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New Constellations of Difference in Europe's 21st Century Museumscape

Sharon Macdonald

Abstract

This essay addresses some of the recent, ongoing and planned reconfigurations of museums in Europe in light of their implications for the making of cultural difference, diversity, and citizenship. It argues that these are configured not only through the internal content of particular museums but also through divisions of classificatory labour and hierarchies of value between kinds of museums, and their locations within cities and within nations; that is, through constellations of difference within museumscape. It examines this in relation to examples of planned and realised new museums, including of Europe, national history and world museums. Particular attention is given here to the fate of ethnographic or ethnological museums – museums that have had especially significant places in the coordination of difference and identity; and to the consequences of this within shifting grounds of belonging and cultural citizenship. The essay then discusses some potential consequences of museum configuration within one city by looking at plans for reconfiguring Berlin's museumscape, especially in relation to the Humboldt Forum – in reconstructed facades of a former palace – in the centre of the urban and national museumscape.

[Diversity, difference, citizenship, Europe, city, nation]

That the making of museums – especially but not only those of ethnography and anthropology – in the 19th and 20th centuries was not merely reflective but also constitutive of cultural difference has been well argued by scholars such as Annie Coombes (1994), Tony Bennett (1996 and especially 2004), and Nélia Dias (1998). They show how the collection and display of various kinds of “others”

supported the making of senses of national citizenship and national publics as museums became part of the panoply of social technologies enlisted into projects of making nation and empire. Of course, museums were never *only* that; and important scholarship and nuanced theorizing has examined the complexities, disruptions and sheer excess of possibilities inherent in collections and objects, so showing that the making processes could only ever be provisional (see also, for example, Bennett et al. 2014; Harrison et al. 2013; Henare 2005; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Penny 2002). Museums' roles in citizen-making must, therefore, be seen as more or less calculated and more or less effective attempts or bids rather than determinacies. Yet, at the same time, these bids – even if unfocused or untidy – mattered, and they could and did have effects, as that literature has shown. What museums collected and exhibited, how they organized their displays and what they wrote on the text labels, were part of the informal education of numerous people in Europe – and beyond. They not only represented academic, disciplinary perspectives but fed back into these, as well as into popular conceptions, thus shaping views of selves, others and objects in multiple, sometimes crude but often subtle, ways. It is not only the content of museums – the collections and the modes of display – however, but also their very presence in the wider museological landscape – or “museumscape” – and the constellation of that museumscape, that needs attention, for this too shapes how any individual museum might be apprehended by the public, as well as forming an institutional division of labour with its own propulsion. Moreover, the very existence of any particular *kind* of museum – such as an ethnographic museum – was, and is, itself a cultural statement, even for those who never visit: it speaks to a particular kind of presence and its significance. It does not do so alone, however, but within broader constellations and hierarchies of difference established by what is exhibited where and under what labels, as well as by other configurations and presences of difference in the city and nation.

In Europe at present these constellations are being reconfigured. A dynamic museumscape has seen considerable museum reorganization already this century, with more projected, as well as

major large-scale developments planned but then stalled or cancelled. A major impetus for these initiatives is perceived “problems of cultural diversity” in European societies, with museums being called upon to address their historical roles in citizenship-formation afresh in order to help with the enfranchisement and recognition of “new citizens.” Planned, new or renewed museums of European and of national history, migration museums and world museums are notable developments underway. All inevitably play into and reconfigure existing museums, sometimes through adding to the existing offer but also by renaming, merging or reorganising existing museums and collections. The waning of the names “ethnographic museum” and “ethnological museum” in the European museumscape is particularly noteworthy given their historical significance in representing cultural diversity. In some cases, former ethnographic museums continue under new names; in others their collections are incorporated into existing or new museums (see, for example, Pagani 2013 for a partial list). What then are the consequences of such re-constellations of cultural difference for citizenship? Do the newly reconfigured museums avoid problematic divisions, hierarchies and exclusions of the past – and/or might they lead to new ones?

Citizenship and Difference in Museums

Citizenship has increasingly been conceptualised and investigated not only as a legal or all-or-nothing category but as referring to a complex of entitlements, obligations and even affects in relation to the state. Citizens are thus defined not only by legal status but are also made, in ongoing processes, through cultural practices and representations (see, for example, Bennett 2007). Those who are legally citizens may, then, still be or feel relatively disenfranchised in some respects, and may become less or more so over time and in relation to specific experiences. The concept of “cultural citizenship” is useful here in giving recognition to ways in which people may be and feel relatively affiliated to the state through participation in, or being recognised by, civic culture. Of especial symbolic importance here, as Bryan Turner points out, is participating in and being

recognised by what is defined as worth saving for futures generations, that is, as future heritage (Turner 2001).

As well as being primary agencies of heritage-making, museums also participate in “making citizens” (as Bennett 2005 puts it) through a wide range of means, including direct informal education into canonical knowledge, such as of national history, and more indirect “object lessons” in ways of seeing, acting and evaluating. In doing so, they not only highlight what is deemed to be of value but also establish explicit and implicit hierarchies through their differentiations, classifications, layouts and styles – as well as by their exclusions. The representation of cultural diversity and difference is inevitably and extensively entangled in this, contributing to the production of citizenship through establishment of identity through processes of opposition – “we are not them”; though potentially also doing so by other more encompassing or inclusive ways (see Baumann and Gingrich 2004). Museums that have traditionally focused upon non-European “others” – that is, museums often called ethnographic or ethnological¹ – have a particularly significant role here but they do not act alone but alongside other kinds of museums within broader constellations of difference and museumscares.

In using the terms “constellations of difference” and “museumscares,” then, I seek to give recognition to the ways in which museums may operate collectively – though not necessarily advertently or in concert – to set up coordinates of difference through what each attends to, where and how, and to how those locations are themselves relationally valued. This is to draw attention to the ways in which cultural difference is produced unintentionally, for example through the effects of relative location, as well as intentionally, as in the explicit depictions of “other cultures” in ethnographic museums. In addition, the terms are intended to allow for a topographical concern with actual physical location as well as more topological interest in how other spaces and times may be enfolded into this.² A museumscape can, for example, refer to the set of museums within a particular city – and it is sometimes used in everyday terms in this way, including by culture and urban

managers. But it might also be used, as in Paul Basu's term "global museumscape" (2011), to refer to how museums in one place recognise their connections with those in other countries, as through the initiatives with "diasporic objects" that he describes, thus enfolding more physically distant places into near-at-hand ones. Likewise, times may also be "plaited in" to both constellations of difference and museumscapes by, for example, emphasis being given to certain pasts, such as those of colonialism or perceived national glory (which might be seen by some as the same thing and by others as quite the opposite). Thus, neither constellations nor museumscapes are fixed but may change as new museums form, old ones merge or vanish, and also as new connections and emphases are made. While what actually ends up being constructed is of especial consequence, plans and projects for possible new developments are also telling, often showing significant political imaginaries, as well as struggles over inclusion and exclusion, as well as what what may no longer be so possible in post-colonial, culturally diverse Europe.

Cultural Diversity and European Identity

"Cultural diversity" is the subject of numerous reports, debates and initiatives within Europe, including many focusing specifically upon heritage and museums. Often containing rhetoric about the "richness" that such diversity offers, the word "challenge" also often appears, sometimes alongside or as a euphemism for "problem." One set of concerns, emanating especially from European Union institutions, is with how to forge senses of "Europeanness" in a continent of many nations, languages and memories; that is, how to create "unity in diversity" as the EU motto puts it. This has led to new museum developments and efforts to establish trans-national heritage routes, networks and collaborations across borders within Europe (see, for example, Höglund 2012; Kaiser, Krankenhagen and Poehls 2012).

The House of European History, funded by the European Parliament, and due to open in Brussels in 2016, is one of the most prominent of these. Focusing upon the history of

European institutions and integration, the words in the speech at which it was initiated show clearly the mobilisation of the potential of museums as helping in identity and citizen formation. The House was thus envisaged as: “a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union” (Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, 13 February 2007; quoted in Committee of Experts 2008: 5). It is noticeable, however, that its current self-presentation is much more reticent in its identity-making ambitions, presenting itself instead as a place “to learn about European history and to engage in critical reflection about its meaning for the present day.”³ This has followed considerable struggles over how to deal with different national perspectives on events such as World War II (Kaiser, Krankenhagen and Poehls 2012: 150-1). Such difficulties are also reported by the former director of another, even longer-running, project to create a Museum of Europe – which still holds on to its strong identity-building ambitions even as its hopes to be realised in a permanent site seem to be fading. For example, its former president, Élie Barnavi received furious condemnation from Greek commentators after he suggested that “Europe began in the Middle Ages,” which he only later specified as “meaning a Europe aware of itself as a body of civilization” (Barnavi 2015). They saw his failure to acknowledge the importance of Ancient Greece as part of an attempt to exclude Greece from Europe. As examples from other research on Europe also have shown, trying to forge a European identity which encompasses diversity risks creating new hierarchies and exclusions as it does so – something that undoubtedly turns it into a “minefield for curators” as Veronika Settele reports of the House of European History (2015: 9), and the results of which will no doubt be subject to much scrutiny when it opens.

Important though these struggles over diverse national interpretations of events and their significance are, however, they tend to be described as matters of “memory” and “interpretation” – thus consigning them primarily to the past and as soluble by finding “objective history” established through “scientifically proven findings and methods,” to use phrases from the Committee of Experts of the House of European History (Committee of Experts 2008: 7). For the most part, they are not described as “cultural diversity” or “cultural difference” – problematic areas that tend to be envisaged as more of the present and more intransigent. Although these latter terms are sometimes used in relation to a range of forms of diversity, including those of gender and sexuality, for the most part what is meant are “those ethnically-marked cultural differences associated with the international movement of peoples” (Bennett 2001: 28). And while that international movement can refer to that which takes place within Europe, the greatest amount of attention under the cultural diversity label has been directed to those who have moved to Europe from outside it as part of colonial and postcolonial migration (Ford 2010: 628).

Despite the considerable policy and academic attention such diversity within European nation-states has been attracting for decades now, it is still possible for it to be ignored in museum and heritage developments. Indeed, the House of European History’s initial plans show a quite remarkable inattention, with colonialism presented only in terms of “migration push[ing] people [from Europe] to explore new parts of the world” (2008: 11), decolonisation just as independence from Europe (2008: 21, 22), and Islam only in relation to “terrorist threat” in Europe after September 11th 2001 (2008: 24). There is no recognition of the effects of Europe beyond its boundaries, of colonial and postcolonial (and indeed any) migration into Europe, or of Muslims in Europe as anything other than militant terrorists. The constellation of difference of a House of European History produced according to its 2008 outline would send a clear message of non-recognition of the presence, histories and concerns

of minorities and new citizens. As a major new presence in the museumscape – with its presence in the political “heart of Europe” and a budget of over €56 Million – this would be a particularly striking exclusion, all the more visible by contrast with other museological developments that are providing such recognition.

Before turning to look at some of these it is worth also noting that these debates and associated initiatives only occasionally consider the diversity typically recorded by the continent’s numerous museums of folk-life and folklore, popular arts and traditions – museums sometimes called “ethnographic” or local equivalents. An exception is the attention given to Roma, perhaps because of their numbers and presence in so many countries, and the frequent hostility towards them. The diversity depicted in folk-life museums is sometimes marked as “ethnic” – as in the case of Roma, Sorbs or Sami – but may be that of localities and regions. Depictions tend to be of peasant life and traditions that are no longer practised or are on the brink of disappearing; such difference thus being cast as largely of the past. Largely ignored by cultural policy, such museums are also frequently overlooked in museological debate (Srisinurai 2014), even though such museums were established as national institutions in many European nations and even though some, largely at an individual level, are creating lively and sometimes provocative displays (see examples in Peressut, Lanz and Postiglione 2013). One development that is, however, attracting considerable and international attention is the redeployment of the collections of the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions (Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires) in the architecturally striking and expensive new Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (MuCEM: Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée), which opened in Marseille in 2013. Claimed by Culture Minister Frédéric Mitterand to offer “a new way of envisaging our common history... of building our memory and perceiving the dialogue of our cultures” (quoted in Bodenstein and Poulot 2012: 29, my translation), the

reconfiguration was a response to “the ‘crisis’ situation of the national museum of ethnography and folklore, increasingly being considered as too associated with certain overhauled nationalist principles” (ibid.: 27) – a problem that other such museums also share. Bringing together the Mediterranean and Europe was intended to help in overhauling the national by breaching its borders and simultaneously increasing the range of diversity incorporated. While on the one hand, the move from Paris, where the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions was located to the country’s southern edge could be seen as part of a welcome attempt to decentralise, the placing of this particular museum away from the political centre might also be seen as a marginalisation of its non-national perspective within the national political geography. As such, it does not act as much as it might have done to challenge the emphasis on “unity” that Caroline Ford argues has remained through most of the reorganisation of France’s museums, including the Musée du Quai Branly (2010). Whether MuCEM will kick-start a broader wave of high-level attention to European museums of popular arts and traditions, folklife and folklore, remains to be seen. Without it, however, there is a risk that such museums may act within wider constellations of difference as little bastions of “real” if vanishing Europe, excluding others in the process; and that at the same time, their neglect may marginalise those who do feel senses of attachment to the minority, regional and local identities that they represent.

Cultural Diversity and Multiculturalism

Although national-based diversity within Europe may sometimes be a source of frustration to European policy-makers, it is accepted, and indeed sometimes celebrated, as an integral feature of Europe. Likewise, the diversity of those minorities classified as European is also taken as fundamental and worthy of protection. Diversity resulting from migration from outside Europe, especially from European colonies and former colonies, however, is often

viewed as more problematic. Although discussed under the label of “cultural diversity,” it is seen as posing a challenge of more ramifying “difference” – of that which might not be amenable to comfortable accommodation within the existing polity (Dias 2008). This is largely shared across Europe, even though the specific approaches may vary, as do countries’ formal citizenship requirements. France, for example, has relatively open doors to legal citizenship but a strong emphasis on cultural assimilation and unity; the UK, by contrast, makes greater demands for formal citizenship, including a test, while having for many years operated a cultural policy of “multiculturalism” relatively amenable to allowing at least some forms of cultural difference (for example, the wearing of veils) in the public sphere. It is beyond the scope of this essay to further explore the implications of the various national contexts across Europe, important though these are; instead, I want to highlight some major forms of new museum developments that respond to the widely shared perceived challenge of this form of cultural diversity.

It is a challenge that despite decades of initiatives seems to have become all the greater in the twenty-first century. Rather than the “problems” having been solved, many European countries have seen a growth of anti-immigrant and far-right parties; and even mainstream governments have also often, and increasingly, adopted more anti-immigrant political rhetoric – a phenomenon that Ruth Wodak (2013) calls the “Haiderization” of politics.⁴ Within this climate, policies of multiculturalism – which promoted the retention and even celebration of at least some elements of cultural difference in a ‘living side-by-side’ approach – and which have been adopted in the public sphere to varying extents across the continent, even if not always as part of official policy, have come under increasing attack. German chancellor, Angela Merkel’s claim, in October 2010, that multiculturalism had “failed utterly” was a prominent example (Conolly 2010). It was immediately followed up by Horst Seehofer, the head of the Christian Socialist Union, Bavarian partner to her Christian

Democratic Union party – who had already been calling for stopping immigration to Germany from Turkey and Arabic countries – with the statement that “multiculturalism is dead” (Conolly 2010). UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, was widely reported as having echoed this in a speech in Munich the following February, with his argument that “Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to lead separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream.”⁵ Multicultural initiatives, it was being claimed, had failed to lead to a more integrated society in which citizens from diverse backgrounds would feel part of a state that allowed for and gave recognition to cultural diversity. There was even a suggestion that multiculturalism had fuelled senses of difference and legitimated non-citizenly participation and values; that it had contributed to “affirmative exclusion” (Amselle 1996 cited in Ford 2010: 636). “Islam” was at the centre of these debates in many countries – including Germany and the UK (Göle 2013); though in some it was others, such as Roma in Hungary and Romania.

National History, National Values

One response to the perceived challenge of cultural diversity and alleged failure of multiculturalism has been to try to promote greater senses of national belonging, a role in which museums, especially national museums, have traditionally played an important part. One of the most high profile and often controversial forms that this has taken is that of calls for new museums of national history – of which there have been many across the continent in the twenty-first century. Of course, the challenge of internal diversity is not the only driver of such proposals. In Eastern Europe, the search for new national pasts in the wake of post-Socialist transition has been central, and several new such museums are currently planned or in the making.⁶ Whatever the impetus, however, what happens to cultural diversity – who and what are included or excluded – when a nation writes a major new version of its history into

public space is clearly an important intervention into the museumscape and the making of citizenship.

That there have been proposals for new national museums in the West, which has not suffered the same kind of political breach as in Eastern Europe, is more surprising. In the case of a proposed National Museum of British History – or a National Museum of Britishness as the press generally called it – the impetus came partly from a wish to strengthen a sense of Britishness in the face of a perceived threat from “being swallowed by Europe” and also from concern about “threats to the Union” in light of greater autonomy – and new national museums – for Scotland and Wales. A new national history museum for “Britain” was proposed, therefore, to help counteract potential disappearance of “Britain” and “Britishness” – the existence of the British Museum notwithstanding – and more generally seemed to remind the population and the world at large of Britain’s greatness in the face of its dwindling role as a world power. That power, of course, was at its height during and because of imperialism and colonialism. This surely set up an immediate problem of how to celebrate this history without glossing over its atrocities during that period and continued postcolonial discontent at home. The plans had originally been proposed by a Conservative minister of education, Kenneth Baker, in the late twentieth century but were then taken up again by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the twentieth, with Baker giving many interviews to also promote the cause. How both addressed the problem, however, was to assert that “the days of us having to apologise for our history are over” (Brown quoted in Kearney 2005; Baker 2008), with the right-wing minister rather extraordinarily quoting Karl Marx, “who said: ‘The question is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we prefer India to be conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton’” (Baker 2008). So better to be colonized by the Brits, with what the PM referred to as their “great British values... of tolerance and liberty... fairness, fair play and civic duty,”⁷

than some other foreigners. As the proposals never got to detailed planning stage, just what would be included was never fleshed out, though beer, cricket, football and rugby, and popular music were often mentioned. While this looked like it might result in a narrative ignoring diversity, the talk was of showing “how we came together as a nation – the polyglot nation we are – Vikings, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Celts, Normans, Picts, and over the centuries many immigrants like the French Huguenots, Jewish refugees, Commonwealth citizens and now many from the developing world” (Baker in 2008). The message seemed to be that just as Vikings, Romans and Co are no longer identifiable distinct identity groups in Britain today – but have blended into an overall “Britishness” – so too would newer arrivals. Whether it would have turned out like that in the end is not possible to know, however, for the plans were shelved in 2009, partly due to the financial crisis but also on account of criticisms from academics and museum directors and curators – some likening it to “Soviet-era backslapping” and others pointing out (perhaps with some hint of threat) the difficulties such a museum might have without existing collections and reliant upon existing museums to loan them (Tait 2009).

Just as a Museum of National History bit the dust in the UK, however, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced his intended “legacy project” – a new national museum of French history – the “Maison de l’Histoire de France” (House of the History of France), to form the centerpiece of his plans to “reinforce national identity” (as he put it) (see Babelon, Bakouche, Duklert and James-Sarazin 2011; Bodenstein and Poulot 2012; Chrisafis 2010). Given that Sarkozy had not turned up at the opening of a new national museum dedicated to migration – the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration⁸ – that had been begun by his predecessor and that opened early in his presidency (Bodenstein and Poulot 2012: 27), it seems unlikely that his own vision was sympathetic to the multiculturalism that the Cité at least symbolised even if that was not entirely realised. Like its British predecessor, however, the House of the History of France was also shelved.

Museum staff and others were angry about the spending of money on what seemed to be a presidential vanity project, especially given that there were cuts to museum and heritage services elsewhere (Tobelem 2011: 79). Staff at the National Archives, where the new museum was to be located (with nine other museums being federated under its umbrella) even held a public demonstration, holding placards declaring it an “*idée folie*” (stupid idea) (Chrisafis 2010). Historians variously declared it an “instrument of propaganda” (Duclert 2011: 17); “a great folly, even a vacuity” (in Babelon, Backouche, Duclert and James-Sarazin 2011: 11); and a prime example of “*l’histoire bling bling*” (“bling bling history”), a term that had been coined by historian Nicholas Offenstadt to refer to mobilizing the past as future self-glorifying narrative (2009). As Offenstadt pointed out in an interview, “The very idea of a specifically French history museum is ideological...If we need any history museum, it would be a world history museum, not a French history museum, to give us real perspective on who we are and what is France today” (quoted in Kimmelman 2011).

A museum of world history is one other possible direction, perhaps taken up at least partly in the transformation of ethnographic museums into world museums, as discussed below. In the Netherlands, however, a proposal for a national museum of Dutch history, which would incorporate its state-run ethnographic museums, seemed to be more concerned to harness the world to the Dutch cause – through stories of exploration – as part of the creation of a “national canon” to “contribute to a Dutch identity... and unite native Dutch people and newcomers” (van Hasselt 2011: 315; Royal Tropical Institute 2013; see also Verkaik 2010). This was an explicit response to the perceived failings of “multiculturalism,” responding to its critics’ call that “immigrants should learn about Dutch history as part of a process of integration” (van Hasselt 2011: 316). Like the British and the French, however, this proposed twenty-first century museum of national history also received extensive criticism (*ibid.*) and has been shelved. This has not, however, put a stop to the attractiveness of the idea to politicians elsewhere in Europe. At present, Austria is pursuing plans for a proposed “House of Austrian History” to open in 2018.⁹ However progressive and reflective the

content might be, however, the fact that the current plan is for it to take up some of the space of Vienna's World Museum (Weltmuseum Wien), which has had to put some of its already begun refurbishment on hold, is surely a significant symbolic spatial squeezing. In the reconstellation of difference in Vienna's museumscape, "other cultures" are to give way to a story of the nation that seems inflected by "Haiderization."

The Waning of Ethnography and Ethnology in the Museumscape

Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna's world museum, was so named in 2013, having previously been the Museum für Völkerkunde – usually translated as "ethnological museum" – focusing on cultures outside Europe. The following year, it closed for refurbishment, its plans now partly threatened by the House of Austrian History. In shedding its former name and putting "world" into its title, it was part of a wider trend in twenty-first century Europe. In 2004, Sweden reorganised its museums and influentially established the Museum of World Culture (Världskulturmuseet) in Gothenburg as part of a new administration with three other museums, collectively known as the National Museums of World Culture.¹⁰ In 2005, Liverpool Museum – an encyclopaedic museum, including antiquities, natural history and geology, as well as ethnology – was named World Museum.¹¹ Rotterdam's former Land- en Voolkenkultur Museum was renamed Wereldmuseum (World Museum) in 2006; and Frankfurt changed its title of Museum für Völkerkunde to Weltkulturenmuseum (World Cultures Museum) in 2010.¹²

One motive for the name changing is getting rid of the term "ethnological" and its counterparts. Indeed, the disappearance of the "ethnological" and co has sometimes found other solutions, as in Munich's former Völkerkunde Museum becoming the Museum Fünf Kontinente (Museum Five Continents) in 2014. Those museums named after their founders – and so lack the problematic word in their title – have not renamed themselves (Harris and O'Hanlon 2013: 9 fn.6). The widespread postcolonial critique of ethnography and ethnology

may be one reason for the growing avoidance. The great majority of the museums that have adopted the “world” label focus primarily upon collections from outside Europe, with the majority of these having been acquired as part of European colonialism. For some, then, the words ethnography and ethnology seem themselves to be tainted with colonialism. Changing the name alone, of course, does not necessarily mean that colonialism is addressed (although in many cases name-change has gone along with considerable refurbishment and sometimes addressing of colonial histories). It also tends to preserve the division between European and non-European that is deeply inscribed into disciplinary and museological conventions in many European countries, as, for example, in the German division between *Volkskunde*, usually translated as folklore, which focuses upon Europe, and *Völkerkunde*, translated as ethnology, which looks beyond it.¹³ All of the German museums that have renamed were previously called *Völkerkunde*, as was Weltmuseum Wien and Wereldmuseum Rotterdam the Dutch equivalent, even though some in fact owned and even displayed collections from Europe too.

In some cases the shift to ‘world’ seems to have been part of a conscious attempt to try to breach a non-European–European division – a division that seems to act against the grain of the “bringing cultures closer” that was the original subtitle of Frankfurt’s World Culture Museum. Something of this can be seen, for example, in Gothenburg, which has given attention to Sweden itself – including directly on topics such as tolerance and norms – as well as overseas; and the name of Munich’s Five Continents Museum leaves no doubt. Clare Harris and Mike O’Hanlon wonder whether the name “world” is supposed to suggest that a museum has “global coverage in terms of its collections” and, as such, seeks to be a new form of “universal museum” (2013: 9). Yet being a world museum certainly does not always mean trying to cover the whole world. Indeed, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam has been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to sell its African and Latin American collections in order to

raise money, and achieve what it describes as “focussing on its strengths” in Asia and the Pacific (van Beurden 2014: 175). A major impetus for the adoption of the “world” label is that it is deemed more likely to be resonant with a public already attuned to terms such as “world music” and “world art.” In a climate in which museums increasingly have to show their public worth either to gain city or state funding or paying visitors, replacing the more academic terms “ethnographic” and “ethnological” seems to make sense. Clare Harris and Mike O’Hanlon warn, however, that “world” in these cases “actually refers to those “cultures” that can be most readily accommodated into the long established paradigms of the West” (2013: 8). As such, perhaps some of the more challenging potential of ethnographic museums might be reduced. The trend towards presenting ethnographic objects as art – a trend exemplified by the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris and extensively discussed – can also be seen as such an accommodation, objects with many different uses and former lives being classified under the Western aesthetic concept of “art” (see, for example, Dias 2008, Price 2007, Shelton 2009).

One question about the label “world museum” is what it does to other museums in the constellation. Do they somehow become more parochial and less “worldly” in the process or does the name just indicate the “exotic slot” of the former ethnological museums?

Anthropologist Markus Fiskesjö, director of Sweden’s Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (MFEA) in Stockholm between 2000 and 2005, suggests that the leaving out of the Nordiska Museet –which deals with Scandinavia ethnology –from the National Museums of World Culture grouping resulted in a less challenging constellation than might otherwise have been the case (2007: 8) – playing into the relative neglect of such museums of folk-life discussed above. He also argues that the developments were less challenging than they might have been due to existing museum hierarchies and interests. In a context of what he describes as “incipient ghettoization of multi-ethnic Sweden, and clearly faltering projects for immigrant

integration,” “museum multiculturalism was put forward as the new survival strategy” (2007: 7). The new Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg was to exemplify this. According to the original plans, however, three Stockholm-based “exotic museums” – the museum of which he was director, the Museum of Ethnology and the Mediterranean Museum – were to be abolished to make way for the new museum, which itself replaced a municipal ethnographic museum (2007: 7). As such, the task of dealing with “diversity” was to be moved out of the capital, to Sweden’s “second city,” and four museums dedicated to “diversity” in varying ways were to be replaced with one. The abolition of the Stockholm museums was, however, rejected by various parties on several grounds, including the “loss” that Stockholm would thus suffer. Some in the Stockholm museums also sought to oppose the National Museum of World Culture grouping, which brought the four museums together as part of the compromise negotiated for keeping them, with some at the MFEA (but not Fiskesjö) doing so on grounds that this would see “fine arts” reduced “to the ethnographic” (2007: 8) and thus a fall in their place in the “hierarchy of museums” (2007: 9). Although opponents did not succeed in preventing the new grouping, they did influence the decision for the name of the collective group (and also, so as not to create a puzzle, that of the Gothenburg Museum) to be in the enlightenment singular rather than pluralized as Museum of World Cultures (2007: 10). While Fiskesjö acknowledges that the Gothenburg Museum has done some great exhibitions, and that the other museums have done so too, often in difficult financial circumstances too, his argument is that they might potentially have gone further had they been able to better address the existing and resulting hierarchical constellation of the museumscape.

The developments that I have considered in this essay are some of the most high-profile and significant in the reconstellation of difference in European museumsapes. They are by no means the only ones, however. Also important in a fuller consideration would be museums of

migration, of which there are now several, with more planned, though Paris' Cité de l'histoire d'Immigration remains the only such museum so far with national status in Europe. Whether such museums configure those arriving as part of the regular citizenship or, perhaps unintentionally (including by the location and status of the museum), position them as outside of this, is very significant within constellations of difference. So too for museums of particular ethnic groups – museums that may be created by the groups themselves in order to claim presence in the museumscape and, thus, in the future heritage that is part of full cultural citizenship. Grouping all minorities together into a specialist state-run museum as in the case of a proposed “House of Minorities” in Hungary might seem on the one hand to give them increased visibility and strength in numbers, and in the proposed location alongside other museums as part of a newly expanded museum areas, City Park, in Budapest, it might perhaps help highlight their common struggles. But the risk surely is that minorities end up defined as not part of the mainstream national story, and thus symbolically ghettoized by the state as not “proper” Hungarians.

There is no doubt that these matters are complex and how they work out on the ground needs to be considered in relation to the specific contexts, and especially the particular institutional and spatial constellation of museums in specific cities and nations. My aim above, however, has been to try to identify some of the possible consequences of certain developments. Because these are less to do with the specific contents of museums (though that is certainly relevant too) but more about institutional and geographical relativities between them, this can easily be overlooked. My hope, however, is that my essay can contribute to bringing these to greater notice. To this end, in the following part of the essay I turn briefly to a case currently in the making, namely, transformations in Berlin's museumscape and its constellation of difference.

Reconstellations of Difference in Berlin

Since German reunification, Berlin has been recentered: it has become Germany's political hub once more. It has also increasingly promoted itself as a cosmopolitan multicultural city. "Berlin Multikulti" has been one of the city's informal slogans since the early noughties – and through numerous initiatives this has continued even since Mrs Merkel proclaimed multiculturalism's failure.

While the city has been recentered within the nation, however, some of its museums have become decentered within the city. The Ethnological Museum (Ethnologisches Museum), which focuses on non-European collections, its counterpart, the Museum of European Cultures, and the Museum of Asian Art, are located in the suburb of Dahlem. While the city was divided, this area, home to the Free University, was relatively central within the Western zone, and its museums a significant draw for tourists and inhabitants of the West. Since reunification, however, visitor numbers have plummeted to less than a quarter of those of pre-unification days (Wulff 2013). This is primarily due to the fact that the city's pre-division central area, which lay in the Eastern zone, has resumed its previous cultural and political centrality. It includes the splendid "Museums Island" complex of five museums, listed as UNESCO world-heritage in 1999. The situating of the German Historical Museum nearby, as well as a private GDR (German Democratic Republic) Museum, with the Jewish Museum not far away, have also increased the museum-pull of the area.

Under plans currently underway, the Ethnological Museum and Museum of Asian Art will be closed and some of their collections moved to this area too, into an exhibition-space called the Humboldt Forum, within a building, generally known simply as "the Schloß," the palace. Currently under construction, the Schloß entails the partial recreation of the Baroque facades of a former palace that was removed under the GDR regime to build their own modernist Palace of the Republic, and is itself part of a complex and contested memory politics in the city (Binder 2009). Within this memory politics, the relocation of what are usually known by the shorthand of "the non-European collections" (in German, *außer-Europäisch* – literally, "outside-European") to the Humboldt Forum, and the city

centre, acts too as a justification for the new building, and, indirectly, for the removal of what is cast as the retrograde GDR presence in this prized location. In addition, the relocation is often promoted as a triumph of moving the decentered “others” of Berlin to its political and cultural centre (von Bose 2013). In a document setting out the vision of the future Humboldt Forum, for example, it is stated:

When the non-European collections from Dahlem move back to the heart of Berlin, they will regain proximity to the Museum Island and return to a context in which they shed the stigma of being considered exotic – restoring a balanced presentation and perception of global cultures. (Parzinger 2011:25)

Exoticism can, however, surely live in the center as well as the margins. Nevertheless, the logic that geographical recentering is political recentering is compelling; and the result of such recentering certainly further expands the multicultural scope of the museological center of Berlin.

There are, however, some further features of the plans – constellation effects – that I want to raise here. I should note that although, at the time of writing, some of the plans are taking rather solid form – the Schloß itself is partly constructed, for example – others are still fluid and in debate; and some of the language and framing from earlier days has already been superseded. Yet, as with the cases above, it is worth looking at proposals and plans as instances of “cosmologies in the making” (Fiskesjö 2007: 6); not least because they can highlight accepted ways of thinking and doing, including ones that may be hard to shake off later even if identified as problematic, or that may even leave imprints despite attempts to abandon them (Author). Central to the constellation of difference in relation to the Humboldt Forum development has been mobilization of the taken-for-granted idea of “non-European” – “außer Europäisch”. This is why it seemed to make evident sense to bring the Ethnological and Asian Art Museums to the centre but to leave the Museum of European Cultures in Dahlem. It is part of a binary that runs deep in German (and many other) museological and

disciplinary classifications, as with the division between *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* mentioned above; as well as being part of a broader European imaginary. As Friedrich von Bose, who has carried out in-depth ethnographic research on the developments, observes, these were infused with a discursive opposing European and non-European, resulting in a “perpetuation of the fundamental division between Europe and its various ‘Others’” (2013; see also Kaschuba 2014). Within the context of the Museums Island developments it also has a further effect, namely to redefine, by opposition, the collections of the Museums other than the Humboldt-Forum as “European”.¹⁴ Yet, these “European” museums include much that is surely not “European” in geographical terms: the Pergamon Museum, the Bode Museum and the Neue Museum all include collections from North Africa and the Near and Middle East. What seems to be at work here is not so much a labelling on account of geography as one of historical belonging to a particular story of Western, European civilization. The “European” museums, that is, are understood as covering that which is seen as showing the foundations upon which European civilisation is built: they are part of “our” history. As part of this binary, the “non-European” remains outside of this history, even though brought to the Museums Island. Indeed, in such close proximity but on the other side of the road, the non-European might have a refraction effect, sharpening the dichotomy still further.

Playing into this too is the orphaning of the Museum of European Cultures. Under the original plans, it was not included in the move to the centre and at the time of writing its future remains unsure. Formerly called a museum of folk-life – “*Volkskunde*” – this museum has re-invented itself with often thoughtful, reflexive exhibitions on topics such as the nature of cultural encounter. Its focus is Europe; and while it does hold exhibitions that would readily find a place in a traditional folklore museum – that is, on topics such as Christmas traditions across the continent – most of these also recognize Europe as a place of cultural change, with a lively presence of peoples from elsewhere. In a city – and indeed nation – that lacks a major or national museum of migration (though this is currently being planned), museums such as this and district museums such as that of

Kreuzberg, fulfill this task, in part at least.¹⁵ To marginalize this task, however, as the “leaving behind” of the Museum of European Cultures seems to do, would, thus, be to marginalize this kind of difference. That is, while the more distant and still, perhaps, relatively exotic “außereuropäisch” is flagged up in the centre, the cultural difference of those so many of those living in the city and the continent is left to the side.

At work here too seems to be something of the awkwardness over such museums that I have suggested above and also the hierarchy of museums that Fiskejō describes for Sweden, in which art and antiquities have, at least until the opening of Gothenberg’s Museum of World Culture, been at the apex. On Museums Island, art and antiquities predominate in a “high cultural” model into which the Museum of Asian Arts can also readily fit. Before the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB) in Paris, which is often mentioned in positive terms in the Humboldt Forum planning documents, the Ethnological Museum might have struggled more to justify its move to the former palace. But now, even if it does not follow MQB’s ethnography-as-art route, the Ethnological Museum can provide sufficiently respectable company, especially with the added endorsement of the distant travels of the von Humboldt brothers after whom the Humboldt Forum is named. The Museum of European Cultures, however, with its roots in a discipline dedicated to trying to document and understand the everyday life of ordinary folk, is less amenable to appropriation as high culture. Many of the objects in the ethnological collections and indeed many antiquities were, of course, equally part of the everyday life of common people. But the symbolic constellations of difference that operate here are not concerned with facts about specific objects but more with what each museum represents. What this may mean is that some European objects will be able to be included in the Humboldt Forum in the end, as has indeed now been suggested, presumably partly in response to criticism (Jähner 2015). Whether this will be enough to reconfigure the European–non-European difference that seems to be settling into the new museumscape will, however, remain to be seen. It will depend too on quite how

the contents of the Humboldt Forum are discursively represented – including whether there continues to be framing as “non-European.”

The inclusion of objects from the Museum of European Cultures is not, however, the only possible way of working against the grain of the fast-concretizing binary being drawn into the heart of Berlin. Just how the ethnological displays themselves are done and how they are framed, as well as what the display spaces of the City of Berlin and the Humboldt University – both of which will also be present in the Humboldt Forum – are able to achieve, will also be crucially important to the overall effects.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the task of deciding how to display collections from diverse parts of the world – and what to do in which kinds of museums – is extraordinarily difficult in the fraught context of culturally diverse, post-colonial Europe. There can be and inevitably is a kind of division of labour between museums within a city and within a country; and we should not ignore the important work that is done at local as well as national and capital city levels. But we need to attend keenly to the political geography that results. In France, for example, it is sometimes suggested that MQB is counterbalanced by the Cité de l’histoire de l’immigration, the two having opened just one year apart, the former not needing, therefore, to encroach upon the task of the latter. Perhaps. But the fact that the Cité is out in suburb distant from the centre is surely one factor that plays into it apparently having less than a 10th of the visitor numbers (even though 80 percent of these receive free entry) for most years since its opening compared with its counterpart in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.¹⁶ Geography is not everything, of course, and being far from the center can mean bringing a museum nearer to certain other people. But in terms of spatial symbolism, who gets a place where matters; it is part of the way in which museums make differences and contribute to the enfranchisement or even disenfranchisement of citizens.

The overall constellation of a museumscape – in terms of institutional divisions and spatial location – is something that takes shape over time, out of the hands of those who actually work in the museums. Only rarely, indeed, is there chance even for governments to shake up the museumscape in major ways, though almost all French Prime Ministers try to do so. Yet, even introducing another museum into the mix, renaming an existing museum or closing it, can have significant reverberations for the overall constellation of difference. And at a time that seems characterised by *grands projets* – especially ones in European capitals and especially ones that in various ways try to address cultural diversity – the repercussions can surely be massive. New museums cost millions of Euros and they are built with the intention of remaining in the cityscape for the perpetuity. As such, their shaping effects will continue far beyond the lifetimes of those creating them; and although future generations will surely attempt to reconfigure them in new ways, addressing the issues of their day, they will inevitably have to do so in the face of the constellations that exist. While we can't know what will concern distant future generations, we can at least try to think carefully about the possible consequences of new developments as part of wider constellations as well as in terms of their individual ambitions. And sometimes, by doing so, we may even be able to find ways to work against the grain of existing constellations and even contribute to creating new ones.

Acknowledgments

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NOTES

¹ The terminology varies across Europe and in some places non-European collections may be housed alongside European, though often with a predominance on the former. This is discussed further below.

² The more topological approach, and the language of “folding” and “plaiting”, derive from Deleuze. See Allen 2011 for a useful account.

³ See its website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/visits/historyhouse.html>.

⁴ For a useful overview, together with results from the latest, 2013, European elections, see: <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21592666-parties-nationalist-right-are-changing-terms-european-political-debate-does>. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance also produces annual reports, the most recent of which notes “increasing support for aggressive nationalist and populist xenophobic parties in some Council of Europe countries” (2014:7).

⁵ The full text of the speech, which is more nuanced than many of the reports about it, is available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/02/terrorism-islam-ideology>.

⁶ In Eastern Europe, many countries had or were embarking on massive revision of their national history museums as part of post-Socialist transition (see, for example, Vukov 2009). Estonia, Poland and Romania, for example, are all awaiting new museums of national history, with plans at different stages of realisation (Bădică 2011; Kostro 2012; Kuutma and Kroon 2012).

⁷ A transcript of Gordon Brown's speech is available at: http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/dec2007/britishness_museum.html.

⁸ Although generally referred to as a "museum" the Cité is so named because it does not have collections.

⁹ See the government concept paper for the project, available at: <http://www.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=58749>. For an update on recent developments see, for example, Weber 2015: http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/wien/stadtpolitik/731114_Das-Haus-der-Geschichte-soll-keine-Schulbuchkonstruktion-sein.html.

¹⁰ See <http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/the-government/the-national-museum-of-world-cultures/about-our-museums/>.

¹¹ See the website. The name Liverpool Museum has subsequently been adopted by a purpose-built new museum in 2011. See <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/> for the current constellation.

¹² See <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/museum/history>.

¹³ In some parts of Europe, especially but not only in Eastern Europe, this led to a grouping of European and non-European collections together under the label 'ethnographic museum.' Néprajzi Museum – the Museum of Ethnography, in Budapest, Hungary, Pántwowe Muzeum Etnograficzne – the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, Poland, and Slovenski Etnografski Muzej – the Slovene Ethnography Museum in Ljubljana, Slovenia, are notable examples, all with roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and all possessing and displaying collections from their own rural populations and as well as from a range of non-European peoples deemed as their equivalents.

¹⁴ In more careful phrasing, as in the brochure quoted from above, the language is of "European and near-Eastern." "European" is, however, what is most often used in the press and the shorthand of debate.

¹⁵ See <http://www.domid.org/de>.

¹⁶ According to the official visitor figures produced by the Ministry of Culture and Communication the annual numbers visiting the Cité have only rarely been over 100,000, whereas MQB has seen numbers in excess of 1,000,000 each year: [http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Politiques-ministerielles/Etudes-et-statistiques/Statistiques-culturelles/Donnees-statistiques-par-domaine_Cultural-statistics/Musees/\(language\)/fre-FR](http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Politiques-ministerielles/Etudes-et-statistiques/Statistiques-culturelles/Donnees-statistiques-par-domaine_Cultural-statistics/Musees/(language)/fre-FR).