



Ethnographic Returns Conference 2020

15-17 June 2020

Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden

Call for Papers

We are happy to announce the conference ***Ethnographic returns: The role of the anthropologist and ethnography in memory and heritage work***, which will take place at the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, 15-17 June 2020.

This conference invites participants to explore the many forms of – and lack of – returns of ethnography and anthropological knowledge in processes related to memory and heritage production. How is ethnographic knowledge reoccurring and reappearing, repeating itself in new iterations, as tradition, as legacy, as heritage? Playing on economic notions of return as yield, how does the value of ethnographic knowledge shift with the passing of time, and for whom? Last, to what extent has awareness of these dynamics, e.g. through collaboration and activism, resulted in a transformation of ethnography as a research method?

Ethnography is a deeply entangled social practice, connecting and entwining people and their worlds through exchanges in the present and over time. The moment of fieldwork plays a significant role in establishing and developing these relations, and much of the concern of Anthropology is focused on this moment. However, as with any social practice, relations and exchanges engendered through fieldwork tend to extend in time. They are intertwined with prior structures and events and linger on in evolving situations and contexts. The exchanges between the ethnographer (and by extension, the anthropological community) and interlocutors (the society being studied) are like short conversations in the middle of long dialogues involving other persons and other contexts. These conversations are fundamentally about knowledge, power and understanding. As a mode of learning and knowing about human nature and diversity, the practice of ethnography engages in exchanges in formalized and structured ways in order to produce knowledge. As has forcefully been made clear, such exchanges are not innocent to power, hierarchy and exploitation. But ethnographic exchanges also unfold in unpredictable and divergent ways, something especially true in the *longue durée*. Over time, the field may speak back; knowledge and concepts may become reappropriated and hierarchies may be subverted. With new technologies, the rediscovery and reinterpretation of previous anthropological encounters has become even easier, and once dominant narratives may be questioned, or harnessed to new projects. Ethnographic practice and knowledge return as memory, history, and heritage.

The focus of this conference, ethnographic returns, serves as a starting point for disentangling the complex and contingent ways that people, communities and worlds, through ethnographic practice, become entangled and implicated in one another over time. Of special interest are exchanges and returns involving ethnographic practice and knowledge as memory, history and heritage, including their physical manifestation in museum artefacts and exhibitions. How do ethnographic returns appear as echoes of the past, how do they direct voices in the present and how do they implicate conversations with the future?

We welcome contributions that in one way or another explore how active ethnographic engagement, in the past or present, intersects with memory or heritage processes. Potential themes include but are not limited to case studies and/or theoretical contributions on the following topics:

- How past or present ethnographic work activates, conditions and informs memory and heritage processes inside and outside the traditional institutions dedicated to heritage making. This can include initiatives which actively engage and return to the past for explicit heritage purposes as well as cases in which the past appears and surfaces in the present unannounced.
- The history of ethnography and its authorizing role in heritage making processes in dialogue with present perspectives, interpretations and critiques expressed by e.g. migrants, intellectuals and activists, who identify themselves with communities and people historically observed and “ethnographized” by the discipline.
- Ethnographic returns as yield: who benefits and how in terms of political economy, recognition, rights
- The return of (and refusal to return) ethnographic objects and visual material as a contemporary form of engagement with anthropological practices of the past (e.g. the colonial era) and its legacies in the present.
- Time, memory and the individual anthropologist: returns to and of “the field”
- Ethnography as a research method in the 21st century and the extent to which has been transformed through its intersections with activism, reflexivity, collaboration and problem solving
- The time dimension of anthropological knowledge production – conditions, contexts, consequences

Please submit a presentation title, short abstract (200 words), and your name and affiliation to reheritage@globalstudies.gu.se on or before February 28, 2020.

Participation fee: SEK800 (approx. 80 € + VAT if applicable).

The conference is a collaboration between The Centre for Critical Heritage Studies and the School of Global Studies, both at the University of Gothenburg, and the Museums of World Culture.

Web page: <https://globalstudies.gu.se/english/cooperation/conferences/ethnographic-returns-conference-2020>

Organising committee: Staffan Appelgren, Michael Barrett, Anna Bohlin, Anne Gustavsson, Carolina Valente Cardoso (conference organiser)



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