

## Museums, Citizenship and Belonging in a Changing Europe

SWICH Mid-term Conference

November 23-25, 2016

Research Center for Material Culture

Steenstraat 1, Leiden (Museum Volkenkunde)

### Programme

Over the last few decades, museums, including ethnographic and world cultures museums, have been conscripted into national and transnational debates around questions of citizenship and belonging. Influenced by, among other factors, political, popular and academic debates about who belongs to the nation, what constitutes national culture/heritage and how this heritage has been (mis)represented, museums have responded in diverse ways, mobilising their collections to connect with differently identified publics within society.

In this two-day conference we want to look critically at some of these different responses by museums to the debate on citizenship and belonging. Focussed on ethnographic or world-cultural museums within diverse (so-called) multicultural polities, we are interested to think critically about how we might reposition these museums in the postcolonial moment when citizenship and belonging are in question.

### Rationale

Questions surrounding the museum's role in practices of citizenship, or in fostering feelings of belonging, have been ongoing for at least the last two decades. These questions have been most rigorously debated within polities regarded as multicultural, where the backlash against what some have posited as a naïve multiculturalism of the 1990s, or against an (allegedly overly) liberal politics of inclusion, has led to heated contestation over who can claim national belonging, what constitutes a national culture, and which heritage is considered national. Within these debates, citizenship is not simply about the legal rights or responsibilities accrued through being a citizen, but is often framed as racialised or culturalised (and increasingly religious) belonging or non-belonging to the nation. On this account some "cultures" are regarded as belonging to the nation, or to Europe, and others not.

These discussions have coincided with similarly important questions around the role of the colonial past in shaping contemporary politico-national configurations, and how this past has been included within or excluded from national histories.

While these debates have been ongoing amongst museums in general, with the UK, USA, and Canada leading these discussions, ethnographic museums (many now called world cultures museums) across Europe have, whether willingly or not, been deeply entangled in them. Sharing their genealogy with Europe's expansionist and colonialist projects, and originally constructed as spaces for the display of cultures deemed 'other' to and outside of Europe, today these museums are asked to become spaces of recognition for migrant and

post-migrant citizens, many of whom were formerly colonised peoples or their descendants now living in 'super-diverse' cities like London, Paris or Amsterdam.

Part of the response of ethnographic and world cultures museums has been to develop new modes of engagement with this diverse citizenry; oftentimes even where traditional national museums have failed. Additionally, they have been engaged with larger transnational stakeholders from originating nations or communities from where their collections come.

But how does the earlier history of ethnographic museums shape the possibilities, or signal points of caution, of becoming places of recognition for differently organised citizens? How should these museums address their colonial histories to better serve the (postcolonial) societies of which they are a part? Do these museums perpetuate forms of differentiated citizenship, as the 'appropriate' museum for the perpetual 'migrant', while other citizens are included in the national narrative (through national art or history museums, for example)?

What are the different theories of citizenship that can be useful to think about the role that ethnographic and world cultures museums can play, in the present and in the future? How might we understand these museums' role in fashioning feelings of belonging to the nation, and what role do heritage objects play in these feelings of belonging? Does the ongoing focus on migration and migratory belonging in ethnographic museums (for example, the ongoing desire by some to create migration museums) impact negatively on the ability of post-migrant citizens to truly belong? Or, conversely, do such museums represent a valuable pathway to envisioning migration histories as intrinsic to contemporary national polities? Finally, given rising xenophobia and the move towards the political right, what role can ethnographic museums play in fashioning more convivial polities, and what dilemmas do they face if taking on such in mission in this political moment?

Bringing critical academic work on citizenship and (the politics of) belonging together with ethnographic museums theory and practice, this two-day conference will explore these questions. We hope to not just look at how museums have responded to the demand of thinking their role differently in relation to changing notions of who is a citizen, but also to think critically about other practices that can challenge the growing rigidity of how we think belonging in the present.

**Day 1: Wednesday, November 23**

16:00 – 17:30

**Book Launch: The Return of Curiosity: What Museums are Good for in the Twenty-First Century – by Nicholas Thomas**

Excerpt: Over the last twenty years museums have proliferated, attracting new audiences and assuming new prominence in public life. The Return of Curiosity offers a fresh perspective on museums and what they may now be good for. Nicholas Thomas argues that what is special about museums are their collections, which are not just rich resources for reflection, but creative technologies that enable people to make new things in the present. Reflecting on art galleries, science and history institutions, and museums around the world, Thomas shows that in times marked by insecurity and increasing conflict, museums can help to sustain and enrich society. They stimulate a curiosity that is vital to understanding and negotiating the cosmopolitan but dangerous world we all now inhabit.

Welcome	Dr. Wayne Modest
The Return of the Curiosity	Prof. Dr. Nicholas Thomas (University of Cambridge)
Response	Prof. Peter Pels (Leiden University)

**Q & A**

**Day 2: Thursday, November 24**

09:30 – 10:00

Registration

10:00 - 10:10

Welcome: The National Museums of World Cultures	Stijn Schoonderwoerd General Director
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10:10 – 10:15

Sharing a World of Inclusion, Creativity and Heritage	Steven Engelsman
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10:15 – 10:30

Setting the Stage: Museums and the Question of Citizenship and Belonging in Contemporary Europe	Wayne Modest
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**10:30 – 11:30**

**Session 1: Museums, Colonialism and its Afterlives**

**1. The Nation-State, Autochthony and the Struggle over Difference**

– **Challenges for Ethnographic Musea**

Prof. Peter Geschiere (University of Amsterdam)

**2. Whiteness, alterity and the ethnographic museum**

Dr. Rolando Vázquez (UCR/ University of Utrecht)

Q&A

**11:30 – 12:00 Coffee Break**

**12:00 – 13:30**

**Session 2: Museums, Difference and the Politics of Emotions**

**3. What if I could take your place: Empathy, Emotions and Knowledge**

Lina Issa (Independent Artist)

**4. Bringing it home: rethinking the politics of belonging, sameness and difference in the ethnographic museum.**

Prof. Rhiannon Mason (University of Newcastle)

***Curatorial Conversation 1***

**Ethnographic Museums and the Colonial Past in the Present**

Dr. Claudia Augustat (Weltmuseum Wien) & Bruno Verbergt (Royal Museum for Central Africa)

Q&A

**13:30 – 14:30 Lunch**

**14:30 – 16:00**

**Session 3: Things Matter: Objects and the Politics of Post-Colonial Citizenship**

**5. Materialising Postcolonial Polities: Encounters with Things in the Ethnographic Museum**

Dr. Sandra H. Dudley (University of Leicester)

**6. Artistic Presentation: 100 MIGRATORY**

Monica L. Edmondson (independent artist)

**Curatorial Conversation 2**

**“We need to do something with Turks, and Islam”: A reflection on Islamic visual culture, heritage and citizenship in the National Museum of World Cultures**

Dr. Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University/National Museum of World Cultures, NL) & Mirjam Shatanawi (National Museum of World Cultures, NL); Michel Lee (Museums of World Culture, SE)

Q&A

**16:00 – 16:30 Coffee Break**

**16:30 – 18:30:**

**6<sup>th</sup> Annual Gerbrands Lecture**

**Hearing Heat: An Anthropocene Acoustemology**

Prof. Steven Feld, Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University

Bruno Latour suggests that even if poisoned, the anthropocene is a deep gift to anthropology, challenging the field to invent new approaches to citizenship and responsibility. This lecture takes up Latour’s challenge through acoustemology, (acoustic epistemology), the study of sound as a way of knowing. I present three stories entangling cicadas and humans, poetics and politics, vocal mediation and affect. The first story utilizes ethnographic field recordings to explore the significance of singing with cicadas in Papua New Guinea rainforest histories of eco-aesthetics and environmental havoc. The second story utilizes film soundtracks and installation sound art to explore cicadas as the traumatized voice of acoustic memory for post-nuclear Japan. The third story utilizes YouTube and ambient video art to explore cicadas and mytho-phonologos in ancient and contemporary Greece, listening equally to Plato’s Phaedrus and the rising mercury of austerity indignation. These three stories reveal how cicadas have sounded as bio-political archives, and how ethnographic, scientific, and art sound recordings can recompose culture and nature into what Donna Haraway calls “naturecultures” that acknowledge “companion species.”

**18:30 – 19:00 Reception follows**

**Day 3: Friday, November 25**

10:00 – 10:30

Registration

**10:30 – 12:30**

**Introduction – Day 3**

**7. Ethnographic Museums, Collaboration and Practices of Self- Representation**

Dr. Barbara Plankensteiner (Yale University Art Gallery)

**Session 4: Questioning Citizenship**

**8. Performative Citizenship: arts, politics, subjectivity**

Prof. Engin Isin (The Open University, UK)

**9. Europe the Game - thinking about representation, museums and European-ness**

Dr. Alana Jelinek (University of Cambridge)

***Curatorial Conversation 3***

**Ethnographic and World Cultures Museum and the politics of Inclusion/Exclusion**

Cécile Bründlmayer (Weltmuseum Wien) & Liza Swaving (National Museum of World Cultures, NL)

Q&A

**12:30 – 13:30 Lunch**

**13:30 – 15:30**

**Session 5: Museums, Multiculture and the Politics of Belonging**

**10. Swings and Roundabouts: Pluralism and the Politics of Change in Canada's National Museums**

Prof. Ruth Phillips (Carleton University)

**11. Is belonging still worth striving for? *Museums in the political cultural landscape of Israel.***

Dr. Judy Jaffe-Schagen (University of Amsterdam)

Q&A

**Curatorial Conversation 4****Global and/or Local - Museums as Spaces of Belonging**

Dr. Sandra Ferracuti (Linden-Museum Stuttgart), Nadja Haumberger (Weltmuseum Wien) &  
Dr. Bojana Rogelj Škafar (Slovenski Etnografski Muzej)

**15:30 – 16:00 Coffee Break**

**16:00 – 18:00 Film Screening**

J.C.ABBEY, GHANA'S PUPPETEER (56 minutes; in English, Ga, Twi, Ewe, and Fante, with English subtitles)

A Film by Steven Feld

This film explores an exceptional fifty-year artistic career, from Accra's streets to Ghana's villages to international TV. In fifteen delightful puppet shows, Mr. Abbey is joined by musicians Nii Noi Nortey and Nii Otoo Annan and filmmakers Nii Yemo Nunu and Steven Feld to chronicle Ghana's music since independence in 1957. The marionettes perform ethnic songs, dances and stories, but equally the sounds of highlife, Afro-jazz, Afro-rock, Afro-beat, reggae, and contemporary hiplife. The soundtrack includes historical documents from radio, TV and broadcast, and LP, as well as new compositions commissioned and performed to playback. This fifth feature in Feld's *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* series mixes styles of historical documentary and music video. Through the pleasures of performance it reveals the cosmopolitan politics that intertwine ethnic, traditional, national, and global musical styles and modes of belonging in Ghana today.