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National Museums, Globalization, and Postnationalism: Imagining a Cosmopolitan Museology

Rhiannon Mason

Abstract

In recent years it has been asked whether it is time to move ‘beyond the national museum’. This article takes issue with this assertion on the grounds that it misunderstands not only museums as cultural phenomenon but also the ways in which globalization, nationalism, and localism are always enmeshed and co-constitutive. The article begins by considering theories of globalization, postnationalism, and cosmopolitanism and their relevance for national museums in the European context. Specific theories of cosmopolitanism are subsequently further explored in relation to two museum examples drawn from the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh and the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin. In different ways both examples demonstrate the potential for museums to engage visitors with ideas of cosmopolitanism, globalization, and postnationalism by revisiting, reframing, and reinterpreting existing national collections and displays. In the process the article makes the case for the merits of a nationally situated approach to cosmopolitanism in European museums. At the same time it acknowledges some of the potential limits to such endeavors. The article concludes by imagining what a ‘cosmopolitan museology’ would offer in terms of practice, politics, and ethics.

Keywords

cosmopolitan museology, globalization, national museums, postnationalism, Europe

If the nation-state and the kind of ‘public’ with which it was associated are on the brink of obsolescence, then what future is there for museums? Are museums perhaps too intimately linked up with material- and place-rooted, homogeneous and bounded, conceptions of identity to be able to address some of the emerging identity dilemmas of the ‘second modern age’ or ‘late modernity’? (Macdonald 2003: 1)

In today’s global, postcolonial and cosmopolitan context, right-wing groups, religious extremists and extreme political parties are appropriating heritage and criticizing museum displays. Indigenous people, local groups and organizations are claiming rights to the past. The nation-state is at the same time deeply questioned. . . . In a global, postcolonial and cosmopolitan context, contrary to a colonial and nation-based context, museums have to rethink their stories, the place as such and the people to whom they aim: What stories are told and why? Who is the audience? . . . Lastly: Is there a future for the museum as we know it? (“The Museum Beyond the Nation?” 2011)

Beyond the National Museum?

A decade ago Sharon Macdonald was already questioning the future for museums in the context of late modernity and contemporary social theory. Macdonald’s own assessment was that the answer was far from straightforward because of the inherently adaptive qualities of museums, their “fuzzy logic,” and arguably because of the “*failure* of the nineteenth-century museum project” (2003: 11). However, as demonstrated by the second quotation above and other publications, this question continues to trouble those who study museums (Rogan 2004a, 2004b; Daugbjerg 2009a; Monash University 2011).

This article sets out to answer the important questions posed in the above quotations. It refutes the suggestion that Europe's national museums are made redundant by societal changes brought about by globalization, postnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. While there is considerable value in these theoretical approaches for reassessing the position of national museums in European societies, there is a problem in the assumption that national museums have somehow become 'out of step' with contemporary globalized societies. This assumption oversimplifies national museums as cultural phenomena and overlooks three key points.

First, globalization is not automatically antithetical to the national but can be seen to coexist with it. Aspects of globalization have been integral to the histories of national museums as they developed in the European context (Prosler 1996). Second, many of the individual objects and collections that have found their way into today's national museums predate modern European nineteenth-century nationalism. Despite being retrospectively conscripted into overarching and unifying national histories, these individual objects continue to have the potential to illuminate global, postnational, and cosmopolitan stories. Failure to recognize this arises from a conflation of nationalizing impulses deriving from the institutional discourses of national museums with what may be discerned at the scale of the collections and individual objects; they are intimately connected but not the same. Third, nations have never been without their own internal heterogeneity and diversity. Nationalism comes in many different forms and combinations, such as ethnic, civic, cultural, and political. The more homogenizing discourses of ethnic nationalism work hard to try to elide and unify or disavow these differences. However, Europe's national museums hold the evidence of this difference within and, in many cases, combine contradictory and competing discourses of nationalism in different parts of their displays and collections. Given their heterogeneity, national museums therefore have the potential to demonstrate the contingent and constructed nature of contemporary nations, *if* they are reframed and reinterpreted through a reflexive and

cosmopolitan perspective and *if* the visitor is inclined, enabled, and encouraged to ‘read for’ such an account.

Instead of categorizing museums as either national, supranational, transnational, or universal at an institutional level or alternatively calling for a move ‘beyond the museum’, I propose therefore that it is more fruitful to recognize that national museums operate as clusters of cultural practices and constellations of material culture comprising many different intersecting ontological scales. In this respect, I draw parallels with Daugbjerg and Fibiger’s work on tensions between local, national, and global heritage and their assertion that

heritage has not *simply* gone global. There is no neat epochal chronology in place in which older local or national meanings are unanimously overridden or rendered obsolete as the global agendas simply take over. (2011: 137)

I also argue that it is more useful to recognize difference and diversity by problematizing settled notions of ‘the nation’ in order to deconstruct the distinction between a nation and its ‘others’. Rather than positing accounts of diversity, migration, and cosmopolitanism as somehow outside of national representations, the point is precisely to find ways to shine a light on the difference that already exists within all nations and is evident in national museums.

The ensuing challenge for Europe’s national museums (and with which many of them are already engaged) is how to recognize, display, and interpret the contemporary complexities of identities, cultures, and histories in ways that are intelligible, engaging, and resonant with contemporary museum audiences. This is particularly so because European museum audiences may themselves become increasingly internally heterogeneous, differentiated, and, in some cases, cosmopolitan in terms of their values, experiences, and

expectations precisely because of the same pressures arising from current forms of globalization and postnationalism.

This article employs some of the many theories of cosmopolitanism that have been extensively debated in the humanities and social sciences literature since the 1990s but that have, as yet, made only limited incursions into the fields of heritage, museum, and material culture studies (Appiah 2006; Cuno 2008, 2011; Meskell 2009; Daugbjerg 2009a, 2009b; Delanty 2010; Daugbjerg and Fibiger 2011; Dibley 2011). Cosmopolitanism offers a theoretical vantage point from which to think through the political, ethical, and practical challenges facing contemporary national museums. It presents an alternative to the way that recent museological debates have been organized in terms of the merits of the ‘universal’ versus the ‘national’ or versus identity politics based around ideas of ethnicity. In particular, I draw upon Delanty’s (2010) ideas of “critical cosmopolitanism,” Held’s (2002) “cultural cosmopolitanism,” and Beck and Grande’s (2007) “nationally rooted cosmopolitanism” to understand how heritage and museums might respond to contemporary societal change in the European context.

These theoretical frameworks are brought to bear on two museum examples, the *Kingdom of the Scots* gallery in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, and the *Cultural Encounters* gallery in the Museum of European Cultures, Berlin. In both cases I argue that the museums contain the potential for what I term a ‘cosmopolitan museology’, although the coordinates within which this potential is framed are configured differently in both examples according to their own institutional and national histories and present-day contexts. The article concludes by considering the possibilities, practicalities, and limits of a ‘cosmopolitan museology’ that might enable visitors to see the world through the ‘other’s’ eyes. At the same time, it acknowledges the significant challenges in aligning this with visitor

expectations and many visitors' understandable desire for a visit experience that might be more affirming of existing identities than disruptive of them.

Globalization and Postnationalism

The suggestion that it might be time to 'move beyond' the national museum references a whole host of societal shifts and intellectual debates that have taken place since the 1970s and 1980s. It is widely argued, for example, that one of the effects of contemporary globalization has been to reconfigure the former relationships of societies and territorial spaces by moving power and influence away from national governments and nation-states as actors (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1999; Young 1999; Habermas 2001; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002; Held 2002, 2010; Held and McGrew 2003). In terms of business, finance, travel, environment, migration, communication technology, and media, the volume and intensity of exchange and movement on a global scale is described as historically unprecedented (Young 1999; Held and McGrew 2003; Assayag and Fuller 2005; Castles and Miller 2009; Isar et al. 2011).

Concomitantly, the ability of nation-states to command the allegiances and commitment of the populations within their own borders is alleged to be weakened (Ang 2011). Appadurai (1996), for example, has argued that the international media of our time have contributed to shaping new deterritorialized, overlapping, and heterogeneous points of reference and attachment, introducing greater possibility for diasporic groups to maintain contact and a sense of cultural identity across geopolitical borders.

In Europe specifically, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the reunification of Germany (1990), and the collapse of the USSR (1991) problematized the future of nations and prompted some to ask whether European societies should now be understood as 'postnational' and 'beyond the nation' (Appadurai 1996; Habermas 2001; Paul et al. 2003; Breen and O'Neill 2010). The recent Eurozone crisis has again called into question the

economic, political, and cultural relations between national, supranational, and global interests in the European context.

As has been well documented, there are several problems with both this ‘accelerated globalization’ thesis and the view of postnationalism that sees the global as superseding the national (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 1–24; Calhoun 2004; Kymlicka 2004). Aspects of globalization can be identified at many points throughout history, depending on how it is defined (Young 1999). Moreover, despite all the talk of mobility, migration, and cosmopolitan lifestyles, geographic and economic mobility remain finite for many people (Assayag and Fuller 2005; Kockel 2010). Ethnicity and national identity also remain powerful points of reference and self-organization (Held 2002; Jenkins 2002). Kymlicka, for example, argues that “ideas of nationhood are still central to our collective political imaginary” (2004: 228). Indeed, in some cases, traditional and conservative forms of nationalism appear to be on the rise rather than on the wane (Taras 2009; Paul et al. 2003; Auer 2010). On the cultural front, museums, galleries, and heritage sites continue to be largely administered, financed, and organized at the national scale (Bennett 2006; Daugbjerg 2009a).

One way to reconcile these divergent trends is to recognize that globalization is always experienced locally. As Assayag and Fuller explain:

the local and the global—and, *a fortiori*, the national, regional or other spatial levels—are always enmeshed or entangled, not separate and preformed, because they are always mutually constituted vis-a-vis each other through social relationships and cultural patterns. (2005: 2)

Similarly, Hernández-Durán argues that we should not be thinking of the national and the postnational as discrete states where the national is superseded by the postnational but “as coeval tendencies in a larger historical process” (2011: 14).

Cosmopolitanism

Theories of cosmopolitanism are similarly interested in the implications arising from globalization’s challenge to the nation-state, namely, the proposal to move beyond the nation (Cheah and Robbins 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Appiah 2006; Fine 2007; Beck and Grande 2007; Brown and Held 2010; Held 2010). The literature on cosmopolitanism generally refers back to two traditions of moral philosophy. First, as Held explains, the Stoics, who argued for the universalist perspective of the ‘cosmos’ as opposed to the more narrowly defined sphere of the ‘polis’, and second, Kant’s Enlightenment ideas of the ‘world citizen’ and cosmopolitan right, which “connotes the capacity to present oneself and be heard within and across political communities” (Held 2010: 68). While supporting this account, Delanty cautions against Eurocentricism and points out that ancient Chinese, Hindu, Islamic, and Christian civilizations also “gave rise to ways of thinking that promoted an inclusive version of human community” (2009: 19–20). However, it is since the 1990s that there has been a significant return to these ideas and a proliferation of theoretical permutations. Yuval-Davis (2011), for example, notes the existence of ‘rootless’, ‘rooted’, ‘visceral’, ‘vernacular’, ‘banal’, and ‘convivial’ cosmopolitanism. While all these variations are noteworthy, I will focus here on three works: those by Delanty, Beck and Grande, and Held, theorists whose ideas, I suggest, hold particular resonance for thinking about museums and heritage more broadly.

Delanty’s 2006 article provides an overview of the burgeoning field of cosmopolitanism divided into four categories: moral, political, cultural, and critical. Moral

cosmopolitanism follows the approach of the classical writers, arguing for a universal view of humanity and morality. Delanty sees this underpinning “liberal communitarian approaches to multiculturalism as in the idea of the universal recognition of the moral integrity of all people” (2006: 28). Political cosmopolitanism concerns itself with questions of citizenship, democracy, and international human rights in a globalized and transnational world where nation-states and place-based identities may no longer hold the same sway. Cultural cosmopolitanism concerns itself with “major changes in the cultural fabric of society leading to the erosion of the very notion of a bounded conception of the social” (2006: 31). Thus, cultural cosmopolitanism argues that people’s patterns of identification and sense of identity have been reconfigured by the effects of greater mobility, migration, multiculturalism, and a globalized mediascape to become pluralized and discontinuous. Consequently, it is argued that the local and global have become enmeshed in unprecedented ways so that an awareness of being simultaneously implicated both ‘here’ and ‘there’ is intensified (Rosenau 2003).

As with the globalization and postnationalism theses, there are several limitations with each approach, and it is not always self-evident how such theories can be usefully brought to bear directly on questions of museums and material culture. However, Delanty also proposes his theory of critical cosmopolitanism, which he has applied to ideas of European heritage and identity and which is applicable to questions of interpretation, representation, and cultural encounters:

A critical cosmopolitan approach with respect to cultural phenomena, in brief, concerns a methodological emphasis on: (1) the identification of openness to the world, (2) self-transformation in light of the encounter with the other, (3) the exploration of otherness within the self, (4) critical responses to globality, and (5) critical spaces between globality and locality. (2010: 17)

Delanty's focus on the encounter with the other and self-reflexivity echoes the work of Held, who advocates cosmopolitanism as a way to see things from a perspective outside of one's own "location" (Held 2002: 58; Held 2010). Adoption of this "expanded horizon," Held (2002) argues, is necessary to deal with the precisely global nature of present and future challenges facing humanity, such as the environment, war, terrorism, economic crises, religious diversity, and multicultural societies. Translating this idea of an expanded horizon into the sphere of culture, Held proposes his model of cultural cosmopolitanism as follows:

[C]ultural cosmopolitanism should be understood as the capacity to mediate between national cultures, communities of fate and alternative styles of life. It encompasses the possibility of dialogue with the traditions and discourses of others with the aim of expanding the horizons of one's own framework of meaning and prejudice (Gadamer 1975). Political agents who can 'reason from the point of view of others' are better equipped to resolve, and resolve fairly, the challenging transboundary issues that create overlapping communities of fate. (Held 2002: 58)

Although neither Held nor Delanty discuss museums explicitly in these writings, it is not difficult to imagine how museum displays and collections might offer such opportunities for encounters beyond the self. Since their inception museums have seen it as their *raison-d'être* to collect the 'other' defined by time or geography or both (Sherman 2008). Yet, having an interest in the 'other' is not the same as being able to see the world 'from the point of view of the other' or to value it on its own terms. To qualify as properly cosmopolitan in orientation that interest would necessitate a capacity for empathy and self-identification with the other as oneself. It would need to be transformative in the sense that it has the effect of relativizing

one's own position. Delanty defines it thus: "In the encounter with the Other the self or native culture undergoes a process of learning or self-discovery. . . . [it entails t]he capacity for a mutual evaluation of cultures or identities" (2009: 87).

This cosmopolitan approach to otherness has certainly not always been the case in museums. Given the colonial histories of many museums, it has been quite the opposite. However, there are indications that this philosophy is now evident in some areas of contemporary practice. The Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, for example, adopts an explicitly cosmopolitan, postcolonial, and globalist philosophical stance in its institutional statements:

In dialogue with the society in which it exists, the Museum of World Culture seeks to serve as a meeting place where sensitive, intellectual experiences will enable people to feel comfortable at home and abroad, trusting in and taking responsibility for a shared global future in a constantly changing world. (Museum of World Culture: 2012a)

The museum wants to be an arena for discussion and reflection in which many and different voices will be heard, where the controversial and conflict-filled topics can be addressed, as well as a place where people can feel at home across borders. (Museum of World Culture: 2012b)

Accordingly, the museum has staged displays based on transnational topics such as people trafficking, AIDS, mobility, and travel. Similar efforts can be found at a supranational level; for example, UNESCO has initiated a project with partner museums of "culture and civilization" entitled Museums of Intercultural Dialogue, focused on Common Heritage: A

Museological and Educational Approach to the Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations.
(UNESCO: 2012).

A core idea of cosmopolitanism is therefore to facilitate encounters beyond the known and the self in order to take one outside of, and to encourage reflexive awareness of, one's 'own location'. At the same time, much of the recent writing about cosmopolitanism stresses the importance of simultaneously holding onto a notion of the local and particular (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 4; Daugbjerg 2009a, 2009b; Appiah 1998). While there is a tendency in some writings to conflate cosmopolitanism with globalization and transnationalism, several writers argue strongly that it should not be understood as antithetical to national, rooted, situated, or patriotic affiliations (Appiah 1998; Delanty 2009; Daugbjerg 2009b).

Beck and Grande, for example, argue for a radical rethinking of nationalism but at the same time assert that nationalism "represents the historically most successful way of underpinning and stabilizing collective difference with universalistic norms" (2007: 16). For some writers, the nation-state remains the only serious legal and political framework within which the rights of individual citizens can be realized and addressed (Kymlicka 2004). Beck and Grande's proposal for a nationally rooted cosmopolitanism offers a useful way of thinking about the challenge for national museums, specifically in Europe. Based on a logic of *both/and* rather than *either/or*, they argue:

Cosmopolitan Europe is not only the antithesis of, but also presupposes, a national Europe, i.e., a Europe of nations. It cannot simply abolish national Europe but must cosmopolitanize it from within. In this sense, we speak of a nationally rooted cosmopolitanism. . . . the cosmopolitan must be conceived as the *integral* of the national and must be developed and empirically investigated as such. (2007: 16)

National museums are particularly appropriate for such contemplations precisely because they are situated at the juncture of global flows of ideas, objects, and peoples while simultaneously being enrolled in regional and national politics. They are also subject to local economic pressures and the material legacies associated with specific places in the form of particular collections and articulations of identity.

Close-Up: Not Either/Or but Both/And

Switching to a close-up view of specific institutions, I now want to consider how two individual national museums might be related to the kind of societal changes and theoretical concerns outlined above. Do they seek to foreground cosmopolitan ideas of pluralistic, internally diverse, and heterogeneous societies? Do they go beyond simply celebrating pluralism as a form of cultural enrichment to encourage self-reflexivity, both positive and negative? Or do they domesticate such differences by subsuming them back into a traditional national story, and if so, why?

A salient point here is that a nation's 'historical consciousness' (Macdonald 2006; Seixas 2006) is deeply shaped by what is imagined to be at stake in presenting the nation's 'constitutive story' (Smith 2003) at any given moment. Risse (2010), for example, argues that discourses of national identity differ markedly depending on whether the nation has had to construct its own historical past as a negative other to its present and future, as with Germany and Spain's fascist pasts.

At the same time, it would be wrong to overdetermine the relationship between nation-states, governments, and museums. Museums cannot be reduced to mere instruments of nation-states or individual governments; the relationships are too complicated and the agencies involved too multifaceted (Mason 2007; Mackenzie 2009: 9; Whitehead et al. 2012). Institutional identities, the histories of individual collections, and the materiality of museums

as display spaces all determine what museums come to mean. Museum professionals bring their own disciplinary, cultural, and intellectual perspectives to work, just as visitors come through the museum door with their own motivations, expectations, and habitus (Macdonald 2002). Museum objects and spaces too have their own biographies and social lives (Alberti 2005; Appadurai 1986) that intersect with, but are not fully overwritten, by the museum's technologies of display and interpretation. As Tony Bennett puts it,

a point I take from Latour's account of the ways in which technologies fold into and accumulate within themselves powers and capacities derived from different times and places (Latour 2002a), objects carry with them a part of the operative logic characterizing earlier aspects of their history as they are relocated into reconfigured networks. (2005: 537)

It is precisely this accumulation of multiple logics and the resulting polysemy of objects and spaces in museums that makes them amenable to so many reinterpretations. However, it is equally important to explore the limits of the museum's multivalency and—with the earlier theoretical discussion in mind—to consider the following questions:

- Is it possible to make an object or a display that was previously created, designed, and intended to communicate notions of distinctiveness and, in some cases, the national supremacy of one nation over another now resignify in a cosmopolitan way?
- National museums of the nineteenth century typically sought to marshal their collections to tell unifying national stories. By contrast, many of the individual

objects that make up national collections predate conceptions of modern nationalism as developed in many European countries. What kinds of insights do these kinds of objects provide into the longer histories of globalization and cosmopolitanism and the organization generally of societies prior to nineteenth-century nationalism?

- How far can objects and spaces be rescripted through new display and interpretation strategies to promote intercultural understanding and a sense of supranational European, postnational, or global identity? Should they be?
- How amenable are museums, their staff, and their collections to (re)discovering and emphasizing ‘new’ cosmopolitan stories of globalization, diversity, and the migration of ideas, objects, and people instead of presenting a settled nation?

This next section explores these questions through two different examples: the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, and the Museum of European Cultures, Berlin, Germany. The purpose is to examine what two different museums pitched at contrasting scales (one national and the other transnational) and in two quite different national contexts may illuminate about the kinds of issues raised above. What kinds of different histories do they make available to visitors and what other potentials might they contain?

To understand the ways in which the museum representations make sense of—by which I mean organize, define, and value—the possible sets of relations afforded by their collections and spaces I employ Beck and Grande’s (2007) theorization of the distinction between two different ways of conceptualizing cultural difference: (1) nationalism and (2) cosmopolitanism.

The National Museum of Scotland: Reconciling Diversity and Unity?

The National Museum of Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh opened in 1998 on St. Andrew's day against a backdrop of political devolution that gave (or returned, depending on your perspective) political autonomy from the British parliament to a newly constituted Scottish parliament based in Edinburgh. As such, the new museum is heavily freighted with national significance and symbolism. The museum comprises six floors that begin with the formation of the land we now call 'Scotland' geologically and end with the present day. The museum project had a long history and the extant museum, known at the time as the Royal Museum, to which the new NMS adjoined, has been in existence since 1854 (Mason 2004). Objects from the Royal Museum's collection were relocated into the new museum. As is common with almost all ostensibly new museums, the collections and objects themselves have had a much longer life that precedes the new institutions, so that collections have often been relocated, parsed, scattered, and sometimes reconstituted several times in the service of various different institutional and political agendas. In 2011, the Royal Museum of Scotland was significantly refurbished and both parts were rebranded jointly under the single name of The National Museum of Scotland.

For present purposes, I am interested in what this museum's collections can tell us about many of the issues commonly identified with globalization, postnationalism, and cosmopolitanism—migration, diversity, mobility, exchange, and hybridity. Specifically, I am interested in what they tell us about the long-standing histories of cultural exchanges and interactions across borders and the ways in which the display and interpretation organizes the possible sets of relations, thereby creating particular kinds of accounts of cultural difference. My proposition is that museums are full of objects that have the potential to draw our attention precisely to the long-standing mixing of cultures within and beyond national

borders, to the movement of peoples, ideas, and material culture, and the fluctuation of national borders throughout history. Indeed, to the attentive eye the constructed nature of the nation is always just below the surface in museum representations. Every museum display about national unity and coherence also contains within it centrifugal forces that problematize a conventional national narrative if presented in a particular way. A ‘close-up’ perspective on an individual object enables us to examine this in further detail.

The example I have in mind can be found in the section of the National Museum of Scotland that focuses on telling the formative moment in Scotland’s history, *Kingdom of the Scots*—the time when Scotland becomes a kingdom and “emerges as a nation” (National Museum Scotland: 2012a.). It might be expected that this will be an overtly nation-building account, and ostensibly it is, but if one looks closely all sorts of artifacts can be found within the displays that complicate the picture. The particular object in question is the Lewis Chessmen exhibit described by the National Museum of Scotland as perhaps its most famous exhibit, fame enhanced by the appearance of replica pieces in the 2001 internationally successful film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. These chess pieces were found in 1831 on the Hebridean island of Lewis off the coast of what is now Scotland (figure 1). Carved from walrus ivory, the museum’s website describes them as follows:

The Lewis Chessmen have fascinated visitors and art historians alike. Believed to be Scandinavian in origin, it is possible they belonged to a merchant travelling from Norway to Ireland.

They were probably made in Trondheim in Norway during the late 12th and early 13th centuries, when the area in which the chessmen were buried was part of the Kingdom of Norway, not Scotland. It seems likely they were buried for safe keeping on route to be traded in Ireland. (National Museums Scotland: 2012b.)

- Fig. 1. “The Lewis Chessmen”. National Museum of Scotland. Copyright: NMS

The original hoard is thought to contain four chess sets comprising ninety-three pieces (National Museums Scotland 2012b). After its discovery it was divided up and eighty-two pieces were acquired by the British Museum in London between 1831 and 1832, where they have remained until today (Robinson 2004: 7). Having failed to originally secure the other chess pieces, which passed into private hands for many years, the Society of Scottish Antiquaries worked with the British Museum to purchase eleven additional chess pieces in 1888; these are the chess pieces now on display in the National Museum of Scotland (Robinson 2004: 6–7). The retention of the lion’s share of the hoard in the British Museum has been the source of contention for some campaigners in Scotland who have argued for the return of the Lewis Chessmen to the place of their discovery, the Isle of Lewis. The campaign has been supported recently by local councillors, members of the Scottish National Party, the ruling party of Scotland, and no less than the party leader and first minister of Scotland, Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond. One of the arguments made in favor of their return is for the potential economic benefit of heritage tourism to the local area of Lewis. The area has suffered considerable population losses in the last twenty years because of the decline in its traditional industries of tweed, fishing, and oil rig servicing (Macleod 2007).

In 2012 the British Museum finally agreed to return six chess pieces on semi-permanent loan to Lewis’s newly refurbished Lews Castle Museum (BBC 2012). They will arrive in the year 2014, which has been designated a second year of the Scottish homecoming, the seven hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn of 1314—a famous battle in which the Scottish defeated the English—and the year when a public

referendum will be held to decide whether Scotland should separate from the UK after more than three hundred years of political union.

The British Museum's Lewis Chessmen recently featured as one of the podcasts on the British Museum's hugely successful *History of the World in 100 Objects* project. In that broadcast the cultural history of the game of chess was discussed and the global heritage of the objects emphasized:

Chess originated in India after 500 BC and had arrived in Christian Europe via the Islamic world by at least the AD 990s. The original Indian and Islamic game was adapted to reflect medieval European society, so that the Indian war elephant was replaced with the figure of the bishop. The rooks biting their shields resemble the Viking berserkers of Norse myth, while the pose of the queens is derived from depictions of the grieving Virgin Mary. The pawns, lacking any human features, reflect the abstract pieces used in the Islamic version of the game. (British Museum website)

The global heritage of the game of chess—the way it fuses transnational cultural influences and transcends political and geographical borders—is underscored by a related holding in the National Museum of Denmark. This museum holds similar European chess pieces discovered in medieval Danish forts and recently displayed them alongside several Muslim chess pieces also found in Denmark, identifiable by their nonfigurative form. A number of these chess pieces featured in a 2012 exhibition entitled *Europe Meets the World*, staged in the year Denmark held the European Union (EU) presidency (figure 2). The writers of the museum catalogue for that exhibition explain that “[e]ven though figurative chess pieces were probably the most sought after, non-figurative pieces were also used in medieval

Europe. Examples of the latter from Danish medieval forts show that Europeans were equally able to play chess in Arabic fashion if required” (Christensen et al. 2012: 143). Replica pieces of the National Museum of Scotland’s and the British Museum’s Lewis Chessmen were on sale in the National Museum of Denmark at the time of the exhibition, testifying to the transnational nature of today’s museum retailing and the wide appeal of certain museum objects.

Fig. 2. "European figurative and non-figurative chesspieces of Muslim type: Archaeological finds from Denmark." National Museum of Denmark. Copenhagen. Copyright: National Museum of Denmark. Arnold Mikkelsen/National Museum of Denmark

The Lewis Chessmen therefore illustrate the complex interweaving of local, national, and global heritages and identities that can be found in so many museums, particularly where collections concern trade, migration, colonization and empire. In this respect, it is clear that to describe a museum and all it comprises as simply ‘national’ is to oversimplify the situation. Certainly, at the institutional level expressions of traditional nation building can be discerned in the National Museum of Scotland, but at the level of individual objects there are innumerable examples that exceed and complicate the national story.

These chess pieces, for example, have the potential to signify in many directions. They can draw attention to the changing nature of borders and how the past differed from today’s political arrangements. They can reorient visitors’ view of Scotland today by emphasizing its Scandinavian heritage rather than its British connections. Moreover, when the history of chess is brought to the fore, these diminutive objects have an important story to tell about the long-standing interplay between East and West and how European cultures have been shaped through interactions with many other parts of the world. At the same time,

these objects can also tell a story of local heritage focused on the place of discovery and present-day aspirations for culture and tourism as new economic drivers. They may be equally mobilized into a nationalist, political narrative by those of the pro-independence persuasion, arguing that Scotland always has to fight for recognition from London-based institutions.

In actuality, the label in the object case attempts to balance a transnational story with a nod to local claims. Entitled “The Norse,” it says the chess pieces “are a legacy of the times when the Norse ruled the Hebrides . . . They stayed as settlers and intermarried with the Gaelic-speaking inhabitants. . . . These marvellous chesspieces were probably made in Scandanavia, but belonged equally in the Gaelic world where they were clearly valued.”

By contrast, at the top level of the textual interpretation in the National Museum of Scotland, these potential stories are mostly contained and constrained within the narrative of the formation of the Kingdom of Scotland. The dominant message from a display perspective is about how diversity is turned into national unity. This can be seen in the large text panel at the entrance of the gallery in which the Lewis Chessmen sit:

LAND, PEOPLE, LANGUAGE AND BELIEF all helped to define Scotland.

Gradually one kingdom and one name emerged from territories which were described by early writers as Dál Riata, Pictavia, Alba, Caledonia and Scotia.

These were the lands of different peoples of different ethnic backgrounds who came together under a single dynasty of kings in the early 9th century.

Look down to the floor below on your right to Scotland before history was written down. Look down to your left and there is the formation of the landscape. The entrance in front of you takes you into the *Kingdom of the Scots*, where the story of Scotland in history begins.

The story opens with the shaping of a nation often invaded, but committed to the idea of independence.

This approach of presenting cultural difference as ultimately unified within the national paradigm matches Beck and Grande's (2007) account of how nationalism operates as a system of classifying and organizing the world. Unlike colonialism or caste and class systems, which are organized *vertically* into "a hierarchical relation of *superiority and subordination*," they observe that:

As a strategy for dealing with difference, . . . [nationalism] follows an either/or logic . . . Nationalism has two sides: one oriented inwards, the other outwards . . . nationalism dissolves differences internally while at the same time producing and stabilizing them towards the outside. (2007: 13)

With this in mind, the *Kingdom of the Scots* display can be understood in terms of the tension between stories of transnational cultural exchange and networks of global interaction that these premodern objects themselves offer up and the interpretive, overarching framework of the display that pulls the intended visitor toward a modern understanding of how the world is organized into nation-states.

The kinds of logics identified here are common to many museums and certainly to most national museums. Although the kinds of national narratives present can vary considerably from display to display—especially between more historical and contemporary galleries—overarching themes of migration, global interaction, and cultural exchange tend not to be strongly connected vertically between different floors and time periods. Visitors are not necessarily encouraged to consider the perennial push and pull of the twin poles of unity

and diversity that always characterize processes of nation formation. Nor are they encouraged to reflect upon broader questions of how societies have dealt with long-standing issues of cultural difference and sameness in different ways throughout history.

While this is understandable in one sense and it is important to avoid anachronisms, it is also possible to imagine a more explicitly lateral and layered approach to interpretation that could make those connections across the different time periods, displays, disciplines, and collections not only in individual museums but in counterparts like the British Museum, the National Museum of Denmark, or the local museum in Lewis. This could be designed to encourage visitors to actively follow and investigate crosscutting transnational and global themes such as the histories of migration, trade, cultural exchange, and cultural difference, both past and present.

Following the logic of both/and rather than either/or, the interpretation could adopt a polyvocal approach and foreground the multiplicity and interconnectedness of histories and peoples. With new forms of digital interpretation and the ability to connect physically distinct collections by means of transnational digitized resources, new possibilities for realizing more pluralistic and self-reflexive, cosmopolitan approaches to interpretation are emerging all the time. In our present time, when relations between European and Islamic cultures are often characterized in the media and politics as irreconcilable, the Lewis Chessmen and their Arabic counterparts have a powerful story to tell.

The Museum of European Cultures, Berlin: Reframing the Nation?

My second example comes from a museum that has created a self-reflexive presentation of the nature of nationalism that both critiques a traditional view of the nation while using some material culture collected and produced for nineteenth-century nationalistic purposes. It is in the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin, one of the national museums of Berlin, rooted in

the intellectual traditions of European ethnology, folklife studies, and social anthropology and thus premised upon a comparative approach to cultural difference. It is a smaller museum than the previous example and shares its location in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem with an Ethnological Museum and a Museum of Asian Art. Its website explains that

[t]he Museum of European Cultures was called into being in 1999 and was created by merging the 110 year-old Museum of European Ethnology (Museum für Volkskunde) with the European collection of the Ethnological Museum. It focuses on lifeworlds in Europe and European cultural points of contact from the 18th century until today. Comprising some 275,000 original objects, the museum houses one of the largest European collections of everyday culture and popular art. The topics covered by the collection are as diverse as the cultures of Europe themselves: ranging from weddings to commemorating the dead, the cult of Napoleon to Halloween, music on Sardinia, the historically pagan 'Perchten' processions in the Alps . . . the list goes on and on (Museum of European Cultures 2012b).

Much of its collection was destroyed in the Second World War: an estimated 80 percent of its ethnographic holdings (Museum of European Cultures 2012a) . Following the division of Berlin post World War II, other parallel museums and galleries were set up on the other side of the city. After the reunification of Germany, the collections from East and West Berlin were brought together in 1992 to create a single Museum of Folklore (Museum of European Cultures 2012a) In 1999 the move was consciously taken to abandon a German-specific focus and instead to adopt a European perspective. The curators explain: "As Europe became more united, it was no longer appropriate to have two institutions, one with an almost exclusive German ethnographic collection, the other with an analogous collection from the

rest of Europe, located in a museum which exclusively concentrated on non-European cultures” (Vanja and Tietmeyer 2009: 129). Today, the museum describes its institutional mission as follows:

Within the overall organization of the National Museums in Berlin, the Museum of European Cultures is the institution responsible for posing questions about the daily life and lifeworld of individuals, as seen within the wider context of the cultural and contemporary history of Europe. . . . Following on from the scholarly tradition of the then Museum for Folklore, the Museum of European Cultures also continues to engage itself with our own society's everyday culture, seen within a European context—posing such questions as who is part of our own society and who is not. The issue of migration thus also plays a foremost role in exhibitions and events. (Museum of European Cultures 2012b)

The museum's main display, *Cultural Contacts: Living in Europe*, opened in 2011 and juxtaposes material from different national cultures within an interpretive framework that actively draws attention to the way nations operate as discourses and are always interwoven with ideas of region, locality, and the global. The display takes the last two hundred and fifty years as its time period and is structured around the ways that cultures encounter and shape each other. The curator explains: “It examines cultural phenomenon in their specific local, regional, ethnic, and national forms, changes and hybridities based on the migration of people, things and knowledge” (Tietmeyer 2011: 11). Thematically organized, it focuses on topics such as “Encounters,” “Borders,” and “Religiosity” to explore what happens when different national cultures meet. “Encounters,” for example, contains the subthemes “trade,

travel, media and migration,” while “Borders” looks at “local, regional, national and supranational sitings of culture.”

In contrast to the National Museum of Scotland, the Museum of European Cultures explicitly makes links and comparisons between contemporary accelerated globalization and its earlier precedents. For example, the “Encounters” section opens with a display about the Silk Route and the European clothing and fashions enabled by this international trade. The text panel begins by discussing how silk weaving develops out of China in 600 AD and closes with a discussion of the continuing trade in silk today. Similarly, a Venetian gondola works as a centerpiece for the gallery to emphasize Venice’s role as a long-standing trading hub for glass between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also to represent how global patterns of tourism have always commodified places through the promotion and circulation of national symbols for tourist consumption (Franke and Niedenthal 2011).

A more recent acquisition—a doner kebab sign from a Berlin trader—continues this theme of drawing parallels between contemporary and historic cultural contact. The gallery text panel makes explicit connections between the contemporary aspects of global culinary influences and earlier ones in order to problematize ideas of ‘native culture’:

Cultural Diversity Through Migration: Culinary Traditions

Hardly anything characterises a culture as much as its eating habits, diet, dishes and drinks—typical to the region or else modishly adapted. In new surroundings, people tend to stick to the culinary predilection of their native country, as a constant link to their origins.

Greater mobility and growing migration have also helped to spread the unique culinary features of foreign cultures. While French cuisine decisively influenced the fare of the upper classes, at least in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, Italian,

Oriental and ultimately globally adapted culinary influences have come to predominate in the twentieth century.

This is clearly reflected in many European cities: Turkish doner restaurants, Italian pizzerias, Arabian tearooms and Chinese eateries are part of the townscape. Their authenticity, however, is only putative, when they are operated by Kurdish, Lebanese, and Vietnamese proprietors. But is this also applicable to ‘native’ foods and beverages such as potatoes or rice, tea or coffee? They came to Europe from other regions of the world centuries ago.

The “Borders” section similarly looks at cross-border influences both historical and contemporary through, for example, traditional costumes, uniforms, and, more recently, a soccer jersey of a famous Turkish-German player—a particularly resonant object given the long-standing tensions over the status and treatment of Turkish immigrants to Germany. In a contemporary twist on the ethnographic tradition of collecting folk costume, the curators commissioned fashion designers to create two new hybrid costumes for ‘the Europeans’. The text panel explains how “the garments serve as an invitation to reflect on the theoretical construct of a transnational European identity, and to discuss how this is influenced by local, regional and national identities” (figure 3). “Borders” also addresses issues of migration, immigration, conflict, stereotyping, inclusion, and exclusion. The overall display ends by asking who is “at home in Europe or is there such a thing as European identity?” Juxtaposing the EU flag with an image of seaborne migrants in a fragile boat attempting to cross the Mediterranean into Europe, the exhibition questions what values and histories unite and divide individual Europeans today and in the past (figure 4).

INSERT FIG 3 AND 4 HERE

- Fig. 3. “The New Europeans”, designed by Stephan Hann; Museum of European Cultures, Berlin. Copyright of the photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ute Franz-Scarciglia.
- Fig. 4. “At Home in Europe?”, Text Panel, Museum of European Cultures, Berlin. Copyright of photo: Rhiannon Mason

Taken as a whole the display does conform closely to Beck and Grande’s discussion of a nationally rooted cosmopolitanism:

[U]nderstanding Europe in cosmopolitan terms means defining the European concept of society as a regionally and historically particular case of global interdependence *Cosmopolitanism* differs from all the previously mentioned forms in that here the recognition of difference becomes the maxim of thoughts, social life and practice, both internally and towards other societies. It neither orders differences hierarchically nor dissolves them, but accepts them as such, indeed invests them with a positive value. . . . Whereas universalism and nationalism (and premodern, essentialistic particularism) are based on the principle of ‘either/or’, cosmopolitanism rests of the ‘both/and’ principle. The foreign is not experienced and assessed as dangerous, disintegrating or fragmenting but as enriching. (2007: 12–14)

Of particular interest is the section of the museum dealing with “so-called national personifications.” This section takes visual material produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to be explicitly nationalist, jingoistic, and in some cases xenophobic and reframes it through a postnational interpretive frame (figure 5). The result is that the objects signify in both directions simultaneously. We still recognize the unreconstructed national stereotypes visually represented on the collections of postcards, maps, games, souvenir tea towels, and tourist ephemera, but we are also invited to look at them simultaneously from the

cosmopolitan viewpoint that the display organizes for its visitors (figure 6). The museum thereby sets up a double gaze that works with the multivalency of the objects and foregrounds the constructed nature of nations and identities.

INSERT FIG 5 AND 6 HERE

- Fig. 5. Illustrated broadsheet “Greek and Turks”, around 1860; Mainz, Germany; Museum of European Cultures, Berlin. Copyright of the photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ute Franz-Scarciglia.
- Fig. 6 Souvenir cloth “The ideal European should be ...”, 1990s; Strasbourg, France; Museum of European Cultures, Berlin. Copyright of the photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ute Franz-Scarciglia.

The Museum of European Culture indicates how museums might address the societal changes being brought about by accelerated globalization and postnationalism. It differs from the Scottish example in that the Museum of European Cultures does not adopt an explicitly national framework. Instead it presents a mix of the effects of globalization both historic and contemporary (through trade and migration), ideas of transnationalism (cross-border influences), and examples of postnationalism and supranationalism (foregrounding the constructed and changing nature of nations and referencing the EU’s rising importance). Throughout, it is infused with an ethos of cosmopolitanism in its nonhierarchical valuing of cultural difference. Along the way it makes a strong case for the long-standing evidence of different types of cultural diffusion, mixing, and hybridity and the continual interplay and blurring between the scales of local, regional, national, and global. It is, I would argue, cosmopolitan in approach because of its generally positive emphasis on the mutual influence of cultures and because its interpretive stance explicitly encourages the relativization of one’s own position.

And yet, this museum is still rooted in its German context. Its avowedly transnational perspective can be seen as in keeping with a broader suspicion of overt nationalism borne out of Germany’s own twentieth-century history of National Socialism. The conceptual

framework of the display appears indebted to ongoing public and academic debates in Germany about how to present national history specifically as well as broader sociological ideas relating to mobilities and transnationalism. The museum also takes for granted the importance of regions—much more than would be usual in a UK national museum—which reflects the long-standing historical importance and political power of regions (*Länder*) in a federal Germany (Eckersley 2012). Its comparative approach speaks to its roots in European ethnology just as the National Museum of Scotland is a narrative history museum situated in its own specific, politically charged moment of national reaffirmation.

Imagining a Cosmopolitan Museology: Challenges and Potential

As these examples have attempted to demonstrate, it is always essential to acknowledge the specific social, cultural, historical, and political context when reflecting on the state of national museums and wider museological debates. Indeed, several authors have identified that cosmopolitan aspirations risk failure because they may seem too abstract and removed from people's everyday lives. Risse (2010), for example, concludes that any attempt to generate public conversations about the changing nature of national identities and Europeanization is much more likely to be successful if it is framed within the terms of the discourses appropriate to the respective national context, rather than in supranational terms. Similarly, Dibley (2011) has criticized cosmopolitan aspirations for museums on the basis that empirical studies seriously question the extent to which people are able and prepared to make the conceptual and ethical leap between their own situation and that of others they perceive to be far removed from themselves. Preferring the term 'cosmopolitical', Dibley concludes:

Perhaps, the cosmopolitical museum might come to put forward proposals by which ‘we’ think of our decisions ‘in the presence of’ those others once disqualified by the borders of nation, species, and animation, not on the assumption that we nevertheless share a common world, but that we enter into the hard work of its composition.

(Dibley 2011: 162)

While still considering the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to have value, I concur with Dibley that we should not presume the general acceptance or a priori existence of cosmopolitanism. In order for (what I would term) a ‘cosmopolitan museology’ to be successful it must be framed in terms of, and accessible through, a local scale that genuinely resonates with people. The coordinates of this scale will be determined by the discourses surrounding politics, culture, and identity that obtain within a given setting.

Bearing Dibley’s critique in mind, we might also ask whether visitors would be not just able but inclined to respond positively to the framework offered. Conversely, would they filter out the cosmopolitan framing device by seeking objects and narratives that are ‘identity-confirming’ rather than disrupting? Large-scale research carried out by Doering and Pekarik since the 1990s into the relationship between visitor expectations and visitor responses to the Smithsonian Institution suggests that many visitors are predisposed more toward exhibition messages that concur with their own ‘entrance narratives’. They argued that if a discrepancy existed between the two it was either simply not recognized (if minor) or a source of displeasure (if strongly marked) (Doering and Pekarik 1996; Pekarik and Schreiber 2012).

If this is the case, any attempt to encourage visitors to step outside of their location and see the world through the eyes of ‘others’ will have to be framed in ways that equally offer points of recognition for visitors and invite them to extend this perspective into new territory. It is essential to remember that people have chosen to spend their precious free time

visiting museums and therefore any attempt to use museums to raise controversial or sensitive issues has to be thought of in the context of a leisure choice, and not in the way it might be addressed through the formal education system.

Encouragingly, Rounds (2006) argues that a key motivation for museum visitors is to engage in acts of identity-as-exploration. He argues that visitors use exhibition visiting as a low-risk means to temporarily try out other worldviews and see this as a source of pleasure, although he suggests that this rarely fundamentally calls into question the visitor's own identity except where topics might be particularly powerful, such as the Holocaust. This low-risk exploration falls short of Delanty's and Held's more transformative visions of the encounter with the other as prompting a full relativization of one's own position. However, the scenario Rounds describes is probably a more realistic account of what museum exhibitions might achieve for a majority of visitors and, I would argue, still has considerable value.

More broadly, thinking of museum visiting as an opportunity to see the world from another's perspective raises two important questions. First, what might be the scope of such exploration; are there any limits to the kinds of views and horizons that a museum might wish to present? Second, does a cosmopolitan approach lead to the overt instrumentalization and politicization of museums, and is this acceptable? To take the latter point first, the 'new museological' literature and museum practice of recent years has resolutely confirmed that museums are not and cannot be 'neutral' spaces or apolitical. Displays, interpretation, and collecting practices are all bound up with questions of politics and power. Moreover, a close relationship between museums and government is not particularly new in many countries and contexts where museums have been seen as useful tools for achieving social, patriotic, diplomatic, or economic goals (Ang 2010; Eckersley 2012).

However, what I am arguing for is not necessarily the same as being conscripted to particular cultural policy agendas emanating from specific governments. In fact, it could be argued that cosmopolitanism is less explicitly political in the sense that it advocates recognition of a heterogeneity of perspectives and acknowledges a plurality of worldviews rather than pursuing a singular policy agenda.

Cosmopolitanism's emphasis upon plurality of views—some of which may be in conflict with one another—leads us to the second question about limits. Would a cosmopolitan approach to museology therefore mean that all views should be equally welcome in the museum space, or even treated with parity? The wider literature on cosmopolitanism addresses this question of possible cultural relativism, and it is frequently advocated that a respect for difference must be tempered by a higher principle of respect for human rights, equality, and relevant legal frameworks. In a similar way, we might ask if there are lines to be drawn and judgments to be made on the limits of museums as spaces for public dialogue. In practice, most museums as institutions operate—whether explicitly or tacitly—with an ethical code that informs the kinds of views they are prepared or able to espouse. Sometimes this will result from legal obligations that attach to them as publicly funded bodies and prohibit the promotion of certain points of view, particularly around race and equality legislation. In some countries museums may also be subject to more direct political control by governments. Despite the seductive claim that museums can truly be an open forum for every different point of view, in practice some arguments are always treated as more equal than others. If museums pursue the logic of operating as dialogic spaces, they will need ultimately to address these questions of implicit political frameworks and the limits of public discourse as defined in that context. Some institutions, like the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, are already doing so (Grenill 2011).

Concluding Thoughts

This article has endeavored to identify issues that arise when theories developed in relation to economics, finance, or demographics are transferred into the realm of material culture and cultural history as embodied in museums. Throughout, the overriding intention has been to address this question of whether we should be moving ‘beyond the national museum’ because of its traditional association with concepts of the nation and place-bounded identities. My conclusion is that this is not necessary or advantageous. Museums are already more than capable of telling stories that resonate with new, contemporary, and cosmopolitan ways of being in the world. They are extremely flexible and adaptive forms of cultural practice because the objects and stories that they house can be re-presented and reinterpreted in a myriad of ways. As the Museum of European Cultures shows, it is possible to set up a deliberate tension between the museum’s interpretation and the cultural objects to call ideas of nationalism into question. Within a museum like the National Museum of Scotland, which is focused on the national perspective, there is equally the opportunity to draw out powerful stories of global connections and intercultural exchange. As these examples illustrate, museums have the potential to play an important role in helping contemporary societies navigate the perennial questions of identity, belonging, sameness, and difference.

Rather than seeking to move beyond the national museum the imperative must be, in my view, to cosmopolitanize it from within. This is not just a philosophical issue but also a practical one. Few museums are able to transcend their national parameters in an operational sense. In the same way that citizenship is only legally realizable within the parameters of nation-states or regional blocs like the EU (you cannot have a passport of the world), in reality only in a very few cases will it be possible to construct entirely new museums and new collections in line with a more explicitly postnational or global outlook. Fully supranational museum projects will most likely always find it challenging to muster enough financial and

political backing to survive long-term precisely because they fall outside any nation-state's vested interest. In most situations museums that wish to respond to the challenges of addressing contemporary topics of migration, diversity, and multiculturalism will be working with what they already have.

Moreover, there is a risk that by identifying some topics as transnational, such as migration and diaspora, and demarcating those aspects of history in distinct institutions, we reassert comfortable notions of what counts as core and peripheral histories. While there may certainly be times when this is justified, I would argue that it is generally better to pluralize nations' histories from within so as to bring to the fore the diversity that has always been there. After all, the nation's 'others' are perpetually reminded of their peripheral status; the challenge raised by globalization, postnationalism, and cosmopolitanism is therefore to question the certainty of the core of the national story. In this way, museums—national or otherwise—can help societies better understand the historical roots of contemporary societal change, in turn helping to make sense of present-day concerns.

Museums alone do not have the answer or carry the responsibility for these sociological, philosophical, or political problems. They must be seen in relation to the wider political and cultural sphere and this will be highly differentiated according to each national context. Not all museums are subject to repatriation claims or the high levels of international visitors experienced in major cities. However, it seems reasonable to imagine that many museums will encounter some aspects of the accounts of globalization, postnationalism, and cosmopolitanism outlined above. Many museums are already grappling with the changing nature of their 'local' population and seeking to understand the heterogeneous mix of reference points that their audiences bring. At the very least, many museum visitors may bring with them some awareness that things happening simultaneously in many other parts of the world have a connection to their lives, be that in terms of the environment, global

security, or international economic crises. The challenge is to meaningfully connect the way that people experience such issues locally with their global, transnational, and cosmopolitan dimensions.

How best might this be achieved? A cosmopolitan approach to museology would seek to make intelligible both what is common and shared across societies and what is distinct and particular within groups and places. It would look for methods of polyvocal interpretation and display that can engage an increasingly heterogeneous audience base. It would encourage people to consider the world through the ‘other’s’ eyes and from an ‘other’s location’ while encouraging visitors to connect this back to their own lives and experiences. It would try to capture the sense of what it means to be implicated simultaneously in both ‘here’ and ‘there’, local and global, past and present. A cosmopolitan museology does not need to be restricted to national museums; it can occur at any scale, although it may be easier to achieve in temporary exhibitions with a clearly defined focus and narrative. Whatever the practical methods adopted, to paraphrase Appiah (2006), the challenge for a cosmopolitan museology is to help people find new ways to live together as neighbors ‘in a world of strangers’.

Dr. Rhiannon Mason is a senior lecturer in museum, gallery, and heritage studies at the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University. Rhiannon’s research and teaching interests concern national museums and heritage, history curatorship, identity, memory, and new museology. Rhiannon is the author of the book *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums* (University of Wales Press, 2007). Rhiannon has been involved in several research projects that bring together museological research and museum practice. She is currently coinvestigator on Work Package 1 of the European Commission–funded MeLa project European Museums in the Age of Migration (MeLa: n.d.).

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