

Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter

By the 1940s, the collections and displays of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) had been thoroughly infiltrated by European imperialism.¹ The majority of Asian and African material accessioned since the founding of the institution in 1846 had been donated by travellers working in association with the expansion of the great colonial powers. The transformation of European museums displaying 'other' cultures during decolonization is a growing concern in the study both of the 'end of empire' and of museums, yet museums of non-European cultures on the other side of the Atlantic were also required to negotiate political change at this time.² Despite the increasing scholarly emphasis on the role of the United States in the decolonization of European empires, important questions remain about how the US framed the 'imperial' collections of its national museum between 1950 and 1970.³ How, we might ask, were cultural arenas like museums active in decolonization and what was the interaction between US collections and the collapse of empire in a political and intellectual milieu which appeared to lean towards democracy and anti-colonialism?

At the level of strategic and economic policy, the US held a highly complex position on European imperial endeavors. Despite the American 'ideological distaste' for mid-century European imperialism, it is now well known that the US acted as a 'sleeping partner' in the

¹ The Natural History Building, part of the Smithsonian Institution's United States National Museum, was renamed the National Museum of Natural History on March 24, 1969 (*Smithsonian Year*, 1969, 59). For ease of reference, NMNH will be used throughout.

² On European museums see, for example, Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe," in Dominic Thomas, ed., *Museums in Postcolonial Europe* (Oxon, 2009), 12-31; Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums, and Colonial Memories* (Basingstoke, 2004); Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago, 2011); Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY, 2013); Christina Kreps, "Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology," in Janet Martine, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twentieth-Century Museum* (Oxon, 2011), 70-84; Claire Wintle, "Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes," *Museum & Society* 11, no. 2 (2013): 185-201.

³ On the US and decolonization of European empires see, for example, Wm Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (Oxford, 1978); Erez Manela, "Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire in 1919," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1327-1351; Mark Bradley, "Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2010), 464-485.

British and French empires at certain points in this period, and that as the Cold War progressed, the American government had an active interest in creating stability and ideological alignment across Europe's languishing empires.⁴ Certainly, US strategic and economic interests in Asia, the Middle East and Africa would shape the course of global politics at this time and take on a decidedly imperial character as they developed. Thus, as they built their independence, the former European colonies would have to negotiate with the economic influence and global strategic interests of this new superpower.

The important if ambivalent role of museums in empire building has already been explored, but despite our increasingly nuanced understanding of the 'end of empire', scholarly perceptions of the museum during the high point of political decolonization remain limited.⁵ Often, anthropology museums of this period have been framed as static sites, paralyzed by their embarrassing links to imperialism. According to some scholarship, as empire crumbled, museums 'languished'.⁶ But re-examining the relationship between Western museums and the end of empire in the middle years of the twentieth century provides a valuable opportunity to examine both decolonization as a process and the impact of cultural forms on the political sphere. Museums are products but also agents of social and political change; they are influential in practices of identity formation, political negotiation and economic development.⁷ During the middle years of the twentieth century, such institutions were key sites for actors of the time, present as arenas for trialing and enacting

⁴ Martin Thomas, Bob Moore, and L.J. Butler, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial States, 1918-1975* (London, 2008), 36; Wm. Roger Louis, and Roger Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22, no. 3 (1994): 462-511. For the quotation, see p. 472.

⁵ On museums and imperialism see Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London, 1998); John MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester, 2009); Sarah Longair and John McAleer, eds, *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester, 2012).

⁶ For some notable exceptions, see the references in footnote 2. The literature on the impact of decolonisation in the French cultural sphere between 1945 and 1970 is increasingly well developed.

⁷ E.g. Flora Kaplan, ed., *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves'* (Leicester, 1994); Simon J. Knell, Suzanne McLeod and Sheila Watson, "Introduction," in Simon J. Knell, Suzanne McLeod and Sheila Watson, eds, *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed* (Oxon, 2007), xix-xxvi.

Claire Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter', *American Historical Review*, 121(4), 2016, forthcoming.

forms of anti-colonial resistance, independence, decolonization and neo-colonialism.⁸ Indeed, in the case of the Smithsonian Institution, museum staff, anthropologists, and government officials in the US, Asia and Africa saw strategies of display and acquisition as a way to affect, mediate and come to terms with wider political change.⁹ Matthew Connelly has argued that historians must move beyond the public record to make Western elites as well as subalterns 'speak'.¹⁰ Arguably, hidden in the display cases, exhibition plans, and correspondence of the curators at the NMNH, is evidence of how decolonization was lived and enacted beyond 'flag independence' and constitutional reform in both metropole and (ex-)colony. Here, museum archives provide insight into broader political and cultural histories.

Much has been written about how, since 1980, museum practice has transformed as a result of decolonization in Asia and Africa, the Civil Rights movement in the US, and First Nations' campaigns for equality in New Zealand, Australia and North America.¹¹ However,

⁸ Wintle, "Decolonising the Museum." There is a rich literature on the political context of other cultural events, such as world's fairs and trade fairs, in the middle of the twentieth century: see, for example, Robert A. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington, D.C., 1997); Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Basingstoke, 1997); Michael L. Krenn, "'Unfinished Business': Segregation and US Diplomacy at the 1958 World's Fair," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (1996): 591-612; Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago, 1993).

⁹ On the Smithsonian Institution's participation in temporary art exhibitions during this period, and their strained relationship with government Cold War agendas, see, Michael L. Krenn, *Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit: American Art and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005), 209-232. Krenn also mentions the fascinating and under researched case of the Smithsonian's Traveling Exhibition Service and their work, on the request of the State Department, to 'instill an appreciation of the political principles upon which the United States was founded' via temporary exhibitions in Europe in the 1950s (Krenn, *Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit*, 86-87). On the Museum of Modern Art and its temporary exhibitions program in relation to US foreign policy, see Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (1974): 39-41.

¹⁰ Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 739-769, here 765.

¹¹ Key examples include Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds, *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London, 2003) and Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C., 1991). In her discussion of the representation of First Nation peoples in Canadian museums between 1967 and 1992, Ruth Phillips positions the 'Indians of Canada' Pavilion at the Montreal Expo '67 as a turning point in museum practice. She does, however, also highlight the anomalous nature of this progressive event in which indigenous people attained full control over the representation of their histories and cultures, suggesting that it was not until 1992 that practice shifted more decisively and permanently (Ruth B. Phillips, "Show Times: De-celebrating the Canadian nation, De-colonising the Canadian Museum, 1967-1992," in Annie Coombes, ed., *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa* (Manchester, 2006), 121-139). The 'Te Maori' exhibition (1984-1986) is more commonly cited as the watershed event for postcolonial museum

even before this period, US museums were required to respond to global reframing and government approaches to decolonization. There is, of course, scope to examine the Smithsonian's policy in relation to the colonial history of the US: representations of the Pacific featured heavily in the remodeling of the museum, and William Walker has shown how the display of Native Americans at the Smithsonian glossed over complex histories of genocide and cultural change.¹² However, in a bid to engage with the transnational histories of decolonization, it is pertinent to examine how the national collection responded to the political shifts of the former European empires, and how the new world role of the US was revealed through museum practices. The reconstruction of the Asia and Africa galleries at the NMNH between 1959 and 1967 has particular potential to shed light on this ambivalence while the exhibits relating to India, Pakistan, and southern Africa merit particular attention because of both the rich source material available, and the importance of these areas in the history of anthropology, Cold War politics and decolonization. In engaging simultaneously with these macro-histories of formal, political decolonization and the micro-histories of individual museums, it is possible to shed light on both the cultural dynamics of the end of empire, and the ambivalent experiences of the institutions that tried to follow them.

Decolonization is, of course, a contested term.¹³ Increasingly, its triumphant guise as a mid-century, finite moment rooted in 'flag independence' and its relationship to the realm of high politics has been displaced. Recent historiography has defined decolonization as inclusive of formal acts of withdrawal from the colonies, but also acknowledges the impact of anti-colonial struggles and neo-colonial models of 'freedom', as well pointing to the social

practice. See, e.g. Moira Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-colonial Era*, revised ed. (Oxon, 2001).

¹² William Walker, "John C. Ewers and the Problem of Cultural History: Displaying American Indians at the Smithsonian in the Fifties," *Museum History Journal* 1, no. 1 (2008): 51- 73.

¹³ On the historiography of decolonization studies see John Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire," in Robin Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford, 1999); Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (Oxon, 2006); Farina Mir, "AHR Roundtable: The Archives of Decolonization: Introduction," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 844-51.

processes of re-imagining and practicing European, American and colonial lives after empire.¹⁴ Yet the relationship between the 'decolonization' of the world map and the 'decolonization' of museum practice demands further investigation. Museums have often been deemed political entities, but rarely are they mapped precisely onto political shifts; the case of the Smithsonian sheds light on relations between the two.

After World War II NMNH progressed with a major redevelopment program, with twenty-two new galleries opening between 1954 and 1967.¹⁵ Relatively late in the planning process, in 1958 and 1959, two new associate curators with specialisms in Asian and African cultures were appointed. Eugene Knez was assigned responsibility for NMNH's Asian collections and Gordon D. Gibson was appointed to care for the African material. Knez came to the museum with a recent doctorate in the anthropology of Korea from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Born in Indiana, he had been posted in East Asia during the war and directed the US Army's Bureau of Culture in Korea between 1945 and 1946. From 1949 to 1953, he worked for the federal government, first in cultural and public affairs at the American embassies in Korea and Japan, and then as chief of branch operations for the United States Information Service (USIS) in Korea.¹⁶ Gibson was raised in California and had read anthropology at undergraduate and postgraduate level at the University of Chicago, conducting his major fieldwork on the social organization of the Herero and Himba

¹⁴ See also Ruth Craggs and Claire Wintle, "Introduction: Reframing Decolonisation," in Ruth Craggs and Claire Wintle, eds, *Cultures of Decolonisation: Transnational Productions and Practices, 1945-1970* (Manchester, 2016), 1-26, here 3.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the wider strategies of modernization employed at the Smithsonian between 1945 and 1980, and the influence of Secretary S. Dillon Ripley from 1964, see William Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum* (Amherst, 2013).

¹⁶ "Biography," "Register to the Papers of Eugene I Knez (Part 2)," National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2002, <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fa/knez2.htm#2> [accessed 02.08.2013].

peoples of southern Africa in 1953. Prior to his appointment at NMNH, he taught anthropology at the University of Utah.¹⁷

Upon their arrival in Washington, both men were expected to begin plans for major new galleries. The 'Cultures of the Pacific and Asia' gallery curated by Knez and the museum's curator of the Pacific, Saul Reisenberg, was inaugurated in June 1962, and the 'Cultures of Africa and East Asia' gallery, curated by Gibson and Knez, opened in August 1967. These galleries would necessarily respond to a world in which many of the countries portrayed were undergoing major political shifts and social and economic changes. How they did so would depend on the approaches and perceptions of the actors involved, and the perceived and actual constitutional and socio-economic status of the countries depicted.

Shifts in US museum practice across the twentieth century were driven by a number of important factors: in the last years of the nineteenth century, the anthropologist Franz Boas had already made persuasive arguments discrediting the evolutionary display paradigm inspired by the natural sciences and commonly used in Europe and the US.¹⁸ Prior to the interventions of Boas, as well as other anthropologists and funding bodies, most museums of non-European cultures subjected their collections to classificatory schema based on the assumption that all historical and contemporary human cultures could be positioned on a hierarchical, racial scale of social 'progress' beginning in 'savagery', passing through 'barbarism', and culminating in an industrialized 'civilization' which typically reflected Anglo-American middle-class values.¹⁹ But for Boas, cross-cultural comparison could not reveal the 'inherent truths' of individual societies. He argued for the use of cultural relativism

¹⁷ "Biographical Note," "Register to the Papers of Gordon D. Gibson," National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2009, <http://www.anthropology.si.edu/naa/fa/gibson.pdf> [accessed 30.10.2014].

¹⁸ David Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 1 (1994): 242-270, here 263.

¹⁹ David van Keuren, "Cabinets and Culture: Victorian Anthropology and the Museum Context," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 25 (1989): 26-39, here 31; Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, 1984), Chapter 6; George Stocking, "Philanthropoids and Vanishing Cultures: Rockefeller Funding and the End of the Museum Era in Anglo-American Anthropology," in George Stocking, ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison, WA, 1985), 112-145.

in display practices and in anthropology more generally, calling for an appreciation of the 'native point of view' on how objects were used, suggesting that museums should focus on social meaning rather than form and categorization.²⁰ Boas was also the first museum anthropologist to evoke the word 'beauty' as a descriptor for the material cultures of African, First Nation and Polynesian societies.²¹ This, combined with the influence of the European Primitivist artists and dealers who mined the creativity of the apparently primordial and savage 'other' to support their anti-bourgeois projects, had, by the early years of the twentieth century, created a taxonomic shift whereby non-Western material culture could be seen as 'art' as well as 'artifact': natural history museums would still display the material culture and peoples of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas as 'living fossils' alongside (and synonymous with) exotic flora and fauna, but, as the twentieth century progressed, they would compete with, and draw inspiration from, museums of 'primitive' or 'Oriental art'.²²

Boasian contextualism, the wider formalist appreciation of aesthetics, and a continued insistence on equating 'other' cultures with natural history, would all infuse the curatorial approach to the ethnological collections at NMNH in the middle years of the twentieth century. Anthropological functionalism – the mode of analysis that emphasized processes of religion, kinship, and social networks, and which prioritized the long-term study of individual communities as organic, bounded entities – also began to permeate the museum's displays during this period. The 'poetics and politics' of exhibiting 'other' cultures have been closely analyzed over the last thirty years: the imposition of Eurocentric aesthetic and social ideals on objects from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the value judgments inherent in hosting such objects in museums dedicated either to science or art, and the use of text labels, lighting, vitrines and architecture as discursive apparatus to construct naturalized narratives, have all

²⁰ Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays," 262-263.

²¹ Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver, 1992), 51-52.

²² On this shift in representations of Africa, Oceanic and First Nation material culture, see Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago, 1989); on this shift in relation to South Asian material culture, see Robert Skelton, "The Indian Collections, 1798-1978," *Burlington Magazine*, CXX, no. 902 (1978): 297-304, here 303.

been subject to rigorous criticism, and recognized for their ideological and political potency.²³ Such considerations infuse much of what I have to say, but attention must also be paid to another form of 'politics'. Was it simply these developments in museum anthropology that dictated the new displays and curatorial approaches at the NMNH, or were other forces at play?

Almost as soon as Eugene Knez was appointed in 1959, he began planning an expedition to gather new material for the planned Asia galleries at the NMNH. The Asian collections housed by the Smithsonian prior to his arrival were limited to minor collections of unsolicited material and typically included unsystematic selections of objects amassed by American missionaries or British figures with a connection to the US. Knez had a clear program of collecting in mind that actively contrasted with this past. In his own practice, and in advice to his contacts, he sought 'comprehensive' sets of objects that would 'depict particular patterns of behavior', rather than 'luxury items for the well-to-do'.²⁴ In October 1960, Knez left Washington, arriving in Pakistan and travelling through India, Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, eventually returning to the US in January 1961. In each location he gathered new material, assisted by experts on the ground who were able to preassemble material for his perusal, or point him in the direction of key suppliers. Within eighteen months of his return, in collaboration with designer Dorothy Guthrie and other staff in the Smithsonian's Office of Exhibits, Knez had put together over thirty cases of material for display. These cases were

²³ Seminal texts include, Henrietta Lidchi, "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures," in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London, 1997); James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in Russell Ferguson, et al., eds, *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York, Cambridge MA, 1990); Susan Vogel, ed., *Art/Artifact; African Art in Anthropology Collections* (New York, 1989).

²⁴ Correspondence from E. Knez to Dr O.R. Gallagher, Ranchi University, Bihar, September 7, 1962, 'Correspondence India and Ceylon, 1962-1966' file, Box 14, Eugene Knez Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Knez Papers, NAA); Correspondence from E. Knez to R.S.S. Gunewardene, Ambassador for Ceylon, Washington D.C., October 3, 1960, 'Ceylon General Correspondence, 1960-1966' file, Box 6, Knez Papers, NAA.

typically wall-mounted cabinets dedicated to specific types of objects from broad geographical regions such as 'Basketry from India and Pakistan' (Figure 1) or 'Thai Craftwork'. Others focused on an entire culture or theme, as in the case of 'Cambodia: The Khmer Culture' or 'Buddhism in Laos'. The wall cases incorporated certain modernist display tropes, exhibiting limited numbers of objects on a plain, often white, background in order to emphasize the aesthetics or formal construction of individual pieces, though here, and in the Africa galleries, modernist paradigms were also ruptured by extensive text and photographs that were used to contextualize the objects in specific ways. The wall cases were punctuated with maps, three-dimensional dioramas intended to evoke the objects' original context and use (see Figure 4), and stand-alone spectacular pieces, such as a Kathakali dancing figure from Kerala (Figure 2). Material from China, Tibet, Nepal, Iran, Korea and Japan was located with the African displays in Hall 7; India, Pakistan, Malaya, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand were represented in Hall 8 with the Pacific material.

<FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 NEAR HERE>

Prior to his arrival at the Smithsonian, Knez had worked for the US Army and Department of State in Korea and Japan. While in Korea, his empathy for and expertise in Korean cultural heritage grew: he was involved in the founding of the National Museum of Anthropology in 1946 and later assisted the director of the National Museum of Korea in saving their collections in the face of North Korean attack, coordinating the shipping of the museum's collections from Seoul to Pusan. He eventually married Jiae Choi, a highly regarded Korean actress.²⁵ These earlier professional and personal experiences seem to have influenced his curatorial practice in significant ways. In his approach to collecting, for example, Knez was remarkable amongst museum anthropologists of his time in his desire to move beyond the common cultural stereotypes of Asian countries as traditional and static

²⁵ "Biography," "Register to the Papers of Eugene I Knez (Part 2)," National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2002, <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fa/knez2.htm#2> [accessed 02.08.2013].

idylls to be preserved by Western experts for Western audiences.²⁶ In communications with colleagues over his plans for the display of India, for example, he described his desire 'to present the complexity of Indian life today' and the need to move beyond the 'unfortunate rubric' of an over-arching "'Indian tribal culture'".²⁷ One of his exhibits celebrated a long list of technical innovations, flora and fauna, and major religions, as 'Asian Contributions to Western Civilization'.

Significantly, Knez was intent on incorporating the perspectives, advice and directions of scholars and officials from across Asia into his museum's displays and object documentation. His papers are full of correspondence with embassies, universities, museums and other organizations containing requests for assistance and opinions, and the resultant displays bear the mark of genuine collaboration on a number of occasions. In India, Ajit Mookerjee, Director of the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum in New Delhi, acted as Knez's companion throughout his entire collecting trip, brokering deals, suggesting appropriate materials and commenting on the quality of objects. Knez spent much time after his return from Asia desperately trying to raise the funds to appoint Mookerjee as a consultant to the galleries. Even after the opportunity had passed, his concerns to engage his friend's services and approval persisted: 'I do hope that when you eventually see the exhibits here that you will not be too disappointed in my creative efforts', he wrote.²⁸

²⁶ By way of comparison, see the program of William Archer, Keeper of the Indian Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in which industrial samples were deaccessioned from the collection in order to create a 'true art museum' (William Archer, Keeper of Indian Section, Victoria and Albert Museum, cited in Partha Mitter, "The Imperial Collections: Indian Art," in Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, eds, *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New York, 1997), 222-29, here 228). Stella Kramrisch's famous 'Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village' exhibition, which toured various US cities in 1968, has been described as 'erasing historical, cultural, and regional differences [and] any elements of change or conflict' (Katherine F. Hacker, "Displaying a Tribal Imaginary: Known and Unknown India," *Museum Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2000), 2-25, here 16).

²⁷ Correspondence from E. Knez to L.R. Sethi, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of India, Washington DC, n.d. [1960], 'India and Adjacent Areas, 1959-1975, 1 of 3' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA; Correspondence from E. Knez to Vivian Bose, Nagpur, September 28, 1967, 'India and Adjacent Areas, 1959-1975, 1 of 3' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA.

²⁸ Correspondence from E. Knez to A. Mookerjee, June 13, 1962, 'Correspondence India and Ceylon, 1962-1966' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA.

Elsewhere, he discussed possible themes in person with L.R. Sethi and A.B.

Chandiramani, the cultural attachés to the Indian Embassy in Washington, sending floor plans to them for approval; he also worked closely with S.A. Naqvi and other staff at the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi on the development of the Pakistan exhibits.²⁹ It was Naqvi who initially suggested that Sindh should be explored in the Smithsonian's Pakistan displays (as it was in due course), sending Knez a design for a Sindhi courtyard. This eventually provided the direct inspiration for the final diorama of a Sindhi house at NMNH (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

<FIG. 3 and FIG. 4 NEAR HERE>

Although it is not known whether his Indian or Pakistani contacts objected to their countries' heritages being conflated into joint exhibits after partition at this time of heightened political tension (see shared exhibits on 'folk jewelry', 'religious architecture' and textiles), it is nevertheless clear that Knez had a sincere desire to collaborate with them, and keenly respected the expertise of his peers on the subcontinent. The incorporation of the perspectives and voices of producers and their descendants into museum displays has been lauded as one of the key elements of a 'decolonized' or post-colonial museum practice of the twenty-first century. Here we see Knez championing it in an earlier era.³⁰

²⁹ Correspondence from E. Knez to G.N. Vaswani, Educational Attaché, Indian Embassy, Washington D.C., May 23, 1960, 'Correspondence India and Ceylon, 1962-1966' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA; Correspondence from E. Knez to S.A. Naqvi, October 5, 1960, 'Correspondence Pakistan, 1959-1969' file, Box 15, Knez Papers, NAA.

³⁰ Though the influence of indigenous peoples on collections and anthropologies made by Euro-American scholars in the field throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now well known. See, for example, Ruth B. Phillips' discussion of the influence of 'Native agents' as collectors in North America in "Why Not Tourist Art? Significant Silences in Native American Museum Representation," in Gyan Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, 1995), 98-125, and the acknowledgment of the status of Kwakiutl George Hunt as a major collaborator in the formation of Franz Boas' and other significant North American collections in the American Museum of Natural History's exhibition, *Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch* (1991), reviewed in Janet Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "'Vitalizing the Things of the Past': Museum Representations of Native North American Art in the 1990s," *Museum Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (1992): 29-43. See also Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, NC, 2001).

The 'decolonization of museum practice' is well defined in Museum Studies. Christina Kreps has summarized it as 'acknowledging the historical, colonial contingencies under which collections were acquired; revealing Eurocentric ideology and biases in the Western museum concept, discourse and practice; [and] acknowledging and including diverse voices and multiple perspectives'.³¹ Yet while Knez seems to have precociously embraced some elements of this mode of decolonizing, it is also pertinent to examine the relationship between his practice and the wider decolonization of European empires. In fact, Knez's actions, and indeed those of his Asian colleagues, were closely related to the constitutional, economic and strategic shifts of all the nations concerned. In a number of cases, museum practice engaged directly with political frameworks.

Knez's papers reveal a well-honed understanding of American propaganda requirements and techniques, presumably developed during his earlier employment with the Department of State. This expertise was put to good use in his engagements at the NMNH, both with his own government and the Asian governments with which he worked. He was clearly aware of the political sensitivities of anthropology as a discipline in the global political climate of the time, specifically warning colleagues that 'certain foreign governmental agencies do not regard anthropological research as singly basic scientific investigations but attribute to such research a political sensitivity or even consider it to be a type of intelligence activity'.³² Understanding that emerging governments across the world were 'increasingly concerned as to how their way of life is represented in a world capital such as Washington', he fostered connections between the museum and the local Embassy of India, for example, by promising that their collaboration on the NMNH exhibitions would

³¹ Kreps, "Changing the Rules of the Road," 72.

³² Correspondence from E. Knez to Vivian Bose, Nagpur, September 28, 1967, 'India and Adjacent Areas, 1959-1975, 1 of 3' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA.

'undoubtedly contribute much toward an understanding of India among Americans'.³³ In communications with the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs he argued that working with South Asians to 'reassert their own ethnic heritage' (as he presumably felt he was doing through his own projects) was 'one method to implement a genuine cultural exchange, a two-way street and possibly encourage them *to treat our values sympathetically*'.³⁴ Equally, the State Department also drew on the museum, using Knez's expertise in preparation for the President of India's state visit in 1963 and borrowing appropriate collections 'for an exhibit to honor the arrival of the king and queen of Siam' in 1967.³⁵ The United States Information Agency (USIA) featured the new galleries in programs for broadcast in Burma, India and Pakistan on at least two occasions, each time highlighting the close cooperation between the US and the country concerned and shrewdly presenting the relevant country's material culture as the pinnacle of the museum's collection.³⁶

Indeed, it is particularly in the case of India and Pakistan that the complex relationship between the 'imperialism' of US foreign policy and the decolonization of the Smithsonian becomes evident. In the three years between Knez's appointment and the opening of the Asia gallery in 1962 there had been a decisive shift in American strategic thinking towards the emerging nations of the subcontinent. Robert McMahon has examined the ways in which India and Pakistan became 'intense objects of superpower competition'

³³ Correspondence from E. Knez to L.R. Sethi, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of India, Washington DC, n.d. [1960], 'India and Adjacent Areas, 1959-1975, 1 of 3' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA.

³⁴ Correspondence from E. Knez to S. Bradford, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Washington, DC, March 2, 1961, 'Initiated Correspondence, 4 of 6, 1961' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ Correspondence from C. Laise, Deputy Director, Office of South Asian Affairs, Department of State, to E. Knez, June 13, 1963, 'Correspondence India and Ceylon, 1962-1966' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA; Internal Memo from G. Gibson re: 'Services rendered in the FY 1967', August 14, 1967, 'Memoranda 1958-1968' file, Box 15, Anthropology Department Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute (hereafter Anthropology Papers, NAA).

³⁶ Script Outline for Voice of America interview between U Kyaw Aye and E. Knez, May 1960, 'Burma General Enquiries, 1960' file, Box 6, Knez Papers, NAA; Script for Voice of America programme on 'The Professor Tours the Smithsonian' (for India and Pakistan), July 1962, 'Initiated Correspondence, 3 of 6, 1962' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA.

after the mid-1950s: paranoid about the ability of the Soviet Union and China to capitalize on the political instability, economic distress and social chaos of the 'periphery', both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations made economic aid packages to India and Pakistan 'a centerpiece' of their foreign policy.³⁷

Almost in parallel with these policies, and with little qualification, during the planning of his collecting trip in February 1960 Knez seemed primarily concerned with India, despite his own specialism in Korean cultures. In a letter to the cultural attaché of the Indian Embassy, Knez stressed how it was 'singularly appropriate to have a sensitive interpretation of current Indian culture in the National Museum, as expression of the American interest in Indian achievements and aspirations.'³⁸ Especially in his concern with the economic developments of the subcontinent, Knez fortuitously met the demands of US policy which required that India and Pakistan be projected as successful, stable and modernizing democratic nation states.³⁹ In stark contrast to most museum displays of the time, which tended to discard the material evidence of modernity and cross-cultural encounters as proof of social 'impurity' and 'corruption' (as opposed to cultural dynamism), Knez was keen to demonstrate the contemporary, urban and modernizing nature of many communities and nations across Asia.⁴⁰ In August 1959, he contacted the embassies in the US of India and Pakistan, amongst others, to request 'illustrated trade catalogs used in your domestic and export markets' and 'photographs and slides of contemporary urban and rural scenes' for

³⁷ Robert McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York, 1994). For quotations see, ix and 7. On the prestige of India in the early Kennedy years see also, Paul McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, 2013), Chapter 3.

³⁸ Correspondence from E. Knez to L.R. Sethi, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of India, Washington DC, n.d. [1960], 'India and Adjacent Areas, 1959-1975, 1 of 3' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA.

³⁹ On modernization theory see Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science And "Nation Building" In the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000) and David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, 2011).

⁴⁰ Eugene Knez, "Exhibits; Reviewed Works," *Current Anthropology* 4, no. 5 (1963), 549.

Claire Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter', *American Historical Review*, 121(4), 2016, forthcoming.

reference in developing the new displays.⁴¹ For his case of historic 'Oriental arms and armor', Knez contacted the military attachés to Washington of both India and Pakistan, asking for 'a photograph of your armed forces showing the use of modern up-to-date weapons'.⁴² Such images acted as indicators of the successful 'modernization' of these countries and, given that the Pakistani weapons were presumably US-supplied, stood as clear evidence of collaboration between Pakistan and the superpower.

In Pakistan, especially, US concerns for economic stability and political sway aligned closely with the practicalities of Knez's collecting strategy. Knez regularly drew on personnel in US embassies abroad and foreign embassies in Washington to develop contacts and to smooth shipping and currency difficulties, but his new collection from Pakistan was actually assembled by USAID personnel based in Karachi, at the very moment that this government agency was attempting to counteract Communist encroachment through its development programs in education, infrastructure and healthcare. Ethel-Jane Bunting of USAID acted as one of Knez's key contacts in Pakistan, collecting material herself, and brokering the curator's connections with officials working in the government's Department of Archaeology and in the University of Sindh, many of whom would be instrumental in developing the Smithsonian's collections.⁴³ Anthropologists outside museums, funded by the Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations, and influenced by modernization theorists such as Max Millikan and Walt Rostow, had by this time come to engage with these issues: area studies and international studies programs were actively harnessed to inform federal government policies which aimed to promote capitalist modernity and stability in countries

⁴¹ See, for example, the letter he sent to the Burmese Embassy on August 25, 1959, 'Burma, 1959-1963' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA.

⁴² Correspondence from E. Knez to Brigadier Harbhajan Singh, Military Attaché, Embassy of India, Washington DC, May 24, 1962, 'Correspondence India and Ceylon, 1962-1966' file, Box 14, Knez Papers, NAA. The photograph's label highlighted how 'Today the military forces of Pakistan and India are among the modern forces of the world' ('Hall 8: Unit 22: The South Asian World, India & Pakistan, 1961' file, Box 42 Knez Papers, NAA).

⁴³ 'Asian Ethnological Collections Obtained from Overseas' file, Box 1, Knez Papers, NAA; Correspondence from E. Knez to Ethel-Jane Bunting, June 4, 1963, 'Pakistan, 1961-1970' file, Box 2, Knez Papers, NAA.

where the Communist threat loomed.⁴⁴ But where museum displays are assumed to have been divorced from the academic and applied anthropology of the period, wedded instead to an increasingly outmoded functionalist paradigm, we see that in Knez's work, applied anthropology and museum work seem closely aligned.

Another explicit link between museum practice and US government involvement in European imperial collapse emerged in the NMNH's display of Southeast Asia. Although Knez's visit to South Vietnam during his collecting tour was brief, and the region did not feature in the NMNH's new permanent galleries, a temporary show of 'The Art and Archaeology of Viet Nam' was exhibited at the NMNH in 1960. A collaborative project led by the Department of National Education in South Vietnam and the Smithsonian Institution in the US, the exhibition was described in the Smithsonian's press release as being part of the US government's effort 'to promote learning and the exchange of knowledge with friendly oriental peoples'.⁴⁵ Indeed, the US Navy, USIA, Voice of America and the State Department's Division of South East Asian Affairs were all involved in the practicalities of staging the exhibition, while President Eisenhower, Vice-President Nixon, Secretary of State Herter, and the chairmen of both the Senate and the House Foreign Relations Committees were all members of the exhibition's 'Committee of Honorary Patrons'.⁴⁶ Precisely aligned with US government interests in expunging Communist forces in the region, the exhibition focused on southern Vietnam's 'ancient, deeply rooted, indigenous culture', drawing on the disciplines of archaeology, linguistics and anthropology to emphasize a venerable heritage for South Vietnam that explicitly excluded Chinese influence.⁴⁷ Although the exhibition itself was organized by staff at the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Arts, it was Knez

⁴⁴ Thomas C. Patterson, *A Social History of Anthropology in the United States* (Oxford, 2001), 115-123.

⁴⁵ News release, October 1, 1959, 'Viet Nam, 1960, 1968' file, Box 32, Knez Papers, NAA. Thanks to Alan L. Bain for investigating this file on my behalf.

⁴⁶ *Art and Archeology of Viet Nam: Asian Crossroads of Cultures* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 5.

⁴⁷ *Art and Archeology of Viet Nam: Asian Crossroads of Cultures*, 9.

who corresponded with representatives at the Embassy of Vietnam to secure some of the exhibits for the NMNH's permanent collection.⁴⁸

Mapping the NMNH's practice onto the global picture of the Cold War reveals how strategic frameworks opened particular doors for Knez, and shaped his practices in specific ways. The Smithsonian is approximately 65% federally funded, and has included the Chief Justice, the Vice-President of the US, three senators and three congressmen on its Board of Regents since its inception. The direct, practical impact of these political interests on Knez's daily work is likely to have been minimal,⁴⁹ yet the Smithsonian was a government agency, using the same infrastructure as other government interests at this time. Indeed, the curator's requirements and intended narratives successfully matched the political intentions of the US government. In the case of the Asia galleries, despite Knez's remarkably postcolonial attitude on paper, in other ways his practice provides an intriguing mirror of the 'imperialism of decolonization'.

However, as Mark Bradley has argued, our focus on the Cold War tends to 'obscure the significance of transnational postcolonial visions in the global South that imagined a world apart both from the bipolar international system and from the imperial order.'⁵⁰ It was not just the US government and Knez that courted agents in South and Southeast Asia; the reverse was also true. As Matthew Masur notes, the 'Art and Archaeology of Viet Nam' exhibition discussed above was also part of President Ngo Dinh Diem's agenda to promote

⁴⁸ Correspondence from E. Knez to Trunong Bou Khanh, First Secretary, Embassy of Vietnam, Washington DC, February 21, 1961, in 'Correspondence Viet Nam, 1959-1966' file, Box 15, Knez Papers, NAA. Thanks to Alan L. Bain for investigating this file on my behalf.

⁴⁹ Although this is not to say that politicians have not exercised direct impact on the work of the Smithsonian: this was certainly the case in the famous Enola Gay episode (see Steven Conn, "Science Museums and the Culture Wars," in Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Chichester, 2011), 494-508, here 503-505). For a sense of the protracted wrangling between Congress and the Smithsonian over larger and more high-profile projects between 1964 and 1984, see Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago, 2013), Chapters 4 and 10.

⁵⁰ Bradley, "Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962," 465.

his South Vietnam as an independent, modern nation state abroad.⁵¹ In the case of India and Pakistan, cultural, educational and press attachés, as well as academics and museum professionals, were equally keen to present their new nations to an American audience. As noted, the Washington-based Pakistani and Indian representatives took a particular interest in gallery developments, and officials working for these countries' new national institutions pressed for particular themes to be exhibited in the Smithsonian displays, participating closely in the development of the collections. In India, Nehru's government donated Rs15,000 towards the purchasing of materials for the museum and provided Knez with the expert assistance of Mookerjee (the Director of the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum) for the duration of his collecting trip. Indeed, while Knez clearly had particular ideas for the gallery, in the end, under Mookerjee's influence, the collections amassed took a distinctly nationalist turn.

Art and craft in India had long been harnessed for nationalist purposes: *khadi* (home-spun cloth), ancient Indian art and *adivasi* or 'tribal' cultural outputs were all used before and after independence in the construction of a proud, eternal and unified Indian nation.⁵² Just as Mookerjee and his supervisors in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry imagined the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum as a space to promote and preserve independent India's indigenous craft traditions and rising economic trajectory, the selection of modern craft that Mookerjee amassed for the Smithsonian promoted a similar message.⁵³ The *pata* (cloth painting) of Jagganath Temple included in the Government of India's donation (accession number 240189), for instance, is a classic example of the kind of 'folk

⁵¹ Matthew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954–1960," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (2009), 293-313, here 298.

⁵² See, for example, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge, 1992); Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York, 2004); Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York, 2009).

⁵³ On the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, see Paul Greenough, "Nation, Economy, Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi," in Carol A. Breckenridge, ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis, 1995).

craft' that the famed nationalist artist Nandalal Bose (and others) drew upon to express anti-colonial cultural ambitions in the late 1920s.⁵⁴ In addition to this tangible focus on India's craft revival, one of the exhibits of the gallery was a pairing of reproduction Shiva and Parvati bronze sculptures (Figure 5). Billed as 'modern sculpture in the traditional manner', these brass images in the Chola style can be inserted directly into the nationalist narratives of Indian art history developed on the eve of independence.⁵⁵ Tapati Guha-Thakurta has outlined the way in which this particular sculptural tradition was used as an emblem of the nationalist movement by Indian elites across the twentieth century: similar pieces were held up by historians of Indian art such as A.K. Coomaraswamy and Pramod Chandra as receptacles of a religious and spiritual 'psyche' unique to India, and pictured as repositories of the imagined spirit of the historic, united Indian people.⁵⁶ In a related way, it can be argued that the positioning of comparable material, purchased with funds by a newly independent Indian government and selected by Mookerjee, also acted to assert Indian nationalism in the American museum. Accordingly, the Asia galleries at the NMNH provide a nexus for a variety of political and strategic interests during this period. In their planning and in their presentation, we can see the post-colonial attitudes of Knez, the Cold War 'imperialism' of his government, and, conversely, the nationalist identities of the countries involved.

<FIG. 5 NEAR HERE>

Significantly, the African galleries curated by Gordon D. Gibson followed a markedly different pattern from the narrative detailed above. Both in the decolonization of the African

⁵⁴ On Nandalal Bose's project, see Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922-1947* (London, 2007), 84-90.

⁵⁵ For the quotation, see *Report on the Progress and Condition of the United States National Museum, 1950* (Washington, DC, 1962), 6503.

⁵⁶ Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, 180-85.

collections and displays, and in the curatorial engagement with the high politics of decolonization, the circumstances of independence in different African countries and the specificity of US approaches to African nationalism and European colonialism across Africa came into play.

Despite their almost coterminous appointments, Gibson had a different point of departure from Knez. Parts of the Smithsonian's African collections were already well developed by the 1950s: small, miscellaneous sets of objects from most African countries donated by missionaries and travellers had been augmented by a major donation of 2,700 objects from the Congo by the British artist and collector Herbert Ward in 1921.⁵⁷ Participating in Henry Morton Stanley's 'Emin Pasha Relief Expedition' between 1886 and 1889, Ward was, as Mary Jo Arnoldi describes, 'a man firmly embedded in Victorian attitudes about the "other"'.⁵⁸ Ward also donated a selection of his own fine art sculptures of Congolese people modeled in Paris and based on sketches produced whilst in the field. These over-life-size, realist bronze figures were couched in the romantic, Orientalist visual language of the late-nineteenth-century European art academies and portrayed their African subjects as superstitious, infantile and exotic.⁵⁹ By 1959, these collections, combined with choice dioramas and single figures to indicate racial 'types', had already been the subject of a long-standing exhibition later described by Curtis Hinsley as one that 'served rather than questioned the superiority of Victorian American culture'.⁶⁰

But despite (or perhaps because of) this legacy, Gibson's approach to the new 'Cultures of Africa' gallery did not compare with Knez's postcolonial attitude. As Arnoldi

⁵⁷ Mary Jo Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," *Cahiers D'études Africaines*, 39 (1999): 701-726, here 703.

⁵⁸ Mary Jo Arnoldi, "Distorted Mirror: The Exhibition of the Herbert Ward Collection of Africana," in Ivan Karp, Christine M. Kremer and Steven D. Lavine, eds, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, DC, 1992), 428-457, here 430.

⁵⁹ Arnoldi, "Distorted Mirror: The Exhibition of the Herbert Ward Collection of Africana," 430.

⁶⁰ Curtis Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846-1910* (Washington, DC, 1981), 112 cited in Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," 707.

suggests, here 'the overwhelming message created was an Africa outside of time', 'closely related to the primitivist paradigm of the earlier ethnology displays.'⁶¹ Like the Asia exhibits, the African collections, drawn from across the continent, were displayed in wall cases and dioramas and accompanied by large text and image panels; displays covered either a particular type of object from a specific region ('Weapons, Central Africa'; 'Clothing, Madagascar') or broader themes, such as 'Political authority' and 'Markets and money'. Yet, despite the famed focus of his *alma mater* – the University of Chicago – on urban anthropology and sociology during this period, this theme was essentially absent in the galleries and Gibson seems to have taken a fairly traditional approach, largely depicting Africa as a rural, static and archaic unit. Important exceptions were to be found in exhibits such as 'Views of Africa', which presented 'dozens of pictures of modern cities, industries, schools, and commercial enterprises from all parts of the continent' on a screen in order 'to counter the impression that all African culture is at a primitive level'.⁶² However, in the main these nods to new themes in anthropological research were lost within an overarching focus on the pastoral, untouched African engaged in 'typical activities' and bound to their environment.

Case 10, which contained a diorama of an iron smelter in 'Northern Cameroons', was representative of the new exhibits that Gibson developed: despite being designed to 'call attention to the importance of iron metallurgy' in the region, the exhibit explicitly contrasted this limited 'advancement' with other African cultures 'which otherwise may be technologically less advanced.'⁶³ The instruction to the designers John Weaver, Robert Caffney and Peter de Anna was that this 'technological contrast [between levels of development] is to be conveyed by the painted background showing grass-roofed huts and

⁶¹ Arnoldi, "From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History," 712.

⁶² Gordon D. Gibson, Curriculum Vitae, 'Annual Report 1971' file, Box 15, Anthropology Papers, NAA.

⁶³ Smithsonian Institution Design Brief, Exhibit 10, 'African Smelter' file, Box 101, Gordon D. Gibson Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter Gibson Papers, NAA).

scantily clothed people', presumably present as convenient markers of pre-industrial life and savagery.⁶⁴ Rather than renouncing Ward's legacy (recognized as problematic even at the time), Gibson had further sculptures based on the artist's original sketches produced (see Figure 6). Revealingly, when Leon Siroto of Chicago's Natural History Museum responded to drafts of Gibson's text for the NMNH's Fang exhibit by suggesting that a number of objects on display had 'been abandoned for some time' and that 'the use of the "ethnographic present" tense in your labels could offend Gabonese and Camerounians', Gibson responded cautiously to this suggestion that he avoid describing his subjects as ahistorical, explaining that the museum preferred 'if possible to keep the tense constant for all items in one exhibit'.⁶⁵ In 1964, he wrote to Max Gluckman in Manchester, acknowledging that it was 'taking license' to show such a diverse range of masks and costumes as part of a single life group about Makishi masquerade practices in Zambia, but claimed that 'the expert will not depend upon a museum display for this kind of information', while for the general public, 'it is immaterial whether all the figures we exhibit are actually to be seen at one time'.⁶⁶

Gibson was well aware of the problems in perception that museum displays could cause, worrying that his choice to represent a mode of execution practiced by Yansi groups in the Congo would 'be taken as implying African barbarity', pressing the designer to make clear that this practice had been documented by a reliable source and was based on law (presumably a marker of rational conduct).⁶⁷ However, where these concerns did influence his museum practice, some visitors to the NMNH failed to register their impact. An examination of the press coverage of the gallery opening provides only partial insight into audience reactions, but reveals the limited impact of Gibson's (and indeed Knez's) attempts

⁶⁴ Smithsonian Institution Design Brief, Exhibit 10, 'African Smelter' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁶⁵ Correspondence from L. Siroto, Chicago Natural History Museum, to G. Gibson, March 9 and 23, 1965, '17 Fang' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁶⁶ Correspondence from G. Gibson, to M. Gluckman, University of Manchester, 27 March, 1964, 'Rhodes-Livingstone Museum/Makishi Dance Costumes, 1963-64' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁶⁷ Script for Yans execution exhibit, '14 - Central Africa - Platform exhibit' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

to display modern, civilized nations.⁶⁸ Tellingly, the *Washington Post* asked its audience, 'Are you titillated by Tantrism, wowed by weapons used by headhunters[,] mystified by masks of the spirit world? Then by all means rush to the first floor of the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, which last night inaugurated a new section on the traditional cultures of African and Asian peoples.'⁶⁹ The reporter highlighted how the 'ferocious masks and carved figures, ... from Central Africa, were an important part of the secret societies' rites', describing how 'judge and executioner concealed their identity while they forced adherence to tradition with threats of supernatural punishment and pronounced sentences after secret trials....'⁷⁰ As the juxtaposition of the fashionable young American woman and the new statue based on Ward's sketches in the photograph accompanying the article demonstrates (Figure 6), the image of the highly sexualized, violent and savage African prevailed at the NMNH.

<FIG. 6 NEAR HERE>

Like Knez, Gibson also corresponded with experts from the countries with which he was concerned and conducted a collecting tour in the early 1960s with the new galleries in mind. However, in contrast to Knez's relationships with Asian scholars and officials, apart from his earlier direct contact with the Herero and Himba peoples, Gibson's consultants were primarily white colonials working in museums and governments in African colonial states such as Tanganyika, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Nigeria, and Kenya.⁷¹ His connections with the South African government, initially forged during his fieldwork in the region, were particularly strong. Staff at the South African Museum in Cape Town, for example, visited

⁶⁸ See Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum*, 65 on the difficulties of displaying a coherent message through exhibition practices elsewhere in the Smithsonian Institution. Walker also highlights the tensions between a decolonizing and neo-imperial impulse in the display of Native American cultures in William Walker, "A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian, Folklife, and the Making of the Modern Museum", unpublished PhD thesis, Brandeis University, 2007, 15.

⁶⁹ "Spirited Exhibit Opens," *Washington Post*: "For and About Women", August 26, 1967.

⁷⁰ "Spirited Exhibit Opens," *Washington Post*: "For and About Women", August 26, 1967.

⁷¹ E.g. Internal Memo from G. Gibson re: 'Services rendered in the FY 1967', August 14, 1967 and internal memo from G. Gibson re: working with the Portuguese government in Angola, October 28, 1966, both in 'Memoranda 1958-1968' file, Box 15, Anthropology Papers, NAA.

the Smithsonian, providing commentary on the collections for Gibson's reference. He worked closely with both this museum and the Department of Bantu Administration in South-West Africa on the development of his 'Bushman' (/Xam) diorama, asking for advice on 'the true color of Bushman skin' and 'the statures and some limb measurements for the figures', as well as purchasing copies of the casts that the South African Museum had used in modeling the heads of the figures represented in their own diorama.⁷² Collections also arrived in Washington through these contacts.⁷³

Gibson's relationships with black anthropologists and art historians in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia were slightly more extensive. In 1966, Barrie Reynolds, the Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum and the affiliated Open Air Museum, both in Livingstone, arranged for Aaron Mubitana, Keeper of Art, to consider a series of photographs of the NMNH's Makishi masquerade diorama. Mubitana, in consultation with the dancers and craftsmen who worked at the museum, expressed himself, via Reynolds, 'satisfied', with 'no criticisms to offer.'⁷⁴ Shabula Mwaanga, Assistant Curator at the Open Air Museum, was asked to send details of how certain objects were used; Laban Nyirenda, a scholar affiliated with the Ministry of Education in Lusaka, lent Gibson his thesis on Lubale circumcision masks.⁷⁵ One historian of anthropology, Lyn Schumaker, has persuasively argued for the role played by indigenous actors in Livingstone during this period, and certainly the Livingstone museums had Zambian curators and field collectors who directly impacted on the

⁷² E.g. Correspondence from G. Gibson to E.M. Shaw, South African Museum, February 21, 1963, 'Bushman Life Group' file, Box 104, Gibson Papers, NAA; Correspondence from G. Gibson to C. McIntyre, Department of Bantu Administration, Windhoek, South West Africa, July 22, 1966, 'Bushman Life Group' file, Box 104, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁷³ Internal Memo from G. Gibson to A.C. Smith re: Exchange with South African Museum, Cape Town, October 4, 1962, 'Memoranda 1958-1968' file, Box 15, Anthropology Papers, NAA.

⁷⁴ Correspondence from B. Reynolds, Director, National Museums of Zambia, to G. Gibson, July 11, 1966, 'Rhodes-Livingstone Museum/Makishi Dance Costumes, 1963-64' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁷⁵ Correspondence from S. Mwaanga, Assistant Curator, National Museums of Zambia, to G. Gibson, May 13, 1966; correspondence from G. Gibson to L. Myirenda, September 29, 1965, both in 'Rhodes-Livingstone Museum/Makishi Dance Costumes, 1963-64' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

Smithsonian's exhibits.⁷⁶ However, Gibson's engagement with these individuals was brokered throughout by the senior, white figures at the institutions that he approached.

Gibson was clearly a liberal individual, who dedicated his career to investigating and promoting the rich cultures of the African continent. When Gibson's daughter, Lindon, was interviewed for the African-American newspaper *Jet* (following the racist harassment of her Nigerian friend who was studying at Howard University), she mentioned the regularity with which her father entertained African-American and African guests (and also how her family was forced to move from their Maryland home as a result of neighbors' complaints concerning this matter).⁷⁷ Yet in Gibson's professional papers, there is little evidence of these relationships. Representatives from the various African embassies attended the gallery opening in 1967, and Gibson conducted a cultural affairs officer from the Republic of the Congo through the exhibition that year, but no consultation or collaboration seems to have emerged as a result.⁷⁸ Beyond white Africa, his main contacts seem to have been American academics and curators, and national museums at the centers of the former European empires. He commissioned new models of the British Museum's collection of Benin brass plaques from Nigeria, arranged to have copies of the Musée de l'Homme's rock paintings from the Tassili Mountain region of southern Algeria made, and used the arrangements of pile cloth from southern Congo at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, as the inspiration for one of his gallery's designs.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa*; see Correspondence from B. Reynolds, Director, Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, to G. Gibson, November 26, 1961, 'Rhodes-Livingstone Museum/Makishi Dance Costumes, 1963-64' file, Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁷⁷ "Nigerian to Leave U.S. After Arrest in Captial," *Jet*, XXII, no. 1 (1962): 4-5.

⁷⁸ RSVP cards in 'Hall 7 Opening - brochure & Press release' file, Box 109, Gibson Papers, NAA; Internal Memo from G. Gibson re: 'Services rendered in the FY 1967', August 14, 1967, 'Memoranda 1958-1968' file, Box 15, Anthropology Papers, NAA.

⁷⁹ Internal memo from G. Gibson to W.E. Boyle re: funds to purchase reproductions of North African rock paintings, June 10, 1963, 'Memoranda 1958-1968' file, Box 15, Anthropology Papers, NAA; design brief for 'Pile Cloth of the Southern Congo' exhibit, '21 - Pile Cloth', Box 101, Gibson Papers, NAA.

If Gibson's overarching approach to the decolonization of his collection seems divergent from Knez's display of Asia, certain themes in his professional practice appear to correlate with his government's approaches to the decolonization of Africa. In a case entitled 'African Arts – Old and New' (Figure 7), in which objects 'showing foreign influence' provided a rare exception to the gallery's focus on 'untouched Africa', Gibson was implicitly acknowledging epistemological shifts in the art world that had validated certain forms of African culture as 'art', yet he was also tapping into the political narratives that this world endorsed: the emphasis on the objects' physical form, for example, conveniently erased their social context, including their difficult imperial histories, and the case's text label, which emphasized how longstanding forms of creativity were slowly disappearing while 'modernization' progressed, was entirely in line with the US government's contemporaneous desire to promote gradual, non-revolutionary 'modernization' in the region.⁸⁰

<FIG. 7 NEAR HERE>

Elsewhere, in his communications with South African colleagues under apartheid, particularly, traversed the bounds of US foreign policy in complex ways. Y.G-M. Lulat has described the 'contorted and contradictory' approaches of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to South Africa in the 1960s: symbolic gestures, anti-racist rhetoric and limited embargos disguised the fact that the US could not, and would not, impose full economic sanctions on the South African government for fear of compromising their access to South Africa's rich natural resources and facilitating Communist inroads into an unstable region.⁸¹ Ultimately, while Kennedy, in particular, viewed racism as 'anachronistic', 'deeply

⁸⁰ Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley, 1998), 68. Errington highlights this phenomenon as taking place at the Museum of Primitive Art in New York in the late 1950s. See also Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jaques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago, 2007), 170. For Gibson's descriptions of this case, see correspondence from G. Gibson to Evelyn Brown, Harmon Foundation, New York, November 17, 1965, '35 African Arts – Old and New' file, Box 104, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁸¹ Y.G-M. Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa: A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York, 2008), 163-177.

irrational', and an affront to his modernist sensibilities, his consummate pragmatism ensured that 'immediate strategic and economic interests dominated over such abstract notions as self-determination and political freedom.'⁸² Across the middle years of the twentieth century, successive government administrations faced strong domestic pressure to support the end of European imperialism and of apartheid; they also harbored continued anxiety about the damage that charges of American racism caused in terms of international prestige.⁸³ Yet for reasons of expediency and practicality, these governments continued to communicate on economic, political and cultural levels with their South African counterparts.⁸⁴ Interestingly, at NMNH, in part for similar reasons of expediency and practicality, Gibson also continued to rely on established connections with contacts in South Africa, ignoring any moral concerns he may have harbored about apartheid in that country.⁸⁵ Indeed, although many of the echoes between the inevitable pragmatism that hampered the more progressive elements of the museum's decolonization and the US government's limited support of independence and justice for black Africa seem coincidental, it is worth emphasizing the point that had the US government set a precedent by taking a firmer stand against apartheid South Africa, then Gibson, as an individual and as a government employee, would have been more likely to have done so too.

Ultimately, however, while the government administrations involved worked hard to hide the most unsavory aspects of their complex relationship with European colonialism in

⁸² Thomas Borstelmann, "'Hedging Our Bets and Buying Time': John Kennedy and Racial Revolutions in the American South and Southern Africa," *Diplomatic History*, 24, no. 3 (2000): 435-463, here 438; Thomas J. Noer, "Truman, Eisenhower, and South Africa: The 'Middle Road' and Apartheid," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 11 (1983): 75-104, reprinted in Michael Krenn, ed., *Race and U.S. Foreign Policy During the Cold War* (New York, 1998), 131-160, here 156. See also M. Krenn, *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC, 2006), 78.

⁸³ E.g. Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, 1997).

⁸⁴ Michael Krenn, "Volume Introduction," in M. Krenn, ed., *Race and U.S. Foreign Policy During the Cold War* (New York, 1998), ix-xi, here x.

⁸⁵ Daniel Sherman points to a similar phenomenon in France in the late 1960s, when curators at the Musée des Arts africains et océaniens prioritised practical considerations over ethical complexities in accessioning objects from war-torn West Africa (Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago, 2011), 99-100).

Claire Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter', *American Historical Review*, 121(4), 2016, forthcoming.

Africa, and even harder to repair the damage that international coverage of US racism caused to the nation's reputation,⁸⁶ the galleries curated by Gibson (and designed and approved by a range of other actors at the Smithsonian) were expressly intended for public view. Following World War II, African-American interest groups had been vocal in their support for the end of empire in Africa, and critical of US involvement in the continuing European presence on the continent. By 1967, when the Africa galleries formally opened to the public, Black Power, with its emphasis on African independence and an international 'black consciousness', was gaining great political momentum. It is perhaps therefore surprising that the NMNH's displays, with their key tropes of African savagery and pre-industry, and their emphasis on isolated, static cultures, seem to have escaped criticism from local African-American and liberal communities.⁸⁷ Indeed, beyond the *Washington Post* article cited above, there was little coverage of the new gallery; black newspapers such as *Jet*, *Ebony* and the *Afro-American* in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., did not comment on its inauguration.⁸⁸ Gibson's files include only two complaints from the public dated to the years immediately following the gallery's opening: one suggested the racism inherent in showing a series of slides depicting African people followed by a close up of a gorilla, and another, penned by Legrand H. Clegg of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the African-American Research Associates and the Washington Task Force on African Affairs, criticized the distinction made in the galleries between ancient Egyptians (presumed white) and other Africans.⁸⁹ William Walker suggests that 'fears of racial bias' and a sense that the exhibits

⁸⁶ E.g. Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (Armonk, NY, 1999); Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

⁸⁷ Although, as William Walker points out, only a year after the gallery's opening, Secretary S. Dillon Ripley publically described the NMNH as an institution where 'our ethnic subcultures, our minority groups, come off very badly indeed.' S. Dillon Ripley, "Statement by the Secretary," in *Smithsonian Year, 1968*, 1968: 3, quoted in Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum*, 119.

⁸⁸ The *Washington Star* covered the opening in an article entitled "Party in the "Wilds" of Africa, Asia": see clipping in 'Hall 7 Opening - brochure & Press release' file, Box 109, Gibson Papers, NAA.

⁸⁹ Correspondence from Mrs Janet Brown, to the NMNH, November 24, 1967, 'Criticism of Exhibit Hall' file, Box 108, Gibson Papers, NAA; correspondence between Legrand H. Clegg, G. Gibson and J. Lawrence Angel,

'did not have any relevance to their lives' kept African-American audiences away from a museum ostensibly dedicated to natural history, and that they headed instead to the recently opened Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, also run by the Smithsonian Institution, where the experiences of African Americans were considered in some detail.⁹⁰ Yet the limited criticism may also demonstrate both the apathy and the ingrained nature of primitivist, homogenizing stereotypes regarding African cultures amongst museum audiences as well as curators and designers at this time, including those who were African American and liberal.⁹¹ Intractable prejudices and bias, particularly about sub-Saharan Africans, perpetuated in advertisements and film throughout the 1950s and 1960s, were difficult to escape.⁹² Despite an earlier focus on internationalism and anti-colonialism, by the 1960s, anxieties over potential charges of communism, and concerns that a global outlook might detract from the struggle on US soil, had led major organizations within the Civil Rights movement to domesticate their fight.⁹³ Indeed, some of the romantic images of 'Africa' that fuelled the transnationalism of more radical Black Power philosophies did not necessarily clash with those displayed at the NMNH.⁹⁴

Curator of Physical Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, June 1970, 'African Exhibit Criticisms' file, Box 109, Gibson Papers, NAA. Notably, however, by 1990, the galleries were subject to sustained critique by politicians and the general public (see Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Michael Atwood Mason, "Reflections On 'African Voices' at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History," *African Arts* 34, no. 2 (2001): 16-35 and 94, here 16-17).

⁹⁰ Walker, *A Living Exhibition: The Smithsonian and the Transformation of the Universal Museum*, 121.

Although notably, the African-American Howard University graduate, Jeannine Smith Clark was a docent and tour guide in the NMNH galleries between 1968 and 1978, and continued her affiliation with the Smithsonian throughout her life, so not all black Americans chose to remain absent ("Washingtonian Appointed to Smithsonian Board," *Afro-American*, September 17, 1983, 13).

⁹¹ James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Durham, NC, 2002), 4-5.

⁹² Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, 1992), 202; Curtis Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind* (Boulder, CA, 2014), Chapter 4.

⁹³ Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, 145 and 186-87; Yohuru Williams, "'They've Lynched Our Savior, Lumumba in the Old Fashioned Southern Style': The Conscious Internationalism of American Black Nationalism," in Nico Slate, ed., *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (New York, 2012), 147-168, here, 156-57.

⁹⁴ On the impact of Hollywood images of Africa on the imagination of African Americans see William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago, 1992), 151. James Meriwether points to the differing degrees of interest in Africa amongst African Americans in a

How could it be that the countries of South Asia and Africa were subject to such varying forms of decolonized museum practice during the same period of time? We may tentatively point to some of the possible reasons for these discrepancies by again projecting the decolonization of the museum onto the decolonization of the world map: the most promising clues lie in the differences between the colonization process of the countries concerned, and in the trajectories of their independence.

Knez's relationships with his colleagues in India and Pakistan are indicative both of the cultural infrastructure established by the British before 1947 and the maturity of the Indian and Pakistani nation states by 1959. Mookerjee, Haqvi of the National Museum of Pakistan, and many of Knez's other correspondents in universities and museums on the Indian subcontinent had been educated in the UK and were now working in institutions that had either been set up by the British before independence, or were responding directly to an enduring imperial legacy of cultural preservation and classification. This is not to say that these individuals and institutions were not 'Indian' or 'Pakistani', but that because of the recent history of museums and anthropological studies in the region, there was, in the middle years of the twentieth century, a common cultural and institutional vocabulary that Knez and his contacts were able to speak. Indian scholars were present at all levels of the cultural industries prior to independence, so not only had they 'learned the ropes' (and constructed them in various ways) but by 1947, and certainly by 1959, there existed a mature, solid infrastructure that Knez could draw upon. Crucially, the people who made up this infrastructure were also able to draw on Knez and the Smithsonian to support their own agendas.

slightly earlier period: some considered 'Africans to be blood brothers'; others 'felt no such ties' (Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*, 2).

Conversely, the legacy of European colonialism, particularly in Southern Africa, influenced Gibson's practice in similar ways, but with differing outcomes: the organization and circumstances of the white settler colonies during colonialism meant that in some cases the only institutions that Gibson could engage with were run by whites.⁹⁵ Even after independence, the transfer of power in cultural institutions like museums was not immediate. Interestingly, in one case where Gibson did make contact with a potential consultant in Liberia through a colleague at the University of Nevada, he found the experience limited: when asked about the function of Gbetu masks among the Gola and other peoples of Northern Liberia, Jangaba Johnson, a Research Officer at the Liberian Information Service, responded curtly, and with hostility. By way of explanation, Gibson's colleague in Nevada commented that 'The letter is a fine example of the "Don't say nothin if you're asked"-department of Liberian dealings with foreigners curious about secret societies.'⁹⁶

Inevitably, the divergent professional histories of Knez and Gibson also provide some explanation of the differences in their approaches: Knez's earlier employment in the USIS and in US embassies in Asia had equipped him with an understanding of US foreign policy objectives and introduced him to many of the possibilities for cultural exchange and practical assistance that he used in curating the galleries. Knez clearly drew on this knowledge in ways that Gibson was not able to. Further, while Knez had spent time working alongside Korean and Japanese professionals in his former roles, as an academic anthropologist working in the

⁹⁵ Although elsewhere, particularly in West Africa, there were African anthropologists, archaeologists and art historians who worked in such institutions, and emerging local elites were important in the establishment of national museums (see e.g. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa*, and Paul Basu, "A Museum for Sierra Leone? Amateur Enthusiasms and Colonial Museum Policy in British West Africa," in Sarah Longair, and John McAleer, eds, *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester, 2012), 145-167, here 157-59). See Derek Peterson and Giacomo Facola, "Introduction: Homespun Historiography and the Academic Profession," in Derek Peterson and Giacomo Facola, eds, *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens, OH, 2009), 1-30, on both African historians educated in the US and Europe who were practicing in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s and the existence of 'homespun' historians working beyond academic institutions.

⁹⁶ Correspondence from S.J. Johnson, Liberian Information Service, to G. Gibson, June 11, 1963; correspondence from W. d'Azevedo, University of Nevada, to G. Gibson, both from '42 W. Africa Masks and Figures', Box 105, Gibson Papers, NAA.

1950s and 1960s, for Gibson, black Africans tended to be cast as his 'subjects' rather than as his colleagues. While Knez studied at a school that focused upon 'Citizenship and Public Affairs', during Gibson's fieldwork he was supported by organizations in Southern Africa that were strongly influenced by the racist legacy of colonial physical anthropology.⁹⁷

Moreover, as suggested above, popular forms of socio-evolutionary theory still clearly pervaded the representations of Africa that circulated in the US. While India, Pakistan and other Asian countries were subject to their own sets of complex and often pernicious stereotypes, acknowledgement of the rich and ancient cultural traditions of Asia and the 'wily intelligence' of its peoples apparently elevated them beyond 'Africa' as a backward seat of nature.⁹⁸ While the Civil Rights movement in the US and liberation campaigns in Africa had made great strides by this time, deeply ingrained assumptions about both African-Americans and the capacity of black Africans for self-rule continued to infuse popular opinion and government policy in the US throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁹ By the 1960s, India and Pakistan in particular were firmly understood as individual nation states with discreet national characteristics; at the same moment, while many African nations were still formulating their own borders and national identities, in the US, images of Africa as a

⁹⁷ On the types of anthropology that were conducted at the South African Museum throughout the twentieth century, see Patricia Davison, "Typecast: Representations of the Bushmen at the South African Museum," *Public Archaeology* 1 (2001): 3-20.

⁹⁸ See, for example, those discussed by Naomi Greene, *From Fu Manchu to Kung Fu Panda: Images of China in American Film* (Honolulu, 2014); Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India* (New York, 1958).

⁹⁹ On government perspectives, see, Andrew Jon Rotter, "Culture, the Cold War, and the Third World," in Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford, 2013), 156-177, here 158; in 1968, Beyer and Hicks, in their survey of American school children, observed that Africa remained a 'primitive, backward, underdeveloped land with no history – a hot, strange land of jungles and deserts, populated with wild animals ... and by black naked savages, cannibals and pygmies' in the white psyche (Barry K. Beyer & E. Perry Hicks, *Images of Africa: A report on what American secondary school students know and believe about Africa south of the Sahara* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1968), 780, cited in Samuel K. Bonsu, "Colonial Images in Global Times: Consumer Interpretations of Africa and Africans in Advertising," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 12, no. 1 (2009): 1-25, here 22-23. See also Keim, *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, Chapter 4.

homogenous, 'dark' continent continued to dominate.¹⁰⁰ These perspectives inevitably filtered through to the galleries' designs and reception.

The relationship between US museum practice and decolonization thus emerges as a complex one. The NMNH was inflected by political structures and shifts both in terms of the cultures that were presented and in the ways that they were represented. Despite the assumption that Anglo-American museum practices lagged behind geopolitical shifts and academic anthropology in the twentieth century, here they are shown to have responded with dynamism to the political and social effects of decolonization in ways which both supported the US rhetoric of anti-imperialism and self-determination, and sustained the reality of government activities. In some ways the museum acted as an agent of decolonization in the sense that the reflection, selection and experimentation involved in designing the new galleries required those involved to negotiate and articulate their positions on independence, nationalism, neo-colonialism and Cold War agendas. Whether the Smithsonian 'decolonized' in line with our current understanding of museum best practice, or even according to wider conceptions of decolonization as constituting 'the end of empire', is a grey area, but perhaps the fact that the professional activities of Knez and Gibson trod a fine line between liberal collaboration and neo-imperial primitivism reveals much about the complex, contradictory and incomplete nature of decolonization as a process. Arguably, the muted public responses to the galleries at NMNH, and Gibson's continued engagement with the colonial frameworks that had dominated nineteenth and early-twentieth-century museum practice, are evidence of the denial, disavowal and stasis that form central components of decolonization. Indeed, the dominant use of the term 'decolonization' in Museum Studies to refer to progressive, postcolonial museum policies and activities perhaps also requires rethinking; while there has been much careful critique of contemporary museum work that seeks to counter histories of

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Jon Rotter, "Christians, Muslims, and Hindus: Religion and U.S.-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 593-613.

imperialism, there is as yet little consideration of the more conservative aspects of decolonization as a wider political and economic phenomenon in current conceptions of the 'decolonization of museum practice'.¹⁰¹

Investigating museums in this period is also a useful exercise in examining the complexity of the colonizer/colonized binary often retained in a post-independence frame.¹⁰² Knez and Gibson are evidence of the different approaches held even within single institutions: their personalities and educations influenced their practice in addition to the wider socio-political frameworks described above. Here too, we see the differing experiences of decolonizing nations revealed in the practicalities of curating: the modes of imperialism and decolonization, and the cultural and intellectual frameworks harnessed by emerging nations, are evidenced in the displays and collections of the West. Finally, the suggestion that it was not until the 1980s that the peoples of the Global South and the former colonies were able to influence the presentation of their cultures in the wider world is reframed here.

Decolonization may have been infused with imperialism, but it was led from the periphery too.

This article emerged from research and writing conducted during the 2012 National History Centre International Seminar on Decolonization, Washington DC. I am grateful to the seminar's faculty and participants for their guidance and support in developing this work, and for creating such a welcoming, stimulating environment for critical inquiry. I would like to thank Mary Jo Arnoldi (NMNH), Jacki Lacey of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, members of the London Historical Geographers Group and the University of Brighton's Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, as well as delegates of the 2013 Design History Society conference at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, who commented generously and thoughtfully on parts of this material. I am also

¹⁰¹ For examples of the dominant use of the term as progressive policy in Museum Studies, see Annie E. Coombes and Ruth B. Phillips, "Introduction: Museums in Transformation: Dynamics of Democratization and Decolonization," in Annie E. Coombes and Ruth B. Phillips, eds, *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies, Vol. 4: Museum Transformations* (London, 2015); Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012); Bryony Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement* (New York, 2015), and others cited throughout this article.

¹⁰² Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), 1-56, here 6.

Claire Wintle, 'Decolonizing the Smithsonian: Museums as Microcosms of Political Encounter', *American Historical Review*, 121(4), 2016, forthcoming.

grateful to the *AHR* editors and several anonymous reviewers for their insightful and attentive comments on earlier versions of this article.