Material Culture in Transit
International Workshop

Workshop Global Studies | GS
Organizers: Zainabu Jallo (University of Bern) and Samuel Bachmann (Bernisches Historisches Museum)
Date: Th, March 19, 2020, 10.00 am – 5 pm
Fr, March 20, 2020, 9.30 am – 5.15 pm
Room: Th, Orientalischer-Saal, Bernisches Historisches Museum, Helvetiaplatz 5
Fr, Kuppelraum, University of Bern, Hochschulstrasse 4
ECTS: 1
Registration: By March 19, 2020 to virginia.holzer@cgs.unibe.ch and in KSL: https://www.ksl.unibe.ch/ (Login with UniBe-Account, search by title)

Workshop Contents and Objectives

This international conference examines transnational trajectories of material culture and focuses on the various ways in which mobility reshapes an artefact’s immaterial characteristics. It discusses the processes of disbanding material heritage from its original context and investigates the implications for the transformation of meanings.
Intangible features of material culture are diverse and range from historical, cultural, political to legal and fiscal attributes. Transferred artefacts are susceptible to change in many different respects and could eventually transform the narratives and politics of collective memory and identity they were intended to give evidence for. On the other hand, it is often characteristic for transferred artefacts to infuse other cultures with what is foreign to them and also have the propensity to influence perceptions and relationships between cultures.

The conference addresses an interdisciplinary audience with perspectives on the question “what exactly is transformed when artefacts travel?”. Artefact biographies and the consequences of their mutations on heritage narratives and identity politics, therefore, are the central interest of the conference.

Key Questions:

- What are the various impacts of transnational mobility of material culture on patterns of identity construction?
- In what ways were meanings of specific artefacts altered via transfer from collection points to museums, and to what degree did such transfers retain, expunge, misstate or fabricate its associations with their origins?
- What newer ways of studying objects in the museum nurture the concept of studying human societies?
- What connections exist between what we consider national or ethnic cultural artefacts and their places of origin?
- How have the consideration of the sites of origin of artefacts illustrated the mechanisms by which they have been valued and classified?
- How can the transformed meanings of relocated material heritage be explained alongside its representation history in exhibitions and publications?

Keynote speakers:

Prof. Dr. Nicholas Thomas (University of Cambridge)
Dr. Boris Wastiau (Musée d’ethnographie de Genève)
Prof. Dr. Anna Schmid (Museum der Kulturen Basel)