

Title: Anthropology's legacy in the museum

Bennett, Tony, Fiona Cameron, Nélia Dias,  
Ben Dibley, Rodney Harrison, Ira Jacknis,  
Ira and Conal McCarthy  
*Collecting, ordering, governing:  
anthropology, museums, and liberal government.*  
Duke University Press.

Bonshek, Elizabeth.  
*Tikopia collected:  
Raymond Firth and the creation  
of Solomon Island cultural heritage.*  
Canyon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston.

The practice of anthropology has always involved the collecting – of people, objects, oral history, statistics, photographs, film, and more -- although the way that these collections were made and have been dealt with has changed throughout the discipline's history. Materials classified as ethnographic lie at the discipline's foundation and were essential in building the theoretical perspectives on race and technology that reflected the collectors' interests. During anthropology's 'museum age' (1860-1920), knowledge was produced in the museum rather than in the field and was modelled on the idea of salvage. From the 1920s onwards both the practice of ethnographic collecting and academic interest in the topic decreased as artefacts began to occupy a less prominent place in anthropology and ethnography. In the era of functionalist anthropology, the focus was on 'collecting' culture in its totality during extended periods of fieldwork and artefacts lost the key position they had once held in the discipline. Since the material 'turn' in the 1980s, there has been a renewed anthropological interest in collections as anthropology has developed an increasing, self-reflective interest in its own history, in which collections had played a key role. The presence of ethnographic collections in museums began to be critically questioned, leading to debates about ownership as well as to collaborations between museums and host communities. Attempts to decolonise the (anthropology) museum are ongoing (Lonetree 2012).

The books under review focus on the period when armchair anthropology was critiqued, and anthropology moved away from being a museum-based practice to focus on fieldwork. Both books complicate and moderate the complete break from museums by showing their continuing importance and the enduring legacy of earlier intellectual frameworks. They each focus on collections assembled during fieldwork; the (institutional) factors that influenced the collecting processes; the networks formed; and the way collections were classified and deployed once in the museum. The point of departure for these monographs is the perspective that collecting objects in the field and their modification within museums owe as much to wider social attitudes, intellectual debates, and museum politics as they do to the agency of collectors and Indigenous people.

*Collecting, ordering, governing* is a collaboratively authored work by Tony Bennett, Fiona Cameron, Nélia Dias, Ben Dibley, Rodney Harrison, Ira Jacknis, Ira and Conal McCarthy, and focuses on the relationship between anthropological fieldwork, museum practices, and governance. The collective analysis, with none of the chapters attributed to individual authors, is placed at the ‘intersections of museum studies and the history of anthropology’ (p. 1). The chapters cover case studies ranging from the Torres Strait Island expedition (1898-1899); Baldwin Spencer and John Hubert Plunkett Murray’s fieldwork in Australian territories (Northern Territory and Papua in 1900-1920s); a project of Mass-Observation in Britain (1930s-1940s); Clark Wissler’s extension of Franz Boas’ work at the American Museum of Natural History, and the influence of the Boasian culture concept on the development of American assimilationist policies in the 1930s and 1940s; the museums and individuals that produced the concept of ‘The Maori as he was’ (Aotearoa New Zealand, 1890-1940); and the Musée de l’Homme’s impact on displays of Indochina (France and Vietnam, 1920s-1930s).

The ambitious range of case studies and their broad time span is impressive and draws on a vast range of resources, making the essays both scholarly and relevant. This wide-ranging

coverage enables comparisons across national boundaries, for example, as in the influence of the Boasian culture concept on exhibition practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The case studies show the entanglements between the discipline of anthropology, the creation of its museums and the production of knowledge associated with colonial agendas and agencies. While the focus is on anthropology, the issue of colonial power is ever-present. Some of the ethnographic collections under discussion may not be colonial in the narrow sense of having been acquired by colonial officers, yet they were enmeshed within what Benoît de L'Estoile (2008) terms colonial relations.

By including a chapter on the project of Mass-Observation in Britain, the discussion aims to incorporate 'anthropology at home' (p. 89). While this case study might show the influence of governance, it feels out of place as it is the museum, rather than general 'centres of calculation' (p. 25), that binds the other chapters together and strengthens the overall argument. As an added bonus, the discussion throughout the volume is well-illustrated with images that are accompanied by long, highly informative captions, which almost provide a PowerPoint lecture. Overall, *Collecting, ordering, governing* expands the notion of the museum phase of anthropology as it demonstrates how anthropology and the museum remained linked in the early twentieth century.

With its various chapters drawing on recent scholarly concepts such as post-Deleuzian *agencements*, Latourian centres of calculation, and Foucauldian liberal government, this is a book aimed at scholars with prior knowledge, for whom the dense theoretical framework combined with rich, detailed case studies will prove stimulating. While many of these theoretical concepts were born out of the necessity to encompass all the communities under study, the emphasis is still mainly on the collectors and institutions. Unfortunately, we do not meet many Indigenous agents in the book, apart from in the chapter on Aotearoa New Zealand.

By contrast, acknowledging Indigenous agency in the collecting process is the main focus of *Tikopia collected*. Elizabeth Bonshek focuses on the 641 objects in the Australian Museum collected by Raymond Firth during fieldwork in Tikopia in 1928, specifically examining how the objects became transformed into ethnographic objects and cultural heritage. As such, the monograph follows the social life of the collection. As one of Malinowski's students and thus influenced by functionalism, Firth considered the artefacts he collected to be a small part of a larger 'scientific anthropological record' (p. 27) and as 'specimens of indigenous craft' (p. 138). He did not necessarily focus on the objects themselves but on 'the relations between individuals' (p. 35). As a result, he recorded information on the exchanges with a range of individuals and we now have records of a large number of donors or vendors. We know when things were acquired and what was given in exchange. This rich level of detail, which was unusual at the time, has been compiled in the book's appendices. Bonshek shows that for Tikopians these things were a way of establishing relationships and of influencing their representation, while also acknowledging that Tikopian society was changing. She documents, for instance, how the introduction of Christianity rendered certain objects alienable.

In comparison with *Collecting, ordering, governing*, the book is less theoretical in focus and is therefore accessible to undergraduate students with an interest in an anthropological perspective of collecting cultural heritage. With chapters on the historic encounters between Tikopians and Europeans, followed by chapters on fakatino or embodiments of atua (translated as gods in the book), and on koroa or valued property, the focus then moves to the museum life of the collection. After Firth revisited Tikopia in 1966 he discussed the Tikopian concepts of a 'treasure place' or museum-like setting. By then the status of sacred objects had changed as they had become 'heritage' (p. 119). This was also the case for the Firth collection which moved from the anthropology department at Sydney University to Canberra, before being

moved back to Sydney. While Firth supported a repatriation request in the 1970s, this failed, and the collection has remained in the Australian Museum.

*Tikopia collected* shows how collections are the result of a multitude of relationships that were formed through them. However, while Bonshek gives us a detailed case study, the Firth collection itself could have been explored even more. Her analysis is mostly limited to objects of special status, but the valuable ‘Specimen List’ in the appendix shows that there are also food hooks, sinnet beaters, adze heads, tattooing implements, and fans among other things, which could have told us even more about the people behind the collection in the past as well as the present. That said, learning what modern Tikopians think of the collection is an inspiring part of the volume.

Both books show that museum collections continue to form the core of constantly renewing social relationships and knowledge production. Whether they are seen as networks (Latour 2005), assemblages (Bennett 2010), or meshworks (Ingold 2011), museum collections are more than sets of static, decontextualised objects. More to the point: whatever we might think of ethnographic collections being in the museum, it is how we deal with them now that matters. This includes providing nuanced assessments of historical processes and giving voice to the various parties involved in encounters. *Collecting, ordering, governing* and *Tikopia collected* provide such insights, while documenting how collections were assembled, who was involved, and how things were displayed and deployed to promote particular agendas. Both books show the potential involved when museum collections are no longer treated as historical specimens but as contemporary agents that form the foundation for new and collaborative engagements. These books should therefore be read by students and scholars with an interest in anthropology, material culture, museum studies and cultural heritage.

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## References

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