

Symposium March 1, 2018 Diasporic Objects

Abstracts

Paul Basu, Professor of Anthropology, SOAS University of London, UK.

Title

From Object Diasporas to Museum Affordances

Abstract

In earlier work I have drawn upon the metaphor of diaspora to conceptualise the dispersal of ethnographic collections and archives in the global museumscape, and argued that we need to recognize - as scholars of human diasporas have - a diversity of diasporic conditions, from the 'exilic' to the idea of diaspora as an ambivalent but creative space of 'inbetweenness' or 'double-consciousness'. In museological contexts I have suggested that we might think through the concept of diasporic remittances to consider the value of dispersed collections to erstwhile 'homelands' in their diasporic locations, rather than regarding 'return' (that is, repatriation) as the inevitable resolution of historic displacement. Building on these arguments, I would like to pursue the idea of the 'diasporic condition' and consider what conditions are brought about by the diasporic status of ethnographic museum objects and other archival 'things'. What does this diasporic condition afford? What possibilities for action does it give rise to? If such metaphors of movement, relationality and reconnection are good to 'think with', how can museums and archives activate the latent possibilities of the object diaspora? I introduce a new research project, Museum Affordances, which explores such questions through a series of experiments with a remarkable ethnographic archive (see <https://re-entanglements.net>).

Biographical note

Paul Basu is Professor of Anthropology at SOAS University of London. He took his PhD at University College London, where he was associated with the Anthropology Department's Material

Culture Group. He went on to teach at the University of Sussex before returning to UCL to run its Museum Studies MA programme. His research has focused on the migrations of people, things, ideologies and narratives of the past. For the past 15 years he has worked in West Africa, especially Sierra Leone and, more recently, Nigeria. Among his publications are the edited volumes, *Exhibition Experiments* (with Sharon Macdonald), *Museums, Heritage and International Development* (with Wayne Modest) and *The Inbetweenness of Things*, as well as the monograph *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora*. Particularly relevant for the conference are his article 'Object Diasporas, Resourcing Communities' (Museum Anthropology, 2011) and the special issue of *Mobilities*, 'Migrant Worlds, Material Cultures' (2008). He is currently leading a 3-year project entitled 'Museum Affordances', an attempt to apply an experimental museology to re-engage with colonial collections in decolonial times.

Héctor García Botero, curator, Gold Museum, Banco de la República, Colombia.

Title

Negotiating place, meaning and identity in the Ethnographic Museum of the Central Bank of Colombia (Leticia, Amazon)

Abstract

This conference is about the renovation of the Ethnographic Museum of the Central Bank of Colombia in Leticia. The museum, formerly known as Francisco Jover Lamaña Museum of the Amazon Man, opened in 1988 with a collection lent by the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin of more than 350 objects of different ethnic groups of the Colombian Amazon.

Twenty years later, in 2008, the collection was completely donated to the Bank, and then decided to renovate its exhibition and curatorship.

In this conference I would like to explore the 'diasporic' condition of the collection and the different ways that it has affected the Museum during the renovation project. I would like to think this condition from the 'practices of location' of the objects, since

they were first collected more than 70 years ago until their final display in the current museum in 2015. This perspective would have to assume a critical standpoint towards the historical asymmetry of archaeological and ethnographical collections in Colombia, of the centerperiphery model of the country and of the knowledges and technologies that make possible the existence of the artifacts as museum-objects. I hope to show that the 'diasporic' condition of the objects is an inextinguishable force that is redrawing the very core of the museum institution.

Biographical note

Anthropologist and MA in Social anthropology by the Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá, Colombia). Since 2010, he is part of the curatorship team of the Gold Museum. Amongst his work with the archaeological and ethnographical collections of the museum, he has curated the new exhibition of the Ethnographic Museum of the Central Bank of Colombia, in Leticia, and the exhibition *Molas. Layers of Wisdom* as efforts towards a more open museological practice. Currently, he is working on a research about the act of repairing objects. His main areas of interest are the history of anthropology in Colombia, practices of representation of 'the other' in museums, and tangible and intangible heritage politics.

Wonu Veys, Curator of Oceania, National Museum of World Cultures, NL.

Title

Diasporic Waka in a Dutch museum: Fostering and Mediating Relationships

Abstract

Since 2010 there are two Māori canoes (*waka*) on the museum terrain of Leiden's Museum Volkenkunde. An important icon of Māori culture and indeed of New Zealand, the *waka* is the obvious object and symbol around which to collaborate. The *waka tētē kura* is available for general use, making it possible to actively experience aspects of Māori culture. The *waka taua* is used for Māori cultural purposes. The Māori principles and ideas that inform behaviour and customs relating to *waka* (*kaupapa*

waka) have been introduced. Within the Netherlands, the Museum Volkenkunde and the Njord Royal Student Rowing Club (Njord) share the responsibility for the *kaupapa waka*, while the legal ownership of the *waka taua* remains with Toi Māori Aotearoa, a charitable trust and umbrella organization supporting contemporary Māori arts nationally and internationally.

In this paper I will first examine what triggered the development of the *waka* project and hence the status of a museum object that people can touch and even use. Secondly the nature of these diasporic objects will be addressed in the sense that the *waka* are the nodes for an active relationship with the homeland, but are equally important in building a home for itself through the relationship with people of the host country, and other people of the same diaspora. To conclude, this paper will question what it means for the museum to hold a diasporic object in terms of ownership, authority and access.

Biographical note

Fanny Wonu Veys is curator Oceania at the National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands. She has previously worked at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge (UK) (2004–2006, 2008–2009) and has held postdoctoral fellowships at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) (2006–2007) and at the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris) (2007–2008). She curated the *Mana Maori* exhibition (2010–2011) in Leiden and published a book with the same title. She co-curated a barkcloth exhibition *Tapa, Étoffes cosmiques d’Océanie* in Cahors (France). Her fieldwork sites include New Zealand (since 2000), Tonga (since 2003) and more recently Arnhem Land, Australia (since 2014). Her topics of interest and expertise include Pacific art and material culture, museums and cultures of collecting, Pacific musical instruments, Pacific textiles, and the significance of historical objects in a contemporary setting. Her most recent single author book is *Unwrapping Tongan Barkcloth: Encounters, Creativity and Female Agency* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

Maja Povrzanović Frykman, Professor of Ethnology, Malmö University, SE.

Title

Practices of migrant homing and objects of connection

Abstract

The paper argues that empirical attention should be given not only to diasporic objects as signals of belonging, but also to migrants' personal engagements with the materiality of transnational dwelling, notably to objects of everyday use. Carried, sent and received across national borders, such objects facilitate familiar material practices that in their turn help the migrants to feel at home in different locations. At the same time, they lend a sense of connection between migrants, those who stayed behind, and homes located in different countries.

Positioned at the intersection between ethnology, migration research and studies of material culture, the paper draws on Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller's analytical distinction between the ways of being and the ways of belonging, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus, and Ghassan Hage's discussion of hexis. It suggests that ethnographic research on mundane objects in the context of transnational dwelling can destabilise the ways migrants are thought of in terms of difference and thereby contribute to critical studies of migration.

Biographical note

Maja Povrzanović Frykman is professor of ethnology and teaches at the Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University, Sweden. She is also participating in research projects at Agderforskning, Kristiansand, Norway, teaching in the PhD programme in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Zagreb, and coordinating the IMISCOE research group TRANSMIG - Transnational Practices in Migration. Her main research interests are war-related experiences, refugee- and labour migration, diaspora, transnational practices, highly skilled migrants, place, ethnicity, affect, and material culture.

Professor Povrzanović Frykman is currently engaged in two projects involving refugees, entitled 'Exploring Integration as Emplaced Practice' (RFFAGDER, Agderforskning), and 'Museums as Arenas for Integration – New Perspectives and Methods of Inclusion' (AMIF, Malmö University). She recently

completed two projects on the well-being of highly skilled labour migrants in Sweden and Norway and co-edited a book on highly skilled migrants in Sweden, that will be published in 2018 by Arkiv förlag.

Her recent publications include the articles 'Food as a matter of being: experiential continuity in transnational lives' (in Food Parcels in International Migration: Intimate Connections, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and 'Conceptualising continuity: a material culture perspective on transnational social fields' (Ethnologia Fennica, 2016), as well as two co-edited volumes: Migration, Transnationalism and Development in South-East Europe and the Black Sea Region (Routledge, 2017) and Sensitive Objects: Affect and Material Culture (Nordic Academic Press, 2016; the E-version of the book can be downloaded from <https://doi.org/10.21525/kriterium.6>).

Laura Osorio, Museum of Cultural History at the University of Oslo, FES Junior Scholar, NO.

Title

Reconstructing home. Craft making among Wounaan migrants.

This presentation will explore craft making practices of displaced artisans from the Wounaan indigenous community in Colombia. It will look at their basket making with traditional materials as a practice that does not only allow them to make a living but, most importantly, it is the migration of traditional fibers and inks from their 'original' home in Chocó to the urban areas, like Bogotá, that allows them to reconnect with their 'original' home. By actively engaging with traditional materials and techniques, Wounaan artisans bring home to the present. Furthermore, this presentation will analyze the central role that migrating/diasporic traditional materials play in the Wounnan process of adaptation and the reconfiguration of their social networks, their cultural identity and their individual craft practice.

Biographical note

Laura Juliana Osorio Iregui is a PhD candidate at the Museum of Cultural History at the University of Oslo. Before that, she obtained her Master's degree in History of Art, Theory and Display at the University of Edinburgh in 2013. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Los Andes University in Bogotá, Colombia. Her research interests include heritage, material culture, craft and cultural policy. For the past 5 years she has been studying South American indigenous communities, both prehispanic and contemporary. Through her past work experience in museums, such as the Gold Museum in Colombia, she has had the privilege of working directly with living indigenous communities and their material culture.

Pim Westerkamp, Curator of South East Asia, National Museum of World Cultures, NL.

Title

Home is where the food is; objects. Longing and belonging.

Abstract

The focus in this paper is on objects from my family that are related to the preparation, serving and eating of Indonesian food. My family has migrated to and within Indonesia since 1803 and my parents settled in the Netherlands after Indonesian independence in 1945. Some of them are everyday objects, others are more precious ones, only used at specific occasions or celebrations. The objects are always referred to by Indonesian words, like the food itself. In the family the smell and taste of the food is passed down as well.

I will explore the complex relations between migration and material culture (Paul Basu) and the concept of home possession (Daniel Miller) to answer the questions of why and how these objects gave my family both a sense of (be)longing and home as strengthened the sense of displacement. The objects, the food and the display of it enabled the family to long for and connect to a distant place or time (Indonesia and the colonial time) and to include or exclude people, hence building social networks. The objects provide an air of nostalgia,

belonging or continuum depending on which (post)colonial-self needed to be performed.

Biographical note

Pim Westerkamp is curator of Southeast Asia at the National Museum of Worldcultures. He studied Indonesian Languages and Cultures in Leiden and Theatre Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He graduated in 1987 on a comparative study of Javanese dance masks. In 2001 he graduated again as an anthropologist with research in the life of young Muslims in Yogyakarta, Central Java. He started as a curator in 1991 in Museum Nusantara, and left to become the curator of Southeast Asia in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam in 2005. Since 2014 he works for the National Museum of Worldcultures in the same capacity.

Westerkamp is an expert on Indonesian (colonial and contemporary) history and material culture, he has published on Indonesian material culture and photography and is involved in ethical issues. He is currently working on his PhD research on collections in private and public spaces and the performance of (post)colonial selves.