

# Unity in Diversity: Multiculturalism, Nationalism and the Repre- sentation of His- tory in the Slovak National Museum

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores institutional social memory as presented within the Slovak National Museum, focusing on the museum's contradictory and often overtly nationalist narratives. The various exhibits within the museum support both ethno-centric Slovak histories as well as a nominally multicultural view of history that recognizes other possible narratives. These exhibits are used to examine the functioning of various narratives of the past and their associated ideologies in Slovakia's current political context.

The ethno-nationalist narratives present in these exhibits attempt to remember a history that supports the nation, but they are ultimately faced with the ambiguity of the past. In response, two suggestions are offered within the exhibits. First, these multiple pasts are temporalized through the idealization of peasant culture, implying there exists a lost past where these difficulties were non-existent and both memory and the nations were homogenous. Second,

multiculturalism is invoked to neutralize the impact of minority discontent. Multiculturalism is used to suggest both that ethnic minorities are respected and that the national community contains an irreducible number of ethnic demands. In both cases the exhibits argue that current political arrangements are the only possible solution to the ethnic tensions in the region.

There then arises a contradiction between a lost homogenous nation and a multicultural past that allows the nation and memory to opportunistically vacillate between homogenous and diverse. Thus, the history of Slovakia is able to represent both its idealistically homogenous, and its begrudgingly accepted, multiethnic aspects. The impossibility of a workable minority in politics combined with a satisfactory respect for the presence of these multiple historical narratives requires, and allows, the use of Slovak national symbols to represent the whole. The paper argues that this self-contradictory and dual view of history supports an understanding of the past and present in which a façade of democratic multiculturalism can be used to ignore current ethnic inequality.

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## Introduction

The Slovak National Museum (SNM) traces its beginnings from “the endeavor of the Slovak nation for national emancipation and self-determination” (SNM, 2007). The SNM’s earliest roots lie in the collection activities of the *Matica Slovenská*, a cultural institution that promoted Slovak cultural development in fields from science to history, in the early 1870s. In 1875, *Matica Slovenská*, which was created to unify and articulate Slovak culture in opposition to Hungarian cultural and political hegemony, was forcibly closed by the Hungarian *Diet*, the main governing institution of Hungary at the time. Despite the closing of *Matica Slovenská*, its collection activities continued in various forms until 1961 when it joined the Society of the Slovak National Geographic and History Museum, founded in 1924 to create the current Slovak National Museum, centered in Bratislava (SNM, 2007).

Though national emancipation from the Kingdom of Hungary was achieved in 1918 at the end of World War I, and over 100 years of history have substantially changed the demands of imagining the Slovak nation since the 1870s, the SNM still partakes in the construction and maintenance of a Slovak national identity. Any number of exhibits celebrate the Slovak nation and its heroes. At the same time however, the various museums in the SNM reinforce Hungarian national historical claims, at times in direct opposition to the claims of nationalist Slovak history presented elsewhere.

While both Slovak and Hungarian ethno-nationalist narratives present in these exhibits attempt to remember a history that supports the nation, they are confronted with the existence of the other historical narrative, both within the space of the SNM and political discourse at large. Throughout these exhibits two narratives seem to arise in order to confront this ambiguity in regards to the past. First, these multiple pasts are temporalized, implying there exists a lost past where these difficulties were non-existent and both memory and the nations were homogenous. Second, multiculturalism is invoked to neutralize the impact of minority discontent. Multiculturalism is used to suggest both that ethnic minorities are respected and that the national community contains an irreducible number of ethnic demands. In both cases the exhibits argue that current political arrangements are the only possible solution to the ethnic tensions in the region.

There then arises a contradiction between a lost homogenous nation and a multicultural past. Instead of destroying the power of these narratives, they ultimately allow the nation and memory to opportunistically vacillate between homogenous and diverse. Thus, the history of Slovakia is able to represent both its idealistically homogenous, and its begrudgingly accepted, multiethnic aspects. The impossibility of a workable minority politics combined with a satisfactory respect for the presence of these multiple historical narratives requires, and allows, the use of Slovak national symbols to represent the whole. In the final analysis, this self-contradictory and dual view of history

supports an understanding of the past and present in which a façade of democratic multiculturalism can be used to ignore current ethnic inequality.

## The Museum and the Nation

The SNM, both in its telling of the past and its mere existence, plays a role in the identity work necessary for a Slovak national identity and participates in a general construction of a nationally centered view of history that affirms the imagined communities of other nations. Macdonald (2003) and Rounds (2006) both argue that museum spaces are important sites for ‘doing identity work.’ Rounds focuses on individuals’ use of museums to perform and reinforce existing identities, arguing that museums offer a controlled environment in which the validity and continuity of identity is reassured. Museums provide ‘ontological security’ by suggesting that order can be made out of the chaos of everyday life. Exhibits are able to condense meaning into very ordered narratives, with every aspect labeled and explained (Rounds, 2006). Although it is never directly stated, Macdonald seems to suggest that museums provide an opportunity for collective identity work in addition to the individual identity work Rounds discusses. While these collective identities are constructed and imagined they create real effects and it is that process of construction and imagination of a national community that is at stake in this identity work. From this perspective it is possible to examine precisely how the SNM engages in and

aids the identity work necessary to create politically powerful conceptions of Slovak and other national identities.

There are two interrelated elements of museum displays that make them particularly capable of doing the identity work of nations. First, the collective ownership of the museum's actual artifacts aid in the construction of a common culture. The ownership of these items by the entire nation offers an opportunity to intensify feelings of intra-national kinship, as they are partially owned by individuals across the nation. More importantly, though, the 'sanctification' of objects in museums allows them to signify the distinctness of the nation (Macdonald, 2003). By placing an object, especially a cultural artifact, in a museum it is removed from its daily function granting the object special significance. The object is not simply a piece of fabric or a wooden figurine but one that is both typical of the national or regional community and distinct from other communities. The text explaining the exhibit, "Unity in Diversity," explains the importance of this process for the exhibition:

There are things that accompany a man throughout his life. A person gets used to them and hardly notices the passage of time during which the original function gradually gets lost. Then the object ceases to simply fulfill its task, it begins to bear witness about its creator, about the moments they have been through together...It is necessary to seek for a way to preserve and present these valuable relics of the culture and the way of life of generations long past, because every result of a human activity bears in

itself traces of the road, which led to it (SNM, 2007).

In the museum's explanation, the importance of an object is seen as intrinsic, with the object slowly losing its function while gaining an innate ability to testify to its own cultural significance. This 'sanctification' of museum objects imbues them with the ability to speak for themselves. Curators' and exhibit authors' role in selecting and explaining their significance is erased in favour of an assurance that objects both speak for themselves and call out for protection. In so much as the object is seen to possess an undeniable cultural significance, it affirms and represents the culture of the nation as naturally given. Furthermore, while Slovak culture exists 'objectively,' the objects that affirm it are destructible. Thus, in these objects lies the basic formula for nationalist politics. Slovak culture exists as a timeless value, but the objective symbols and expression of culture require constant preservation.

Second, the spatial nature of this intensification of order within museums lends itself to a narration of the past based on a connection between space and memory that is so vital for the imagination of the nation. The distinction Pierre Nora draws between memory and history in his introduction to *Realms of Memory* can serve as a helpful point of departure for elucidating this connection between space, memory and the nation (1996). For Nora memory is an unreflective part of everyday life embodied in peasant culture and tied to places while history "being an intellectual, nonreligious activity, calls for analysis and critical

discourse” (1996, p. 3). While it is problematic to accept that there existed some ideal time before history where the past was constantly present, this distinction is elucidating as it replicates the division of the past and present often noticeable in nationalist discourses. In the same way that national communities are imagined but still produce real effects, it could be said that Nora’s conception of memory is constructed but produces tangible outcomes. For Nora,

History was holy because the nation was holy...when it shed its identification with the nation, it lost its subjective force as well as its pedagogical mission, the transmission of values as the current education crisis attests. The nation is no longer the unifying framework that defines the collective consciousness (Nora, 1996, p 5-6).

Here, by history, he means the retelling of the past as memory, or memory-history as he refers to it, not the critical academic history he decries. This form of memory serves to nationalize both the past and the very act of remembering by claiming that there existed a previous idealized era, in which memory functioned ‘properly’ to sanctify the nation.

In sanctifying the nation, memory also spatializes and territorializes the nation, creating distinct national boundaries. Especially important to the modern construction of a sovereign nation, with its own history and present, is the notion of a specific bounded space and the division of the rest of the world into similarly distinct national territories (Anderson, 2006; Malkki, 1992). As Nora sug-

gests, “memory fastens upon sites, whereas history fastens upon events” (1996, p. 18). The relation between memory and place becomes even more apparent as history begins to threaten it. For Nora, the remnants and traces of a disappearing memory are embodied and commemorated in *lieux de mémoire*. The vestiges of this lost memory are maintained in these memory sites, such as museums, memorials, cemeteries, etc. The investment of national memory in specific places roots the nation to a specific territory. This rooting in place becomes a powerful concept for imagining national communities, as it creates a trans-historical space for the history and future of the nation to occur. Furthermore, it promotes a worldview in which the globe is divided into multiple homogeneous nations linked to individual territories. Memory aids in this work of territorializing the nation and its history, creating memorials and other *lieux de mémoire*, which are nationally oriented and often evoke their importance from the history of their location. In doing so, museums are able to objectify and territorialize the history of the nation contributing greatly to the imagination of the national community.

## Contradiction and the Lost Memory-Nation

Despite the Slovak National Museum’s self proclaimed origins involving “the endeavor of the Slovak nation for national emancipation and self-determination,” (SNM, 2007) there exists at places in the museum system a countervailing narrative.

This narrative celebrates Hungarian control of the region from Stephen I through to the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, which laments the loss of greater Hungary. The most notable source of this view of history in the museum system is the Museum of Hungarian Culture. Despite its status as a state institution, it questions the need for an independent Slovak nation. The museum stresses the importance of Bratislava and Slovakia to the Hungarian state, especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when the rest of the Hungarian Empire was under Turkish control. The museum also claims that the development of present day Slovakia was a result of the efforts of people from throughout Eastern Europe and that, “a dozen of ‘ethnicities’ were creating a ‘nation’ of Hungary”. The museum even historicizes the creation of nation-states and their inalienable rights, suggesting that attempts to exercise these rights could only lead to conflict. Likewise, despite a general celebration of Slovak history and its heroes, the Museum of History includes a replica of the Crown of St. Stephen that was a gift to the museum from the Hungarian government in 1967. Historically the crown was worn by the ruler of the Lands of St. Stephen, which included present day Slovakia.

The spatial focus of memory within national conceptions of Hungarian and Slovak history along with the spatialization of memory within the SNM can begin to explain the coexistence of divergent histories. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* comes into existence at the same point as the trace, and attempt to possess and save the traces of the past from the destruction of critical history

that threatens to devalue them (Nora, 1996). These traces, though, are always multiple and ambiguous. All of these sites, especially since thousands of years of history are compressed into them, offer support for any number of contradictory pasts. The presumption offered by this national view of memory in which objects and sites are able to speak for themselves, contains the danger that they could be made to say something else. If another trace can be found in an object or place that speaks on its own, then that other trace can be seen as equally natural and given. Indeed, Pál Csáky, Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development at the time of the opening of the Museum of Hungarian Culture, is quoted at the beginning of the museum book:

One of the basic tasks of Hungarians in Slovakia, as part of a nation living in minority, is to preserve consciousness of its own identity and to foster mother tongue. Other activities ensue out of that, e.g. searching the past and capturing its traces (Muzeum Kultury Madařov, 2003, p. 3).

Part of the obligation of defending one’s culture as a minority, is here specifically linked to the seeking out of these other traces.

The difficulty in controlling these traces is well demonstrated in the Museum of Hungarian Culture. The introduction to the museum presents the historical change of territory by stating that the territory that is now Slovakia used to be called Upper Hungary, but when it comes to naming Bratislava the text is more uncertain about the

historical procession. The English and Slovak versions of the text state that “Bratislava became a political centre of the country, a coronation town of Hungarian Kings,” while the Hungarian text maintains the older Magyar name Pozsony. The text also provides a similar treatment to other towns such as Trnava/Nagyszombat and Košice/Kassa. While the city is still known as Pozsony in Magyar, the name Bratislava is a relatively new creation. The anachronistic use of the Slovak name as well as the maintenance of the Magyar name, suggest the multiple traces that arise from a single place. Although this can in part be attributed to translating the names into Magyar, a German translation of the same text, which is not displayed at the museum but is included in the museum book, also maintains the Slovak names, despite the existence of German names. At one point the name Bratislava is followed by the German name, Pressburg, in parentheses. Otherwise, the Slovak names are used.

These ambiguous traces are not merely about selecting names, but also about selecting which functions of places to commemorate. The aforementioned crown of St. Stephen is displayed in Bratislava Castle, home of the History Museum and former Austro-Hungarian castle, alongside a list of royalty coroneted in Bratislava. In contrast, the entrance to a Natural History Museum exhibit on cultural diversity throughout Slovakia features posters explaining the various branches of the Slovak government and their locations in Bratislava. Not only can multiple names be forgotten or retained, but so too can the memory of Bratislava as

a Hungarian or Slovak capital. These traces are never unitary, especially since millennia of history and memory are condensed into single spaces or objects. Although Nora sees the traces of memory coming towards us from the past, it is clear in this instance that these traces also move in the opposite direction. As the text of the Hungarian Culture Museum suggests, in the hindsight of history the future of Pozsony as Bratislava appears as a trace. Bratislava/Pozsony functions as a *lieu de mémoire* where other contradictory traces can always be found and commemorated. These sites’ meanings are never closed or homogenous and thus a museum or a nation that uses them to explain history can never create a closed narrative.

The ambiguity of objects and the representation of place in the museums is, in many ways, a byproduct of the autonomy granted them, but it makes the process of guaranteeing order difficult within museum spaces. In order to maintain the coherence of these multiple contradictory traces that appear both in individual exhibits and the museum system at large, certain exhibits, like Nora, long for a simpler time when representation in service of the nation was unproblematic. This longing for meaning is the same problem that plagues Nora:

Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (Nora, 1996, p. 3).

Memory represents an idealized moment when representation of the past was wholly un-

problematic. In a way it is a moment, prior to representation, where the past is supposedly lived and experienced in the present rather than considered.

Both the Ethnographical Museum in Martin and the Museum of Hungarian Culture valorize peasant culture, just as Nora who sees it as “that quintessential repository of collective memory.” The permanent exhibit of the Museum of Hungarian Culture consists of two sections. The first outlines the history of Hungarians on the territory of Slovakia, while the second is an ahistorical display of faceless mannequins wearing traditional clothing, with collections of pots and other hand-made implements surrounding them. The Ethnographical Museum largely forgoes the political history in favor of focusing solely on traditional clothes and wares in an attempt to argue, “the striving for self-sufficiency – a characteristic feature of traditional Slovak culture – was reflected in the production and maintenance of most things of everyday life used in [Slovak villages].” The representation of peasant culture in the museums functions as a *lieu de mémoire*, commemorating and constructing a unitary folk society preceding all class and political divisions (Trumpener, 1992). In the context of these museums peasant culture is presented as faceless, unchanging and removed from history in order to become a phenomenon of the present.

This peasant culture symbolizes Nora’s idealized notion of memory as well as a similarly sanctified concept of the nation. Nora recognizes the proximity and even interchangeability of these

two concepts in their ideal form when he refers to the death of the ‘memory-nation.’ The lack of narrative coherence in both the museum system and the similar lack of ethno-national homogeneity in the Slovak nation at large make the memory-nation represented by peasant culture, which is free from such difficulties, a powerful concept for the museum. Despite the narrative coherence assumed to exist in peasant culture, their inclusion in the museum is unable to overcome the contradictory traces of the past. Peasant culture does not create sense out of the disparate past; rather it serves to represent a longing for a time when a simple, comprehensible understanding existed.

By presenting the memory-nation as lost, the national narrative of the museum is able to make sense of its own incoherence. This temporal narrative locates meaning and memory in the distant past of peasant culture, bemoaning its own difficulties as a problem of the present. It incorporates the inevitable multiple narratives and traces that arise from *lieux de mémoire* into a single melancholic understanding of the past. Thus, the museum appropriates the multiplicity of the present as part of a larger narrative of the nation but at the same time guarantees space for these divergent narratives.

## United in Diversity

In addition to the concept of a lost homogenous memory-nation, a second narrative that instead celebrates the diversity of the past operates at places within the SNM. Both the permanent exhi-



bit at the Museum of Hungarian Culture, and an exhibit at the Natural History Museum, entitled “Slovakia and its Culture – Unity in Diversity” break with the narrative of a lost homogeneity. The two exhibits glorify the heterogeneity of the past to legitimize Hungarian and Slovak control over Slovak territory. The two governments’ recognition and respect for ‘unity in diversity’ serves both as a justification for their policies and as an argument against any possible calls for further cultural or territorial autonomy.

While the Museum of Hungarian Culture participates in the melancholy for a coherent past, the introductory statements also problematize this once homogenous past of peasant life:

Neither from the point of view of natural and economic conditions or social and national division, this territory had not been a homogeneous element – there were considerable difference between its individual regions...besides Hungarians and Slovaks, an important role was played here by Moravian, Polish and Ruthenian colonists, who enriched the country by their characteristic life style and labor culture.

This statement at once categorically denies the existence of a more understandable and simple past while also employing heterogeneity to argue that national emancipation was always a problematic project.

The claims of the introductory text are two-fold. First, they aver that the political situation in Hungary after the Ausgleich of 1867, which established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, was wholly legitimate and allowed for the adequate

expression of minority culture. From this perspective Hungary was not a Hungarian nation, rather it was built from the combined efforts of a plurality of groups. Any discussion of inequality, cultural suppression or forced Magyarization is erased by a retroactive recognition of general cultural diversity.

Second, the text multiplies the field of ethnic and national demands in order to imply any outcome of the Treaty of Trianon that dissolved the Austro-Hungarian Empire would have been arbitrary and illegitimate. Since Slovakia, and all of Hungary, consisted of multiple and territorially entangled ethnic groups, dividing the country was inevitably a problematic process. The introduction concludes that:

Contemporary opinion used to hold the language and ‘habits of nations’ an inalienable right, while a dozen of ‘ethnicities’ were creating a ‘nation’ of Hungary. Perception of the nation in the present meaning – that is identifying the nation especially on the basis of commonly used language – started to be formed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while parallel birth and activities of a movement of national revival represented a potential conflict.

This description hints at the intractability of any national demands within the Kingdom of Hungary.

Here the history of minority relations is evacuated in favor of a general multiculturalism. This begins to reveal the interaction between the narratives of the lost memory-nation and legitimizing multiculturalism. The de-ethnization of

Hungary alongside the impossibility of ethnic policy or narratives forces the use of formerly majority ethnic symbols and artifacts to represent multi-ethnic Hungary. Thus, the mannequins of peasantry dressed in traditional Hungarian clothing symbolize the past of multi-ethnic Hungary, but in doing so they do not lose their Hungarian significance. The traditional clothing vacillates in its symbolic function, representing both a homogenous and multi-ethnic Hungary. Since no one can truly speak for or represent multi-ethnic Hungary, there is no choice but for the homogenous memory-nation to stand in for this impossibility. The artifacts of an ethnic Hungary become default symbols for an intractably intertwined multicultural past. At the same time, this process does not necessarily undermine the narrative of the lost memory-nation. Peasant life can still signify a lost period of memory, since memory, for Nora, is the direct representation of the past in the present. Idyllic Hungarian peasant life thus signifies in the past of the memory-nation, a point in time when Hungarian-ness could unquestionably and directly represent a multi-ethnic Hungary. In this telling it is not the existence of heterogeneity that destroyed the memory-nation, rather it is selfish minority demands to be represented individually, apart from symbols of the Hungarian nation, that ignored the impossibility of national-ethnic demands and forced Hungary from the safe comfort of memory into a conflict-ridden history.

The narrative presented in the museum opposes the legitimacy of the Slovak state, problematizing its creation and focusing on its abuses. In

doing so, it serves the exact opposite purpose and legitimizes the Slovak state as a multicultural entity. Peter Maráky, the general director of the SNM, in his statements celebrating the opening of the Museum of Hungarian Culture expressly stated the museum's legitimizing function:

Multi-culturalism belongs to characteristic signs of Europe... Museums and documentation centres of ethnic minorities' culture fulfill the tasks in the Slovak National Museum, which will ensure that, in the future, also our country would contribute by its share to the mosaic of true picture of culture of unified Europe. Making the Museum of culture of Hungarians in Slovakia accessible to general public, inhabitants and visitors of Bratislava just at the time, when the process of joining the European Union by the Slovak Republic is reaching its climax, is more than symbolic (Muzeum Kultury Madarov, 2003).

By establishing the museum along with other museums of minority culture, the museum system and the nation as a whole are able to appropriate ethnic minority dissent as proof of true multiculturalism. The state endorsement and funding for multiple ethnic narratives, one of which even implicitly attacks the foundation of the Slovak state, only end up proving its current openness and respect for multiculturalism.

The Natural History Museum's exhibition "Slovakia and its Culture – Unity in Diversity," whose name directly invokes the EU motto of 'United in Diversity,' uses a similar logic to account for and address ethnic diversity. The exhibition is housed in 'Harmony Hall' and consists of a

central entrance with two wings, one devoted to the highlands and the other the lowlands. The introduction to the exhibit stresses both Slovakia's ethnic diversity and unity:

Slovakia, like any space inhabited by people, is culturally unique...Slovakia's cultural history has been written by generations of inhabitants, who have lived and worked here. They belonged to different ethnic and religious communities...The cultural heritage of Slovakia proves the fact, that it has been determined by a variety of conditions, under which it has developed but at the same time it contains all the elements necessary to create a whole.

There is here the same logic as before. Slovakia is presented as a country that recognizes and respects diversity. At the same time, this diversity serves the express purpose of enriching an unproblematic and presumed indivisible whole.

This exhibit employs a similar narrative strategy as the Museum of Hungarian Culture by multiplying the field of ethnic and cultural difference in order to mitigate any individual demand, but the Natural History Museum's exhibition slightly modifies this logic of 'unity in diversity' by refusing to differentiate culture on standard ethnic divisions. The exhibition designers decided to divide the country first into lowlands and highlands. Then it was further subdivided into eastern, western, and central parts, based on divisions used within the Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia (Benža and Slavkovský, 2004). Such extensive division of the country moves cultural difference from the standard ethno-linguistic organization to a more

complex set of "traditional cultural regions" that are less politically volatile. While there may be some validity to this organization, such divisions still amount to what could be seen as ethnic gerrymandering to dilute and divide more politically relevant cultural groupings.

Within the exhibit the importance of language and ethnicity are largely mitigated in favour of economic and environmental differences. Indeed, the description of the western lowlands mentions the presence of Hungarians "in addition to the predominant Slovak population," but the defining aspect of the region is its natural richness, which allowed for farming and winemaking. It largely disregards ethnicity, displaying and explaining typical folk art and products, from the region. This predominate focus on material culture and production has a dual function. First, it serves to justify this specific ethnographic division of the country. Second, it trivializes and neutralizes cultural difference. One of the defining characteristics of the western lowlands culture, according to the exhibit, is painted furniture, a much less contentious difference than language. How one's ancestor painted their furniture does not affect one's economic prospects or ability to receive education or public services in a language they understand. In shifting the focus of cultural analysis to folk production that crosses ethno-linguistic lines, cultural difference can be safely depoliticized.

The exhibit is also based on the interdependency of European cultures, stating,

Cultures of different nations have for centuries mutually influenced each other. The culture of Slovakia and its regions was not isolated in the Central European region either; it is a part of Europe's greatest common creation – its culture.<sup>1</sup>

This interdependency of culture is set in the context of a vast 'European' culture, allowing the multiplicity of this European culture to replace the need for national political attempts to deal with cultural difference. Since 'Europe' protects and represents cultural diversity, the nation's relation to culture becomes deemphasized, further de-ethnicizing the nation. The more 'Europe' as a concept guarantees 'Unity in Diversity,' the fewer obligations the Slovak state has to implement specific minority policy. The Slovak nation is then given even more freedom to vacillate between its ethno-national aspects and its multi-cultural 'European' aspects, allowing either to be invoked as is pragmatic. In a sense, under this logic Slovakia has an obligation now to represent and protect Slovak culture in the broad diversity that is 'Europe.'

## Conclusion

The focus on diversity and common culture, with the resultant break with naturalized ethno-nationalist divisions, is in a sense a non-nationalist position, but it must be remembered this entire discourse of multiculturalism is still in the context of its ability to form a unitary Slovak whole. The outcome of this logic is ultimately the impossibil-

ity of any ethnic or national politics and all that is left is the 'multicultural' Slovak state, which incidentally is the subject of the central entrance hall. Pictures of government buildings are accompanied by explanations of their functions. The Slovak state, like the Kingdom of Hungary, is presumed to be natural and unproblematic. The association of the state with multi-ethnic origins both legitimizes it and de-ethnicizes it. In light of this multiculturalism and the difficulties with ethnic politics, Slovakia, whose constitution begins "We the Slovak people" and recognizes "the natural rights of nations to self-determination", must suffice. Slovakia, as a mono-ethnic nation, is supposedly able to represent a multiethnic territory. The multiple meanings of the nation make it incredibly powerful, as politicians can invoke either its homogeneity or its heterogeneity as is politically pragmatic. Thus, the logic of multiculturalism in this context does not spell the end of ethnic inequality, but rather attempts to close and neutralize discussions of ethnic difference as justification for the current political situation.

The museum, like the Slovak political sphere, presents at times the facade of multiculturalism in order to justify the maintenance of the current imbalance of political and cultural power within the country. It is precisely the nation's ability to vacillate between a sanctified homogeneity and a recognition of multiplicity that allows the nation to become such a power political concept in this context. When debates over history arise, the nation is invoked in all its idealized glory, requiring ethnically Slovak politicians of all persua-

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<sup>1</sup> Accompanying text; Natural History Museum - Bratislava

sions to support the historical symbolism of a distinct Slovak nation. On the other hand, when questions such as granting greater minority rights arise, the multiethnic character of a European Slovakia is invoked to allow politicians to claim that minority rights in Slovakia are already above standard. While this ambiguity is infinitely more preferable than the outbreak of direct ethno-nationalist violence, the facade of a limited multiculturalism will do little to address the underlying problems of cultural and ethnic inequality.

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