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# DCNtR Debate

## The Gender of Ethnographic Collecting




It has long been accepted that colonialism had a distinctive epistemic dimension, which was upheld by disciplines such as social anthropology and other knowledge-making projects. Under this colonial episteme, people and human experiences were hierarchically classified according to racial categories and ethnography and ethnographic collecting were key components in these processes. However, the colonial regime did not only rely on race as an organising category, but also on gender.

There is now a growing literature on how many aspects of colonialism and its discursive techniques were gendered male. Still, not much analysis has been done in regards to how ethnographic collecting and its resultant knowledges were and continue to be gendered. Histories of collecting have usually been limited to a generalised engagement with the relationship of collector and subject, ignoring gender and how it may impact the results of these knowledge-making projects.

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Taking this general observation as a starting point, we propose an engagement with ethnographic collecting and ethnographic museums that takes gender as its central analytical category. We invite reflections on questions which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is the relationship between ethnographic collecting, gender, and imperialism? Is there an imperial masculinity specific to ethnographic collecting?
- How far can ethnographic collecting be understood to be a gendered activity and in what ways can the resulting collections and knowledges be understood as gendered? What codes and landscapes are used in these kinds of knowledge productions?
- What is the relationship between the gender of the collector and that of those collected from?
- Museums & Gendered Collections:
    - In how far do styles of display highlight/occlude/sustain the gendered histories of collections? How can new museologies challenge these?
    - Can specific modes of exhibitions themselves be understood as gendered?
    - What about the (assumed) gender of visitors?
- What are the methodological considerations/implications for a gendered approach to the study of histories of ethnographic collections?

Abstract submissions of **150 words** may be sent to Carl.Deussen@stadt-koeln.de no later than **1 April 2021**.

In case your contribution is accepted, we expect to receive full position papers of not more than **1000 words** by **1 May 2021**.

The accepted papers will be published on the DCNtR blog. Additionally, all contributors will be invited to a private workshop dedicate to further discussion, held via Zoom on **14 May 2021**.

**Conveners**

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**Mary Mbewe, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town**

**Carl Deussen, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne**