

The Future of Anthropology's Archival Knowledge: An International Reassessment (FAAKIR)

Report on a Workshop held at the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig, May 10–11th 2011, by the Co-Organisers Dr Daniel J. Rycroft (University of East Anglia) and Katja Müller (GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig)

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Overview of the Workshop

The workshop on “The Future of Anthropology's Archival Knowledge: an International Reassessment” (FAAKIR) aimed to develop opportunities for collaboration between anthropologists, historians, curators and archivists. It was held to generate ideas, identify possibilities and begin team-building for a full-scale research and exhibition project.

FAAKIR focused on the visual archives of three European researchers (Egon von Eickstedt, Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf and William Archer), produced in India in the 1920s–1940s. These three researchers have approached the representational field in individually distinctive ways, but all at a time when questions of “aboriginality” and indigeneity were rigorously contested between colonialists and nationalists.

The workshop and its participants intended to reassess the participation of Eickstedt, Furer-Haimendorf and Archer in the production of visual, textual and material knowledge pertaining to the Adivasis (tribals/indigenous people)—who comprise almost one tenth of India's population. Each archive is historically engaging, given the researchers' divergent interpretations in the contemporary fields of ethnology, ethnography, physical anthropology, administration and welfare and their particular engagements with visual technologies.

One core theme of the workshop concerned the digital repatriation of the visual archives. Because these archives focus on various Adivasi minority peoples, the team began to formulate intellectual, ethical and practical approaches that in future decades would enable these archives to become widely available and meaningful for Adivasis as well as for historical and anthropological researchers. Beyond this, the workshop addressed the question of how the archival material and the topics raised through the project could become relevant to museum visitors, both in India and in Europe, and to Indigenous peoples worldwide.

The workshop concluded that there is an urgent need for a full-scale re-thinking of museum ethics, questioning how anthropological knowledge and anthropological

networks (considered both historically and in contemporary terms) must now be approached

- (a) with the intellectual, curatorial and organisational involvement of Adivasi representatives;
- (b) with a shared commitment to understanding the tensions that define colonial, national and indigenous heritage, as well as their inter-relations; and
- (c) with a vision that the digital transmission of archival materials should build mutual and sustainable dialogues—between museum curators and the various stakeholders and publics involved—on matters of interpretation, preservation and display.

The requirement that academic, cultural and social institutions recognise this agenda, as well as its urgency, may be taken as characteristic of the shared vision of the workshop's participants. Beyond this, it also characterises the integrity of the full-scale project that will be generated out of the workshop as an initial meeting.

The participants expressed the need for our initiative to develop into a multi-faceted arts and heritage movement, centring on Adivasi experiences in a pan-Indian context. As such, we recognise that “the archive” with which we are working will undergo transformation as it assumes a more prominent location in contemporary culture, and as it is addressed in accordance with contingent ethical issues. These may pertain to museological, environmental, socio-political, genealogical, commemorative, etc. concerns and should provide engaging opportunities for intercultural dialogues, between and across the different value-systems that define global, national and Indigenous communities. As an archive-in-the-making, our initiative will contribute to the creation of new “identity formations,” as people weave elements of it into their lives, their memories and their cosmologies. It is this new repatriated archive that participants will intend to work with, individually and in cooperation with each other. We aim to generate probing research agendas by revisiting those sites of cultural heritage and social memory that have remained hidden until our source archives acquired a public presence. The multi-sited exhibitions that we have begun to conceptualise will also relate to this archive-in-the-making, and become expressive of the intercultural journeys, mediations and translations that define indigenous, anthropological and archival knowledge, as well as their intersections and their futures. Following the workshop, participants agreed to commit their ideas and plans for inter-institutional collaboration to a full-scale project to be led by Dr Rycroft.

Summary of Panels

Representatives of each of the six main project partners (GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde, University of East Anglia, School of Oriental and African Studies, Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, Bhasha Research and Publication Center, Campaign for Indigenous Rights and Identity in India) delivered presentations on Day 1 of the workshop. A thematic introduction by Dr Rycroft and an evening lecture by Prof Devy framed the various panels. Dr Rycroft's introduction covered the main points of the workshop by referring to the sub-section of the FAAKIR proposal entitled “Moving

between archives, museums and ethnographies.” He also alerted the team to think, at the project's inception, about its resonance and applicability beyond India, and suggested that participants could consider how the project

1. will facilitate a public re-evaluation of anthropological knowledge and, in a practical sense, prompt anthropology's disciplinary variations to coexist (i. e. historical, visual, ethnographic, museological, etc.)
2. will contribute to an understanding of how multi-sited knowledge systems may be analysed, through a re-visiting of sites of memory contained in the archive and through the digital dissemination of these sites
3. will generate new patterns of Indigenous (Adivasi) self-understanding in India and, by establishing new heritage practices, also provide opportunities for a qualitative assessment of indigenous futures world-wide
4. should address the institutional legacies of “race”, racism and various “racial” formations in India and Europe, by contributing to an ongoing international reassessment of colonial documentary practices and by defining an intercultural ethical framework for archival interpretation
5. should direct curatorial and public attentiveness towards archive-related displays that are not India-specific, yet ones that touch on related aspects of imperial and post-imperial history.

Prof Devy's lecture on “Museums and society” reflected on the subjugation of pre-colonial forms of thinking and expression in modern India and generated a series of provocations relating to the need for museum curators to re-think key concepts such as “the museum”, “knowledge”, and “repatriation”. He provided personal and shared insights into why contemporary India may be perceived as a politico-cultural terrain that continues wrongly to privilege text-based understandings at the expense of “voice” and orality, i. e. *Bhasha*. He generated an overview of his work as founder and director of the Museum of Voice and of the Adivasi Academy in Gujarat, India. He revealed how representatives of Adivasis and “De-notified Tribes” are becoming closely involved in a movement to reclaim linguistic knowledge. He gave his listeners a chance to reflect on the potential role that eighteen “tribal research centres” spread across India might play in our project. Organisational responsibility for these formerly state-owned institutions, originally belonging to the Anthropological Survey of India, has recently shifted to the Museum of Voice. This presents a real opportunity for a collective and integrated re-conceptualisation of issues pertaining to Adivasi cultural identities and histories. Prof Devy envisaged that our project could mark a watershed, in terms of the national and international recognition of Adivasi and Indigenous heritage. He concurred with the organisers' overall idea that a shift in thinking and practice is required. The broad purpose of the project is to enable the anthropological archive to become a site of reconciliation, as well as a site of memory.

During Day 1, full deliberations were held on the three anthropological archives that will provide our primary source materials. These are held at the Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen (Dresden and Leipzig), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, University of London) and the Museum of Archaeology and

Anthropology (University of Cambridge). The debates were led by Ms Krebs, Dr Blackburn and Dr Elliott, respectively, with additional contributions from Dr Icke-Schwalbe, Dr Mallebrein and Ms Müller (panel Eickstedt), Dr Joshi (panel Haimendorf) and Dr Carrin (panel Archer). These were followed by a roundtable discussion, chaired by Mr Tudu, a founding member of the Campaign for Indigenous Rights and Identity in India and former national coordinator for the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. The points raised during these discussions were honed during Day 2 of the workshop that, in the first instance, was comprised of a roundtable discussion and a film-screening of ethnographic work produced by Mr Killius that prompted further exchanges on Adivasi aesthetics, sound archives and ethical documentation. The participants were then encouraged to think in practical and imaginative ways about the shape of the project, and three small focus groups were convened to address three potential areas: (a) approaches to exhibitions; (b) visual practices and dissemination; (c) academic and social conferencing. Each group was also requested to consider how the project should conceptualise 'heritage', given the term's multifaceted nature and the complexity both of its translation, between specific historical moments, and of its cross-cultural interpretation. We intended that these focus groups would provide the necessary impetus for the final phase, 'Planning for the wider network and modes of international collaboration'.

Ways Forward

The workshop co-organisers envisage that the full-scale project that results from our meeting should be managed in three clear phases, as a way of defining, testing and implementing approaches and topics that are both international and inter-local in scope and relevance. The main project partners have been encouraged to think precisely how they will relate to each other through these phases, and how they will work with individuals and organisations, that were not represented at our first meeting. The participation of such groups (heritage professionals, artists, filmmakers, storytellers, educationalists, public relations experts, etc.) will ensure that the project becomes as effective as possible, in terms of resonating across Adivasi societies and in non-Indian contexts. Such contributions will help to ascertain the value of re-interpreting "the archive" to the various publics, whose cultural identities are associated with it, including those of the anthropologist and of the "dominant" cultures more generally.

The project has the potential to benefit wide-ranging communities: those whose cultural heritage is documented in the archive; those whose curatorship of Adivasi material culture is limited by the inaccessibility of the archive; those who are aiming to promote a shift in pedagogy (from Tribal studies to Indigenous studies); those whose participation in the international and intercultural re-appraisal of imperial and colonial pasts is determined by histories of exclusion; those who are interested in evaluating the applicability or non-applicability of contested notions of heritage; etc. The specific shape of each of the three phases of the project will be annotated within the proposal itself, as these are

currently under construction, and will be defined by the dialogues between, and potential reconciliation of, these aforementioned beneficiaries.

As workshop organisers we thank all the participants for their excellent contributions hitherto. The value of our project is evident in the participants' shared understanding and commitment to responding effectively to the issues raised in the workshop. It is also evident in the urgency and scope of the project that we have identified.

Epilogue

Following the workshop, the co-organisers have considered some of the intellectual possibilities and ethical parameters of the project, and we close our report by suggesting that, if it is successful, the initiative will be able to respond effectively to the questions raised in the following three areas:

1. Given that Memory studies have become a significant part of the Humanities in the past two decades, it is imperative that those sites of memory that are inscribed within the anthropological archive are made available for re-interpretation. As the anthropological archive was produced in an era of national de-colonisation, we will need to address the extent to which nationalised as well as colonialist outlooks are evident, and to question what it means, in terms of Adivasi heritage, to acknowledge these interfaces either as spaces of contestation or as spaces of reconciliation. Keeping these issues in mind, how could the repatriated archive become identifiable as a practical site of encounter, creativity and reconciliation?
2. If we acknowledge that our initiative will involve individuals and institutions that inevitably hold divergent understandings of and approaches to "the archive", and if we continue to bring to the foreground the idea of a shared future (for "the archive", for Adivasis, for museum anthropologists, and for exponents of critical pedagogy more generally), what does this do to the concept of heritage? Is the notion of relational heritage worth evaluating, not only to address the relational aspects of the trans-colonial anthropology that produced the three archives under consideration, but also to unpack the visual and conceptual relationships that have facilitated interactions between colonial and post-colonial anthropological traditions in India?
3. The project is ascertaining a mandate for the joint re-evaluation of both Adivasi heritage and anthropological heritage: what these terms mean, what they comprise, and how their constitutions are documented, preserved, interpreted, disseminated and displayed. It uses archival material to prompt shifts in "museum ethics" and will contribute to debates on what a transnational indigenous identity is, and on what an intercultural approach to heritage studies might become. It is important, therefore that an "intercultural ethics" framework becomes clearly discernible within our project. An advisory team or intercultural ethics committee should be invited to act as guides as the project partners work together to repatriate the archive. What will be the long term effects of our collective construction of, and critical reflection on, such a framework?