which the museum's visual order was deployed to construct meaning.

Visibility is known as politically inflected praxis and has always been political (Creech). It is the process of observing and reflecting on what has been observed and therefore not simply the act of seeing and being seen by others (Gordon). Using the knowledge gained from visibility is helpful to shape the subject. The politics of visibility is the way of understanding the overlap between the practice of visuality and techniques of powers. It describes seemingly natural phenomenon (what is visible, perceptible, and understood) with the dynamics of shifting power relations of the acts of representation. The politics of visibility allows us to rediscover how events become established knowledge for the public – understanding the visibility position on the politics of seeing means we can understand how subjects challenge power. According to Foucault, the power works through modes of knowledge and visibility, both as a type of control and counterpoint that control. So, looking at the apparatus of visibility will open the possibility of influencing the power relations generated and produced by the image production mode and practices of seeing.

In the context of museum practices, a politics of visibility works by mobilising perception and representation through the museum's visual order. Visibility reflects that museums act as a knowledge production medium. The practices are clearly seen through the impression the museums try to make out of a particular reality. In museums, visual representation is aggregated, archived, and produced by trained technicians, and it provides an epistemic basis on which contemporary power relations legitimise (Creech). Here, visuality becomes productive in packaging reality. This research argues that a museum's visual order has the power to construct knowledge because it presents opportunity of witnessing using diorama, artefacts, wall texts, and the architecture of the building itself. In this case, visuality turns into a technique of seeing that is fundamental to the working of power. Back to the example of the museum practices, many museums use installation and architectural practices to gain their power through the acts of witnessing.

While the coloniser used museum narrative to establish and develop the idea of their superiority, colonised countries employ museums to build the idea of the nation and citizenship. Some of the public museums observed during this study construct the idea of Indonesia as a nation utilising the narrative of the history of colonisation to achieve its independence. Putting aside the fact that the colonisation started from the sixteenth century in the archipelago, the narrative simulated by the museums on this research focuses on the later period of colonisation from 1930 onward with the exception of *Museum Mandala Bhakti* that constructed the Java War on 1825–1830 in one of its exhibitions. In line with the museum practice in the West, the ruling regime in Indonesia also plays its role in the politics of visibility. Using museum narratives, the ruling regime defines what is deemed as collective memory that should be celebrated as public knowledge.

Based on both visual method and field observation, this research classifies museum's visual practices into two, namely architectural practices and installation practices. While architectural practices are related to how a museum is defined as a physical building that can be visited, installation practices focus on how a museum displays its collection and what kind of experience it offers to visitors. The following section will elaborate on how these two practices play their roles in the museums' politics of visibility.

Architectural Practice (and the Paradox)

Architectural practice places the museum as a concrete structure tangible by visitors. It looks at the museum as a visual entity that consists of the building, locations, and other visual features that can be experienced, such as landscape and neighbourhood area. Occupying a former colonial building is one of the major practices implemented by public museums in Indonesia. Museum *Mandala Bhakti* in Semarang resides in a colonial building from the 1930s that used to be *Raad van Justitie* or the Supreme Court for the European in Dutch East Indies during the colonial period. The building is located in a well-known colonial landscape, Wilhelmina Plein, more popularly known as *Tugu Muda*. *Tugu Muda* itself is a candle monument erected in a garden built to commemorate the heroic action of the Indonesian freedom fighters in

Figure 1: The view from *Museum Mandala Bhakti* in Semarang – the *Tugu Muda* roundabout and another recognised colonial building, *Lawang Sewu*.

Semarang's 5-day battle. Across the museum resides another famous colonial landmark, *Lawang Sewu*, which used to be the headquarter of the Dutch East Indies Railway Company during the colonial time (Figure 1).

Another noticeable visual order is the practice of opening a museum in an elite neighbourhood area. Some of the museums observed in this study are located in the elite neighbourhood once used for the European residential community. Though *Museum Brawijaya* does not occupy a former colonial building, it is located at the famous historical landmark in the city, *Idjen Boulevard*, one of the most expensive residential districts in the city today, widely known for its colonial buildings and beautiful surroundings. The renowned annual festival *Malang Tempoe Doeloe* also takes place in this area.[1] In a way, *Museum Mandala Bhakti* is surrounded by famous historical landmark used to be the European residential area during the colonial period. The practice of establishing a museum in an elite area and the city centre is also observable in the other museums studied in this research such as *Museum Kapal Selam* (Figure 2).

The fact that some museums occupy prominent colonial buildings or located in old prestigious area shows their importance from the authority perspective. Being part of a memorable landscape of the city, it is expected that museums will be the place for everyone to visit, especially for recollection of the citizen's struggles during the colonial period.

The location of museum in the central part of the city may represent Javanese architecture philosophy. During the colonial period, the traditional Javanese residential architecture had a room called *senthong tengah* (Roosandriantini et al.; Cahyandari; Satwiko). *Senthong tengah* is an essential part of the house where the owner keeps their valuable and cherished belongings. To some extent, *senthong tengah* is a sacred part of the house (Roosandriantini et al.; Cahyandari). This shows that spirituality was one of the important notions of Javanese society during that time (Prianti). In his doctoral research on traditional

1 *Malang Tempoe Doeloe* is a yearly festival held by Malang local government. During the festival, the entire *Idjen Boulevard* was changed into the colonial time. Visitors were also wearing the clothes in the colonial period. They mimicked different kind of class: European, Orientals as well as the indigenous.

Figure 2: The neighbouring landscape of *Monumen Kapal Selam* in Surabaya.

Javanese residential designs, Satwiko argued that philosophically speaking, *senthong tengah* is the basis for all the decisions made. In this place, one seeks spiritual guidance before making decisions. Applying this analogy, museums function as *senthong tengah* – the place to keep the valuable and cherished items that do not deal solely with objects but, more importantly, with what we could call ideas, knowledge – notions that we are as "once" a colonised nation.

Unfortunately, though practising the *senthong tengah* principle, most museums in Java failed to be the centre of people's interest. During the webinar on the topic of "the face of our museums" conducted with the spirits of performative research attended by researchers, scholars, students, museum managers, museum owners, museum communities as well as other museums activists, the audiences agreed that the image of museums is identical to old, dark, and creepy outdated colonial building. The webinar also discussed how museums are seen as something elite and exclusive for intellectuals, not for the commoner. A porridge seller has been selling in front of the museum for 8 years, but never once stepped inside the museum. Apparently, in his opinion, he has nothing to do with what is inside the museum.

The visual order of the city landscape formation intersects with many different interests: the authorities, the architectural agency, the decision-makers, and any other concerned parties (Seppänen). Hence, the architectural practice of a museum's visual order is the work of representation and meaning-embedded. The architectural practices imply that visual orders are meaningful but are not necessarily hegemonic. People are capable of their own interpretation though it does not always escape from the constructed discourse as shown in the installation practice, which will be explained below.

Installation Practice (and the Promise of Authenticity)

This practice focuses on how museums work to acquire, safeguard, conserve, and exhibit its collection. It does not solely deal with objects but also simulate ideas or knowledge. It looks at the museum's potential to create an established way of looking which visitors will experience. Moreover, it should be noted that installation practice is neither descriptive nor innocent activity but interpretative and a value-laden one. As argued by Lidchi, museums do not simply issue accurate descriptions. Instead, they generate representation and attribute value and meaning in line with particular perspectives which are historically specific.

Figure 3: The court chamber in *Gedung Indonesia Menggugat*.

To construct its narrative, some of the public museums studied in this research employ indistinguishable visual strategies that can be categorised into the collected and reconstructed artefacts. The collected artefact consists of objects from the past that are generally regarded as pristine material embodiments of specific historical events. According to Durrans and Lidchi, the physical presence of the collected artefact delivers a promise of stability and objectivity, which suggests the authenticity of the narrative. While exhibiting the original artefact is generally not difficult for museums in Western countries, it is not the case in the colonised ones. In these countries, collecting artefacts is a problematic and struggling task. In relation to the scarcity of the original artefact, but in need to give an "authentic" experience as part of its visual strategies, public museums in Indonesia use replica artefact in their display. In *Gedung Indonesia Menggugat,* for example, the only collected artefact visible for the visitor to see is the building itself. To construct the narrative about the historical event in the 1930s when Soekarno, who later became the first president of Indonesia, contested the Dutch colonisation during his trial, the museums installed a courtroom replica in the original chamber. It is a small chamber of less than 30 m square (Figure 3) and becomes the main and only installation exhibit. The rest of the rooms in the building are used as a common place, a library, and a cafeteria, which has no relation to the original purpose. The practice of using replicas in the museum's visual order falls within the category of reconstructed artefact, which will be elaborated below.

Reconstructed artefacts are any objects or physical units installed by the museum as part of its visual order. Replicas, dioramas, statues, paintings, and murals are typical reconstructed artefacts used by the museum to deliver the promise of narrative authenticity for the visitor's visual experience. These kinds of exhibit take a large portion of the museum's visual order. Any visitors visiting *Museum Mandala Bhakti* will not be able to escape the visual sensation of a massive mural depicting the story of Prince Diponegoro. The 3D mural occupied almost 50% of the *Museum Mandala Bhakti's* installation. From the moment visitors entered the museum building that used to be the supreme court on the colonial period, they will see a massive painting of trees on the ceiling, the floor, the stairs as well as on the walls which depict the forest where Prince Diponegoro conducted guerrilla warfare against the Dutch (Figures 4 and 5). The same visual strategies are also applied for the next couple of chambers portraying Prince Diponegoro's Java War, including reconstructing *Goa Selarong* – Prince Diponegoro's hideout – with its stalactites and stalagmites (Figure 6). Walking through them, the visitors are offered the story of Prince Diponegoro, which serves as the introduction and the context for the collected artefacts that they will see and interpreted afterwards.

The significance of using the physical objects as token of history in the museum's visual order can also be seen from other reconstructed artefacts. They range from dioramas, paintings that reconstruct specific historical events, statues of Indonesia national heroes who were considered to play a role in the Indonesia independence movement, wall cases displaying items of adornment, enlarged documents, and photographs to wall panels presenting text (Figures 7–9).

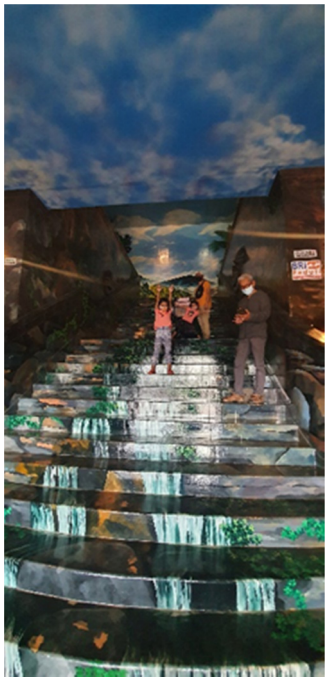

Figure 4: The installation of forest mural in *Museum Mandala Bhakti.*

Figure 5: The 3D mural representing Prince Diponegoro's Java war.

The museum and the nation-state arose together. Museums provide space for the community whose unity and autonomy were both prefigured and paradigmatic of the nation's projected unity. Simultaneously, in juxtaposing subjects *vis-à-vis* artefacts, the museum provided its citizen-subjects with *exemplary* objects, "object-lessons" with aesthetic, ethical, political, and historical worth: no museum object is mute but is already entailed with a legend and an address in cultural and historical space-time. Museums render what is visible legible (Preziosi).

In the context of national histories, public museums have the authority to inscribe their narrative concerning a particular historical event. Museums bring the promise of authenticity, as if the narrative they offer is the only truth. The architectural and installation practices seem to make their narrative uncontested and unquestioned. It perhaps roots to the intention of building an undivided national identity, as discussed in the following section.

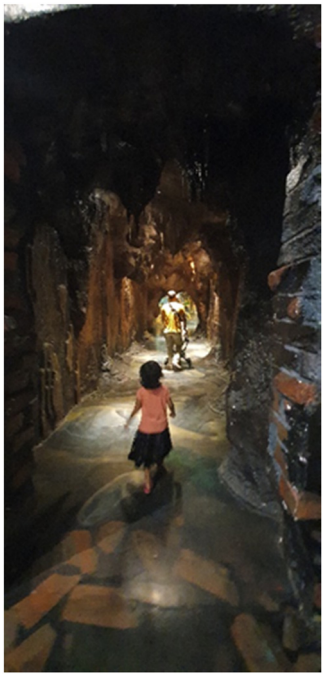

Figure 6: The installation of *Goa Selarong* in *Museum Mandala Bhakti*.

Figure 7: Wall case in *Museum Brawijaya*.

Museum as a Vehicle of Meaning in Constructing National Identity

As discussed above, the tradition of museums in Western countries is loaded with orientalist perspectives stereotyping the East inferior to the West, which serves the interests of the colonisers. While different studies mentioned earlier have shown the relation between museums and the colonial gaze, this section will elaborate the interconnection of the colonial's point of view employed by the museums in the West in constructing the national identity and how the museum practice in Indonesia apply the same practice.

From the coloniser's perspective, museum practice allows them to articulate colonial gaze which works for their favour – shaping the stereotype for the greatness of West and the powerless East, also building the meta-structure between the West and the rest of the world. It can be concluded that museums act as a disciplining machine that produces specific knowledge to build national identity by forming boundaries

Figure 8: Wall panel in *Gedung Juang Menteng*, installed outside the building but hardly to be missed due to its large size and its placement.

Figure 9: Paintings and statue of one of the Indonesian national figures in *Museum 10 November*.

between us (West) and them (East). To the contrary, in the East, museums shape the colonised collective memory regarding the hardship of colonisation and the struggling for independence in order to instil a sense of belonging to the newly independent nation.

The museums' role in constructing national identity and sense of belonging in the case of Indonesia as once a colonised nation is not only inferred from an analysis, but clearly stated by the museums' authoritative. *Museum Brawijaya*, for example writes down its mission as the source of knowledge that will assist the future generation in studying their country history for the sake of national identity on its wall panel. The same practice is applied in *Gedung Juang* which uses glass panels to display the museum's vision and mission in large printing. This glass panel is even displayed next to the museum's front door. Several other museums observed in this research implement the same strategy.

Since in general the primary purpose of historical museums is to build national identity, the visual order is designed to acquaint visitors with the concept of Indonesia as a nation. The architectural and installation practices mentioned above are intended to form collective understanding and interpretation regarding colonial memory. As an archipelago encompassing more than 1,000 islands and more than 1,000

different tribes and ethnic groups, Indonesia is an immensely diverse country. Each tribe has its own culture, customs, language, customary laws, and religious teachings (Prianti). Therefore, Indonesia is inherently multicultural in nature and was built upon an idea of nationhood – an "imagined community" in the words of Anderson. The museum visitors are therefore drawn into specific historical events in which unfamiliar objects became meaningful and made intelligibly, where the visual order encourages the narrative of national identity.

Built over the concept of "imagined community," especially as a newly independent nation, the practice of using museums to inscribe the national identity is unavoidable. It is considered one of the most effective ways to achieve that goal, just as the coloniser did when building the discourse of European superiority over the colonised nations. However, after more than seven decades since Indonesia claimed its independence, the use of a single narrative of Indonesian history (that loaded with colonial residue) in public museums is supposed to be reconsidered. Due to the fact that museums have the ability to articulate and simulate different knowledge existing in society, featuring local perspectives that are more inclusive and diverse can be one strategy for the museum to decolonise their practice.

Conclusion

The idea of using museums as social institutions emerges from European imperialism and their troubling encounters with the colonised. For that matter, museums were used to show the glory, domination, superiority, and conquest over their colonies. Museums then were a symbol of victory over a competition of excellence of European nations. Through the history of conquest, trade, and the politics of colonialism, Western museums are undeniably a representation of the coloniser. For another purpose, the entire collection is shown, displayed, exhibited, and used as a medium to build their national identity. Ironically, for the colonised, this is the best practice they adopt. While the coloniser used museums and constructed the metastructure between the West and the rest, the colonised society used them to reconstruct their national identity. As once a colonial nation, over a narrative of imagined community, public museums in Indonesia are utilised to inscribe a sense of belonging to the newly independent nation.

In this context, museums are seen as the work of representations embedded with the discursive formation in the production of knowledge. Therefore, museum practices are not innocent acts, and it roams into political visibility. Public museums in postcolonial Indonesia position their narrative uncontested and unquestioned by using both the architectural and installation practices on their visual order, which is precisely the evidence of colonial residue that is supposed to be contested. Public museums should act as forums for exchanging different available narratives regarding the national history rather than as a fortress of the *status quo* and the continuation of colonial legacy.

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