

The Bog and the Beast

Museums, the Nation, and the Globe

By Peggy Levitt¹

During the 2008 United States' presidential campaign, Barack Obama told an adoring crowd of more than 250,000 gathered in Berlin's Tiergarten that he was speaking to them as a citizen of the United States and as a citizen of the world. The President's globalism contrasts sharply with the fierce nationalism and anti-immigrant fever plaguing parts of Europe and the United States. How do we reconcile these two seemingly clashing views? And how might we move beyond them?

Museums are one place to look for answers. Ever since the leaders of the new French Republic opened the doors of the Louvre to the general public, cultural institutions have played starring roles in the drama of nation building. But in today's global world, what kinds of citizens are museums creating? What combinations of identities, from the very global to the local, do they reflect and who is embracing them? What can we learn from the choices curators make about how nations respond to immigration and their changing positions in the globe?

This article, based on research on museum professionals in the U.S., Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, focuses on the cases of Sweden and Denmark to explore these questions. All of the museums I studied showcase their nation's increasing diversity and encourage visitors to engage with global issues to varying degrees. The relative weight given to the national, regional or the global in each country reflects an implicit division of labor within and between institutions and differences in how museum staff perceive the relationship between nationalism and globalism and the role museums play in shaping it.

Migration, Globalization, and Museums

We live in a world on the move. There are an estimated 214 million international migrants worldwide, up from 150 million in 2000. In 2010, one in nine people lived in a country where migrants made up 10 or more percent of the population (Terrazas 2011). One out of every 33 persons in the world today is a migrant (IOM 2011).

Much migration scholarship has focused on immigrant incorporation – on how migrants become part of the countries where they settle. Recent work, on both sides of the Atlantic, reveals how migrants continue to invest, vote, and pray in the countries they come from at the same time that they remain active in the economic and political life of the countries where they move (Faist 2012, Caglar 2007, Glick Schiller 2005, Bocagni 2011, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Both sending and receiving states are waking up to these dynamics and creating new ways to encourage long-term membership without residence and forms of participation and representation that do not require full citizenship. Among the EU-15, for example, only six countries require that people renounce their former citizenship when they naturalize. Countries outside of Europe, like Turkey, India, Tunisia, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia and the Dominican Republic have also eased restrictions on people that naturalize, allowing immigrants to retain citizenship, make it easier to regain it, or easing the consequences of losing it. In general, though, while more and more migrants live some aspects of their lives across borders, they continue to be served by legal, educational, and health

care systems that remain stubbornly inside the boundaries of the nation-state.

At the same time, and as a result, we are witnessing the rise of “superdiverse” urban spaces (Vertovec 2007). Because migrants from a wider range of countries are settling in more places, with very different legal statuses and access to rights and services, new patterns of inequality and discrimination are emerging. This new complexity is layered onto existing patterns of socioeconomic diversity, residential segregation and social exclusion. What would enable these migrants and the native-born to embrace what Glick Schiller and her colleagues (2011) call cosmopolitan sociabilities or the competencies and communication skills that allow people to create social relations of openness and inclusiveness in the world? What conditions create what Gilroy (2005) calls “multicultural conviviality,” that arises when cultures, histories, and structures of meaning that had been kept apart by large distances now come together in the school, bus, café, cell, waiting room, or traffic jam? Achieving conviviality does not negate difference or deny that power inequalities persist. The end goal is not a universalistic self-definition or a single global political project. But if, as Beck (2008) argues, cosmopolitanism is a necessity rather than a luxury, how do we move beyond it as an attitude or an ethos to create participatory institutions that reflect and respond to contemporary global integration (Calhoun 2008)? Where might the cultural elements come from with which to reimagine, let alone put into place, a social contract that is not fulfilled solely inside the nation-state?

The answers to these questions vary in different countries according to their philosophies of integration and narratives about who already belongs to the nation and who is allowed to join (Favell 2001, Bramadat and Koenig 2009). They vary based on how the nation sees itself in the world. Each country’s diversity management regime reflect deeply ingrained assumptions about how much “they” can become part of “us.” National incentive structures also reward certain kinds of identities and strengthen certain groups (Bloomraed 2006). In the United States, for example, accepting an ethnic or religious label or creating a formal organization based on race or ethnicity enhances access to state protection and support (Johnson 2007, Kurien 2007).

Cultural institutions both respond to and create the backdrop against which these intergroup dynamics take shape. Nations perform themselves differently (Errington 1998, McClellan 2008, Coombes 2004, Dias 2008) and museums are central stages where these imaginings are articulated and disseminated (Preziosi and Farago 2004). Breckenridge (1989), for example, argued that museums and international exhibits created a “Victorian Ecumene,” a transnational imagined community including Great Britain, the U.S. and India in a discursive space that was both global and nation-specific. Dias (2008) argued that the institutional ancestors of today’s Quai Branley wanted to simultaneously affirm the distinctness of French culture and stress its roots in universal values. As McClellan writes (2008: 30), “the value of many works as national patrimony stemmed directly from their perceived worth as the cultural heritage of

mankind.” Moreover, the museum world itself is becoming increasingly global. More and more museums belong to global organizational networks and/or franchises, although museum governance still remains primarily national.

The challenge writes Bennett (2006:59) is to “reinvent the museum as an institution that can orchestrate new relations and perceptions of difference that both break free from the hierarchically organized forms of stigmatic othering that characterized the exhibitionary complex and provide more socially invigorating and, from a civic perspective, more beneficial interfaces with different cultures.” One way to do this is to build on the museum as a kind of “differencing machine” that facilitates cross-cultural dialogue. According respect and recognition to previously marginalized groups, inviting their members to tell their own stories, combining exhibits with educational programming, and repatriating objects with questionable genealogies are now standard parts of museum practice. Various museums, especially those in former settler societies with official policies of bi- and multiculturalism, have done this with varying degrees of success (Bennett 2006).

Another view sees museums as simply too flawed to redress their historical wrongs. Ghassan Hage (1998), writing of “zoological multiculturalism,” argues that all too often museums become collections of otherness that proudly display diversity as a national possession. Because the White majority still controls the discursive and visual tools with which this is done, difference is too often displayed in an exaggeratedly self-referential, self-congratulatory manner.

Still a third view dismisses these critiques. Writing in response to critics who see museum installations and, therefore, museums themselves, as “never not ideologically motivated and strategically determined,” James Cuno (2011:44) asks his readers to confront the obvious: “Is this your experience of museums? Do you walk through the galleries of your local museum and feel controlled in any significant way? Do you feel manipulated by a higher power?” (2011:45). He believes that museums still matter and that “Enlightenment principles still apply” (2011: 7). Collecting, classifying and presenting facts, calling into question unverified truths and opposing prejudice and superstition, and being “confident in the promise of rigorous, intellectual inquiry to lead to truths about the world for the benefit of human progress” are still at the core of the museum’s mission.

This study contributes to these debates by examining empirically how museum staff think about these questions and why they do so the way they do in particular national contexts. The findings presented here are based on a larger study of museums and citizenship creation around the world. They draw on my first-hand conversations with museum directors, curators, and policymakers; accounts of past, current and future exhibits; observations of gallery talks and educational programming; and on the stories I’ve collected of famous paintings, eccentric benefactors, and iconic objects that define their institutions. In the United States, I compare museums in seemingly provincial Boston with their counterparts in the alleged center of the cultural universe – New York. In Europe, I focus on Denmark and

Sweden, two former bastions of tolerance that are now both dotted by pockets of anti-immigrant sentiment. I then ask if museums in Singapore and Qatar create Asian or Muslim global citizens. How does the tension between globalism and nationalism play out outside the West? Finally, my encounters with curators at the Guggenheim and Hermitage Museums in Bilbao and Amsterdam explore if and how a new generation of museums creates global citizens without a nationalist agenda.

Since the spring of 2009, I interviewed over 70 policymakers, academics, museum directors, educators, and curators in Sweden (Stockholm and Gothenburg) and Denmark (Copenhagen). My conversations are about what these individuals think they are doing not about how well they are doing it. My respondents work at all types of museums, both art and ethnographic and not just official “national” institutions, because all of these are sites where the global and national might be explored. In other words, I am interested not only in the authorized, emblematic version of the nation but in all the places where it gets represented and how they fit together. For that reason, I treat museums as embedded in urban organizational fields where they may or may not make decisions in relation to each other. Although I could not study all the museums in each city, I did explore the extent to which each institution saw itself as part of a larger museum community and who its conversations partners were. My findings are not generalizable to the larger museum universe. Rather, they shed light on how staff in particular places, at a particular time, see themselves as creating citizens,

what kinds and in what combinations, and what their rights and responsibilities might be. Their answers reflect how these professionals make sense of the relationship between globalism and localism (and all other identities in between) and what they think the role of museums should be in working it out.

I found that an implicit distribution of labor drives how and where difference gets represented in Sweden and Denmark. In both countries, museums showcase the global and internal diversity but to varying degrees and with different goals in mind. As we will see, some curators do not feel that museums are places to create citizens. In general, however, Danish museums engage with the global to reassert the national while, in Sweden, museums try to create global citizens as a valid goal in and of itself. While institutional characteristics, and the unique individuals, collections, personalities, and policies that shape them, explain some of these differences, they also reflect differences in how staff perceive national approaches to diversity management and each country’s global role.

The Bog and the Beast – the Danish Case

Few people remember that the Dutch occupied Northeastern Brazil between 1624 and 1654. One of their goals, besides getting rich quickly by carving sugar plantations out of the rainforests, was to flex their colonial muscle and expand a commercial empire that already stretched from present-day Indonesia to Suriname and New York City. The indigenous inhabitants of Brazil were seen as godless savages who needed conquering and convert-

ing. To accomplish their goals, the Dutch set about documenting and classifying daily life. The Governor-General's entourage, including Albert Eckhout and Frans Post who worked as court painters; German natural historian Georg Marcgraf; and Dutch physician Willam Piso, collected written and visual ethnographic information. Art and science were also tools of conquest.

While they never amassed significant riches, the Dutch did produce some of the first European scientific accounts of the region. According to Art Historian Rebecca Parker Brienen (2006), Nassau-Siegen's team generated spectacular, detailed descriptions and illustrations of the plants, animals, and everyday life of the people living in the colonies – one of the richest treasure troves of information about the colonization of the new world and the first glance that many Europeans had of non-Europeans.

Eckhout painted still lifes and figures, including the African, Indian, and mixed-race people living in the colony. Their rich, distinct tones and the range of plants and animals they depicted fueled fantasies about the exotic cannibals and beasts to be found in the new world. Excited viewers responded enthusiastically when Nassau-Siegen brought these reports and artifacts back to Europe in 1644. In fact, people coveted new world accounts and objects so much that some ended up in the Curiosity Cabinets of Denmark's King Frederick III and Louis XIV of France.

This is how the set of nine Eckhout paintings came to be included in the Danish National Museum's ethnographic collection. Walk in the door marked "Peoples

of the World" and that is the first thing you see. The "Portrait of the Woman Cannibal Carrying Human Meat in her Basket" is perhaps the most famous and most striking. Seen from far away, its layout resembles many famous portraits of the day, with its tall, imposing figure staring out directly from the canvas.

Despite the major historical significance of these works, many museum visitors just keep walking. There are no wall labels explaining who painted them, how they got to the museum, or how they dramatically influenced the ways in which Europeans imagined "the other" for generations. According to Karen Nyberg, who was head of the department between 2010–2011, "the paintings are virtually unexplained, they are just left as a kind of monument to their artistic value. They are, of course, set in an ethnographic context with objects used by the same people that they refer to, but it is a shame that there is not a little more about how they came into the collection or about the kinds of social processes these kinds of paintings were produced by." The average visitor cannot possibly grasp how much these works shaped European sensibilities about the world beyond their borders or about how backward, inferior, and in need of help from European saviors its inhabitants were.

Contrast this to what greets visitors when they enter the New Danish Prehistory exhibit just downstairs, revamped with great fanfare, just a few years ago. "Experience over 14,000 years of Danish prehistory, from the reindeer-hunters of the Ice Age to the voyages of the Vikings," the Museum website invites visitors. The riches include Denmark's most significant

archeological finds from the Iron, Bronze, Stone, and Viking Ages. Professional archeologists, farmers, and amateur diggers – quite numerous in Denmark – discovered many of these icons in bogs. So the fascination with the Egtved girl, a young, blond, about 16 years old who was buried during the summer of 1370 BC or the magnificent sculpture of a bronze horse pulling an intricately decorated gold-coated disk in a chariot that follows behind him, depicting the sun as it travels from East to West. The Chariot of the Sun, which has become a national icon, is unique. “No religious artifact like it,” the Museum’s website boasts, “has been found anywhere else in the world.” (www.natmus.dk/sw20374.asp).

These treasures, found in bogs and elsewhere, are sumptuously lit and luxuriously ensconced in cases draped in velvet. Extensive text, written in simple language and displayed with eye-catching graphics on attractive, back-lit panels explains in great detail how people lived, worked, and worshipped during each “age.” Although commercial and trade links to the outside world are highlighted and ancient, chiseled coins are showcased, connection to the outside is not the central theme. “If you put up great signs telling these things in a few sentences you would be a missionary. The visitor has to work his way through to get that a lot of what is there is of foreign origin but it is also a national treasure,” said Museum Director Per Kristian Madsen. “The Sun Chariot, which you see everywhere, was probably made in Denmark but the belief in the sun as a God was not widespread here during the Bronze Age... Many things going on in Denmark were also going on in Southern

Europe. There is a plaster cast of the Emperor Augustus to remind you that 2000 years ago, the world was not restricted. People up here knew of him and his ideas and he knew about Denmark.”

The contrast between “the pre-historic bog” and the ethnographic, meat-eating “beast” reflects deep divisions within the museum over how it sees its place in the world. Most curators agreed that, at least right now, Danish pre-history is the favorite child while the ethnographic collection is the step-child. This was not always the case. In fact, the ethnographic collection at the Danish National Museum used to be its jewel in the crown. According to Inger Sjørølev, a former curator who is now a professor of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen, in the 1960s and 70s, the museum staff saw their role as pedagogical – to teach the Danish people that there were other ways of living and thinking – that you didn’t have to live as Danes do.² Before airplane travel, *The History Channel*, and foreign films became commonplace in Denmark, the public flocked to the Museum but by the 1980s, mass media had brought the world to Denmark. Danes began traveling widely. They did not need the museum to learn about the outside world.

According to Director Madsen, it is not that the ethnographic collection has been sidelined. It’s simply that I am conducting my research at a particular point in the museum’s cycle of renovations. If I had come in the 1990s, when the ethnographic material were last reinstalled, I would have seen a state-of-the-art exhibit using the latest technology. The ethnographic collection was supposed to be like a three-legged stool – the “People’s of the

World” exhibit; a sort of open storage, treasure-trove exhibit that would display, side-by-side, a variety of utensils, tools, and clothing from the museum’s warehouses; and a space for in-depth didactic exhibits. Unfortunately, the department lost that third space to make way for more school programming.

Diversity, however, is represented in other parts of the museum and other places around the city. In the children’s section of the DNM, there is an exhibit about the Pakistani immigrant community created in collaboration with and from materials donated by its members. In the classroom area, where school groups begin their tours, there are religious objects, instruments, and clothing from other countries that children can touch and try on. The Danish Modern History collection, which reopened in 2001, tells the stories of Denmark from 1660–2000. When curators discussed the exhibit’s redesign, and the herculean task of covering more than 300 years of history, they struggled with how to tell a single national story that had grown so diverse. They realized, according to Lykke Pedersen, the lead curator, that Denmark does not have one story but many and that they needed to celebrate different perspectives at different points in time that would sometimes struggle or compete with one another. “Danishness was more like a question than an answer,” she said. In a section entitled “New Danes” a 47 year-old taxi driver from the former Yugoslavia and a 40 year old woman of Jewish origin share their stories. A Qu’ran is showcased in a short section on Islam.

Across the city, the Copenhagen Museum and the Statens Museum for Kunst

(National Gallery of Denmark) are also doing their part. In 2011, the Copenhagen Museum launched an exhibit entitled, “Becoming a Copenhagener” which is “the first exhibition that places immigration at the very core of Copenhagen’s development... not just as a curious feature in the life of the town, but rather as a key ingredient in the town’s growth and development.” Copenhagen would not exist without this continuous stream of immigrants nor would it be “the metropolis with which we are familiar today without their contribution (www.copenhagen.dk/en/2012).” The David Collection, a private museum, houses a prominent collection of Islamic Art. The Danish Jewish Museum showcases the role of Jews in Denmark since the 17th Century. At the Statens Museum for Kunst, educators are one of eight institutions participating in a nationwide project about citizenship. According to Nana Bernhardt, an Art Educator, the idea is to use active participation, self-reflection, and polyvocality as educational methods to teach young museum visitors citizenship skills.

But most of the people I spoke with, both inside the museum and out, agreed that what Danes have in common is much more central to most of these exhibits than any kind of differences. They also felt that while the New Danish Prehistory informed visitors about Denmark’s outward connections, it was still primarily a celebration of national pride. Per Kristian Madsen claims this is, in part, due to the Museum’s mandate. Of the 5.5 million people living in Denmark, 4.9 million are considered ethnic Danes and 567, 932 are immigrants and their descendants (www.denmark.dk/en/menu/About-Den-

mark/Denmark-In-Brief/Facts-about-Denmark.html, 2012). The museum's job, he says, is to put on display the national experience, to collect and preserve the Danish experience broadly and preserve its common memory, not to focus too much on particular regions. Documenting "Danish peasant culture," is key because that is what Danes share as a nation. Even though today's curators document the urban, industrial experience, collecting objects and stories from peasants, including registering each and every one of the country's churches is still an important part of their job. It's only right, he says, that a very small amount of the museum's real estate should be dedicated to immigrants. Copenhagen is the most diverse place in the country so the Copenhagen Museum is a better place to take on these kinds of issues.

But others disagree. According to one curator, "The foreign is only interesting in that it pertains to some aspect of Danish history... I think there are pockets of the museum (The Danish National Museum) where the ethnographic collection is seen as aberration." Government support for research has been dwindling. In fact, some politicians have questioned why Denmark needs ethnographic collections at all – what light can they shed on Denmark today? The only recent research to be funded concerns the former Danish colonies, including trading posts around Accra, the Southeastern Indian coast, and the Caribbean.

So, for now, the bog is clearly winning over the beast, even if it is only a temporary victory. While the New Danish Prehistory Exhibit stresses Denmark's longstanding ties to the outside world, it

does so to assert and understand Danishness. What happened in Denmark always took place in conversation with the rest of the world and influenced the country's national treasures, but they are still national. Immigration and diversity are showcased primarily in children's programming and by other cultural institutions. "It's okay to talk about diversity with kids and young people because that is at the periphery," said Berit Larsen, the Head of Education at the National Gallery, "but once it gets closer to the core of what the museum does, people hesitate a bit."

Bringing the World Home

The first thing that greets visitors when they arrive at the Etnografiska Museet (EM) in Stockholm is a permanent exhibit called, "Bringing the World Home." It's about how influential travelers brought the world back to Sweden and how their travel reports, radio broadcasts, and the objects they collected reflected their understandings of the world and Sweden's place in it at the time. How did these ideas shape how Swedes imagined the world beyond their borders and how did they gradually become part of what Director Anders Björklund refers to as the "Swedish cultural knapsack?" "When 20 percent of the Swedish population is born outside Sweden, it's evident that the border between us and them has changed over time," he said. "Just as the museum's collection demonstrates that the outside world came back to Sweden in multiple ways in multiple voices, that also happens today. Visitors need to listen, not just to one voice, but to listen, read, and travel so they can decide for themselves."

The great men who influenced Sweden's understanding of itself (and they were great men) included the great classifier, Carl Linnaeus; Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, who crossed the Northeast Passage for the first time; the explorer and geographer, Sven Hedin, who, when not busy leading four expeditions through Central Asia, wrote the book that taught generations of Swedish children their geography; the Swedish missionaries who saved souls in the Congo; and Sten Bergman, who enthralled radio visitors each week during the 1950s with his tales of "his father, the cannibal"—a chief in Papua New Guinea he came to know and love. The last part of the exhibit includes a row of lockers from Stockholm's Arlanda airport. Behind each door are examples of things travelers bring home today – an ivory sculpture, sacred objects, cheap souvenirs. Museum staff want visitors to think about what happens when people buy, collect, or steal things from other places now, to understand world power dynamics through the prism of collecting. Is it right for individuals to bring back something that is sacred, even if it is for sale? Is it right to collect something that is produced under conditions that hurt the environment? Is it possible to know the world without controlling it?

Anders Björklund believes firmly that museums should pose these kinds of questions. In Sweden, the collections belong to the public and should be used democratically, for democratic purposes. Of course, exhibits must be based on state-of-the-art science that is tested. But they can also be used to pursue social goals, to help create a certain kind of Swede in a certain kind of Sweden. It would be more of a problem,

he thinks, if the collections were in private hands and served private interests. Society uses different resources to solve different problems. "Museums are like hospitals and schools," he said, "we just use different tools to do our work."

This kind of thinking underlies a temporary exhibit on Human Trafficking. "Across the globe," the introduction states, "the trafficking of human beings is trailing its marks and evidence. The exhibit "Trafficking" shows the indelible stamp and imprints left on the bodies and souls of people, most often vulnerable women and children, by the trade in human beings. Trafficking is about borders and the violation of borders, about geographical borders creating boundaries and erecting barriers and about openings penetrated and forced." In essence, Anders Björklund summarizes, *Trafficking* is about modern slavery. All Swedes, he says, especially young people need to know that human trafficking is a global problem and that therefore it is a Swedish problem that everyone needs to do something about. "In some sense, this exhibit is about the fact that solidarity doesn't stop at the border," Björklund said. "It's like air-borne diseases, national borders are of no importance. Trafficking is the same. It crosses the border everywhere you look. Young people need to understand that this is not just a Swedish problem but a universal problem but they also need to see it as a Swedish problem that is structured in a global way."

The Ethnography Museum is one of four museums that make up the State Museums of World Culture, a new museum authority created in the early 2000s. In the late 1990s, following a period of rapid im-

migration, the Minister of Culture looked to museums to help Sweden cope with its new face. She focused her efforts on collections dealing with non-Swedish matters or what came to be known as World Culture, including the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (Medelhavsmuseet), the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska Museet), the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm (Etnografiska Museet), and the former Museum of Ethnography in Gothenburg (which was renamed the Museum of World Culture—MWC). At least initially, recalls Göran Blomberg, a former Director General of the Swedish Arts Council, “the idea was, in part, to use these collections to make exhibits that were relevant for immigrants – for them to see culture from their homelands. I would say it was a new way of handling old objects.”

But what also emerged was a series of exhibits on global dynamics including HIV/AIDs, ecofashion, and about rain-forest dwellers in southern Venezuela. The MWC wants, according to its website, 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” (www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/varldskulturmuseet/om-museet/in-english/2011). The museum uses objects to tell different kinds of stories in non-traditional ways. A recent exhibit on *Bollywood*, for example, featured a collection of Bollywood posters that had been paired with objects and labels about Hindu practice when they were displayed in another venue. When the posters came to the MWC, according to Klas Grinell, Curator

of Globalization, the staff used the materials to make the point that “World culture is not ethnification or Americanization but polycentric with connections everywhere.” Bollywood is the largest film industry in the world, even bigger than Hollywood and it produces world culture that is consumed by a global market. “By consuming artifacts from other parts of the world,” Mr. Grinnell says, “we are drawn in and we learn things about daily life in these places even if we’ve never been there. You learn things about the United States by watching Hollywood movies. You learn things about Japan through Manga.”

Destination X, which opened in March 2010, takes up similar themes. Here curators sought to explore how and why people travel and to get visitors to think about how people change as they move. “We wanted to explore,” says Grinnell, “who has the freedom to move and who doesn’t. We are more mobile today than ever before but we are also more stuck. We need visas and passports to be able to travel. Today if you don’t have the right color passport, money, or skin you can’t move freely. Refugees and tourists move differently. The global businessman is very different from people who are locked out or forced to return. The difference between illegal and legal is very little – it’s all about having the right piece of paper in your hand. Societies are not stable because mobility is a fact of modern life. The nation-state might just be a ‘parenthesis.’ It’s just one way of understanding and organizing human life.” *Destination X* doesn’t propose another option or solution, it just drives home that how “we imagine who belongs somewhere, who

should stay, and who should travel is rather contingent.”

This commitment to taking on global issues and to telling stories that stress global interconnectedness does not stop here. Even institutions one might expect would be bastions of Swedishness, like the National Historical Museum (NHM) in Stockholm, adopt a global storyline. In contrast to the New Danish Prehistory Exhibit at the Danish National Museum, the introductory text to Sweden’s comparable exhibit reads, “In the year 1000, there was no Swedish nation, there were no fixed boundaries or borders. There was no common law or currency and there were few common traditions. People did not think of themselves as “Swedish” but rather as living in a particular place, belonging to a certain clan or having a certain lord and master. The history of what we call Sweden is really the thoughts, decisions, and actions of innumerable people – a chorus of voices, only a few of which can be accommodated in this exhibit.”

Archeology, says curator Fredrik Svanberg, has always been used to build nations but the staff at the NHM wanted to use these materials in different ways. The first part of the exhibit moves chronologically, following a set of characters who lived during different time periods. The second part is organized thematically around a set of questions about who the visitor is, what he or she believes, and how history is made. The visitor is now the ninth person in the line of the eight characters he or she encountered earlier. Based on the direction they choose (organized like the gates in an airport), visitors explore these issues in different rooms organized around these questions – in what

is, according to Museum Director and Head of the Swedish Museum Association Lars Amreus, “one of the few post-colonial pre-history exhibits.”

But while Swedish museums showcase the nation’s deep connections to the world beyond its borders, one has to look harder to find the diversity within. As in the modern Danish history exhibit in Copenhagen, the immigrant experience is there but subtly. “Where are immigrants represented in the museum,” one curator at the Nordiska Museet³ responded to my question, “Maybe you don’t see them explicitly. Nowhere, really. But, of course, they are there. When you look at the silver, you realize it reflects the German influence which was big in Sweden in the 17th century.” Recently, staff began using labels to signal these points of connection in the permanent collection. The visitor is told that the quintessentially Swedish potato is really an import from South America or that the coffee culture that Swedes are so proud of was first introduced in the 18th century when Charles XII, who developed a liking for the beverage while imprisoned in Turkey, returned to Sweden after his release.

As in Denmark, there is an implicit institutional division of labor. Over and over, respondents mentioned The Mångkulturellt Centrum or the Multicultural Centre, located in the municipality of Botkyrka with its large immigrant population, as the place where the immigrant experience is on display. The Centre, founded in 1987 “promotes a society where diversity is reflected in the national self-image and where migration-related phenomena are a natural part of the Swedish cultural heritage” (www.mkc.botkyrka.se). It’s re-

search and documentation tries to capture how migration changes society – that being a multicultural society is not just about people from different countries but about all Swedes. At the Stockholm City Museum, according to the Head of Documentation unit, Anna Ulfstrand, most work on immigration revolves around children’s programming or contemporary collecting. “We have not worked very hard on it although we are trying now with contemporary collections,” she said. “I want to find themes where the immigrant experience can be part of another theme, not special projects about how is it to be an immigrant... I think it’s really important to say that immigration is a part of contemporary Swedish history, it’s not something at the side, it’s really something in the middle. In Sweden, the idea of immigrants has been talked about as a problem, as something that is not a part of the society and I think after all these years we have to let that go.”

The Bog versus the Eco-friendly T-shirt?

The museum communities in Sweden and Denmark have responded differently to the demographic sea changes underway in their respective homes. While institutions in both countries took on the global, Danish museums did so primarily to understand and reassert Danishness while Swedish museums saw creating a globally-minded public as a valid goal, in and of itself, and one that would ultimately lead to a stronger Sweden. Museums in both countries took on internal diversity reluctantly. The immigrant experience was showcased subtly, as part of larger exhibits with larger messages. The charac-

teristics of the museums themselves, aspects of curatorial practice, and differences in how museum staff understand approaches to nationalism and diversity management in each country help explain these differences.

For one thing, some curators believe that museums are not the right place to create citizens. They are made of bricks and mortar. They are not built to respond easily to new developments but to produce permanent exhibits that last a long time. “We are not set up to respond quickly and with agility,” said Håkan Wahlquist, Curator for Asia at the Ethnography Museum in Stockholm. “Our exhibits are too blunt. It’s a pretty slow medium.”

Sharp divides also plague the curatorial field in both countries (and around the world). In general, older curators, who were often trained in art history, tend to see “the present” as not part of their job description. Rather, they are responsible for mastering every detail of the collections in their care and to make sure that scholars around the world have access to that information. “A Curator for Globalization is not responsible for collections,” Staffan Brunius at the EM in Stockholm commented, “it is a person who is floating in the philosophical sphere. We are getting rid of everything that is the backbone of the museum.” Younger curators, many who were trained in anthropology or cultural studies, see their older colleagues as benign dinosaurs at best and obstructionists at worst. How can you possibly continue with business as usual – as if at least some of the objects in the museum’s collections did not come into its hands through coercion or force? How can you sidestep turning up the volume on stake-

holders' voices when they now live next door?

A second problem all curators face, be they Danish or Swedish, is neo-liberalism. Museums around the world are facing major cutbacks. Concerns about the performance measures and visitor targets museums must meet peppered my conversations. Pressures to appeal to tourists sometimes directly conflict with pressures to appeal to national audiences. There are so many other things competing for the public's attention, several respondents complained. If you want to learn about Native Americans, you can just stay home and look it up on the Internet.

In both countries, particular institutions play particular roles in performing difference – there is an implicit organizational distribution of labor. The interests and commitments of curators and administrators often determine this. In addition to the citizenship project at Denmark's Statens Museum for Kunst, for example, curators are also reinstalling the permanent collection with an eye toward telling a different national story. Although constrained by their institutional mandate, and by what is in their collection, just as the New Danish Prehistory exhibit stresses connections between Denmark and the outside world, the newly-installed "national identity" gallery will also highlight how foreign artists influenced the Danish National Academy.

Some institutions are also just considered more appropriate venues for showcasing diversity. The Copenhagen Museum was seen as the right place to jumpstart these debates not only because Copenhagen is so diverse compared to the rest of Denmark but also because the Co-

penhagen City Government, which tends to be more liberal than the national legislature, owns, funds and runs it (<http://www.copenhagen.dk/en/about/>).⁴ In Stockholm, the Mångkulturellt Centrum fulfilled a similar function. In both countries, much of the programming focused on immigration is aimed at children and school groups.

Both Swedish and Danish Museum staff are grappling with how to tell immigrant stories and with how to connect them to the national narrative. Their choices reflect national styles of diversity management and national attitudes about who can become part of the nation. Writing about the Nordic countries in general, Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2002) argues that there are few words for expressing that something or someone can be different but also equal. The Danish word generally used for "equality," she says, is *likhet* or "likeness," "similarity," "identity," or "sameness," meaning that people have to feel more or less the same to be of equal value (Gullestad 2002). This kind of logic makes people interact in ways that emphasize their similarities and downplay their differences. It also implies that too much difference, whether between individuals or opinions, can be problematic. Open conflict goes against the basic grain so that "different" parties may avoid each other to keep the peace.

Therefore, actively signaling ethnic or racial difference, various respondents on both sides of the border feared, can lead to marginalization. While the United States allows and even encourages groups to claim "Irish-Americanness" or "Indian-Americanness," as a way to assume their

rightful place at the American table, in Sweden and Denmark, embracing such labels is often seen as a step toward social exclusion. According to Birgitta Svensson, Professor of European Ethnology at Stockholm University, “The United States does a good job when it comes to this but we have nothing like it. All the Americans you meet say ‘I come from India, my grandmother was from Italy.’ It’s natural, they are Americans but they are proud of their heritage.” In Sweden, she goes on to explain, outward expressions of ethnicity mark you as different and, therefore, somehow deviant. Once you are labeled, it is hard to escape the box – even if you don’t identify primarily as a Somali or as a Muslim, people may label you that way. It is easier, several curators believed, to showcase the experience of the foreign-born based on their global connections rather than their immigrant status. The MWC in Gothenburg, for example, reached out to the Peruvian community around its Paracas textiles or to the Bolivian community when it mounted a show about the Orinoco River but it has not done exhibits on the immigrant per se. “Swedish culture,” curators commented, “is not always included in world culture.”

But while Sweden and Denmark have similar ideological responses to diversity, their policy responses have been somewhat different, which is also reflected in museum practice (although the political backdrop against which this takes shape is changing, even as I write). Swedish policy recognizes five official national minorities including the Sami, the Swedish Finns, the Tornedalers, the Roma, and the Jews. These groups, states a government website, “have existed in Sweden for a

long-time and are part of Sweden’s cultural heritage. The policy aims to protect, promote the participation of, and keep the languages alive of these groups in accordance with the National Minorities Law in Sweden (Government Bill 1998/99:143) and two Council of Europe conventions: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (the Framework Convention) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Minority Languages Charter)” which Sweden ratified in 2000. By so doing, the Swedish government institutionalized difference and linked it to political visibility and resource distribution (www.humanrights.gov.se/extra/pod/?module_instance=2&action=pod_show&id=55).

This way of managing minorities also reflects, some respondents noted, the Swedish states’ longstanding strategy of dealing with citizens as members of groups. Because, in the past, people received services or were mobilized as “workers” or “women,” creating a new category, “immigrants,” was a natural next step. Minority status allowed these groups to use their officially recognized languages in legal and administrative contexts, to send their children to pre-schools where the language of instruction was their ancestral tongue, for senior citizens to be cared for in elder care facilities where they could use their native languages, and to expect “particular attention” to be paid to their cultural activities which the government would support (<http://www.minorityrights.org/1501/sweden/sweden-overview.html>).

So-called “new” minorities could also claim rights and recognition. Minority

Rights Group International points out that “the Swedish Constitution also makes provision for the promotion of opportunities ‘for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own’; and it states that ‘a foreigner within the Realm shall be equated with a Swedish citizen in respect of protection against discrimination on grounds of race, skin color, ethnic origin, or sex’.” Here again, the Swedish government relates to its citizens as members of groups which guarantees them a certain level of recognition and services.

Economic downturns and the rise of Far Right parties dampened Sweden’s commitment to multiculturalism, which many came to see as a threat to Swedishness leading to tolerance without integration. What had been called Immigration Policy is now called Integration Policy. Policies should meet the needs of immigrants and citizens alike. But rather than abandoning their focus on diversity, some respondents felt, politicians simply expanded it to include a wider range of differences including age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status.

In contrast, since World War II, Denmark has developed a universalistic welfare state that provides health care, education, unemployment benefits and old-age pensions to all citizens and legal residents. Successfully integrated immigrants had to accept “Danish values,” because the Danish political system does not officially recognize minorities and only rarely acknowledges minority rights and cultural claims based on minority status. There is also little support for multicultural policies or for policies that tell institutions

how to deal with cultural diversity (Hedetoft 2006) which also helps explain why these themes have been less common in the Danish museum landscape. According to Berit Larsen at the National Gallery, many middle-aged Danes grew up in a very white, western environment at the height of the Danish welfare system. There were supposedly no class differences or poor people in Denmark. But in the last five years or so, you can openly discuss inequality or the different cultures that live next door with whom you don’t mingle but “we don’t really have the language to talk about it.”

The last government coalition introduced a legislative “package” which restricted the numbers of immigrants and refugees allowed to enter the country, toughened the requirements for permanent residence or citizenship, and tried to make sure that newcomers embraced “Danish values” and became socially integrated. Since 2002, to become a naturalized Danish citizen, immigrants have to live in Denmark for nine consecutive years, be economically self-sufficient, have proper housing, no criminal record, and be fluent in Danish. A second law, introduced in 2003, included a “24-year rule” for family reunification. It states that no Danish citizen can marry a non-EU or Nordic foreign national and settle in Denmark with his/her spouse unless both parties are 24 years or older. The law was designed, in part, to prevent family members from pressuring young women into marriage. One unintended consequence, though, is that young, native Danes with foreign spouses have to settle in other EU countries, primarily Sweden (Hedetoft 2006).

The Danish government also decreed an official national cultural canon in 2006–2007, designed to specify what is special about Danish culture and preserve it. Minister of Culture, Brian Mikkelsen, hoped that the 108 works that were ultimately included would create a “collection and presentation of the greatest most important works of Denmark's cultural heritage.” The canon would “give us reference points and awareness of what is special about Danes and Denmark in an ever more globalised world and to strengthen the sense of community by showing key parts of our common historical possessions” (<http://www.kum.dk/kulturkanon/english>).

The canon evoked a strong response from almost everyone I spoke with. Opponents saw this as a way to nationalize culture and to keep non-ethnic-Danish elements out. Supporters, including Ole Winther, the Head of the Museum Department at the Heritage Agency of Denmark, saw it as a catalyst for positive public debate. “Denmark is changing and people have to be able to see what they are changing from. When you specify the ten most important works of Danish art, it forces people to react and discuss what they are in favor of. In Sweden, they don't even talk about it.”

Denmark is such a small country, sums up Janne Laursen, the Director of the Danish Jewish Museum, that people can go their whole lives without ever meeting someone from another island, let alone another country. This sense of valuing the local as a way to embrace and strengthen the national encourages that inward, singular focus. The history of the Jewish community and its contributions to Dan-

ish society, she says, went unrecognized by many Danes even though Jews had lived in Denmark 400 years and owned some of its most important industries. When she first began her studies, the museum classification system she learned had no categories for non-Christian objects.

Moreover, many Danes associate the birth of democratic Denmark with an ethnically Danish, egalitarian nation-state that looked inward, to pursue its own internal social and economic growth (i.e. outward losses must be compensated by inward gains) after the traumatic loss of much of its territory and people in 1864 (Olwig 2003). This perception of the nation also informs museum practice. The emergence of the successful modern welfare state is seen to rest on a long shared culture and history (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011). So, said National Museum Director Madsen, “Danes are a small tribe, communicating with our backs to the world.” Ole Winther agreed. “So few things have changed since we became a democratic nation. A lot of our institutions are several hundred years old. We've never actively said we don't want this anymore. There's so much continuity. So Danishness is something within me. My kids are in school now and they are learning many Danish songs and psalms. I hear two notes and I know which song it is because it is so deeply rooted. It is almost a pre-cultural, beyond words, tacit knowledge that we all understand.”

Although Denmark has never been as homogenous as many people would like to believe, discourse often trumps demography. The idea of Denmark as a culturally homogeneous society persists and new-

comers are often seen as not being able to or wanting to fit in. Although the welfare state has extended considerable social and economic assistance to immigrants and refugees, thus helping them settle in Denmark, “Danish perceptions of these people as culturally different – and therefore as foreign elements in the country – have presented serious obstacles to their social acceptance” (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011:3). Many people simply ignore how socioeconomic conditions in Denmark might influence immigrant incorporation or why people might want to maintain their religious practices and traditions.

Swedish museums’ greater willingness to showcase diversity and globalization also reflects Swedish attitudes toward nationalism and the country’s perceived role in the world. If Denmark turned its back on the world, Sweden has always looked face front. It sees itself as an outward-looking internationalist state whose commitments to justice and equality do not stop at the national border (Bergman, 2006b). Swedes feel a sense of cosmopolitan duty, not just to Swedes alone (Bergman 2004). Olof Palme (1968:22) championed the idea that ‘solidarity has no boundaries,’ inextricably linking domestic and international appeals to justice and proclaiming them two sides of the same coin. During the height of the Swedish welfare state, Sweden considered itself a model for the rest of the world – the world needed Sweden as an example of tolerance, equity, and responsibility. In the 1980s and 90s, as the welfare state lost steam, according to former MWC Director, Thommy Svensson, “Sweden had great difficulties finding its new identity because now Sweden needed the world in-

stead. The MWC project was an attempt to work this out which became even more challenging as so many new immigrants came in.” The way the museum was built and its exhibition style reflects how modern day Swedes think about their place in the world. “I think it reflects an openness, interest, and curiosity in the world around us, respect for other cultures, a sense of wanting to do good in the world outside,” said Lars Amreus, “but also an annoying self image of being somewhat the conscience of the world, the do-gooder of the world, perhaps.”

“Sweden,” says MWC Curator of Globalization Klas Grinell, “came late to industrialization. We don’t have our own enlightenment thinkers. Secularization was created elsewhere. Swedes pride themselves in always being a bit careful at the beginning, in not being the inventors but in being the best adopters... when we realize that multiculturalism is what is happening and that we are leaving behind the old kind of nation-states, then we go one step further than everyone else. We’re not the first nation to not put national pride first but we might be the first to be truly global.”

So just as the Nordiska Museum and Skansen were created during a period of major social change in the late 1880s to preserve and protect Swedishness, now the MWC is also “a bridge over troubled waters” suggested Historian Patrick Henry, a response to the collective identity crisis caused by Sweden’s entry into the European Union, the economic downturn of the 1990s, and soaring immigration. And just as, in the 1940s, cultural institutions helped transform rural farmers into urban, middle-class workers so, today, museums

can also be used to make immigrants into Swedes. “The Government expects,” said Thommy Svensson, “that museums and other cultural institutions should be a kind of mouthpiece for our cultural policy, that they should talk about democracy, diversity, equality, and integration of recent arrivals. It’s sometimes a difficult position.” Though he won’t go so far as to put a Swedish label on it, Anders Björklund believes that this willingness to see museums as tools that can take on big questions is unique. “Museums are not sanctuaries... You should work scientifically but the outcome should be available for all people in a very broad sense... Maybe that is Swedish, making it more democratic.”

Sweden’s global embrace also reflects its discomfort with nationalism. To be able to express guilt-free national pride, Swedes would have to face up to parts of their history (and of their present as recent elections reveal) that they would rather not talk about. The country’s cooperation with the Germans during World War II, its treatment of the Samis, and its experiments in genetic engineering and racial purity are just some of the things most people would like to forget. According to Political Scientist Krister Lundberg, “We try all the time to keep it back. Not talk about it at all. That is the Swedish solution for many things. Social democracy educates people but you are supposed to think only the right things.” Many people see nationalistic displays as intolerant, anti-immigrant, and dredging up dark episodes in Swedish history. In fact, several museum staff saw their job, especially following the Sweden Democrats’ success in the last election, as preventing ultra-nationalists from hijacking traditional sym-

bols for their own ends. “It’s so much more convenient,” said Lars Amreus, “to not address these issues about the nation and nationality and to focus on other exhibitions, but the worst we can do is just ignore this...there was a big discussion about ten years ago when Neo-Nazi supporters kidnapped the symbol of Thor’s hammer from Viking age mythology and made it theirs, so people could not wear that as a necklace any more. We wanted to take back those kinds of symbols and not let them be kidnapped by certain groups. Institutions such as ours must do that with things like the Swedish flag, to continue a dialogue with our visitors about what Sweden is and what its history has been.”

Conclusion

Half way around the world, in November 2010, Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) opened its new Art of the Americas Wing. Visitors are greeted on the ground floor by a magnificent set of Pre-Columbian funeral urns. The message is that American art is strongly influenced by its neighbors to the north and south. “The wing is very different than every other wing of American art in the country,” Elliot Bostwick Davis, the John Moors Cabot Chair of the Art of the Americas Department told me, “because it includes the ancient cultures as far as we can go back. We are going north, central, and south to work with that as a continuum. We will walk people through so they get a sense of this layering and richness, and I hope for each individual there is an opening of the mind of what is American.” This is a radical move for an institution that has always defined colonial America as a New England phenome-

non. But change goes only so far. The United States is still at the heart of the agenda. The exhibit questions the sources of Americanness but not the country's place in the world. It recognizes that "American art" is shaped by forces at work both inside and outside national borders but it does not take the next step to re-think how that shifts America's global status. "I do not think that museums create citizens," Ms. Davis told me, "I hope that universities do that."

Kevin Stayton, Chief Curator at the Brooklyn Museum, where a comparable exhibit, *American Identities*, was reinstalled in 2001, disagrees. "It is not a question," he says, "of whether museums are the right place to do this (creating citizens). Museums have to do it because we won't survive for the next 100 years doing what we have always done which is collecting things together and sorting them into library-like categories for a handful of scholars to look at. We still have to play that role but we also have to present the arts in a way that our mission is possible, to find that connection with art that makes some of us devote our lives to it, the fact that these human expressions are moving, that we want to share that pleasure with people who might otherwise not find it."

President Obama used aspirational language when he addressed that 2008 crowd in Berlin's Tiergarten. He wasn't predicting that someday we'd all carry global passports. He was saying that we live on the same planet and face similar problems that we need to do something about. But we still define problems and their solutions nationally. When we create international institutions, like the United Nations or the World Court, national interests of-

ten interfere. If global connection is the wave of the future, then understanding how a global ethos is created, who gets to embrace it, and what it looks like from different national standpoints is of pressing concern.

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Notes

- 1 Thank you to Tine Damsholt, Birgitta Svensson, Eva Silvén and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 This was, in part, adds Sjørsløv, because curators showcased the collections in special exhibits ('Bredeudstillingerne') with themes like "The White God" (about myths in colonial and contemporary Latin America), "China" (with included a naturalistic representation of a Chinese commune) or "Brasil 86" that the objects became such an eye opener to the world. Even given this, there was a sense among several respondents that the museum's ethnographic materials were always primarily regarded as comparative material for understanding how "Danes" lived in prehistoric times – from a strong evolutionary perspective.
- 3 The Nordiska Museum, a cultural history museum, housed in an imposing castle, and Skansen, the world's first open-air museum, were created by Artur Immanuel Hazelius in the late 1880s to showcase Scandinavian material culture. Its website invites visitors to "Discover Sweden's cultural history. Exhibitions on the home, clothes and fashion, customs and traditions uncovering daily life in Sweden through the ages (www.nordiskamuseet.se/category.asp?cat=187&catname=English&topmenu=142, 2012).
- 4 Between 2001–2011, the City Council stood in opposition to the National government but in October 2011, a new government was elected and the City Council is no longer at odds with its national counterpart.

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