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4 Using souvenirs to rethink how we tell histories of migration

Some thoughts

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The representation of migration in Australian museum exhibitions has been shaped by two main issues. The first is that in settler countries like Australia, migration is closely linked with nation-building. Unlike European countries, where migrants are perceived as an addition to a well-established population with strong roots in immemorial time, non-indigenous Australians are all linked to a process of migration. The focus on how we tell the stories of migration in museums has, as a consequence, concentrated on the experiences of travel itself, on what migrants brought with them and finally on how they contributed to building the nation. This is so regardless of whether we are talking about migrants in the nineteenth century, defined as ‘settlers’, or referring to the post-World War II migrants, more recent migrants from the Asian region or refugees. The assumption is that migrants come, stay and become Australian. The second factor is the close relationship between the representation of migration and the emergence in the early 1970s of multiculturalism as a formal policy of the Australian government. Given the close association between museums and nation-making, it is not surprising to see that museums capitalized on the opportunity to use the multicultural agenda to anchor their educational, public role. Representing either the culture and heritage of individual migrant communities or their contribution to Australia’s national development served a double role – to incorporate them into an Australian national imaginary and to encourage the Anglo majority to value their contribution to the nation. As Ian McShane (2001: 128) has put it, in these narratives migrants undergo a process of rebirth, emerging as new citizens and enriching the cultural matrix.

Since the early 2000s a number of exhibitions on migration have attempted to critique these celebratory narratives (McShane 2001 and Witcomb 2009) by taking a more critical look at the policies of migration and the actual experiences of migrants after arrival in Australia. Significant examples include the new Migration Museum in Melbourne (2001) and the Horizons gallery at the National Museum of Australia (2001). The focus in these exhibitions, however, has been on the Australian side of the experience. Unstudied and unrepresented is the movement of people backwards and forwards between their ‘mother country’ and Australia. This is a problem which results, in part, from Australian historiography, which has been dominated by nationalist agendas. As Ann Curthoys (2002) has argued, since the 1970s, Australian historians have conceptualized...
Australian history in an insular manner, largely in reaction to previous historiography, which placed Australia within the history of Empire and then of the Commonwealth. In terms of migration history, while the fact of migration links the country to diasporic communities, its historians have focused on the history of migration into Australia by looking either at the policy angle or contributing to ‘a tradition of “ethnic contribution” histories, studying the contribution of the Chinese, Italian, Jewish, or perhaps Scots or Irish, to Australia’s development and forms of culture and society’ (Curthoys 2002: 149). Only rarely has this history been understood as part of a transnational phenomenon. And yet, historians elsewhere have increasingly become interested in ‘comparative, diasporic, world, international and thematic transnational histories’ (Curthoys 2002: 142). Australian historians, Curthoys argues, need to engage with this literature and to situate Australia within it.

There are some signs that Australian museums are beginning to engage with this argument. One way this has occurred is by moving away from migration as an organizing category. In the redevelopment of the Horizons gallery at the National Museum of Australia, for example, the new exhibition, *Australian Journeys* (2009), seeks to locate Australian culture as the result of a transnational movement of objects, people and ideas. The exhibition uses objects to present the stories of people who came to Australia as well as those whose life stories took them backwards and forwards. The idea was to focus on movement as a contributing factor to the national story. While the exhibition has received mixed reviews, with many commentators upset at the loss of an explicit critical engagement with the politics of migration to Australia (Young 2009; Ang 2009; Witcomb 2009), the focus on movement does open up a new approach to thinking about the experience of migration, and it is one which this chapter takes up in relation to how we might represent that experience in museums.

The ease and relative cheapness of global travel in today’s world means that migrant populations now have the possibility of going ‘home’ for a holiday and returning to Australia, effectively building new roots while maintaining and reinvigorating their old ones. This chapter explores how these new practices of coming and going might begin to be understood through the study of one particular category of material culture – ‘the souvenir’. Its focus lies in thinking through the constellation of meanings around the purchase of a souvenir by migrants when on holiday in their country of origin and its consequent display when back at home in Australia. Implicit in this quest is a sense that these meanings are different from those around the practice of buying souvenirs by standard tourists as well as those which surround those objects that migrants chose to bring with them at the point of migration and which have informed most displays on migration. Understanding the meanings migrants give to these souvenirs might provide insight into how they manage their relationship to ‘imagined’ homelands and their new country, and afford insight into new forms of citizenship formation.

At this stage my arguments are an attempt to sketch out the contours for further inquiry as opposed to a reflection based on an extended research project. They are not, therefore, based on ethnographic research. Instead, the motivation and material for this inquiry lie in an exhibition I curated as long ago as 1997 on the
Portuguese community in Perth (Witcomb 1997, 1998, 2003) at the Fremantle History Museum’s Community Access Gallery. In that exhibition, *Travellers and Immigrants: Portugueses em Perth*, the aim was to present the history and experiences of the Portuguese community, an ethnic group never previously represented in the museum, both for its own benefit and that of the general public.

The community access gallery movement in Australia has been one of the ways in which major state museums have provided a space for the representation of cultural diversity (Witcomb 2003: 81–2). Quite often this is expressed in exhibitions put together by specific migrant groups. The ideological purpose of these spaces has been to teach the value of respecting cultural diversity, in common with the representation of migration within both migration museums and general social history museums which also represent the history of migration. This has resulted in exhibitions commonly described as the ‘suitcase’ narrative in which the audience is inexorably led through a story of dislocation, the experience of the passage to Australia, the importance of maintaining traditions around religions, food, costume and festivals alongside their eventual integration into mainstream society (McShane 2001; Witcomb 1998, 2009). Important to this narrative has been a focus on what migrants bring with them – both in the way of tangible objects and the intangible culture that they represent. Hence the majority of exhibitions dealing with migration include displays of what the migrants arrived with, using these objects to represent their ethnic difference – costumes, domestic linen, cooking utensils and so on. Such items depict at once their heritage, their difference and their contribution to a vibrant, multicultural Australian society. This is also reflected in the anthropological literature, which focuses on the importance of the objects displaced people choose to take with them (Parkin 1999) or more generally on the role of objects as part of the process of migration (Mehta and Belk 1991; Belk 1992).

In the case of *Travellers and Immigrants*, however, the desire of one family to loan for display, not their family heirlooms or objects that they brought with them at the time of migration but a small group of souvenirs was striking. Bought whilst on holiday in Madeira, the island in the middle of the Atlantic from which they had migrated in the early 1950s, these souvenirs consisted of two objects – a miniature iron cooking-pot and a miniature wine-barrel complete with two bottles of Madeira wine which were proudly displayed in their kitchen. These were offered alongside two folkloric wall figurines and a book on Madeira with an image of their village. Whilst it was impossible to explore the significance of the two souvenir objects to them at the time, they were clearly different from all the other objects loaned for the exhibition – embroidered tablecloths, examples of hand-made lace, shawls handed down from mother to daughter, folkloric costumes used by the community’s dance group, regional pottery or cane craypots made locally in Fremantle using traditional techniques. It was not only that these objects could not be classed as ‘authentic’ markers of ethnicity, being neither functional, hand-made, produced for everyday use nor for the performance of traditional, intangible heritage. The difference was that these objects were souvenirs – mass-produced objects made for a tourist market and explicitly selling Madeirense identity.
Figure 4.1 Objects brought with them by Portuguese migrants at the time of migration and typical of the kind of objects found in exhibitions dealing with migrant groups in Australian museums (photograph by Andrea Witcomb).

Figure 4.2 The ‘installation’ of objects offered for the exhibition *Travellers and Immigrants: Portuguêses em Perth* by a family from Madeira. Included are two mass-produced souvenirs – the miniature cooking-pot and miniature wine-barrel complete with two bottles of Madeira wine (photograph by Andrea Witcomb).
What constellation of meanings might such objects have for this family? Would these meanings be any different from those a ‘tourist’, whether local or international, would have? How different might these meanings be at the point of purchase and at the point of display back at ‘home’? Why were these objects seen as representative, given their mass-produced nature and their status as souvenirs, not traditional items? Were these objects understood as souvenirs with a different status from the heirlooms or objects carefully brought to Australia at the point of migration, or did they give them the same status as carriers of meaning?

Such questions were given added significance by the realization that this particular migrant community was marked by a history of constant coming and going. The Portuguese working class has a long tradition of migrating to other countries in search of work, especially in the period before Portugal joined the European Union (Brettell 1986: 11–12, 70–97). During the long dictatorship, in particular, the country failed to fully industrialize by comparison with other European countries. This failure to modernize its economy can be seen in the relatively slow growth of an industrial workforce. In 1930 only 20.5 per cent of the population worked in industry. By 1970, despite foreign investment, only 36.7 per cent did (Robinson 1979: 136). The result is that Portugal compared, with other European countries, paid only 52 per cent of its national income to labour in 1971 compared with an average of 60 to 70 per cent in a developed country (Robinson 1979: 158). At the same time, Portugal’s agricultural production was woeful. As Robinson argued, much of this was due to the size of landholdings, the majority of which were too small to support the cost of mechanization or to employ large numbers of people. With such a small base of blue-collar work and the impossibility of moving beyond subsistence farming for the greater part of the land, many tried their luck elsewhere, sending money home and returning from time to time to spend time with the family (Brettell 1986: 12; Robinson 1979: 148, 155–56).

The problem was particularly acute in provinces like Madeira and the Azores, which had even smaller industrial economic bases. The economy of Madeira was predominantly based on the production of wine, sugar and fruits, and tourism, while that of the Azores was based on fishing, cereal-growing and cattle-grazing (Robinson 1979: 20–1). As Robinson puts it, both provinces were poor and ‘emigration … an accepted phenomenon’ (1979: 21). Furthermore, as home visits to members of the Madeirense community around Fremantle, near Perth, revealed, many came to work in Western Australia’s fishing industry via South Africa and North and Latin America. As the title of the exhibition put it, many were used to being travellers as well as migrants. As such they had a personal history of going backwards and forwards, with periods ‘at home’ (Witcomb 1998: 391).

In these contexts of mobility, what did these souvenirs mean as expressions of their identity? The literature on souvenirs provides a starting point from which to begin to answer this, in particular the work of Susan Stewart (1984) and her now iconic volume On Longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection. For Stewart, souvenirs provide a means to capture an ‘authentic experience’ within today’s consumer culture in which lived experience is increasingly
mediated and abstracted. The souvenir therefore embodies the lost world of 'authentic' experiences in which the exotic, the antique and the pastoral figure heavily. As such, Stewart argues, souvenirs help us to create narratives about experiences outside everyday life. In the process, they offer an insight into the lives of their possessors rather than their makers.

However, because souvenirs help their possessors build a narrative between their everyday domestic environment and the location of their purchase (not necessarily their production), Stewart argues that souvenirs generate narratives that look backwards and inwards rather than outwards and towards the future. Souvenirs feed the nostalgic impulse and are always necessarily incomplete objects, expressing a desire for something which cannot be grasped. Their function as a vehicle for nostalgia also helps to explain why, as in the case of the two examples cited above, souvenirs are often miniatures. For miniatures, as Stewart (1984) points out, are most often associated with childhood, with toys and with a time for ever gone for adults. Miniatures, therefore always express a lost world.

For most of the time, this lost world is intensely private, dealing as it does with people's experiences of place. For example, souvenirs often turn historical sites or events into personal calendars. Public sites such as the Eiffel Tower become personal ones as the miniature Tower purchased in Paris becomes a metonym for the claim 'I was there.' For Stewart, there is also a distinction to be made between these kinds of souvenirs, called a sample souvenir, mass-produced but integrated into a private life, and souvenirs of individual experience which cannot be bought, including scrapbooks, memory quilts, photo albums, a shell picked up from a beach.

Ultimately, the souvenir's function, for Stewart, is to denote the past as more authentic than the present.Souvenirs are essentially nostalgic and antiquarian in their nature. Hence people often seek the folkloric, the antique and the exotic as a souvenir, as well as mass-produced postcards and mementoes. Miniatures also fit into these arguments, since they are often produced at precisely the point in which the demand for the 'authentic' object diminishes as a result of the arrival of modernity into traditional cultures. Miniatures become a souvenir of a time now gone.

Stewart's arguments are broadly supported by discussions of the souvenir in the tourism literature, in cultural studies and in cultural geography. Almost without exception, all frame souvenirs as connected with tourism, capturing out-of-the-ordinary experiences, freezing time, feeding nostalgia and marking their possessor as having been elsewhere on holiday. And in large part, this is because there is an assumption that those who buy souvenirs are, by definition, tourists. The assumption is that there is no 'authentic' relationship between the purchaser and the culture or place to which the souvenirs refer. Gordon, for example, defines the function of a souvenir according to how 'its physical presence helps locate, define and freeze in time a fleeting transitory experience and bring back into ordinary experience something of the quality of extraordinary experience' (Gordon 1986: 135). In fact, the assumption of a constant link between souvenirs, tourism and tourists is so pervasive that it affects all approaches to the topic. There are ethnographic studies that follow souvenirs from the point of
production to the point of purchase and eventual display in the tourist’s home (Ramsay 2009), analyses of the difficult relationship between souvenir production and authentic cultural practices (Bunn 2000), edited collections which look at souvenirs as the material culture of tourism (Hitchcock and Teague, 2000), linking them in to interesting questions around authenticity, identity, consumption and commodification and development. But none of them uses, as a starting point, the purchase of souvenirs by those who are not tourists but who may want to use them to mark and represent their identity in some way.

How does this kind of analysis, then, sit with the souvenirs brought back to Australia by migrant families on holiday in their original homeland? It would be easy to argue that these objects should be interpreted as embodying the migrant’s past and as feeding a nostalgic desire for it. This would particularly explain the choice of miniature ‘traditional’ objects such as the cooking-pot. This form of nostalgia for the past is also closely connected to memories, and in this context it is interesting to note that the Portuguese words for souvenir — lembrança and recordação — mean first a ‘memory’, something with which to remember (the verb to remember is lembrar), and second a record, a trace of something that was, from the verb recordar, which means both to record, to write down what happened, and to remember. Souvenirs, then, in the Portuguese language are literally lieux de mémoire (Nora 1989).

There is also, within Portuguese culture, a disposition towards valuing such lembranças through the importance attached to the concept of saudades which permeates the Portuguese language and has long been taken as emblematic of Portuguese culture (see, for example, Botelho 1990; Vasconcelos 1990). Frequently but incompletely translated as ‘nostalgia’, the word saudades refers to a sentiment which is felt in an intensely embodied, material way, as a physical and emotional longing for something, someone or somewhere which is now inaccessible. To express saudades for someone or for a place is to articulate the presence of a series of feelings which express a sense of loss or emptiness, a desire for a return one knows is not possible and which is accepted as part of fate. It is also an attempt to recover the suite of feelings associated with that someone or place and is thus a bitter-sweet emotion. To indulge in its expression is at once to feel the loss more keenly, but also to relive the pleasures of that which is now lost. The expression of saudades can thus be a purposeful activity. This understanding of the concept is reflected in the use of the phrase a matar saudades, literally to kill saudades, to expunge them. Returning to a place for a visit can thus be interpreted as an attempt to kill saudades by reliving the past, while knowing that this past is never entirely recoverable.

The word is generally taken to describe and encompass important aspects of Portuguese culture and experience, such as a longing for a return to the golden age of the wealthy early period of the Portuguese Empire and, in the context of this paper, the mass movement of people away from their homeland (their terra or birthplace). It finds expression in popular art forms such as the fado, a particularly sentimental song form which often embodies nostalgic forms of desire, in painting, in literature and even in souvenirs, many of which incorporate the word saudades on their surfaces. While it is possible to find equivalents in English, such
as ‘to pine’, for example, the cultural attachment to the sentiment on the part of the Portuguese does not appear to have a parallel in other cultures. They have made it part of their national identity.

In pursuing Stewart’s line of inquiry in relation to these souvenirs, then, it is not difficult to see how these objects could clearly be useful as sources for personal narrative-making, for the construction of memories that keep alive cultural practices no longer able to be maintained or even gone. It is unlikely, even in Madeira, that families continue to cook in iron pots like that shown in Figure 4.2, for example, and certainly not in Australia. In their role as carriers of memory, then, such objects would enable the production of a narrative that links a distant homeland with the new domestic environment simply through the power of evocation, making manifest the presence of the past in the present, literally embodying the suite of emotions attached to the notion of *saudades*.

However, there is an important distinction to be made between the use of these objects by Portuguese migrants and the standard use of souvenirs to express nostalgia. For these souvenirs embody a lived experience rather than a nostalgic desire for an ‘authentic experience’ on the part of a tourist. These migrants would have cooked in such pots, drunk and had barrels of Madeira wine. Purchasing a miniature is a way of capturing what ‘was’ rather than the expression of a desire for something that never will be. In that sense, these objects do not refer to the ‘extraordinary’ (Gordon 1986) or to that which is outside everyday life. On the contrary – they refer to an everyday life that was lived and experienced but which can no longer be practised – a form of life for which they now have *saudades*. In this sense, these objects act more like Susan Digby’s (2006) ‘salvaged’ souvenirs, despite the fact that they were bought rather than emerging out of the detritus of everyday life. For, as with Digby’s ‘casket of magic’, a tin box filled with bits and bobs which, for their owner, make a ‘home’ for them by connecting their past with their present in a context of no fixed abode (Digby 2006: 177), these souvenirs connect different places and times in the lives of their owners.

There is a second difference which also needs exploration. In both Stewart and other, more ethnographic studies of souvenirs, including Digby (2006), the assumption is that souvenirs enable the production of meaning through narrative. However, one of the things to be confronted in developing the *Travellers and Immigrants* exhibition was the total lack of concern for narrative amongst certain groups of people within the community, invariably those with little or no formal education. A considerable number of families were simply not concerned with the question of what meanings these objects might hold. For them, these objects simply ‘were’. This tendency to resist interpretation, to resist situating themselves or their objects within narrative, problematized the notion that narrative was the key to unlocking their meanings, as Stewart seems to suggest. For this tendency to simply say these objects ‘are’ what they are rather than ‘represent’ their former lives reflects a flattening of the differences between souvenirs, family heirlooms and ‘traditional’ objects. They all have the same status and the same function – to express their Portugueseness or more specifically their Madeirenseness. Hence they were offered alongside more traditional, folkloric objects as if they performed the same function (see Figure 4.2).
Furthermore, these objects reflect what appears to be a common expectation of what an exhibition on a migrant community should contain – objects that mark them as different, as coming from somewhere else. Such objects always point to the traditional and the folkloric whether they are hand-made or mass-produced. Considering all the objects people chose, it is obvious that all of these objects represent traditional cultural practices. In turn this raises the question as to whether, in this context, heirlooms also become souvenirs, much like Digby’s ‘salvaged’ objects.

Interestingly, this practice of offering that which is marked as ‘ethnic’ or traditional is not, I think, generated by a sense of what the ‘Australian community’ would want from ethnic communities. The simple insistence, on the part of those offering to lend objects, that their meanings are obvious and require no explanation indicates that what they were producing was a sense of themselves to themselves. They were after an affirmation of their identity, not an explanation. The meanings of objects are obvious within the community and are taken as such by the lenders. This resistance to narrative, to representation on the part of some families, reflects the ways in which culture can appear to be, following Clifford Geertz (1975), ‘common sense’. For Geertz this common sense involves such a deep familiarity with the matter at hand that it seems crazy to want to interpret it, to name it. In some ways, common sense does not represent formal knowledge at all but a direct understanding, derived in an almost sensorial way. The lenders’ engagement with these objects then, was on an emotional, embodied, material plane rather than a more abstract and explanatory one. In a way, the concern here is similar to that of curators Kirsten Wehner and Martha Sears, who suggested that the tendency to use objects as illustrations of themes stops an engagement with their materiality and thus the development of an ‘object knowledge’ (Wehner and Sears 2010: 144–5, 150–4).

How is this kind of sensorial knowledge understood? As an increasing number of scholars are recognizing, objects have a power to trigger responses at an embodied, visceral level which does not involve a conscious level of articulated knowledge. Informed in part by Deleuzian approaches to sensory forms of knowledge as well as by phenomenological approaches (Merleau-Ponty 1992; Taussig 1993), scholars working in a number of fields such as art (Best 2001; Bennett 2005), film (Shaviro 1993) and material culture studies (Dudley 2010; Edwards 2010, Kwint 1999) are theorizing the existence of embodied forms of knowledge which cannot be articulated through language but which reside instead in sensorial experience. All these move away from the traditional binary oppositions of subject–object and mind–body, and focus instead on the space in-between, the space of engagement between people and the material world which surrounds them and of which they too are a part. This is a space in which the senses rather than the word are privileged, and in which matter (objects) can act upon subjects (people) through material and sensorial engagement as much as people can change and act upon matter.

These arguments for a sensorial, embodied form of knowledge also make sense when placed side by side with various attempts to understand the role of objects in the creation of sensory as opposed to narrative forms of memory. In narrative
forms of memory, stories are told about particular people, places and experiences from the past. In doing so, tellers commonly use the past tense, placing these memories within a temporal framework in which the past is clearly differentiated from the present. In this context, souvenirs provide anchors for such narratives and clearly position the experiences to which they refer in the past. Such temporal demarcations, however, are not so easily made in sense memories. Scholars who study the expression of memory in those who have suffered trauma know that there are involuntary forms of memory which are not based in language but in experience and whose expression is not in narrative but in physical sensations. For Charlotte Delbo, a member of the French Resistance and survivor of Auschwitz, a ‘sense’ memory is the physical imprint of a traumatic experience that lingers on, casting aside any understanding of memory as based on a temporal division between past and present (Bennett 2005). Such memories become a form of matter, they form an ‘impervious skin of memory’ (Bennett 2005: 25) which can erupt at any time, returning the victim into the past in an instant through literally visceral experiences in which victims relive the physical pain of the initial trauma.

In material culture studies, sensorial experiences around objects are increasingly associated with a form of memory which also collapses time and which cannot be easily narrated. Marius Kwint (1999: 2–3) makes this particular connection quite clear by pointing to the close connection between the sensory engagement with objects and the experience of involuntary memories, so famously described by Marcel Proust writing about the memories evoked by eating a madeleine soaked in lime-blossom tisane. What distinguishes these forms of sensory memory, therefore, is an intensity of sensory experiences and the resulting collapse of chronological time. As Kwint makes clear, this means that objects, if associated with narrative memory, function as representations by working as tools to aid the process of remembering. The agency lies with the story-teller (Kwint 1999: 2–3). However, if we look at the role that objects play in causing memory through sensory experiences, objects become the agent, taking those who encounter them on an involuntary journey back through time.

Could it be that these souvenirs were bought by this family because they triggered an involuntary memory, causing an embodied memory of times past to resurface and with it an emotional landscape of place and family? That they gave material form to saudades? To suggest this is to suggest that the ways these souvenirs work is the reverse of the normal pattern. Rather than being bought as a memento to facilitate remembering by creating a memory, through representing an experience, were they bought because they triggered a memory of a time before the moment of purchase, a time which was no longer accessible to the purchaser? The possibility is even more intriguing if we pursue the association of saudades, as did Afonso Botelho (1990) in his philosophical explorations of the word, with the collapse of chronological time.

If these objects are best understood by exploring the ways in which they produce sensory forms of memory for their owners, then the significance of these objects lies in their affective power, rather than in a straightforward form of representation. This is a possibility that would also go some way to explain why narrative
was not forthcoming, because whilst affect is linked to the process of making meaning, this process derives first of all from sensory forms of experience. As Susan Best (2001: 220) puts it, ‘affect is an originary trace, an inherited mapping of the body and its expressive potential that becomes the stuff of signification. In turn, this catching up of affect into signification allows affect to signify or register this corporeal bedrock of meaning.’ Affect, then, while experienced at the sensorial level, also becomes part of the symbolic realm. In the case of these souvenirs, the process would be intricately related to the ways in which memory works both at an involuntary level and through an active process of remembering.

In thinking about these souvenirs outside the normal frames we have used for understanding them, frames which have limited our understanding of who purchases them, the ways in which they might connect to the expression of identity as well as to the ways in which humans remember, produce and maintain memories of personal pasts, there are a number of implications. Some of these have to do with the ways in which the experience of migration is conceptualized and thereafter rendered within museum exhibitions. Others have to do with the ways in which a more complex understanding of the contexts in which souvenirs are bought and displayed within people’s homes might be broadened beyond tourism studies to encompass an interdisciplinary approach bringing together tourism studies, migration studies, material culture studies and ethnographic work. In conclusion, then, it is worth speculating on what a fuller study of the contexts in which migrant groups purchase and display souvenirs of their original homeland during a holiday there might accomplish.

Implications for display

In offering these souvenirs alongside more conventional folkloric objects and a book about Madeira, the family was offering Fremantle History Museum an installation, a constellation of artefacts which they felt expressed their experiences. For them the fact that they belonged to different categories of objects was not important, for it was the relationships between them, how they worked as a group, that mattered. From this perspective, souvenirs are not always a tool for remembering exotic experiences — they can be a tool for remembering home and perhaps for negotiating the co-existence of two homes, an experience that all first-generation migrants have. The difference between souvenirs and heirlooms is that souvenirs remind us that these days, migrants move back and forth. They are travellers, not just emigrants. In the context of museum displays, this must mean a shift in focus from the nationalist themes which have so far framed exhibitions on migration. The story cannot be told simply from the point of view of either assimilation or multiculturalism. A second, but no less important issue is that of how to display these objects. If their significance lies in the realm of affect and sense memories, traditional forms of display in which objects are used as illustrations of historical themes will fail to bring this out. New strategies of interpretation which enable affective forms of engagement with the object are needed (see Wehner and Sears 2010 and Witcomb 2010 for further discussions of this point).
**In terms of souvenir studies**

By opening up the use of mass-produced souvenirs by migrants going on holiday 'back home', this chapter adds to a body of emerging work on 'salvaged souvenirs' for displaced people such as the work of Susan Digby (2006) and David Parkin (1999), both of whom explore how salvaged souvenirs help displaced people make a home. In interrogating the use of mass-produced souvenirs by the Portuguese community in Perth, it becomes clear that these objects, as well as 'authentic' folkloric objects bought after the initial migration process, play a role in making a 'home' for people who have experienced displacement at some level, even if they are not refugees.

There is an increasing awareness that such work is also relevant to internal migrants within a country or ethnic groups within a country, particularly where there has been civil conflict and where expatriate populations dwell. Colleagues have pointed out during discussions that, as people not living and working at 'home', they too buy 'kitsch' patriotic souvenirs to display in their office as a reminder of home. They also added that they would never do this if they lived and worked at 'home'. Souvenirs, especially of the kitsch variety, were a quick way of affirming and announcing their identity to themselves and to those who visited them. Another colleague raised the use of 'ethnic' objects by expatriate communities rather than migrant communities, commenting that they too use objects that could be classified in the souvenir category to make a 'home' away from 'home'. Others, who were themselves migrants, began to talk excitedly about what they displayed at home which announced their ethnic identity, saying at the same time that they would never decorate their home in their own country of origin in that way. Some began to discuss how objects that identified their ethnicity were being used within their original homelands, where announcing ethnicity could be a political statement. Lejla Voloder, a Bosnian scholar living in Melbourne, commented how during doctoral ethnographic work, she had become very conscious of the artefacts my participants displayed in their homes as markers of their identification with Bosnian culture. Many of these items (such as ornately designed coffee pots and oil paintings) were in fact purchased during migrant visits back 'home', where such objects are commonly found in local shopping districts in the old quarters of towns. I understood that possessing and displaying such objects in homes were avenues through which one brought the 'homeland' into the domestic spaces of their Australian 'homes'.

(Voloder 2009)

Voloder had never understood these objects as souvenirs, in the knowledge that locals in Bosnia also displayed such items seemingly in order to assert their ethnic identification, neglected during the Yugoslav context. The idea of the souvenir suddenly became intriguing. 'I wonder', Voloder wrote, 'how transferable is this notion of the “souvenir” to the same object when purchased at “home” as
opposed to when one is “away”? And then what happens when “away” is also one’s “home”?

(Voloder 18 May 2009)

These discussions point to the need not only to broaden the understanding of what might be meant by the category of ‘displaced persons’ by taking into account the enormous variety of people who find themselves living away from ‘home’ as well as the categories of objects that turn out to be significant in their lives. Commodified souvenirs may also be of relevance alongside ‘salvaged’ objects or those handed down across the generations. At the very least, then, it should now be clear that souvenirs should not be studied only in relation to tourists.

Looking at how these objects are used by mobile people could also add to our understanding of home-making through objects, an area explored by Miller (2001) and Hoskins (1998), particularly for those for whom home is not a fixed place. As Miller points out, it is important not to set the home as stasis, as the opposite of mobility. Understanding how these souvenirs are used at home may well afford an insight into the experience of constant movement and its centrality to people’s lives.

On the interdisciplinary space between tourism, material culture studies and migration studies

As there is little research into the consumption patterns of migrants returning home for a holiday, it is difficult to say whether the interpretations of souvenir items differ between this group and tourists. As it stands, the detail regarding the consumption patterns of souvenirs within local communities is also limited, making it difficult to establish whether those of migrant groups around the display of particular categories of souvenirs are different from those of their families back home. In the Portuguese case, the widespread cultural practices around lembranças and their association with the expression of saudades also indicate the need for a comparative approach so that the issues around the specific context of migration can be differentiated from broader issues of cultural practices amongst all Portuguese. A further question is whether such practices have a class base. At the very least, however, there is a need to situate the study of souvenirs in an interdisciplinary as well as transnational context, with approaches drawn from the disciplines of tourism, material culture studies, migration and diasporic studies.

In examining the practice of displaying objects, within and without the domestic sphere, it has become apparent that migrants engage in interesting consumption patterns which are neglected within the existing scholarship on souvenirs. There remains a need for investigation into the role of souvenirs in the negotiation of homeland and displacement, especially in a world where mobility and return are becoming more and more common. Such a study would have important implications, not only for the understanding of souvenirs. It would also make a contribution to current attempts to understand the transnational movement of people, ideas and goods as a way to denationalize what has, perhaps, become an overly nationalistic concern with the history of the nation at the cost of understanding the multiple ways in which its peoples negotiate their identities.
References


