Making of an Exhibition

Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland

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Abstract: *This paper explores the ways in which the 2016 exhibition Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland at the National Museum of Iceland was created in collaboration between museum staff, University of Iceland, academics and migrants. The exhibition dealt with themes such as: migration to and from Iceland, transnational relationships, historical racism, prejudice and the role of textbooks and children's literature in promoting or maintaining ideas about race and difference. Various challenges the team encountered on the way will be examined, for instance how complex concepts such as racism and transnationalism were transmitted through this medium. The role of the museum in promoting open-mindedness and tolerance is also discussed – and questions raised on its capacity to influence society to change or improve through interaction with visitors.*

Keywords: Museum exhibition, role of museums, transnationalism, racism, discourse.

Temporary exhibitions provide relatively short-term commentary on current topics of social relevance. They highlight the Zeitgeist, revealing how societies perceive themselves, reacting emblematically to a given mood (Kaiser *et al.* 2014:158).

Cultural history museums take on a variety of subjects in their exhibitions. They can, for instance, select a specific part of the collection and present it to the public from different viewpoints. The range of object-based stories that can be told can be said to fall within a certain spectrum: the methods of production, the historical significance, the story of the maker/artist or owner/user, or the social

context (see for instance discussion on object biographies in Wehner & Sear 2010:146). Other exhibitions have a starting point outside of the collections and deal with selected themes, ones that perhaps have particular relevance to society. In this way, the museum seeks to take part in an ongoing discourse in their wider society. Whatever the approach, it is important to examine the ways in which artefacts are selected and arranged in an exhibition to tell a story, as they participate in creating a narrative. The artefact comes to represent ideas greater than itself and plays a part in a wider discussion on society: the economy, trade, social life, or ideology. All aim to create a meaningful and

interesting experience around concepts and ideas, which can contribute to contemporary debates within society.

This paper addresses the ways in which an exhibition was created; how intangible ideas took on material form and how the museum served as a forum for discussion of contemporary topics. It explores the challenges the team at the National Museum of Iceland faced for the creation of the exhibition *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland* in working with text-based results of academic research and how to communicate selected ideas through limited text, artefacts and illustrations (including photographs). In dealing with multiple and sometimes complex concepts, such as racism and transnationalism (for further discussion on these issues see e.g. Vertovec 2009; Hipfl and Loftsdóttir 2012), choices had to be made – as always – on what to include and what to leave out. The role of the National Museum of Iceland in promoting open-mindedness and tolerance will be discussed – and questions raised on its capacity to influence society to change or improve, within a transnational world, through interaction with visitors.¹

THE EXHIBITION: BACKGROUND

The National Museum of Iceland curated the 2016 exhibition entitled *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland*. It was the result of a fruitful collaboration with the University of Iceland, mainly the Department of Anthropology. In 2013 Kristín Loftsdóttir, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iceland, put forth a proposal for an exhibition on transnationalism, that would be based on her research on the subject and linked to other current research in this field. The proposal presented an opportunity for the museum

to address some of the criticism raised at the time of the museum's opening in 2004 of a new permanent exhibition entitled *Making of a Nation*, on the absence of the role of migration in Icelandic society, which would have been especially relevant in the part of the exhibition that deals with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see e.g. Kjartansdóttir 2005:173).

The starting point was to create a platform to discuss migration and how Icelandic society has been shaped by the movement of people and ideas between countries, as well as to show that racist ideas had for a long time been part of Icelandic society. The themes dealt with included: migration to and from Iceland, transnational relationships, historical racism, prejudice and the role of textbooks and children's literature in promoting/maintaining ideas about race and difference. The exhibition was set up in the Arc Hall, the National Museum's temporary exhibition space and ran from November 2016 until the end of December 2017. An accompanying publication provided readers with more in-depth information on the projects on which the exhibition was based (Loftsdóttir *et al.* 2016), and a lecture series gave the researchers a platform to further present their findings.

MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

To provide context for the exhibition, a little background information on migration in Iceland is necessary. Migration has been a part of Iceland's history since the settlement of this North-Atlantic island at the end of the ninth century. Following the initial immigration, the scale of migration to and from Iceland has not been numerically significant throughout the centuries. Icelanders would sail to Copenhagen for study, as for centuries it was their capital

city, being a Danish colony from late in the fourteenth century until independence in 1944. The first significant emigration started at the end of the nineteenth century with thousands of Icelanders moving to Canada, the United States and even Brazil, as part of a larger European wave of migration. Smaller groups of different nationalities migrated to Iceland at different points in time. Danish officials and merchants lived there for varying periods, fishermen from other European countries (such as France) had come and gone. In 1956 a group of Hungarian refugees came to Iceland, followed by Yugoslavians in 1959 and Vietnamese refugees in 1979 (Loftsdóttir & Skaptadóttir 2016).

However, it was not until the turn of the century that the number of immigration and emigration started to rise, and significantly so after 2005. The percentage of foreign citizens living in Iceland was around 2% for most of the second half of the twentieth century but had reached 8% in 2016. An important factor contributing to this development was that in 1994 Iceland became part of the European Economic Area (EEA), an agreement that provides for the free movement of persons, goods and services within the member countries. In 2006, countries such as Poland were given free access to the labour market, and subsequently, many Poles opted to move to Iceland for work (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska 2016). In 2017 the number of Polish migrants had reached 13,811, compared to 2,167 in 2005 (Hagstofa Íslands n.d.), an increase of over 600%. These numbers may not seem high, but they must be considered in light of the fact that the total population in 2017 was around 340,000. After the economic crisis in Iceland in 2008, many Icelanders emigrated to Norway and other countries (Guðjónsdóttir 2016). During the first decades of the 21st century,

there was a significant change in the scale of migration.

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Questions of what kind of multicultural society was developing in Iceland had started to attract more attention (Mobilities & Transnational Iceland n.d.). So, in light of these social changes and issues being dealt with in society at large, how to deal with the various aspects of transnationalism in an exhibition? A multifaceted topic like this needs careful grounding in current research if it is to achieve some in-depth coverage.

Soon after the work on the exhibition started in collaboration with a team from the museum's exhibitions and research departments and Professor Loftsdóttir, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, professor of Anthropology at the University of Iceland, joined the team. Later other scholars were asked to contribute from their research projects to specific aspects of the exhibition focusing on migration in the past and the present. This broad collaboration was fundamental for the realisation of the project, as it introduced data from a range of sources. The exhibition was based around three themes that each drew from one or more research projects, carried out by the academic collaborators: 1) Migration in the past; 2) the context of racism and prejudice and 3) migration in the present.

MIGRATION IN THE PAST

When entering the Arc Hall, visitors were faced with a large wall onto which a stylized world map had been painted (see fig. 1). The map highlighted migration of different groups to and from Iceland in the nineteenth and

Fig. 1. A stylized world map was a central feature of the exhibition *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland*. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson, National Museum of Iceland, 2016.

twentieth centuries with photographs and small display niches that held various artefacts. One of these was a box of Cocoa Puffs cereal, an ordinary enough household staple in Iceland. But this particular box had been taken by an Icelandic grandmother as a present to her granddaughter living in Norway where such American imports are not easy to find. The stories of selected individual migrants that had arrived in Iceland in the past were also told, with photographs and related objects belonging to them. These short stories were the efforts of a collaboration with several other scholars for this part of the exhibition. The stories presented women from Denmark (Ellenberger 2016) and Poland (Germany) (Ísberg 2016)

and also an Icelandic woman that had emigrated to Brazil (Eyþórsdóttir 2016). The Danish woman's parents came from Denmark and Thailand, and she had lived as a child in Bangkok from 1912–1920. She later married an Icelandic man and settled down in Iceland. Her cosmopolitan background highlighted that mobility and transnational families are not just a contemporary phenomenon.

Within this context of migration and transnationalism, the exhibition explored how material culture has been a part of migrants' lives. Transporting personal belongings when travelling can be challenging and migrants have to be selective in what to bring to their new home. An old, large travelling chest

was displayed filled with items from the museum's collection that had at some point been transported with Icelanders to North America and evoked an image of the trans-Atlantic voyage they had undertaken. It showed examples of the kind of things people brought with them to start a new life on a new continent around the turn of the twentieth century, such as a carved box, sheepskin shoes and even an astronomy book. Next to it was placed a large cardboard box, known in Filipino circles as the *Balikbayan* box, which migrants commonly use to send gifts to family members back home. In a world of commodities, this type of transfer of goods is the material manifestation of transnational relationships (Glick Schiller 1992). In collaboration with Professor Skaptadóttir, who has researched transnationalism and migration, Filipino migrants in Iceland helped to select items for the cardboard box display, which included clothing, non-perishable foods such as pasta sauces and chocolates, small electronic appliances and toiletries.

This part of the exhibition created a comparison, both to highlight the contrast between the past and the present, but also to draw attention to the similar concerns of transporting material culture in the transnational context. However, the process of selection and the status of the objects was very different for these two displays. On the one hand, a chest from around 1800 was filled with artefacts from the museum's collection. There the selection was, of course, limited by what had been collected through the years. The collection is not necessarily representative of the wide range of material possessions of every time, class, gender or age, especially with regards to belongings of Icelandic migrants in other parts of the world. On the other hand, there was the *Balikbayan* box, purchased for

the exhibition and filled with commodities that the Filipino participants in the project helped select. Its content was based on the real-life experiences of today's migrants. Skaptadóttir's participation and collaboration with the migrants were instrumental in capturing a representation of contemporary realities, although this was not part of her prior research. The historical display of the chest, however, was curated by museum staff and represents their point of view as well as being the product of the museum's collecting policy through time.

THE FACE OF RACISM

On the other side of the large wall that divided the Arc Hall, visitors were introduced to the historical context of racism and presented with ways in which it can appear in Icelandic society. This material was from the project *Images of Africa in Iceland* (e.g. Loftsdóttir 2007). The project focused on racism in Iceland, especially regarding perceptions of "blackness" and Africa as a continent. Parts of materials analysed in the project were children's books and textbooks. Derogatory generalisations about the characteristics of people from other continents, such as Africa and Asia, are, for instance, found in textbooks from the late nineteenth century. The research showed that negative stereotypes were being portrayed through the use of both terminology and illustrations. Racist terminology like "negro" was used, and illustrations showed caricatures of Africans (see further Loftsdóttir 2013). These books were republished for decades and in use well into the twentieth century (see Loftsdóttir 2011). Generations of Icelandic schoolchildren were thus introduced to racial categories, presented as scientific facts, which raises questions about how racism is created

and perpetuated. Selected quotes about Bluemen (Icelandic term for dark-skinned peoples), Mongols and Indians were presented in the exhibition. These quotes described them as not showing much initiative, lagging behind other nations or being dishonest. Some of the textbooks from the nineteenth century were displayed alongside recently published books that visitors could browse through. Attention was also brought to how the Icelandic nation and its diversity are presented in these books. The objects were placed within the historical background of ideas of racism, its development in the nineteenth century and ideas about Nordic exceptionalism (where the Nordic countries have considered themselves as not having participated in earlier forms of racism).

Particularly highlighted in this part of the exhibition was the controversy surrounding the 2007 republication of the 1922 book *Ten Little Negros* with illustrations from Icelandic artist Muggur (Thorsteinsson 1922), which was also the subject of Loftsdóttir's research (2013). A key feature of this presentation was the juxtaposition of two children's books, both illustrated by the same well-known and well-loved early twentieth-century artist. One was the story of *Dimmalimm*, the pretty little white girl who finds her prince (Thorsteinsson 1942). The artist portrays the characters in a very positive way. Next to it was the story of the *Ten Little Negros*, portraying the children in a less than positive way, using caricature elements such as excessively large lips and eyes and almost monkey-like bodies (Loftsdóttir 2013:302). The aim here was not to draw out the artist's skills, but rather show how these images manifest certain positive or negative attitudes in society. It also asked visitors to reflect on diversity and racial classifications in their own schoolbooks, thereby implicitly raising questions on what messages are being

sent to children through the texts and images presented to them. Contemporary children's books were also placed within the display to showcase how this has changed through time (see Loftsdóttir 2010, 2011).

Even though the main aim of this part of the exhibition was to rebut the idea that racism was not part of Iceland's history (see Loftsdóttir 2013), the team also felt it was essential to stress racism in the present. Loftsdóttir and Skaptadóttir collected a series of comments shared by migrants interviewed for various projects or posted by individuals on the internet regarding the controversy of the republication of *Ten Little Negros*. These included remarks such as:

Do people not know that in this country there are dozens of mixed-race children, with one Icelandic parent [...] Do people think it is normal for black children to learn in their preschool to call themselves a 'negro'?

If you get this label 'Lithuanian' then it does not matter how hard working you are.

I can't be bothered to go for a night out because men think I am a prostitute.

Projected onto the wall and by using sensors, the comments were set to follow the visitor as he/she moved past the wall, as such hurtful and racist comments tend to follow those they are aimed at. This installation drew attention to some of the manifestations of racism in present Icelandic society and highlighted its prevalence in everyday life.

CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION

The third theme dealt with examples of present-day realities of a transnational world. Early on in the process of creating the exhibition, there was interest within the exhibition team

in personalising the stories of migration, of selecting real-life stories to include as part of the narrative, not necessarily to stand as representatives, but as a few examples among many others that visitors could relate to. Such methods of storytelling are not unfamiliar to museum workers. Migrants were central to the exhibition concept, and their involvement in its creation was on two different levels. Firstly, they were involved through participation in the research projects carried out by the academics that were part of the project. The initial selection and inclusion relied on the requirements of the various research projects involving migrant groups to or from Iceland, representing both past and recent (or ongoing) migration. Secondly, six individuals of different origins were selected to participate directly in the making of the exhibition, three men and three women. Most of them were migrants living in Iceland, originally from Poland, Lithuania, the Philippines, Kenya, and a refugee from Iran. One was an Icelandic man that had emigrated to Norway. The researchers acted as intermediaries in establishing contact and asking them to participate. These individuals were of the same nationalities that had been the focus of the research projects. This allowed for better contextualization of their individual stories.

The migrants that agreed to join the effort of creating the exhibition each contributed their own unique story. Although the idea was not to select people that were somehow representative of a larger group, it was a possibility that they would be perceived as such by the visitors. The intended approach was to highlight named individuals as just a few examples of many more stories that could have been told, to give voices to migrants' personal experiences.

Nina Simon, an advocate for public participation in museums and the author of *The*

Art of Relevance stated that: "One of our core programming goals is to build social capital by forging unexpected connections between diverse collaborators and audience members." (Simon 2016:116) Although *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland* was centred on co-operation with academic researchers, it brought about other's involvement, creating new inspirations. The migrants played a vital role in this respect, and their participation provided important grounding for the project that allowed for an indirect dialogue between them and the audience.

The migrants were asked to share their stories focusing on the reasons for their migration, how life was in their new home and how each connection to their native countries manifested itself. In this way, visitors would hopefully identify and connect with some of those experiences. Their accounts were edited and displayed alongside large portraits that were taken for this purpose. In this part, the museum staff did not have much direct contact with the migrants themselves but relied on dialogue through the researchers. The researchers carried out the interviews, gathering the necessary information for the exhibition and preparing the selection of artefacts. So, although the migrants participated in the curation, the museum did not fully embrace the opportunity for co-curation.

The participants were also asked to select artefacts for the display that carried personal significance to them. Each chose two objects, one that symbolised their relationship with their native country or was meaningful in some way, perhaps a treasured item that they had brought with them when they migrated. The other one was to be something that they felt was important for their lives in the new country – Iceland or Norway. The Filipino

Fig. 2. Display of artifacts selected by migrants for the exhibition Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland. Photo: Ívar Brynjólfsson, National Museum of Iceland, 2016.

chose a cocoa pot that once belonged to her grandfather and was revered as a family treasure. The Lithuanian selected a pair of basketball shirts, one from each country, as he was a keen basketball player. The Kenyan chose a key to a swimming pool locker, a part of daily life in Iceland, while a Polish man chose beard oil, speaking to the masculine trend of growing facial hair popular in Iceland. The Iranian refugee was faced with a dilemma of selecting an item from her home. She had spent two

years on the run before arriving in Iceland. The haste of her original departure meant that she had not been able to bring anything with her. Rather than finding something that she would be able to obtain from her family, something that would be typically Iranian, the team chose to present this fact. An empty display column was placed amidst the others, with text highlighting the lack of material possessions that resulted from her refugee status.

The display of contemporary migrant arte-

facts was a central feature of the exhibition (fig. 2). It empowered the participants to contribute to the narrative, through the selection of their own meaningful artefacts – albeit within the framework set up by museum staff. The everyday nature of the selected objects, the limited number of artefacts and their setting within individual cases, placed them in a context of significance within the exhibition. Drawing attention to the artefacts in this way signalled their particular value as both a symbolic and a personal selection.

The material culture of transnational relationships provided an essential dimension to the exhibition, but these items were not part of the museum's collection. This fact raises questions regarding the museum's collection policy. During the early phases of the project, discussions took place on whether it should include contemporary collecting. That way, the participants would have been asked to offer their selection of artefacts for accessioning by the museum. This idea was abandoned, and all the artefacts, some very personal and valued family heirlooms, were returned to the participants. The main reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, concerns for the impact this might have on the selection process, as the participants would have considered a gift to the museum differently from a loan, and family heirlooms would probably not have been selected. Secondly, there was a difference of opinion on the relevance and value of the selected items for the National Museum's collection.

Interactive aspects can help visitors to engage with the topic at hand and even encourage communication between visitors, directly or indirectly. As Bergkvist (2004) put it: "Museums should aim to create an environment or space or dialogue." (p. 17f) Budget here is, of course, a concern, and for this project, the ideas for

interactive features were ambitious but had to be scaled down. The final exhibition included a feature intended to get people thinking about the material aspects of migration and the process of selecting things to take with you from your home country if you were moving to another place. Visitors were asked the question: What would you take with you? Small notes were provided along with writing implements and several hooks were placed on an area of the wall. Many guests participated in this and shared with fellow visitors what they would bring. Although a systematic analysis of these contributions has not been carried out, an informal review highlights certain themes. Different types of objects were mentioned (or drawn), as were family members or family heirlooms. However, a prominent theme was food – either a particular food item itself (such as a specific brand of tea for some of the British visitors) or recipe books (some handed down from earlier generations). This tied directly to the display of a jar of honey that the Polish participant had selected to represent his home country. By juxtaposing the notes from the visitors alongside these stories, they could then put themselves in their shoes and relate to the shared human experience of migration.

CREATING MEANINGS

One of the aims of the exhibition was to communicate the results of academic research to a wider audience, the museum's visitors. Certainly, the project was carried out in collaboration with various researchers and had links to their individual projects. However, it is important to note that while all of these projects focused in one way or another on migration, the data was not collected for the exhibition. For instance, the theme that dealt with migration in the present brought together

individual participants that were interviewed specifically for the research. The narrative displayed was collected and edited for the exhibition, but it was carried out within the wider context of the various research projects. Material culture had not in all cases been a focus of the projects, so the selection of objects and their presentation was essentially a product of the curation process, where the museum's expertise played an important role. The curation process thus created elements of representation that were not part of the original research and contributed another dimension to the exhibition. This dialogue produced a creative space within which ideas could grow and take new shapes.

Perhaps the most significant research contribution to the exhibition was the theme dealing with the context of racism and its manifestation in books and online comments. There, the exhibition highlighted selected findings or research projects focusing on racism.

Creating meanings in exhibitions is an interactive process that depends on different types of relationships. Curators at the National Museum of Australia reflected on their understanding of exhibitions:

We – the curatorial staff – tend to understand exhibitions as open, performative environments in which meaning, or rather multiple meanings, are created as visitors observe and interrogate displayed objects and recognize and construct relationships between object elements, drawing on both new and known knowledge. (Wehner & Sear 2010:151)

In light of this, how did *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland* engage with the task of creating meanings? Each theme of the exhibition was composed of different layers of text, photographs and artefacts. The narrative

of the exhibition was created through this selection of artefacts and how they were placed in relation to each other to support the story. Visitors then delve into the different layers of communication, depending on what interests them. Some will only look at artefacts and images, whereas others will take a more in-depth approach and read the texts. In this way, the range of interpretation will depend on the visitor's approach in 'reading' the exhibition and creating meaning through the experience of the visit. As a form of communication, it relies much more on implied and suggested ideas, than on a detailed explanation that is near to impossible with the limited amount of text that an exhibition can carry. The length of texts varied from 30–50 words for the artefact texts to around 200 words for the migrant's stories. In this way, the process becomes more about creating an experience that captures the audience: it is more of visitor learning than visitor education (Kelly 2007).

Some of the artefacts in the exhibition *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland* were placed side by side to draw out a comparison, such as Muggur's children's books in the section on the context of racism. Others gained increased significance by being presented on a central podium, such as the objects selected by the migrants. However, certain artefacts were selected for the exhibition and displayed, even though they had no direct relevance to the research: A tablecloth with hand-embroidered signatures of guests to an Icelandic home in Reykjavík, an interesting form of guestbook, an illustration of one of the ships that transported Icelanders to Canada and the United States and even the exhibition's icon, a small carved globe attached to a pole that sticks out of an image of Iceland. What is their relevance, and why are they part of the exhibition? Their inclusion is the result of the curation process,

which was not only about communicating the results of the research but was a project in itself, negotiated with the different partners, academics, migrants and designers.

In her article on “The Dangerous Museum” Tøndborg (2013:5) illustrates how: “these museum professionals feel that museums have the potential to play a new and more active role in a changing society”. However, following on from her discussion on participatory practices and controversy in museums, Tøndborg argues that museums should not take on the role of making a difference – and that such tasks are best left up to institutions that can take a more direct approach to effecting social change (2013:13–14). However, keeping in mind the words attributed to Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (The Institute for Intercultural Studies n.d.). It is not always the direct institutional approach that will have the most impact. The outcome of such an effort, to prompt the visitor to think about his or her own attitudes and practices, is not easily measured. It is not necessarily manifested as an instant, significant or visible change. Rather it could be seen as an idea that can take longer to germinate and have an effect. It could also just be something that is easily forgotten and of no concern.

The potential to make a difference perhaps then depends on how relevant the content of the exhibition is to the individual visitor or how the project team has succeeded in presenting the material in a way that speaks to them. Relevance, in Nina Simon’s terms, “is a key that unlocks meaning. It opens doors to experiences that matter to us, surprise us, and bring value into our lives.” (Simon 2016:25).

The National Museum of Iceland intends to stand for tolerance. It aims to be thought-

provoking and a forum of discussion in society (see e.g. Ársskýrsla Þjóðminjasafns Íslands 2013). In that respect the ideas represented in the exhibition can touch anyone in different ways. The visitor always brings his or her own experience and background to the museum. The presentation of old definitions of the nature of the races, with the white man in supreme position, can perhaps be taken as a good idea that reinforces the discourse of those that exhibit prejudiced views on others. Bringing up what today is considered more negative aspects of the past can possibly be thought-provoking, but it is the dialogue between the past and the present that is important to encourage.

Museums play many roles, one of which is to provide a forum for discussion. Museums have through time been used for different purposes, even as a means to support debates for a particular cause. In the case of *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland*, one of the aims was to encourage tolerance and open-mindedness by highlighting common factors in the experiences of both Icelanders and those of other nationalities that had migrated to Iceland, both relating to the movement of people or ideas across borders.

Can an exhibition prompt visitors to reflect on how racism appears in our society and what role they play themselves? What is our attitude towards those moving to our country? What is our attitude towards those Icelanders that have emigrated to other countries? Has our personal experience or history had an impact on how we live and work in a transnational community? What are the challenges involved with living in a transnational world and having connections to people all over the world? These were some of the questions raised during the making of the exhibition. The team hoped that it would encourage visitors to think about

these subjects. No visitor surveys were carried out for this exhibition specifically, but it was well attended with around 235.000 visitors in 2017 (Ársskýrsla Þjóðminjasafns Íslands 2017:32). Each museum visitor approaches the exhibition on their own terms, with knowledge and attitudes that shape their experience. Possibly the exhibition will move them, bring them new knowledge, prompt new questions, all to better understand the present in light of the past.

As was mentioned at the start of the paper, recent changes in the composition of the Icelandic population and current debate regarding the effects of migration and transnationalism (e.g. see *Mobilities & Transnational Iceland* n.d.) prompted the creation of this exhibition. Therefore, it was conceived of as a contribution to the social discourse and a forum for discussion and thoughts on the various related subjects, including racism, tolerance and what it entails living in an interconnected world. The context of the exhibition was Iceland, and, as the title suggests, its ties to the world. Questions of multiculturalism, migration and identity would surely not have been tackled in the same way in a different country, where patterns of movement have encouraged a distinctive approach and ideas have manifested themselves in other manners.

I believe that for museums to be relevant today, they need to have the courage to take on difficult topics and reach out to various collaborators in order to create meanings in their exhibitions. As a forum for discussion, the museum can play a role in the development of society and facilitate reflection on divergent points of view. In the case of *Iceland in the World, the World in Iceland*, the National Museum of Iceland was able to introduce recent research projects to new audiences

and strengthen ties both to the academic community and migrants. As a project in its own right, carried out with co-operation between diverse participants, the team contributed to the ongoing discourse within society. The museum, through the creation of the exhibition on migration and racism, therefore played a part in the development of a transnational world and endeavoured to make a difference.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the entire team at the National Museum of Iceland for their collaboration on this project, as well as the academic partners. Professors Kristín Loftsdóttir, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and their colleagues. Also, I would like to extend my thanks to two anonymous reviewers whose comments helped to improve the focus of the article, as well as Ingunn Jónsdóttir and Aimee Moisan Quinn for helpful suggestions. The exhibition was part of the project *Iceland Identity in Crisis: The Intersection of Gender and Racialization* funded by the Icelandic Research Fund, and connected to the Project of Excellence, *Mobilities and Transnational Iceland*, also funded by the Icelandic Research Fund. An earlier version of this article was presented at the *Democratising Heritage* workshop at the University of Reading in July 2018, and I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Avril Maddrell and other participants for their feedback.

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