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MUSEUMS OF EUROPE:
Tangles of Memory, Borders, and Race

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ABSTRACT

In this article I investigate the making of two new museums of Europe—Marseille's Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean and Berlin's Museum of European Cultures—by focusing on the kinds of "Europe" envisioned in their exhibitions. I argue that museums represent an important site where the geopolitical imaginary of a bounded, culturalized Europe is produced, even if by default. I explore how these older national folklore collections were strategically rebranded as museums of Europe to give a second life to their nearly obsolete displays. National projects and geopolitics play a key role in such memorial Europeanization. These insights challenge taken-for-granted understandings of scale in memory studies and offer a more nuanced understanding of how Europeanization is playing out within cultural institutions. Amid multiple European crises, "Europe" is increasingly imagined as a diverse but essentially united cultural space—however fuzzy and contested its cultural content may be—while this spatial imaginary is racialized in subtle ways. [museums of Europe, European memory and heritage, strategic Europeanization, transnationalism, cultural racism]

Collective memory plays a crucial role in the making of spatial imaginaries and in shaping the common-sense, taken-for-granted boundaries of the political community to which we feel we belong. In this article, I investigate the way museums are creating a new "European" memory, as well as the kinds of "European" spaces that are imagined in and through this process. This article focuses on two new museums, both reconverted collections of ethnology and folk-lore—namely, Marseille's Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (MuCEM) and Berlin's Museum of European Cultures (MEK), which opened in 2013 and 2011, respectively. I discuss how these two museums narrate (or fail to narrate) "Europe" and its relationship to "other" spaces, as well as the tensions, contradictions, and gaps that mark these narratives. Rather than focusing on European identity, I analyze these narratives via a spatial lens by looking at borders and spatial imaginaries as key analytical concepts so as to foreground issues of race, which have long been neglected in memory studies.

Multiple actors, including the European Union (EU), push toward musealizing Europe, but there are fundamental difficulties with this project (Mazé 2009, 2014; see also Kaiser et al. 2014, chap. 1). Both the Marseille and Berlin museums are examples of what could be called *strategic Europeanization* on the part of museum and heritage professionals who rebrand their outdated—and largely unpopular—folklore collections and displays in order to keep up with contemporary public tastes. What is striking is that a kind of creeping Europeanization (silent but advancing, as Kaiser et al. [2014] show) is taking place in museums across and beyond the EU. It proceeds, however, through discontinuous, disjointed, and contradictory processes, often working through the very institutions and tropes of the nation-state it is expected to supersede. As Thomas Risse (2010) has remarked in connection with European identity dynamics in general, supra- and transnational memory works through national and regional sites and actors of memory. This is in no way a unidirectional trajectory without detours and even U-turns. Although EU policies play a key role in this push, European memory making is a multisited process, tense with conflicts, and one that has also been advanced by non-EU actors—national, regional, grassroots—for a variety of different purposes.

MuCEM and MEK exemplify this form of Europeanization and the representational predicament it ignites—that such museums either paradoxically abdicate their role to represent Europe or produce highly dissonant and muddled images of it. Moreover, their representations are symptomatic of the current European crisis, which is also a crisis of representation both political and aesthetic. They help reproduce a peculiar spatial imaginary of Europe as a bounded entity that proliferates in spite of, or perhaps precisely because of, the crisis. My broader theoretical point is to think of museums and memory making as "bordering practices" producing spatial imaginaries of containment—social imaginaries of bounded communities-cum-territories or bundles of territory-community-culture (see also Whitehead et al. 2013)—that play a role in the legitimation and

naturalization of hard-and-fast borders, of "Fortress Europe," and the exclusion of many from the newly reimagined European cultural community. In spite of heightened political fragmentation, Europe is increasingly imagined across multiple sites as a bounded cultural community, however fuzzy and fundamentally contested the cultural content of this imagined community may be.

Methodologically, this article is inspired by Stephanie Moser's approach to museum displays as "active agents in the construction of knowledge" (2010, 22). My investigation, therefore, involves an analysis of the narrative conveyed by a museum display and an investigation of the constellation of diverse actors, forces, and events that enter into its making (see also the hybrid methodology adopted by Macdonald [2013] to trace the social import of displays). I also interviewed a number of key curators and former curators in both museums to grasp not only their own understanding of how displays came to be, the meanings that they wanted to convey through them, and the negotiations, tensions, and conflicts marking this process—but also their understanding of the structural constraints that limited their own agency. In addition, I spoke with several museum visitors to obtain some sense of their experiences. Finally, I examined exhibition reviews and media reports that appeared in the German, French, and international press to trace the public debates triggered by these museums. In the following sections, I discuss the growing body of scholarship on European memory and connect it to studies of borders. Building on this theoretical framework, I then elaborate upon the results of the research sketched above in two sections devoted to MuCEM and MEK, respectively.

The Making of a European Memory

The opening of the Berlin and Marseille museums is part of a broader trend toward an emerging Europeanization of the museum field across the EU (Kaiser et al. 2014; Mazé 2014). From the 1980s on, a new interest in a common European culture and memory has emerged in the EU alongside the traditional focus on economic and political integration. This trend solidified in the 1990s with Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty, which provided a legal basis for a European cultural policy. Pro-EU political elites

and intellectuals have called for projects promoting a new European heritage, and a number of memory initiatives have been put in place to bolster EU citizens' weak European identity and solidarity, as well as the legitimacy of the EU (e.g., Assmann 2006; Barroso 2012; Leggewie and Lang 2011). Since the Maastricht Treaty, the European Parliament has issued memory resolutions and established common memorial days, as well as Europe-wide conventions, professional associations, and research networks to contribute to a growing European infrastructure of memory production (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Rigney 2014; Sassatelli 2009; Sierp 2014, chap. 4). A testament to the prominence of this agenda is the fact that "memory and heritage" have become key themes and priority areas governing EU funding for the humanities; in turn, EU funding is increasingly important for museums and other heritage institutions at a time when (nation-)state subsidies for culture are being drastically cut back. While the EU cultural budget itself is limited, overall there is a growing discursive emphasis on the cultural dimension of the union.[1]

Yet, this memory work has run into manifold obstacles—especially regarding the problem of which past and which culture to promote as the communitarian one, given the deep memory and cultural divisions cross-cutting Europe. The purported solution to this dilemma has been found in the union's motto, "unity in diversity." However, there has been a tendency toward developing projects promoting a bureaucratic "cold" version of the past—a consensus past that can hardly "make us dream" (Braidotti 2008)—or those abdicating the idea of creating any meaningful "European" dimension if not for the homogenization of languages and practices involved in being part of an EU-wide network (Sassatelli 2009).

Such has been the problem with several museums of Europe. These include two history museum projects tied to EU institutions, namely, the Brussels-based Musée de l'Europe and the upcoming House of European History established by the European Parliament. Focusing on postwar integration history, these museums tend to reproduce a success, even a teleological, story—a kind of new master narrative of the EU—which has in fact deeply divisive implications in spite of well-meaning inclusionary goals. Like the broader EU politics of memory, these museums have

been criticized for the discriminatory character of such a master narrative depicting an EU with a clear Christian origin and a past (and present) dominated by powerful men and an essentially homogeneous, white citizenry (Kaiser et al. 2014, 118–25). Also problematic is the narrative of totalitarianism that imbues them, which I discuss below. Other more experimental museums, such as Aachen's Bauhaus Europa and Turin's Museion per l'Europa, failed early due to budget cuts or, as in the striking case of Aachen, due to a citizens' initiative stopping the project. Of all the museums of Europe projects—interestingly, all located in Western Europe—the two reconverted museums of ethnology that are the focus of this article are the only ones operating as I write this article, except for some smaller institutions specializing in aspects of European political history.[2]

Yet, memory has a special place within dominant self-understandings of the European institutions and elites, as highlighted by the foundational narrative of the EU as the telos of an upward movement "from war to peace" (significantly, the title of President Herman Van Rompuy's acceptance speech for the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the EU). This narrative tells of EUrope as rising from the ashes of WWII—a healed Europe rising from memory work as a monument to memory itself (Assman 2006; Rigney 2014). In this narrative, as Luiza Bialasiewicz (2012a) has argued, along with other prominent intellectuals such as Habermas and Derrida, Europe's true "other" is its past, and it is the overcoming of this national and lethally nationalistic past that makes Europe into a radically novel, postnational "polity for the future" that heralds a possibility of justice. Yet, the paradox is that this idea of Europe moving "past its past" (i.e., learning from the horror of WWII and the Holocaust by mourning it) is deeply connected to a resurging sense of Europe holding the moral high ground and to a resurging arrogance and sense of superiority (Bialasiewicz 2012a). This sense of superiority in turn reinstates old us-and-them distinctions between a civilized (white) European self who is aware of history and human rights, and an uncivilized (also by ignorance of the past), clearly non-European other (most often Muslim; see Rothberg 2014). Legitimated by memory, then, this arrogance is made possible by a fundamental amnesia, by forgetting colonialism and its postcolonial legacy (Gilroy 2004, Stoler 2011).

Thus, remembering—particularly, remembering a past of suffering so as to learn from it—is increasingly perceived as a truly European value, and a politics of regret marks the current museum boom in Europe that Sharon Macdonald (2013) termed the "European memory complex." In spite of the widely differing narratives of the past and the many memory wars taking place across Europe, scholars believe that a shared European memory culture is spreading and that there is a certain "convergence" (Sierp 2014, chap. 4) of national commemoration practices across Europe. The Holocaust is central to this culture of memory (Assman 2006; Levy and Sznaider 2002). But after the European enlargement in 2004 and 2007, a competing interpretation of the past—the narrative of totalitarianism that frames Nazi-fascism and *both* Stalinism and Communism as all equally evil—has gained institutional ground as a politicized means of cultural integration for "new" Eastern European members (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Mälksoo 2009). While the totalitarian narrative is not only divisive and rather problematic in its blurring of major political and historical differences (Judt 2005; Žižek 2005), it will become, judging on the basis of the current plans, the structuring narrative of Brussels' House of European History, that is, of the new EU history museum.[3] Conversely, there has been no equivalent attempt to fully recognize the place of colonialism in European history and memory (see, e.g., De Cesari 2012; Stoler 2011).

Chris Shore (2000, 2006) has strongly criticized this EU politics of memory because it reproduces the old national model of top-down, state-sponsored memories. For Shore, this politics of memory risks replicating a model of political community that discriminates against those perceived as not belonging to the hegemonic culture or not sharing its official memory. Thus, such an approach fails to serve the goals of what is claimed to be an inclusive, postnational entity. While sundry European intellectuals have emphasized that there cannot be an essentialized European identity and that the European project is "less defined by a future realization of something 'typically European' than by a dialectical negation of what used to be 'all too European'" (Bialasiewicz 2012a, 107, following Ole Wæver), constructions of European memory that actually exist and are widely circulated often depart, and quite radically, from such

postnational visions. Provided that memory has worked historically to produce cohesive but exclusionary national identities based on clear-cut self/other distinctions, is it possible to mobilize this same memory framework for the sake of a different, postnational political project? One must then join Étienne Balibar in asking: "How then both to *individualize and desubstantialize Europe*?" (2004, 221, emphasis in the original). This is the challenge faced by many curators of European museums today.

Memory as Bordering Practice

How do such institutional activities geared toward the production of a new European memory and heritage relate to the broader social process of imagining the borders of an open project such as Europe? Can we conceive of memory and museums as "border devices"? Available scholarship emphasizes that borders are ever-changing entities (e.g., Wilson and Donnan 2012)—the historically, culturally, and socially contingent "outcome of ongoing activity" or "bordering practices" (Green 2012, 576). Something akin to a process of mediation between materialities and immaterialities takes shape around borders. Borders presuppose a system of classification and categorization of the world in their establishment of a clear-cut difference between an inside and an outside, and ideas of borders are always tied to broader ways of conceptualizing the world (Green 2012). For example, our understanding of borders, our border logic (e.g., De Cesari and Rigney 2014), tends to be deeply shaped by what Liisa Malkki calls "the national order of things" (quoted in Green 2012, 576)—the banal nationalism imbuing our daily lives and research practices alike (Billig 1995). Most importantly, ideas of borders are nested within broader geographical imaginaries that are themselves cultural products (van Houtum 2010).

For Freerk Boedeltje and Henk van Houtum (2008, 362), the EU has copied the nation-state model and developed policies to "border and order" its own growing entity. It has "othered" the non-EU by demarcating the Union, including inventing symbols (such as the anthem, the flag, et cetera) but also traditions and memories. This reinvention of Europe as a bounded entity goes against its necessary openness and multiplicity. Instead, it is the symptom of a border syndrome, of the "invasion of the [dis]order of

the border" (after Hage 2003, 86). Ultimately, it owes much to a symbolic politics of invented traditions, homogeneous cultures, and desired pasts—one that reverses the relation between collective identity and agency exposed by Balibar, who advocates for a European identity as an endproduct, a "quality of collective agency" as opposed to a "mythical image . . . forcefully imposed upon reality" (2004, 221). The recent spate of European crises coupled with the refugee catastrophe have accelerated the process of region building in the cultural sense together with the (attempted) entrenchment of the EU's external borders (e.g., Bialasiewicz 2012b) and the seeming re-creation of internal ones. Many of the museum professionals with whom I spoke did not subscribe to a closed, monolithic idea of Europe. Yet, they risk reproducing it in their displays. In the next section, I argue that MuCEM is one of the multiple sites where such geopolitical imaginaries of a bounded Europe, together with ideas about the proper place of its borders, are produced, even if by default.

Marseille's Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean

The Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) represents the latest development of the older Paris-based National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions (the French folklore museum), which was merged with the European collection of the ethnography museum and moved to Marseille in one of the first acts of cultural decentralization in France. The Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions managed to obtain the huge sum necessary for its reconversion—the project cost the state over 190 million euros—thanks to the fact that Marseille was chosen as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) for 2013. (Note that the city was selected to host this event precisely because of the existence, then only on paper, of the MuCEM project.) Indeed, the opening of MuCEM in June 2013 represented the key event of the Marseille ECoC program (and it is this program's former director who heads MuCEM as this article goes to press). President Nicolas Sarkozy's plans for the Mediterranean region also played an important role. A reinvention of the French folklore museum was badly needed in order to close the "era of what Le Monde scathingly described as hanging folk objects from nylon string" (Chrisafis 2013, para.

6). But this project had stagnated for years due to lack of funding and a strong political will—at least until 2008 when a chain of events and especially the choice of Marseille as the location of the oldest and most successful EU cultural policy, the ECoC, hastened its development.

The European Capital of Culture initiative is a months-long, festival-like cultural program that takes place each year in different European cities. While funding and organizing mostly fall on local and national actors, the program is expected to promote Europeanness along the lines of the EU motto of unity in diversity; a common critique, though, is that this wider European dimension is largely subservient to national and local influences and networking efforts (e.g., Patel 2013; Sassatelli 2009). Another common critique of the ECoC is that national and local organizers use culture and the name of Europe to produce urban regeneration and tourism-led socioeconomic development—and even city and nation branding; in other words, local actors use "European culture" to advance their own interests and the interests of capitalism. This economic logic, underlying much cultural policy nowadays (e.g., O'Brien 2014), helps explain why local actors in Marseille welcomed MuCEM, an iconic building expected to rebrand the pervasive image of this southern city's unemployment and criminality, and to stimulate the redevelopment of its deprived port area in one of the many replications of the so-called Guggenheim effect. The establishment of MuCEM crowned an older, larger scheme of urban renewal of the port area of Marseille, ongoing since the 1990s, which, like many similar endeavors, promised to remake the city thanks to a row of new monumental, eye-catching buildings by global star architects. Thus, in the case of MuCEM, cultural decentralization met urban regeneration and European cultural policy to offer a second life to an outmoded folklore museum.

This museum problematizes taken-for-granted understandings of scales of memory making in that it can be considered as a national (perhaps even neo-colonial) memory site camouflaged as a transnational, European one. A big French flag towers over MuCEM's entrance, exhibit labels and most catalogues are in French, and events at the inauguration I attended in early June 2013 were also all in French. In its first opening year, the museum was a big success

with 2.6 million visitors in total; the bulk of these visitors (85 percent) came from France, and half of them from the region of Marseille (Evin and Lequeux 2014). Most importantly, what is striking is the absence of Europe from the representation of a museum that was supposed to be exactly about it. MuCEM represents the Mediterranean, while Europe is not *in* the picture. The assistant director at the time and one of the museum's curators said the following to me in our interview; we had just talked about the other museum of Europe projects happening elsewhere when he said, "We chose to focus on the Mediterranean . . . Europe is in Berlin and Brussels."[4] In another interview, Bruno Suzzarelli, MuCEM's director at the time of the inauguration, declared: "The Museum of Europe, it will surely not be us" (Mazé 2013, 198). This absence of Europe, however, was not in the original plan, which was instead all about the interpenetration between Europe and the Mediterranean.[5]

The original Euro-Mediterranean focus was connected to the choice of Marseille as the location for the renovated folklore museum. It also represented a way for the curators to distinguish the French museum from the other museums of Europe that were being developed in the late 1990s to early 2000s, and that were all part of the same network (Bani et al. 2003). (The German museum that I discuss in the following section, for example, emphasizes Central and Eastern Europe instead.) But the Mediterranean became prominent to the point of displacing Europe only later when the initiator and longtime director of MuCEM, heritage professional Michel Colardelle, who had ties to the Socialist Party, was fired by the culture minister after Nicolas Sarkozy came to power. The museum had then become an instrument of Sarkozy's "Union for the Mediterranean." When Colardelle was replaced by a bureaucrat, Bruno Suzzarelli, the project changed from one that aimed to represent the "Euro-Mediterranean world," thus addressing the very political question of the relationship between Europe *and* the Mediterranean—a concept "too subtle," "too complex," too "difficult" for many, according to Colardelle—to one centered on the Mediterranean alone.[6] Interestingly, given the French rural focus of the old folklore museum, the Mediterranean had to be collected anew or loaned.

French historian Fernand Braudel's notion of Mediterranean civilization(s) had inspired Colardelle's project in its embrace of non-elite culture and its envisioning of a space of encounters and cross-civilizational synergies. But this same notion of civilization could be made to serve Sarkozy's agenda too. Indeed, scholars have heavily criticized this notion for its ahistoric, evolutionary, and Eurocentric connotations, especially against the backdrop of hegemonic orientalizing discourses about the "clash of civilizations" being mobilized to legitimate neo-imperial designs and the war on terror.[7]

Hence, geopolitics and the shrinking but never forgotten grandeur of France played a key role in the making of MuCEM. Sarkozy was keen to establish a new French hegemony in the Mediterranean through the creation of what he initially called a "Mediterranean Union." During his 2007 election campaign, he had proposed an organization comprised of the countries bordering the Mediterranean without Northern Europe—that is, a union separate from the EU. According to pundits, this was intended to strengthen France's international standing but also to provide an alternative to Turkey's EU membership, something Sarkozy opposed. However, the Germans, who were worried about being left out and about French moves that "r[a]ng of grandeur and old colonial links" (Erlanger 2008), insisted on having all EU states included in an endeavor that was then reformed and renamed the "Union for the Mediterranean"; this Union tried, in the end unsuccessfully, to reactivate the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. While France remained in the driver's seat (e.g., Bicchi 2011), the initiative soon foundered with the violence unfolding in the Middle East and with increasingly securitized European policies toward the region focusing not on development but on strengthening the EU's external borders (Bialasiewicz 2012b; De Cesari 2012).[8] But from 2007 to 2008, Sarkozy still needed an instrument of cultural diplomacy (Früh 2015) and a powerful iconic statement of his Mediterranean initiative. This museum, built along the waterfront—in a way that made a local politician call it "a hyphen between the coastline of Marseille . . . and the other shore of the Mediterranean"—clearly symbolizes the city, and France itself, reaching over to the sea and beyond. The paradox, however, is that the manifold international collaborations planned by the museum as part of its new Mediterranean orientation have essentially foundered, at least thus far, in the context of the violence and instability of a postrevolutionary Middle East.

The complex topography of MuCEM suggests a kind of Mediterranean insularity (see Figure 1). The

Figure 1. View of MuCEM, including the new building by Rudy Ricciotti on the former J4 pier and the seventeenth-century Fort Saint-Jean. (Canal Dolly/Wikimedia Commons.) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

main exhibits on the Mediterranean are located in a new magnificent structure built by Rudy Ricciotti, the enfant terrible of French architecture, on one of the port piers of Marseille. This main building is separated from the other section of the museum, which is located in the medieval Fort Saint-Jean, by an arm of the sea. The "Fort" houses some of the old French folklore museum's objects. (Abutting the fort is a memorial commemorating Nazism's victims and the WWII refugees who tried to escape from Marseille's port, but this memorial has long been closed and is unconnected to MuCEM.) Even though an elongated narrow bridge connects the two main sections of MuCEM, that is, Ricciotti's building and the Fort, they remain clearly distinct due to the different architectural styles and the fact that from several perspectives the new structure appears like an island in the sea.

The Ricciotti building's simple external square shape is compensated by the richness of the décor and technical innovation of the skin that envelops it, an irregular net of filigreed concrete that has been compared with the Arabic *mashrabiyat*, or old carved-wood window screens. There is a clear contrast between this architecture, by an Algerian-born Frenchman who disdains minimalism, and the other recently built multipurpose cultural venue right next to it, the Villa Méditerranée, a white modernist-looking structure with a roof extending into and almost embracing the sea. Local Socialist politician Michel Vauzelle wanted the Villa as a platform for the "revival of cultural and political relationships between the Mediterranean's different shores" (Zanderigo and Boeri 2013, para. 15), but in this case the architects took migration as their inspiration and especially the never-ending mass tragedies that have been taking place in the Mediterranean for a long time without Europe demonstrating the will to stop them. Moved by a "desire to counteract the drift towards closure and isolation," the architects made the Villa's architecture to reproduce that of a dock building and an off-shore platform, thus re-creating a "border infrastructure" while combining it with civic architecture in the form of a platform for debate as opposed to a museum (Zanderigo and Boeri 2013, para. 14, 16).

In contrast, Ricciotti adopted an exoticized, insular view of a "mythical Mediterranean" "veiled behind its concrete mantilla" (Ayers 2013, para. 17,

18). An anecdote noted by *The Guardian* reviewer reveals something about Ricciotti's quasi-fundamentalist understanding of cultural difference (see Stolcke 1995), which conflicts with MuCEM's intended openness. During an interview, the architect made disparaging comments about veiled Muslim women: "I hate that, covering the face, and it will cause problems in Marseille. This is a north Mediterranean city" (Moore 2013, para. 9). Clearly, for Ricciotti, Arab-Islamic culture is not at home in Marseille as a "European" city, in spite of his romanticism surrounding the Mediterranean.

MuCEM opened with three exhibitions: a semipermanent one, called the *Gallery of the Mediterranean*, and two temporary exhibits. The semipermanent exhibition centers on four classic Braudelian themes: the invention of agriculture, religiosity/monotheisms (focused on Jerusalem), citizenship, and travel. The first section displays agricultural and similar tools, while the second section on Jerusalem includes all sorts of objects connected to the three monotheistic religions, from Greek icons to models of Jerusalem's shrines. Contemporary art, interspersed among folk artifacts, is mobilized to challenge old museological paradigms (the Eurocentric dichotomy of art as "high culture" versus ethnographic, "low" culture), but the impression is rather one of a haphazard collection of disparate objects that present only a vague and somewhat sanitized idea of historical developments—nothing is said, for instance, about religious conflicts, which is remarkable in light of the choice of the Jerusalem theme.

The third section is organized along evolutionary lines: the progress of citizenship from Greece to France, thus indirectly represented as the pinnacle of both democracy and Mediterranean civilization. The final section (see Figure 2) includes a hodgepodge of travel- and mapping/measurement-related artifacts —all without much context. Labeling is scarce, so as to let the objects speak. Remarkably, colonialism is framed as a form of mobility among others, and its enduring legacy in postcolonial migration appears like one (even accidental) aspect of a plural phenomenology of movements across seas. In these last sections, there is something of the "uncomfortable truths" and "violent histories" promised by the curators (see Chrisafis 2013, para. 7), such as in the displays on the Spanish Civil War and the

Figure 2.   Detail of the section on sea travel in the MuCEM's semipermanent exhibit, the *Gallery of the Mediterranean*. (2014, Jean-Pierre Dalbéra/ Wikimedia Commons.) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, or in the video about women's initiatives and another on migration. Yet, the end result is what *The Guardian* labeled a "muddle" (Moore 2013). One of the two opening temporary exhibits, and a few of the later ones more directly, did address the violence, physical and epistemic, of colonialism and its aftermath; but overall, this is for MuCEM's curators a very "sensitive topic" to be handled with caution especially in the context of France's current tense and racialized politics.[9]

The two opening temporary exhibits attempted to engage with the complex history and the conflicts that have so profoundly impacted the Mediterranean borderland—temporary exhibits in general being easier for curatorial experimentation. These two exhibits purported to tackle the deeply rooted images that constitute the thick, often clichéd lens through which many visitors view the Mediterranean. While some stereotypes were addressed directly, the curators did not manage to subvert them, and in fact arguably reproduced the standard imaginary. The first temporary exhibit represented the Janus-faced nature of civilization, its good and its evil sides. Colonialism and war were juxtaposed against cosmopolitanism and cultural exchange as different types of encounters across shores, as the mafia was juxtaposed against tourism. Yet, visitors did not learn anything about key contemporary processes shaping the Mediterranean region and its relationship to Europe, such as,

for example, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the question of energy and the oil and gas pipelines that crisscross this sea and constitute crucial conduits of exchange. (The obvious irony of course is that such geopolitics provided the very momentum for the museum's establishment.) What was notably absent was a serious discussion of the key issue that has been at the heart of Europe *and* the Mediterranean for several years—namely, migration and refugees, and the fact that this inland sea has become a cemetery for many of the hundreds of thousands of people who attempt to cross it to reach Europe. Ignored is the fact that the EU-Mediterranean border is the deadliest on earth, also due to EU policies (van Houtum 2015). In other words, the relationship between the Mediterranean and Europe was not thematized at all—in spite of MuCEM being ostensibly about this.

The second temporary exhibit was on gender and sexuality, showcasing everything from feminist manifestos to art criticizing homophobia in the Arab world. On the whole, its varied display upheld longstanding representations of the Mediterranean as a place with a fundamental problem with gender. It is striking that such cultural representations can be traced back, at least in part, to anthropological studies that have used the so-called honor/shame syndrome as the chief, essentializing lens through which to interpret Mediterranean societies and that have thus emphasized Mediterranean women's lack of agency

and oppression, and these societies' enduring pre-modern character. These images have had infinite reverberations in media and popular culture.

To sum up, MuCEM abdicated its role of representing Europe and, by focusing exclusively on the Mediterranean—rather than thematizing the osmotic if tense, violent, and contested relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean—reproduced a rather essentialized, almost stereotypical imaginary of the Mediterranean as a place not only frozen in time but also fundamentally *somewhere else and something else* from Europe. Critics have argued against the very idea of "the Mediterranean" as a deeply problematic category of scholarship akin to "the Orient" (Horden 2014, 3). For them, "the Mediterranean" as a culture area with its set of longue durée (unchanging structures) like honor/shame, patronage, cosmopolitanism, and the overwhelming role of agriculture and religiosity, has been historically "defined in contrast to corresponding images of European modernity" (Ben-Yehoyada 2014, 108). In other words, it is because of this apparent impermeability to change that the Mediterranean has never been modern; as such, it has never been European either—or so goes the implicit assumption of the Mediterreanist discourse (see also Herzfeld 2014). In a typical Orientalist fashion (Said 1978), then, MuCEM does indeed represent something about Europe but by default, by not talking about it—by making the Mediterranean into something not-quite-European. This representation of the Mediterranean, I argue, plays a role in shaping a certain imaginary of Europe as a place with fixed borders running across what has been called a "solid sea" and in the making of the Mediterranean as a place beyond the fortified borders of Europe.

Wolfram Kaiser et al. (2014) borrowed the notion of "reflexive Europeanization" from Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande (2007) to explain the worldview and approach of many curators who are at the forefront of the transformations ongoing in the museum field in Europe. They have identified a

> remarkable alliance between the museum as a classical institution of placement, demarcation and exclusion—of classification—and a discourse of mobility and migration that calls any such demarcation or exclusion into question. . . . Reflexive Europeanization challenges the validity of traditional, hegemonic images of Europe modeled on a Western universalism, the Enlightenment or Christianity. Self-examination and a productive sense of uncertainty replace these images, leading to a consideration of Europe's historical and contemporary interconnections with other regions of the world. (Kaiser et al. 2014, 156–57)

Aware of the shifting boundaries and contested nature of the European project, and simultaneously of their own critical role in this process of geopolitical imagining, many European curators navigate a difficult terrain: How can one represent "Europe" in a museum without reifying and "containerizing" it in deeply problematic ways?

Berlin's Museum of European Cultures

Like MuCEM, Berlin's Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK), or the Museum of European Cultures, is the product of the rebranding of two older ethnological collections: the collection of the German Museum of Folklore (Museum für Volkskunde)—itself bringing together the former East and West Berlin sections reunified in 1992—and the European collections of the German Museum of Ethnology (Museum für Volkerkunde). Similar to MuCEM, this is the story of a deeply national institution—folklore museums have traditionally offered very good examples of cultural institutions in the service of the nation-state (Herzfeld 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998)—being reconverted to address a transnational history in order to survive in the global age. In contrast with France, however, neither urban regeneration nor geopolitics represent the driving force behind the creation of MEK. In fact, the Berlin museum is considerably smaller, despite the two collections being largely comparable in size. The cost of MEK was ca. 17 million euros for an exhibition space stretching over 700 sq m. To compare, MuCEM has over 5 600 sq m to showcase its objects (the total museum space is 44 000 sq m), with initial costs approaching 200 million euros. MEK's collection mostly includes objects from Germany but also from Central and Eastern Europe; correspondingly, MEK has focused on this region in its exhibits and cultural diplomacy activities.[10]

The federally funded Museum of European Cultures was officially established in 1999 with a pilot exhibition, but it did not inaugurate a permanent display until 2011 when the current exhibit entitled *Cultural Contacts: Living in Europe* first opened to the public in the rooms of the neoclassical Bruno-Paul building (see Figure 3).[11] The museum is located in Berlin's upscale residential suburb of Dahlem-Zehlendorf next to the modernist structure that used to house both the Museum of Ethnology and the Museum of Asian Art. This setting is changing because the latter museums are moving to the new Humboldt Forum in the center of Berlin, scheduled to open in 2019; but the fate of MEK in the context of this massive reconfiguration of the city's museum landscape is still unclear. Due to the lack of funding and political will that has marred its short life, the museum will remain alone in the city's periphery for the time being, and this relative isolation causes concern about the already low visitor numbers (Bernau 2011; Tietmeyer 2015).

In the small space of the museum—two relatively large rooms and a couple of smaller ones as well as an additional space for temporary shows—only a fraction of its large collection of 280,000 objects is on display. In contrast, the mission of the museum is broad and ambitious—namely, to show "life worlds and cultural contacts in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards" using "everyday culture and popular arts."[12] The curators have moved away from the traditional focus on folklore, rural heritage, and popular traditions to include contemporary urban material culture. Mobilities and cultural encounters, together with identities and borders, are the main themes of the exhibition. For the director, the museum's aim is to show that European cultures are produced in encounters, even if these can be conflictual, asymmetrical ones.[13] However, it is difficult to properly interpret the exhibit without reading the accompanying texts.

The various collections of European material culture were officially separated in 1934 in the context of the Nazi cult of German folklore. The project of bringing them together was a product of the reunification of Germany and of the broader process of European integration (Karasek and Tietmeyer 1999). But this merger was also an attempt to reimagine an institution deeply shaped by Nazi ideology (Tietmeyer and Vanja 2013). In the 1990s, an emerging Europeanization unfolded through the creation of a network of European museums of ethnology and cultural history, and thanks to a number of joint, EU-funded projects—something that helped shape the concept of the new museum to come (Vanja 2003). As demonstrated by the introduction to the catalogue of MEK's 1999–2004 pilot exhibition, *Fascination*
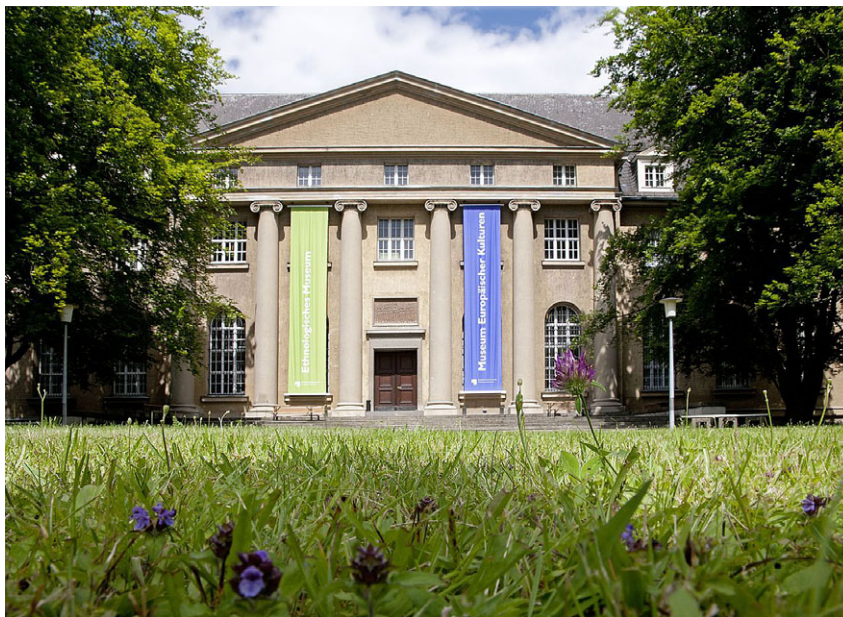

Figure 3. The main entrance to Berlin's Museum of European Cultures. (2011, Ute Franz-Scarciglia/Wikimedia Commons.) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Image (Karasek et al. 1999), as well as by the catalogue of the current show, the museum's concept shares the language of EU cultural policy and of "unity in diversity" by aiming to represent "cultural diversity within the unity of Europe" (Tietmeyer 2011, 12). Curators emphasize Europe as a "community of destiny" (*Schicksalgemeinschaft*), and they seem to understand European society as one that "in spite of its cultural diversity (*Vielfalt*) is characterized by such unity (*Einheit*), which is crucially grounded in the Judeo-Christian religion" (Karasek and Tietmeyer 1999, 13, my translation). The quotation opening *Fascination Image*—the equivalent of a mission statement—is by Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. It is also repeated in the current museum catalogue:

> If we were to imagine that we should merely live with what we are as "nationals," and if we would for example try to deprive the average German of all the customs, thoughts, and feelings he or she has adopted from other countries of the continent, we would be shocked by how impossible such an existence already is, four-fifths of our inner wealth are the common property of Europe. (Ortega y Gasset quoted in Tietmeyer 2011, 11)

In MEK's case, then, the Europeanization of an older folklore collection helped purify it of its hyper-nationalistic, Nazi connotations, but it also helped fundraise for and rebrand an obsolete exhibit. However, this kind of strategic Europeanization did not fully purge the collection of its built-in biases—in particular, the enduring legacy of nineteenth-century academic and museum practices. Such a legacy is exemplified by the emphasis on Christianity, reflected in the large number of nativities that fill two exhibition rooms, as well as by the distinct cultural-geographic understanding of "Europe" embedded in the collection itself, that is, of a Europe including Armenia and Georgia (surely because of their Christian ties), but excluding Turkey and Azerbaijan, which were historically collected in the Islamic Orient section of the Museum of Ethnology (Karasek and Tietmeyer 1999, 18). Even in the postwar era, the older Museum of Folklore relinquished a portion of its Judaica collection to Jerusalem's Israel Museum in exchange for objects considered "German" (Bernau 2011).

MEK's permanent exhibit has a Venetian gondola, positioned at the entrance, as its guiding object (see Figure 4); this artifact is meant to symbolize the key exhibition themes—travel,

Figure 4.   Gondola on display in the MEK. (Photo by Chiara De Cesari.) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

movement, and cultural contacts. Right next to it is a large screen that tells Europe's history in a rather conventional way, emphasizing the classical period and the Enlightenment (at the expense of, for example, colonialism), and ending with the EU—the familiar institutional narrative I discussed earlier in this article. The Berlin museum's introductory video does address issues of migration, refugees, and exploitation, unlike in other reiterations of this teleological Euronarrative where ethnocultural and religious diversity, as well as ongoing violence, are left out of the picture, such as in Brussels' Musée de l'Europe. Yet, this video shows how EU rhetoric and the trope of unity in diversity imbues the museum's narrative, notwithstanding the curators' intention not to be an "EU-museum" (Tietmeyer 2015); likewise, the English audio guide talks about a European common good and a tension between unity and diversity.

The exhibition has three main themes. The first room thematizes encounters in terms of travel, tourism, and migration through a variety of disparate objects, from a traditional Sicilian decorated chart to a big, plastic döner kebab once used as an advertising prop in a Berlin kiosk. The second room thematizes borders and identity-making processes by displaying regional costumes as well as some trappings and rituals of an everyday nationalism reconfigured by postcolonial multiculture, like the T-shirts of minority national soccer idols. In this room, a contemporary artwork entitled "The Europeans" mimics regional fashion using recycled materials while the audio guide asks: "How do Europeans dress? What is typical European?" Finally, there are a few rooms on religiosity showing all kinds of religious items, largely belonging to the Christian faith, such as ex-votos but especially nativities. This is all housed—without further commentary—in a neoclassical building, museums' iconic architectural style, which as Stephanie Moser aptly noted, "celebrates the imperial age of the nineteenth century, symbolizing the power and control of the European nations that amassed antiquities and ethnographic collections from all corners of the globe" (2010, 24).

With its gondola juxtaposed to the döner and the nativities, MEK showcases a dissonant heritage. Yet, the potential for such dissonance to stimulate critical reflection is hampered by a kitsch aesthetics—"all

peace, quiet, and harmony"—that "excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable" (Kundera 1991, 95, 92). Such kitsch aesthetics is benevolently blind to the intractably loaded, fundamentally fraught, and divisive nature of "Europe." Kitsch "derive[s] from the basic images people have engraved in their memories" and precludes questions by reconfirming such images (Kundera 1991, 93). Sanitized and domesticated via kitsch, this cacophony of heritages originates in the history of the collection and the pragmatic motives that led to its Europeanization as a rebranding strategy. In the 1990s, folklore museums were in a deep crisis, as evidenced by their dusty displays in dire need of refurbishing, by their few visitors, and by their chronic lack of both funding and intellectual legitimacy—a crisis exacerbated in Germany by the Nazi heritage of the discipline of folklore studies.[14] In this context, Europeanization offered a way out and the chance for a second life to a "vanishing subject" like folklore (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 300). Yet, the task is an arduous one. "What can you do with this regional stuff out of the nineteenth century? How can you represent Europe with it?"[15] This is the crucial dilemma that MEK's museum curators face. How does one recode a nationalist taxonomy? How does one undo the very idea of a national culture using a collection made precisely to materialize it?

The challenge, of course, goes beyond changing labels or shifting collection strategies. Significantly, the question of cultural diversity is at stake. The challenge is to open up an institution with a Nazi past to represent and involve a multicultural society. How to reframe a collection whose core remains "German" folklore, and whose main public (stammpublikum) is primarily the local white bourgeoisie who sometimes lament that the museum is no longer "German enough," according to MEK's director?[16] By doing outreach and so-called participatory collecting, MEK's curators try hard to enlarge the museum's constituency and engage Berlin's minorities whose material culture they now collect—and yet their are often frustrated. A sign of such tensions is a bifurcated collection logic: Recently, the curators acquired a statue of transgender singer and Eurovision Song Contest winner Conchita Wurst while the Friends of the Museum bought a nineteenth-century Biedermeier dress.

MEK is relegated to Berlin's suburbs and currently receives only about 60,000 visitors a year. This means that the museum's local constituency—the backbone of the Association of the Friends of the Museum, essential for fundraising—shapes its policies and exhibit choices, as the museum director herself admitted to me: It is for this constituency that she has to organize "nativity shows every now and then."[17] The curators' difficulties in reaching a broader public will increase with the move of the ethnographic and the Asian museums to the Humboldt Forum in central Berlin, a move likely to entrench MEK's marginality by severing it from its global setting, quite unlike the original idea of the first director (Vanja 2003). A diverse Europe and the world, so to speak, will be separated in Berlin's museum topography, with the former condemned to a peripheral status—while the classical Europe of "high culture" (i.e., the museums of ancient civilizations and of early modern art) remains in the center opposite the Humboldt Forum. While the curators want MEK to function as a "contact zone" (Boast 2011; Clifford 1997), under these circumstances inclusive moves like displaying the döner risk being rather tokenistic. The framing of the museum's narrative—from the gondola to nativities—signals this predicament.

"Europe Is a Christmas Tree" was the title of a German newspaper's review of MEK's opening (Lautenschläger 2011). This designation points to the exhibit's Christian flavor, as well as its being, like the decorations on most Christmas trees, a bit of a "melange of everything and nothing, a case of mixing all the colors and ending up with mud" (Moore 2013, para. 3, originally reviewing MuCEM). Also in Berlin, the bloody aspects of Europe's past and present are sidelined to promote a kitsch, benevolent, and essentially diluted version of Europeanness. As is often the case with museums of Europe, open and potentially divisive debate is avoided to maintain a form of weak consensus that still fails to accommodate everybody. While struggling to represent its substance and content, however, museums such as MEK and MuCEM do produce "Europe" as a container.

Conclusions

MuCEM does not represent Europe—or rather it does so by default—nor does it address the question of the relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean. Instead the museum freezes these into bounded and separated spaces. We are presented with a Mediterranean with unchanging features that is something and somewhere else from Europe, beyond its borders. In the vitrines of Berlin's MEK, on the other hand, we encounter kitsch aesthetics that anaesthetize a fundamentally dissonant Europe. Structural constraints such as the history of the collection and the museum's constituency, as well as the ongoing reconfiguration of Berlin's museum landscape, which relegates MEK to an insulated marginality, present significant challenges to true diversity. I argue that MEK as a whole—the way in which it thematizes Europe as a bounded object of representation without openly interrogating such politics—produces a kind of "spatial containerization" of Europe, to use Boedeltje and van Houtum's (2008) term. It does so by representing "Europe" as a place demarcated by its culture, even if a transcultural, plural one, and as a space with flexible "internal" national boundaries undone by cultural contacts of all kinds but ultimately with hard and fast borders toward the "outside"—the museum's external walls metamorphosing into Europe's hardening ones. A container called "Museum of Europe" is perhaps not the best laboratory by which to rethink a European memory and heritage suitable for a future inclusive polity. Perhaps the very evocation of a "European memory" and a "European heritage" in the singular—a sin I am myself guilty of—can be seen as a speech act that presupposes and performs a certain unity beneath the crust of diversity, and thus calls into being a bounded entity called "Europe." Certainly, there is no facile recipe to both *individualize and desubstantialize Europe* (Balibar 2004, 221), and the challenge might well be one of multiple, situated struggles—a kind of Gramscian war of position—to produce, within the existing frameworks, exhibits that help audiences to think critically and imaginatively about the geopolitics shaping our lives.

Building on Kaiser et al. (2014), my second point is that cultural Europeanization and the production of a European memory is a contradictory, paradoxical process. Cultural Europeanization does not happen only through EU institutional actors, *although* these are very important in setting policy and discursive frameworks. In a "policy-making at a distance" kind of arrangement, Europeanization also happens due to

the initiatives of a variety of other agents, including the so-called "grassroots" and networks of groups and institutions, and even national entities. Crucially, Europeanization in the museum field is often not so much a choice imposed from above as much as a pragmatic choice "from below": Curators understand that if one's institution or project is to survive in the age of transnationalism and regional integration, not to mention drastic cuts in state cultural budgets, it must be rebranded accordingly. This is a form of strategic Europeanization. Unlike common dichotomized understandings, the transnational emerges through the national in a way that does not imply the disappearance of the latter, to the contrary; this points to the multi- and cross-scalarity of memory processes (De Cesari and Rigney 2014; see also Risse 2010).

Rethinking "scale" along multidirectional lines (Rothberg 2009) is one of the key challenges of memory studies. Much of the scholarship in memory and museum studies is grounded in rather static spatial imaginaries that assume compartmentalized and hierarchical taxonomies of "local," "national," and "European" memories. Scholars and museum professionals alike tend to reproduce imagined topographies of scale as nested hierarchies of bounded spaces —what Jim Ferguson called the "vertical topography of power" (2004)—that conceive of social phenomena as taking place at stacked, neatly separate levels. Yet, different scales are not only interconnected but also mutually constituted. Memories and memory projects do not simply straddle multiple scales; scale making is often one of their aims, as the museums of Europe show. The transnationalization of the museum, an institution so deeply tied to national representation, is an open challenge well beyond Europe, and it is one that surely will not see, at least in the short-to-medium term, the disappearance of the national—but rather its reconfiguration along complex, if unexpected, lines.

My final point is that this spatial imaginary—the ways in which Europe is imagined as a diverse but fundamentally united cultural space—is racialized in a subtle way. It is troubling how often well-intended, critical curators who strive for inclusivity seem unable to overcome civilizational narratives imbued with colonial amnesia and Orientalist assumptions, and the idea that European culture is essentially Christian and made by white Europeans. To this end, I want to

close with the hallmark of Brussels' Musée de l'Europe key exhibition *It's Our History!*—namely, the testimonies of contemporary European citizens telling their own life stories and how they participate in making Europe (de Jong 2011). Here, European diversity is a national one. In spite of the transnational narrative, these Europeans are chosen for their nationality (that is, one individual with one testimony per member state of the EU) —and they are all white.

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NOTES

1. But additional, consistent funding for culture comes from other unlikely EU sources, such as the structural funds to foster social cohesion and regional development through tourism and the creative economy.

2. Other institutions associated with the project of creating a new European memory tend to focus on special dimensions of the history of European integration and not on culture: Brussels' Parlamentarium, for example, is the European Parliament's visitor center (and, as such, is not a museum); the Lieu d'Europe in Strasbourg; the European Museum Schengen; as well as the homes of the founding fathers of the Union spread throughout Western Europe (see their network at http://www.ajmonnet.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=85&Itemid=96&lang=en); see also Kaiser et al. (2014, chap. 5); Mazé (2014).

3. Interview with House of European History curator, Brussels, November 13, 2015; see also Kaiser et al. (2014, chap. 5).

4. Interview with MuCEM curator, Marseille, June 7, 2013. It is striking that this curator's peculiar remark on the true location of "Europe" and his answer to my inquiry into the reasons for the exclusion of Europe from the exhibit recur in public statements and interviews given by the then-museum director (see Mazé 2013, 198) and so can be considered as the unofficial museum position on this potentially controversial topic.

5. Interview with Michel Colardelle, October 31, 2016. See also Colardelle 2002; Mazé 2013, 187.

6. Such a thematic shift was influenced by Sarkozy's advisors such as Henri Guaino—responsible, for example, for writing the president's (in)famous Dakar speech, which laid out a neocolonial and neo-Orientalist vision of African relations and much angered African politicians and intellectuals. But local academics and power groups were also a factor in the "Mediterraneization" of the project, as Michel Colardelle explained to me in our interview (see n. 5).

7. Braudel's Mediterranean model does not only resonate with current geopolitical visions but reveals, upon closer inspection, an unsuspected familiarity with the ideology of French colonialism (see Silverstein 2004).

8. The Union for the Mediterranean was less ambitious if compared to the initial goals of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or Barcelona process of the mid-1990s with its strong region-building approach focusing on human rights and good governance; the key issue of migration, for example, was not really part of it (Bicchi 2011). In the context of the unfolding Arab revolutions and enduring conflict in Israel/Palestine, European Parliament President Martin Schulz tried to revive this moribund initiative with a summit in Marseille during the Capital of Culture event in 2013 but to no avail (see http://www.euractiv.com/east-mediterranean/schulz-resuscitates-sarkozy-unio-news-518894, accessed January 22, 2015).

9. Conversation with MuCEM curator, October 9, 2016. The political sensitivities attached to representing colonialism is a topic that recurs in curators' answers to the question of why and how this crucial dimension of Euro-Mediterranean history tends to be downplayed or underrepresented in museums.

10. MEK's cultural diplomacy includes the European Cultural Days, an annual series of events developed with another European partner, its institutions, and communities present in Berlin.

11. The newly founded institution lacked sufficient funding and so first organized a series of temporary exhibitions and other activities.

12. http://www.smb.museum/en/museums-and-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/education-and-outreach.html, accessed June 2, 2015.

13. I carried out two long interviews with MEK's director and her assistant on May 30, 2014, and January 5, 2015.

14. See Harris and O'Hanlon (2013) and Mazé et al. (2015) for the set of dilemmas facing ethnographic museums today.

15. Interview with MEK museum director, Berlin, May 30, 2014.

16. The conservative press criticized MEK for this same reason.

17. See n. 13.

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