

## **Museum and Society special issue**

### ***Museum, Field, Colony: Collecting, displaying and governing people and things***

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#### **Introduction: New research on museums, anthropology and governmentality**

The papers selected for this special issue of *Museum and Society* have their beginnings in the workshop, 'Colonial Governmentalities', held in late October 2012 and hosted by the Institute of Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney, followed by the seminar 'Reassembling the material,' hosted by the Museum and Heritage Studies programmes at Victoria University of Wellington in early November. The stimulus for these events was the international research collaboration, 'Museum, Field, Metropolis, Colony: Practices of Social Governance funded by the Australian Research Council'<sup>1</sup>

A brief outline of this project is useful to situate this special issue. 'Museum, Field, Metropolis, Colony' examines conceptions of cultural difference and governance emerging from the changing relations between museum practices, broadly conceived, and the governance of metropolitan and colonial populations during the early development of anthropology's fieldwork phase. Comparative in approach, the project focuses on a series of case studies: the Torres Strait Expeditions and the influence of their team members, particularly Alfred Cort Haddon, in developing anthropology in Britain and the Commonwealth as a university discipline and an administrative science; Baldwin Spencer's and Frank Gillen's fieldwork in Central Australia and Spencer's roles as director of the Museum of Victoria and as Protector of Aborigines; Franz Boas' involvement in the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, his curatorial work at the American Museum of Natural History, and his influence on the early development of multiculturalism in the United States; Paul Rivet's and Georges Henri Rivière's roles in the establishment of the *Musée de l'Homme* and the *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires* and the relationship of French ethnology to the study and display of provincial folklore and to the administration of Indo-China; Mass-Observation and the importance of that project's 'Anthropology at Home' in the development of new forms of cultural governance in the United Kingdom; and Māori and Polynesian ethnology as it developed under the auspices of New Zealand museums, particularly Wellington's Dominion Museum and Dunedin's Otago Museum, and how that knowledge was implicated in that nation's native policies and the administration of its Pacific dependencies.

Bringing together an international group of researchers that included the Project team and invited participants, the workshop in Sydney provided the occasion to share work that addressed the project aims.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the event's intention was to explore the implications of different kinds of knowledge associated with practices of collecting—anthropology, archaeology, folklore studies, demography—in apparatuses of rule in various late nineteenth, early twentieth century colonial contexts. To this end participants were invited to examine questions of colonial governmentalities by investigating the ways in which practices of collecting cultures were connected with those targeting the conduct of colonial subjects and populations.

The links between these historical anthropological and museological practices and their alignments with contemporary settler-indigenous relations are also a concern of the project. In the Wellington seminar, held on Te Herenga Waka marae at Victoria University, the discussion focused on the past/present strand of the wider project and the question of indigenous agency in fieldwork, museum collections and government policy. As well as historical and theoretical considerations, speakers also considered the implications of the museum-field-governance assemblage for current museum practice and the ways in which indigenous people today are reshaping heritage organisations from the outside and inside. Speakers from the Australian Museum, Te Papa, the National Library and other organizations demonstrated that indigenous

participation and collaboration was and is a strong feature of Maori and Aboriginal interaction with cultural institutions in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

This Special Issue: *Museum, Field, Colony: Collecting, displaying and governing people and things* highlights the need to rethink the relations between museums, colonialism and fieldwork anthropology. It brings together a selection of the papers from these two events, revised and developed since their presentation, which focus on several of the historical and theoretical aims of the Project. In addition to sharing a focus on how museum collection and exhibition become entwined in relations of colonial government, these papers also share a post-Deleuzian analytical orientation: each is concerned to investigate certain socio-technical arrangements or 'anthropological assemblages' through which relations of government come to be composed, drawing on work by Foucault (2011), Latour (2005), Callon (2005), DeLanda (2006) and so on.

The rationale for this selection of papers can be elaborated through a brief review of this literature, which we believe has much to offer museum studies. The body of writing applying a Foucaultian analytics of government to colonial situations is now a rich and well-advanced one (Scott 1995; Stoler 1995; Bennett 2004; Legg 2007; Petterson 2012). A significant contribution to this literature has been investigations of the role of anthropology in colonial government (Thomas 1994; Pels 1997; Pels and Salemink 1999) and in colonial museums (Barringer and Flynn 1998; Henare 2005; MacKenzie 2009). However, the recent 'material turn' informed by material culture studies, assemblage theory and actor network theory has led many to qualify and refine these arguments (Gosden, Larson and Petch 2007; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Byrne et al 2011). In particular, this turn has insisted greater attention be paid to the technologies, techniques and devices through which relations of knowledge and power are composed, and also demanded more fine-grained investigations that trace the socio-technical assemblages or *agencements* in which particular expert knowledges are implicated and specific forms of authority are exercised (Bennett 2009; Bennett and Healy 2011; Dias 2010; also see Otter 2007). Other writing has called for more work on the agency of visitors, staff, and native and tribal peoples in the processes of museum collecting and display (Thomas 1999; Longair and McAleer 2012; Harrison, Byrne and Clarke 2013).

In museum studies and related fields, our sense is that the now-classic postcolonial critique of colonial museums and collecting is near exhaustion, and scholarship requires fresh frameworks and approaches in order to move beyond a reductionist analysis of this topic and to open up new angles on the two-way encounter of coloniser and colonised, objects and subjects, human and non-human. Responding to this situation, the publications from our project push scholarship into new areas of enquiry, as seen in March 2014 with a special issue of the journal *History and Anthropology* devoted to 'Anthropology, Collecting and Colonial Governmentalities' (Bennett, Dibley and Harrison 2014) and the book from the project *Collecting, Ordering, Governing: Anthropology and Liberal Government* (forthcoming 2016). Likewise, this Special Issue aims to expand and refine the literature of museum studies by drawing on the emerging writing mentioned above, further interrogating colonial governmentality through a new materialist optic to investigate how collecting practices are enmeshed in networks encompassing complex socio-technical relations involving both human and non-human actants. This makes a significant contribution to scholarship by throwing new light on museums, collecting, display and their connections with colonisation and governmentality (see also Bennett, 2013).

The articles brought together here illuminate the connections between museums, fieldwork anthropology and colonial governance by following the ways in which museums enable the 'collecting, displaying and governing' of both 'things and people' in the early twentieth century. A diverse range of scholars look at case studies in different countries, ranging from senior academics to new emerging scholars, from Europe to the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. In addition, the contents include assertive indigenous voices, rare in the international literature, which put the view from the 'other side' of the ethnographic encounter, both historically and in the present. Together these articles and plenary offer an up to date review of recent research, and importantly a solid historical dimension as well as a robust and frank discussion of the implications for contemporary museum practice.

In the first article 'From French Indochina to Paris and back again', Nélia Dias surveys the ethnographic missions carried out by the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and the

École Française d'Extrême Orient from 1900 to the 1930s, exploring the links to the network of local collectors and the plans for an ethnological museum at Dalat in what is now Vietnam. She argues that 'the circulation of objects, and the information related to those objects, conceives both the metropole and the colony as sites for the production of ethnological knowledge.' In the next article, Ben Dibley and Michelle Kelly consider quite a different mode of museological practice and form of anthropology 'at home', Mass Observation in the UK over the period 1939–41. They investigate the ways in which MO's collecting practices were 'recomposed through its research into civilian morale, and linked up with national centres of calculation, in particular the Ministry of Information'.

Julie Thorpe then shifts the focus to Europe, and the Austrian Museum for Folk Culture established in 1895 in Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Contending that the museum continued to project 'imperial memory' onto a post-imperial pan-European map, she traces the museum's exhibitions up to the rise of German nationalism in 1925. In the following article, a very different exhibition history is reviewed at the American Museum of Natural History, 1895–1945. This detailed analysis of 'Anthropological Regionalism' by

Ira Jacknis includes displays by Franz Boas and his successors, which sought to research, collect, and display Americanist subjects in the face of a growing emphasis on Old World cultures. In doing so, Jacknis shows changes in the 'transvaluation of objects, the importance of networks, institutional competition, and the role of disciplinary definitions.'

The last two articles and the plenary concern themselves with the museum collections and display of indigenous cultures in the South Pacific. First Paul Turnbull explores the activities of several Australian museums between 1860 and 1914 in connection with human remains, namely the Australian Museum in Sydney, the Queensland Museum in Brisbane, and the Victorian Museum in Melbourne. He suggests that the collecting, ordering, interpretation and exhibition of 'the Aboriginal Australian bodily dead' by museum staff and associated collectors and scientists served to 'imagine human evolutionary history' and preserve a gap between settler and indigenous people. Second, Fiona Cameron and Conal McCarthy employ the notion of 'anthropological assemblages' to investigate a related but very different relationship between native and nation across the Tasman Sea in New Zealand. Tracing associations circulating in the 1920s and 1930s between the Dominion Museum, the Otago Museum, government Native policy and tribal preservation efforts, they identify two key assemblages: ethnologist HD Skinner's 'culture areas' and 'cultural adaptation' employed by Māori intellectuals Āpirana Ngata and Peter Buck. 'Through these contrasting collecting, fieldwork and ordering regimes,' they argue, 'different views of Māori as liberal subjects emerged to articulate ways the Indigenous population could enter into the cultural life of the emerging nation.'

Finally in the plenary our attention turns to the contemporary legacy of the historical relations described in the articles, in particular the views of Māori heritage professionals Arapata Hakiwai from Te Papa and Paul Diamond from the National Library on the salience of the past in the present. In the ARC-funded project which generated this research, the aim was always to explore a past/present strand that would identify the bearing of those historical and comparative components of the project on the relations between museums and the cultural policies and politics of difference in contemporary post-settler nations such as Australia and New Zealand. The last phase of the research involved the dissemination and publication of the findings, and dialogues with relevant stakeholders and institutions to explore the implications for policies and practices concerning the relations between museums, Indigenous cultures and questions of cultural difference more generally. The plenary is an example of this ongoing engagement, which has continued to develop through related research projects and publications (Hakiwai, McCarthy and Schorch forthcoming 2015).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'Museum, Field, Metropolis, Colony: Practices of Social Governance; is an Australian Research Council Discovery project (Award Number DP110103776). The project was awarded to Tony Bennett (convenor) and Fiona Cameron in the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney as Chief Investigators, and to Nélia Dias (University of Lisbon), Rodney Harrison (University College London), Ira Jacknis (University of California, Berkeley), and Conal McCarthy (Victoria University of Wellington) as International Partner Investigators. Ben Dibley was the Research Fellow appointed to the project. The project was also supported by research assistance from Michelle Kelly. For an overview of this project see [http://www.uws.edu.au/ics/research/projects/museum\\_field\\_metropolis\\_colony](http://www.uws.edu.au/ics/research/projects/museum_field_metropolis_colony).
- <sup>2</sup> The invited participants were Philip Batty (Melbourne Museum), Elizabeth Edwards (Durham University), Henrika Kuklick, (University of Pennsylvania), Tim Rowse (University of Western Sydney), Paul Tapsell (University of Otago), Julie Thorpe (University of Western Sydney) and Paul Turnbull (University of Queensland).
- <sup>3</sup> The seminar and conversation included input from indigenous scholars Phil Gordon (Australian Museum), Dion Peita (Tainui/Australian Museum), Paul Tapsell (Te Arawa/Otago University), Arapata Hakiwai (Ngāti Kahungunu/Te Papa), Paul Diamond (Ngāti Haua/National Library) and Te Ripowai Higgens (Tūhoe/Victoria University).

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