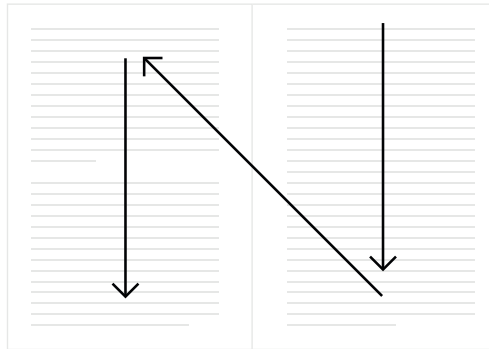


Welcome to the beginning

Always start right, then move left



his text is here to explain how to read this book. As stated before (on the right), begin reading on the right. Then, when a text block ends, move to the left. Often times this means move to the next page. Which is on your left. Sometimes, however a page will have multiple columns, in which case, you start at the most right column and move one column left until you reach the most left column.



Don't worry, you will get the hang of it soon enough. To help you navigate, we've added some indicators and symbols.

2 1 Pagenumbers numbered from right to left



bc Dropcap indicating the beginning of a text



Move left one column



Turn the left page



End of text

The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past

**Curating Heritage,
Art and Activism**

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Introduction

Preface

BY PEPIJN BRANDON, KARWAN FATAH-BLACK,
IMARA LIMON, WAYNE MODEST, MARGRIET
SCHAVEMAKER, AND EMMA VAN BIJNEN



In the past few years some significant developments have taken place in the social, cultural, and political landscape of the Netherlands regarding its dealings with the Dutch colonial past. From the protests against the tradition of Zwarte Piet¹ to exhibitions concerning the Dutch colonial past in museums such as the Mauritshuis, the Rijksmuseum, the Tropenmuseum, and the Amsterdam Museum. In addition, the investigations carried out by financial institutions such as De Nederlandse Bank and several city councils, including the city of Amsterdam, bring to light their roles in Dutch colonial history. On December 19, 2022, then Prime Minister Mark Rutte delivered an official apology on behalf of the Dutch State for the centuries of injustice. On July 1, 2023, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, the King of the Netherlands, Willem-Alexander, followed suit.

The plethora of activities that engage with the Dutch colonial past can be read as an indication of how, little by little, the process of decolonization is taking shape in the social domain and cultural field of the Netherlands. They show how Dutch society is slowly becoming more open and willing to admit that, as a nation, whose grand narrative is based on values such as tolerance and religious freedom, the Netherlands has been careful to omit its responsibility for exploitation and violence.

For those who experience racism daily, and have been doing so for decades, as well as for those who have been battling the lack of knowledge and the “white innocence” with regard to the Dutch colonial past and its afterlife, it often feels like “too little, too late”. Some argue that instead of these symbolic and self-congratulatory programs and words, further actions are needed, like financial restitution and a more fundamental transformation of those welfare institutions that are still based on exclusion and systemic racism, as the ‘toeslagen-affaire’² has made painfully clear. Even though there is momentum here to make long overdue changes to our institutions, we need to acknowledge the shoulders we stand on: the many activists, artists, and critics, such as The Black Archives, Gloria Wekker, Jeffrey Pindaag or Kick Out Zwarte Piet, who under very difficult conditions challenged Dutch prejudices and started to change the discourse.

The book before you was borne out of a shared need to (self-)critically reflect on the ways in which Dutch museums, archives, and universities have been engaging with the Dutch colonial past. Our aim is to initiate and add to discourse, share ideas, and discuss the challenges and lessons we have learned. In addition, we aim to make this knowledge accessible worldwide. To achieve this, we are guided by questions such as: What are the colonial histories that have been represented (and critiqued) by our

cultural and academic institutions? How are they being represented and what is their impact on society? What role do we have as museums and universities in changing the narratives? And where and when should we make space for the voices of artists and activists? **12**

The project “The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past” started in 2021 with a two-day conference organized in conjunction with the exhibition *The Golden Coach* at the Amsterdam Museum. The conference was a collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum, Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), the Rijksmuseum, The Black Archives, the University of Amsterdam (including research groups such as the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA)), the National Museum of World Cultures, and the Amsterdam City Archives, who are also co-publishers of this book. During the two-day event, research, exhibitions, and projects were shared that reflect on the Dutch colonial past and the ways in which this history is dealt with and continues to shape our society today.³ Different sessions addressed topics like Dutch Colonial Heritage in a Global Context; Repair and Redress; Curating Contested Heritage, Decoloniality in Academic Research, Activism and Artistic Practice; and Rereading the Archive. Some of the contributions to the symposium have been rewritten and included as essays in this book. In the months following the conference we also sent out a call for papers, asking for contributions from international artists and academics on a range of related topics, some of which you will find in this reader.

The reader is structured into four chapters, each unpacking a topical theme relevant to the main question: What is the future of the Dutch colonial past? Each chapter opens with a short introduction outlining its theme and key topics, followed by a selection of essays written by authors from a variety of cultural and professional backgrounds, including academia, the arts, independent curation and the museum world at large. Chapters are concluded with an interview with an important critical voice in the field.

To untangle a subject as complex as the colonial history of the Netherlands, and to further the conversation, the publication requires a discursive framework that allows for a multitude of voices and different perspectives, for arguments and counter-arguments to coexist, and for disagreement to become the starting point for dialogue. One way we tried to create this multivocal space was by including in each chapter at least one so-called “provocation” of sorts by various actors in the field.

Artist and designer Raul Balai provided the content with a graphical layer in which one of the most basic rules of Western bookmaking is being inverted, namely, presenting the texts from left to right. Furthermore, stock images of colonized landscapes create a visual narrative in which aesthetics and visual splendor take center stage, challenging the viewer to actively question what we are looking at.

Although there is much to learn from our past, and we certainly should, the operative term in the title of this publication is *Future*. What does—or do—the future(s) of our shared colonial past look like? Who plays what part, and how can we shape this future collectively? The essays, interviews, images, and texts collected in this reader envision a future while critically taking stock of the past.

●

Rereading the Archive. Moderators included Valika Smeulders, Inez van der Scheer, Wayne Modest, Esther Peeren, Mitchell Esajas, Margriet Schavemaker, and Imara Limon.

Notes

1. Black Pete (zwarte piet) refers to the blackface helpers of Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas), the Dutch children's celebration, akin to Santa Claus, which is traditionally celebrated on December 5th. Traditionally, Saint Nicholas offers children who behave well gifts and sweets, whilst the bad ones are punished. Saint Nicholas is aided by his helpers in the form of 'black moors from Spain'; during the celebrations the Black Petes are played by Dutch people in black/brown facial make-up, curly wigs, bright red lipstick, golden earrings and colorful renaissance-like clothing (i.e., black stereotype and black face).
2. The childcare benefits scandal (toeslagenaffaire; also known as the 'allowance affair') refers to a Dutch political scandal in which the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration (Belastingdienst) falsely accused childcare benefit claimants of fraud between 2005 and 2019. The false accusation meant that over 26000 parents had to pay back their (rightful) claim to the childcare benefits in full (often tens of thousand of euros) causing dire financial consequences.
3. The symposium "The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past" took place on November 25, 2021, and was organized by Amsterdam Museum, ASCA, NIOD, Rijksmuseum, The Black Archives, University of Amsterdam, National Museum of World Cultures & Vrije Universiteit, and Amsterdam City Archives. The keynote speech was delivered by Ciraj Rassool. Sessions included Dutch Colonial Heritage in a Global Context; Repair and Redress; Iconoclasm: Toppling Statues, Changing Street Names, Challenging Dominant Narratives; Curating Contested Heritage; Decoloniality in Academic Research, Activism and Artistic Practice; Artistic Practices and Reflections;

The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past: A Round Table Introduction

BY PEPIJN BRANDON, KARWAN FATAH-BLACK,
IMARA LIMON, WAYNE MODEST, MARGRIET
SCHAVEMAKER. MODERATED BY EMMA VAN BIJNEN

Pepijn Brandon



Emma van Bijnen



Karwan Fatah-Black



Margriet Schavemaker



Imara Limon



Wayne Modest

EMMA VAN BIJNEN: Let's start this roundtable with one of the bigger questions: What is decolonialization to you?

MARGRIET SCHAVEMAKER: This is a key concept in our present-day discussions on the colonial past and how to deal with its consequences in the future. The designer of this publication, Raul Balai, once remarked that real decolonization is burning down all our museums, heritage, and knowledge institutions, because colonialism is in their very essence. This is not what we want, obviously. What we can do is to question, contextualize, investigate, and make visible the afterlife of our colonial past in the present. Simultaneously, institutions have an obligation to become more inclusive organizations in terms of diversifying staff and how we operate in general. And decolonization can be used as an umbrella term for all these critical endeavors and developments.

KARWAN FATAH-BLACK: I agree with Balai in the sense that I don't think we can look at our colonial past without looking at the institutions and infrastructures of our society today. We cannot change and decolonize our future without changing these systems that we are leaning on. Imperial narratives can be found all around us: in museums, universities, etc.

EMMA VAN BIJNEN: If we want to talk about decolonialization and think about the future of our colonial past, we need to understand what the infrastructures of colonialism are. How do they work? And how do they continue to shape the present?

MARGRIET SCHAVEMAKER: One of these infrastructures is the division between the museum and academia. Another infrastructure we inherited from the 19th century is the division between disciplines: between ethnography, history, and art, for example, which does not feel contemporary anymore at all. When we define

By way of an introduction to some of the key questions and topics we encounter when dealing with the Dutch colonial past, the editors of the publication *The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past* gathered for a roundtable discussion. Representing the different partner institutions and a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, the participants brought different views and perspectives to the table, offering readers an insight into the roles and responsibilities they see their institutions tasked with, and delineating or mapping out the different positions in the field.