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# What – and who – is ‘European’ in the Postcolonial EU?

Inclusions and Exclusions in the European Parliament’s House  
of European History<sup>1</sup>

ELIZABETH BUETTNER

Along with noting Dutch and British media responses to the European Parliament’s House of European History (HEH) both before and after it opened in 2017 that reflect Eurosceptic and outright hostile attitudes about the European Union, this article focuses on the presence and absence of colonial and global histories and peoples in the HEH’s permanent collection. It contrasts the critical interrogation of modern European imperialism up until the First World War with the lack of attention paid to late imperialism, decolonisation, and postcolonial legacies together with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. As a result, the HEH has thus far missed the chance to probe how European overseas empires and their collapse intersected with the EU’s origins and neglected the EU’s ongoing reach outside the continent on account of overseas territories still held by its member states. It also has not effectively engaged with the presence and impact of peoples of migrant backgrounds from outside the EU’s current borders, who have not been given the European history they deserve. This results in an incomplete global history of today’s multicultural Europe.

Dit artikel gaat in op de reacties van de Nederlandse en Britse media op het Huis van de Europese geschiedenis (HEH), opgericht door het EU-parlement, zowel voor als na de opening ervan in 2017. Die reacties geven de Eurosceptis en ronduit vijandige houding ten opzichte van dit initiatief weer. Dit artikel richt zich vervolgens op de aan- en afwezigheid van koloniale en globale geschiedenis en van de geschiedenis van niet-westerse volkeren

in het HEH. Het artikel contrasteert de kritische reflectie op het moderne Europese imperialisme tot aan de Eerste Wereldoorlog met het gebrek aan aandacht in de permanente collectie voor het naoorlogse imperialisme, de dekolonisatie, de postkoloniale erfenissen, het Ottomaanse Rijk en Turkije. Dit is een gemiste kans. Het HEH kan daardoor ook geen aandacht besteden aan de manier waarop de Europese overzeese kolonies, diens ondergang en het ontstaan van de EU elkaar kruisten. Daarmee gaat het HEH ook voorbij aan het voortdurende contact van de EU met staten die buiten het Europees continent liggen en nog steeds tot het gebied van EU-lidstaten behoren. Een ander punt van kritiek is de weinig doeltreffende aandacht voor inwoners met een migratie-achtergrond van buiten de grenzen van de EU. Zij krijgen op deze manier niet de Europese geschiedenis die hen toekomt. Het resultaat van dit alles is een onvolledige globale geschiedenis van het huidige multiculturele Europa.

Between the time it was first announced in February 2007 and its opening in May 2017, the House of European History (HEH) in Brussels has attracted levels of attention notable for their unevenness and intermittent intensity. Initial inspiration for the project came from Hans-Gert Pöttering, a long-standing German Member of the European Parliament (MEP) who had just started his presidency, who stated his objective thus:

I should like to create a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a ‘House of European History’. It should [be] a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union.<sup>2</sup>

Pöttering’s initiative moved forward in fits and starts, with all funding coming from the European Parliament (EP). Once appointed, the HEH’s Board of Trustees, ‘Committee of Experts’ of historians and curators, and the Academic Project Team appeared eager to limit its public exposure as much as possible.<sup>3</sup>

1 This work forms part of the ECHOES project which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 770248.

2 Committee of Experts, House of European History, *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* (Brussels, October 2008) 4. Accessible via [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf).

3 Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives and Representations* (New York and Oxford 2014) 151-152; Wolfram Kaiser, ‘Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament’s House of European History Project’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55:3 (2017) 525-527; Till Hilmer, ‘Narrating Unity at the European Union’s New Museum:

## Emphases and Controversies

It is not difficult to guess why, for critical perspectives greatly outnumbered neutral (let alone enthusiastic) reporting when the proposed museum did cross the media's radar screen. After the initial 2007 announcement the HEH received sporadic press attention at best in the Netherlands, most of it highlighting the views of detractors, both Dutch and international, and all of it reflecting scepticism if not outright hostility. Journalists looked to Dutch MEPS from parties ranging from GroenLinks to D66 to the PVV to provide sneering verdicts about 'Pöttering's mausoleum' that was described, by turns, as unnecessary, risibly behind schedule, 'a hobby of few Brussels gentlemen', and nothing more than a pro-EU propaganda exercise favouring further integration.<sup>4</sup> Commentators incessantly honed in on the costs after the financial crisis took hold from 2008 onwards. Exceeding €55 million by the time it opened, it had already been condemned as fiscally irresponsible and yet another symptom of the EU's democratic deficit. 'The fact that a million-euro project like a museum is not even debated in times of austerity shows just how much the majority of those in Parliament have become untethered from reality', *Trouw* reported in 2011.<sup>5</sup> Or, as the *Elsevier Weekblad* put it, 'the House of European History will more likely call to mind the EU's wastefulness than its beneficial effects'.<sup>6</sup>

Attitudes about the museum and attitudes about the European Union seemed inseparable as well as a product of their times, and so too was the HEH in and of itself. Pöttering's initiative was announced in the wake of momentous developments across the EU. France as well as the Netherlands had rejected the European Constitution only two years before in referendums

A Cultural-Process Approach to the Study of Collective Memory', *European Journal of Sociology* 57:2 (2016) 304; Pieter Huistra, Marijn Molema and Daniel Wirt, 'Political Values in a European Museum', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 10:1 (2014) 124-136; Jakub Jareš, 'The House of European History: In Search of a Common History and its Future', *Cultures of History Forum*, 12 October 2017, <http://beta.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/european-union/the-house-of-european-history-in-search-of-a-common-history-and-its-future/?type=9999>.

4 Derk Jan Eppink, 'Europese mythes', *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 February 2011; Carla Joosten, 'Hobby van een paar heren. Brussel moet en zal Huis van de Europese Geschiedenis

krijgen, op kosten van Europees Parlement. Een miljoenproject, maar zonder pottenkijkers', *Elsevier Weekblad*, 21 May 2011; Marc Peeperkorn, 'Een dure Europese geschiedenis', *De Volkskrant*, 18 March 2011; Tijn Sadée, 'Huis van de Europese Geschiedenis. Opening van "Europa-museum" komt op een pijnlijk moment', *NRC.Next*, 5 May 2017; Gijs Moes, 'Europese geschiedenis krijgt een dak boven haar hoofd', *Trouw*, 26 January 2012; Ruud Mikkers, 'Wrevel om nieuw EU-museum', *De Telegraaf*, 5 May 2017.

5 Joosten, 'Hobby van een paar heren'.

6 Jelte Wiersma, 'Licht op de Europese Unie: Nieuw museum EU in Brussel kostte 55 miljoen euro. Wat heeft het te bieden?', *Elsevier Weekblad*, 13 May 2017.

held in 2005, but far more fundamental was the Union’s recent enlargement. Gaining ten new member states in 2004, two more in 2007, and another in 2013, mainly in formerly communist Central-Eastern Europe, gave new impetus to exploring what unified Europeans across an ever-wider swathe of nations whose histories of division have almost habitually occupied centre stage. A pan-European, transnational approach to history had never seemed so urgent nor remained such a guaranteed minefield, not least when it came to divergent experiences in and perspectives of the Second World War, the Holocaust and the Cold War that separated the Eastern Bloc under Soviet domination from the Western European states that had taken the lead in the integration process.

The ten-year gestation period between Pöttering’s announcement and the opening, moreover, saw the EU convulsed by a succession of upheavals.<sup>7</sup> The series of debt and bailout emergencies since 2008 that made observers fear the possibility of a ‘Grexit’ whereby Greece might hypothetically pull out of the eurozone made way for the prospects of a ‘Brexit’, which crystallised before and after Britain’s 23 June 2016 referendum that resulted in a narrow but crucial victory for the ‘Leave’ camp. With deep-seated Euroscepticism and often visceral hostility long in evidence, the vituperative abuse meted out to the HEH in the British media comes as no surprise. Tabloids as well as the BBC and other mainstream outlets rushed to circulate verdicts by Conservative and UKIP (UK Independence Party) MEPs about the EP’s ‘House of Horrors’ dismissed as an ‘narcissistic amusement park’, an extravagant ‘vanity project’, and the latest proof of the EU’s ‘self-aggrandisement at the expense of the taxpayer’.<sup>8</sup> With the pro-Brexit vote as only one example of the populist nationalisms and doubts about the EU that have intensified across Western and especially Eastern Europe since the financial crisis and the refugee crisis, one can only echo the conclusion of Tijn Sadée in *NRC.Next*: ‘You have to have guts to open a new museum dedicated to European unification in these Eurosceptic times.’<sup>9</sup>

Bound to be contentious at the best of times – particularly for those whose minds were clearly made up long before seeing the result – let alone

7 Among the many suggestive assessments of the EU’s recent trials and tribulations, see Manuel Castells et al. (eds.), *Europe’s Crises* (Cambridge 2018); Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia 2017).

8 Kirsty Buchanan, ‘£51m to build EU house of horrors’, *Daily Express*, 6 May 2011; Chris Doidge, ‘Does Europe need a £44m history museum?’, BBC, 12 February 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21383375>; ‘EU opens House of European History in Brussels’, BBC, 4 May

2017, <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/controversial-house-european-history-open-6-may>; Ben Weich, ‘EU Museum of Europe Sidelines Churchill While Glossing over Germany’s Nazi Past’, *Daily Express*, 14 October 2017; Robert Hardman, ‘Why Does the EU’s New £47m European History Museum (Part Funded by UK Taxes) Ignore Britain’s Great Achievements and Gloss over Germany’s Wartime Past?’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2017.

9 Sadée, ‘Huis’.

after 2008, what history of Europe was ultimately unveiled when the HEH opened its doors in 2017? With the stated intention of focusing on the post-1789 era, the HEH's conceptual emphasis corresponded closely with the EU's long-term quest for 'unity in diversity' despite being faced with countless examples of division, nationalism, and assertive specificity, both historic and contemporary. To convey 'a transnational overview of European history that is inclusive of its diversity, its varied interpretations and differing perceptions', its planners looked to 'shared memory' as a means of 'reflect[ing] on how core factors and decisive developments in European history could contribute to the formation of a European historical consciousness'. This *raison d'être* informed its three criteria chosen as foci, namely 'events and processes which have originated in Europe, have expanded across Europe and which are relevant until today'.<sup>10</sup>

Non-national priorities mean that visitors looking mainly for canonical national individuals and events are doomed to leave in disappointment, as are those whose interests lie mainly in ancient, medieval, or early modern times. Critical reports in the British media ignored the many British objects and examples showcased in the collection in order to complain that there was no Shakespeare and not enough Churchill. The HEH was faulted for showing no gratitude for the role Britain and its Commonwealth played in helping liberate Europe from the Nazis by journalists who wanted to have their cake and eat it too, demanding that British achievements be more actively flagged while simultaneously insisting that Britain was not properly 'European' anyway and openly revelling in the Brexit referendum's outcome.<sup>11</sup> Nor was Dutch commentary entirely free from fixating on nation-specific sacred cows. Jelte Wiersma's verdict in the *Elsevier Weekblad* that the Netherlands was scarcely discussed ('Nederland komt nauwelijks aan bod') seemed predicated on the HEH's omission of the Plakkaat van Verlatinghe of 1581 rather than accuracy.<sup>12</sup>

Like British commentators, Wiersma had little to say about the many Dutch artefacts that featured prominently and for much the same reason: most items were chosen to illustrate wider transnational themes, not because they told stories largely about the Netherlands alone. Several of the many inspired choices made by HEH curators illuminate cross-border interactions and solidarities to particularly striking effect. Protests against Margaret Thatcher's economic policies in mid-1980s Britain are shown through a Dutch-made satirical puppet of the prime minister lent by the Amsterdam

10 European Parliament, *Building a House of European History* (2013) 8, 24, 6; see also 'Questions and Answers about the House of European History', [https://historia-europa.ep.eu/sites/default/files/assets/qa\\_en\\_2017.pdf](https://historia-europa.ep.eu/sites/default/files/assets/qa_en_2017.pdf).

11 Hardman, 'Why Does the EU's new £47m European History Museum?'; Weich, 'EU museum'; Robert Hannan, 'The Tale of Europe's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Is Uplifting, But It Is Not Our Tale', *Telegraph*, 22 October 2017.

12 Wiersma, 'Licht op de Europese Unie'.

Museum, while the British miners’ strike is explored through a 1984 poster issued by the Steunfonds Mijstakers Amsterdam (Amsterdam Miners’ Strike Support Fund) on loan from the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG). Because it ‘echoed job losses in many Western European countries’, the miners’ strike ‘provoked a large wave of solidarity’ also seen in France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy, the caption notes. Dutch engagement with a British event constituted just one example of many international phenomena.

Even something as seemingly singular and iconic as a 1947 Dutch edition of Anne Frank’s diary appears in the HEH not solely as a means of commemorating the most famous Dutch victim of Nazi concentration camps, but because it has come to illuminate the terrors of Nazi wartime occupation and the Holocaust for Jews throughout Europe for the millions of international readers it has reached ever since. Frank’s diary prepares the visitor for what lies at the crux of the museum, namely Europe’s twentieth-century descent into totalitarianism, war and mass death, followed by its hard road to recovery and selective engagements with this brutal past after 1945. As other contributors to this forum explore in further depth, its approach to the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and the Soviet Union during and after Stalin has proven its most controversial aspects, with the integration of Eastern European post-communist countries as EU member states matched here by the integration of Eastern European narratives and memories. As these foci suggest, Europe’s West and East form the center of gravity in many HEH displays, with one of the consequences being that its North and South are rendered more peripheral.<sup>13</sup> Their coverage also does not approach the level of attention devoted to the history of the European Economic Community/European Union itself.

To its immense credit, the HEH does not shy away from controversial themes, including those concerning the EU. Its ‘Milestones of European Integration’ exhibits succeed in bringing the EU’s own history to life far more effectively than the vast majority of dry scholarly accounts on the subject. Moreover, unlike some critics accused, both pro- and anti-EU sentiments and forces receive attention. Displays on recent ‘Accolades and Criticism’ highlight the EU’s 2012 Nobel Peace Prize alongside evocative visual material exploring protests against the economic suffering caused by the austerity measures linked with the debt crisis, Britain’s 2016 referendum, controversies over the handling of the refugee crisis, and other challenges. ‘Will the countries of the European Union grow closer together or, on the contrary, will the nation state restore lost power again?’, a caption asks. ‘Can the European Union enlarge further? Are the borders fixed and final, or will they continue to change?’

13 Laure Neumayer, ‘Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the “Crimes of

Communism” in the European Parliament’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23:3 (2015) 354–355; Hilmer, ‘Narrating Unity’, 321–323.



ontwerp: piet & erik. druk: luna. bijlage de vrijen 8. 1984.



A poster issued by the Steunfonds Mijnstakers Amsterdam in support of the British miners. Design by Erik Brouwer and Piet de Geus, 1984. [30051001026274], Nederlandse Affiches, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis. <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:NAGO02:IISG-30051001026274>.



These form only a small sample of the guiding questions the HEH poses across several floors. From the moment visitors enter they are asked, ‘What is Europe?’, ‘Where does Europe begin and where does it end?’, ‘What binds the continent together?’, and ‘What could be regarded as European heritage?’. Extending from the EU’s decades-long attempt to forge feelings of cohesion and a common identity among EU citizens to legitimise its goal of ‘ever-closer union’, the museum takes its place in a long line of cultural initiatives revolving around heritage and efforts to identify foundational myths, events, memories and symbols, including newly-invented symbols like the EU flag and Euro banknotes and coinage.<sup>14</sup> Yet the HEH has not opted merely for self-congratulation, as other prominently-positioned questions make clear: ‘What parts of this European heritage should we preserve, what do we want to change, what should we contest? If we remember the past can we avoid repeating its mistakes?’

### The Presence and Absence of Colonial and Global Histories and Peoples

Alongside the history of nationalism and militarism that led Europe into two world wars, totalitarian regimes, the Holocaust, the Gulag and the Cold War, so too is Europe’s global involvement in slavery and colonialism granted space in the permanent collection. Indeed, Europe’s entangled history with the rest of the world was given critical and insightful attention in ways that many observers had not anticipated during the extended planning period. The HEH explicitly addresses the racist, exploitative, violent and militaristic aspects of European imperialism, particularly as they concern the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Statesmen’s signatures approving the partition of Africa at the close of the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference; images of slavery and anti-slavery; scientific instruments used to measure skulls and justify racial hierarchies; a machine gun; a French school atlas teaching children that ‘colonialism and national “progress” were one and the same’; a chicotte (hippopotamus-hide whip) used to coerce Congolese labour during the era of King Leopold II’s Congo Free State, along with E. D. Morel’s book *Red*

14 Important studies include Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London and New York 2000); Bo Stråth (ed.), *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond* (Brussels 2000); Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (eds.), *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York and Oxford 2010); Jan Ijversen, ‘Myth in the Writing of European History’, in: Stefan Berger

and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke 2010) 452-479; Aleida Assmann, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gedächtniskultur?* (Vienna 2012); Ann Rigney, ‘Ongoing: Changing Memory and the European Project’, in: Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin 2014) 339-359.

*Rubber* and photographs that exposed its abuses. These and many other items are impressively displayed with explanatory texts which make no effort to minimise European self-interest and brutality. Moreover, colonial commodities extracted for Europeans' benefit and marketed with racist imagery – including a Dutch Korff cacao box – illustrate how objects and mentalities of imperial origins travelled back to Europe, filling museums and playing a transformative role in popular culture and the arts. This is shown as another aspect of European history shared across national borders, apparent both in countries that had large overseas empires of their own and those that did not, as a Swedish coffee box replete with colonial motifs exemplifies.

Imperial histories in the HEH not only are rendered part of 'European heritage', then, but qualify as part of 'what we should contest'. 'National and colonial ambitions of rival European countries', after all, help explain why Europe went to war in 1914 and how the conflict instantly assumed global proportions. The HEH's attention to European overseas empires and global power carries over into the First World War years in a display referring to the recruitment of soldiers from British India and French North and West Africa as well as Chinese labourers for the war front and home front within Europe itself.

From the First World War onwards, however, European imperialism largely recedes from its narrative. Europe's global connections shift towards the United States during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, and from then on the focus falls on Europe's relationship with the United States and the emergent Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution. While emphasizing the two future superpowers' impact on Europe during the Second World War, Cold War and the transformations starting in 1989 is completely understandable, it nonetheless comes at the expense of paying further attention to Europe's own ongoing imperialism. The consequences of this are threefold.

First, the museum leaves European colonialism behind at precisely the moment when the British and French empires reached their greatest territorial extent after assuming control of former German and Ottoman territories as mandates after the First World War. Nor did crises in Europe and the colonies alike during the Second World War spell an end to imperial ambitions. Britain, France and the Netherlands did battle with nationalist movements in many parts of their empires because they remained convinced that the revival of their national economies and the recovery of their international standing required imperial sustenance. Anti-colonial nationalism in tandem with superpower pressures may have meant that European empires in Asia and Africa were living on borrowed time. Yet the state of denial that widescale decolonisation was inevitable in the face of Europe's waning global power persisted throughout much of the 1950s if not later, long after India and Pakistan stopped being ruled by Britain and the Dutch and French had left Indonesia and Vietnam after drawn-out battles against insurgencies.

Thus, when the EEC emerged with the 1957 Treaty of Rome, resilient imperialism and armed conflict were either part of the very recent past of most of the six founding member states or still had yet to end, just as they were for future EEC members like Britain and Portugal. Though the 2013 overview of plans for the museum preferred to credit the ‘foundation of the European Economic Community’ with (...) ‘prevent[ing] western Europe from regressing to earlier chauvinistic, aggressive, and imperialistic mechanisms’, the reality was very different.<sup>15</sup> European integration not only began well before colonialism ended or before colonisers accepted that its end might be unavoidable. As Peo Hansen has written, joining the EEC ultimately ‘offered ways for colonial powers to make up for and adjust to the changing political and economic circumstances brought about by decolonization’.<sup>16</sup> European integration’s inseparability from what were often reluctantly-accepted decolonisations, however, has no place in EU narratives of its own origins or, by extension, in the HEH. The imperative to portray European integration as standing for peace, freedom and democracy in the wake of war, totalitarian oppression and genocide made ignoring resilient European imperialism involving persistent racist inequalities and endemic colonial violence overseas all too appealing.

Revealingly, the insignificant number of images on display that directly relate to the fate of Europe’s former colonies are presented in such a way that they reveal nothing about European struggles to keep hold of them or about efforts to retain neocolonial styles of influence after empires formally ended. One is a replica of a Soviet poster, undated but presumably from the 1960s or early 1970s, emblazoned with the words ‘We’re in solidarity with you, Vietnam!’. While the image is well-chosen and has the potential to give museumgoers a sense of the links forged between the ‘Second World’ of Soviet/Central-East European state socialism and the ‘Third World’ during the decolonisation era, the museum alludes only to Soviet rhetoric at the time of the American war against the Viet Cong. ‘Both superpowers presented themselves as anticolonial champions, ending the old colonial order’, the caption reads. ‘Decolonisation in Africa and Asia enabled them to expand their

15 European Parliament, *Building a House of European History* (2013) 35.

16 Peo Hansen, ‘European Integration, European Identity, and the Colonial Connection’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 5:4 (2002) 493. Other important contributions to this emerging field of inquiry include Peo Hansen, ‘In the Name of Europe’, *Race & Class* 45:3 (2004) 49–62; Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London 2015); Gurminder K. Bhambra,

‘Postcolonial Europe, or Understanding Europe in Times of the Postcolonial’, in: Chris Rumford (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of European Studies* (London 2009) 69–85; Nora Fisher Onar and Kalypso Nicolaïdis, ‘The Decentering Agenda: Europe as a Post-colonial Power’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 48:2 (2013) 283–303; Frank Schultze-Engler, ‘Irritating Europe’, in: Graham Huggan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford 2013).

areas of influence, relegating the former European empires. The Vietnam war was one of the most acute manifestations of the struggle for the postcolonial space'. Nothing more is said about either Europe or European empires, not even France's 1946-1954 war against the Viet Minh as it sought, ultimately in vain, to maintain its foothold in territories that had been part of French Indochina since the nineteenth century. The Soviet poster is presented alongside images representing other Cold War 'hotspots' including the Korean War, the crushing of the Prague Spring and other renowned episodes; (Western) Europe's own withdrawals from empire, meanwhile, receive no discussion.

Another is a British cartoon published in the *Daily Mail* in August 1960 entitled 'Olympic Flame on Congo Escalator'. Depicting Dag Hammarskjöld carrying an Olympic torch and running up a downwards escalator reminiscent of those in the London Underground, the accompanying caption stated that 'Sweden had a very proactive policy of neutrality and mediation. As United Nations Secretary-General, the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld strove to prevent war and was particularly intent on bringing peace to Congo. He was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961'. Although the posters he runs past took the form of satirical advertisements for 'Mali split peas', 'Katanga dentifrice', 'Grape-shot: the wonder breakfast food builds bonny blacks' and the 'Khrushchev (Africa) Loan Co.', the explanatory text fails to take issue with the unreflective racist portrayals of African leaders and allusions to racist advertising that are clearly visible. No supporting information is provided about Congo's incomplete independence from Belgium that had taken place only two months before the cartoon was published, let alone its sordid aftermath.

Belgium's history in Congo, in the HEH's telling, is thus restricted to artefacts linked to violence of the Congo Free State era during the reign of King Leopold II on display in the pre-First World War exhibits. Critical engagement with the notorious beginnings of Belgian imperialism in Central Africa is not matched by reference to Congo's equally notorious violent decolonisation. Never mentioned are the loss of the main overseas possession of one of the EEC's founding members nor Belgium's neocolonial ambitions in the region, the ongoing international covetousness of Congo's mineral wealth, the superpower rivalries nor the circumstances and recurrent debates surrounding the involvement of Belgium, the UN and the CIA in the overthrow and assassination of Patrice Lumumba, even though the *Daily Mail* cartoon provides every invitation to do so.

In its current form, the HEH devotes so little attention to the end of Europe's overseas empires in its postwar exhibits that visitors might be forgiven if they left thinking either that colonialism had been over long before the EEC began, or that colonialism had never ended at all. They will not have learned, for example, that Algeria, legally defined not as a colony but as part of the French nation until its independence in 1962, once counted

as part of the EEC by extension. Nor do the museum’s exhibits reveal that today’s EU still extends far outside the European continent on account of the surviving overseas territories, dependencies and enclaves held by a number of its member states in the Caribbean region, Indian Ocean and North Africa. A fuller account of the EEC’s and EU’s colonial heritage might have offered the chance to confront not only the intersections between colonial, decolonisation, and integration histories but also how the history of global empire-building could stand in the way of a nation’s self-identification as European long past its imperial heyday. If Britain’s strong orientation towards its empire and Commonwealth as well as its ‘special relationship’ with the United States do much to explain why it only joined the EEC in 1973 after the Commonwealth declined in appeal, it also contributed to the ardent Euroscepticism that has survived ever since that is now set to redraw the EU’s borders after Brexit.

Second, both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish republic have little if any presence in the museum. Not only does the HEH’s modern emphasis preclude engaging with deeper European histories of conflict and orientalist cultural engagement with the Turkish ‘Other’ whose legacies remain important today; the decisive role played by the former Ottoman Empire in reshaping both Europe itself and European empires overseas from the nineteenth century onward is also ignored. Before its ultimate collapse after the First World War, it gradually lost hold over much of the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa. As such, it was not just many EU member states in Southeastern Europe that grew out of former Ottoman territory in the modern era but also pivotal parts of the British, French and Italian empires that spanned the Mediterranean up until France finally withdrew from Algeria in 1962. Despite the inseparable histories of Europe and the (ex-)Ottoman Empire, the long-proverbial ‘sick man of Europe’ was rendered insufficiently European for the HEH.

To return to several of the questions posed near the entrance of the permanent collection, namely 1) ‘What is Europe?’ and 2) ‘Where does Europe begin and where does it end?’, the implicit answers provided by the HEH would seem to be 1) ‘Not Turkey’, and 2) ‘At Greece’s and Bulgaria’s borders with Turkey’ – the borders of today’s EU. Excluding Turkey from European history sends a strong message about Turkey’s awkward status as a prospective EU member state that now has a decades-long history of its own. With the former Soviet Bloc and post-Soviet Russia together with Turkey having long functioned as Europe’s closest ‘Others’, the museum’s strong emphasis on the former makes its neglect of the latter all the more striking. As Thomas Risse writes of the EU’s Eastern enlargement, ‘it was never contested that Central Eastern Europe belonged to Europe and had a legitimate right to EU membership’ after the collapse of communism. ‘In the case of Turkey, this is much more controversial’, not only due to human rights questions and the rule of law but also on account of exclusions predicated on geography, culture

and religion.<sup>17</sup> ‘For decades, the most relevant external Other was the threat of Eastern European communism, but with the end of the Cold War, this Other was gradually replaced by the threat of Islam and Islamism [...] and, by extension, of Turkey’s possible entry into the EU,’ Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand summarise. ‘Europe’s threat was once the communist Hammer and Sickle and is now Islam’s Star and Crescent.’<sup>18</sup>

Leaving out Turkey (past and present) and Islam implies that both are non-European and corresponds to the wider marginalisation of religion, including Christianity, within the museum overall.<sup>19</sup> Rendering Europe predominantly Christian in terms of its heritage but largely secular throughout its modern history has the effect of placing many ethnic minorities beyond the museum’s pale, with the exception of Jews and the Holocaust proving the rule for other groups, Muslims above all. Right-wing populist hostility towards the idea of Turkish accession – however unlikely in the foreseeable future – visible across many EU member states overlaps significantly with widespread Islamophobia that targets both radical Islamism outside Europe and Muslims within Europe alike, whether they be of Balkan, Turkish or other postcolonial origins.

This inattention to late imperialism and decolonisation overseas along with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey’s entanglement with Europe is closely connected with a third theme whose inclusion is tokenistic at best: the European presence and impact of peoples of migrant backgrounds from outside the EU’s current borders. Aside from the mentions of the colonial soldiers and workers in Europe temporarily during the First World War and an image of Josephine Baker performing in interwar Paris, there is no allusion to migration from outside the continent until visitors reach displays illustrating tensions at the time of the economic downturn starting in the 1970s. Two posters, one Dutch and one French, illustrate calls for public solidarity with exploited migrant workers in ways that both draw attention to and critique racism, state opportunism and heavy-handed exclusionism. The French *Collectif sos Refoulement (Repression)*’s poster stands out for its evocative cartoon images featuring a dark-skinned construction worker, trowel in hand, being carried by a white man in a suit towards a pile of bricks, out of which he feverishly builds a wall before he is kicked out – literally – by a white policeman once the wall is complete. Its caption describes the high

17 Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca 2010) 217, and chapter 9 more generally. See also Viatcheslav Morozov and Bahar Rumelili, ‘The External Constitution of European Identity: Russia and Turkey as Europe-Makers’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 47:1 (2012) 28-48.

18 Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity* (Cambridge 2013) 147.

19 On related issues, see Risse, *A Community of Europeans?*, 6, 78, 199, 210-212; Kaiser, ‘Limits of Cultural Engineering’.

unemployment migrants suffered and how economic crisis ‘led to a drastic reduction in immigration policies in countries that had made extensive use of foreign labour in the 1950s and 1960s’.

Although examples like this are welcome additions to the HEH’s collection, they are nevertheless too few to provide an adequate account of the nature of postwar arrivals and settlement.<sup>20</sup> They neglect to mention that many migrants to Western European colonising countries arrived as citizens with rights thanks to policies introduced after the Second World War that had the intention of soldering European metropolises and their empires together – policies subsequently rolled back from the 1960s onwards once decolonisation intervened. However much European countries may have restricted legal entry and residence for many wanting to come after laws changed, this did not prevent millions who were already present from remaining and rebuilding family lives in diaspora once relatives could join them in Europe. Others who lacked citizenship may have arrived as ‘guest workers’ from Turkey, Morocco or other countries, but they too often became permanent residents and eventually gained citizenship despite the range of obstacles thrown in their path. Yet by stressing only the ‘drastic reduction in immigration’ and showing migrants being expelled, however, the HEH stops short of illuminating the long-term rootedness of millions whose settlement history commonly extends to two or more generations, and who count as both citizens of the nations they live in and as EU nationals—whether or not they are popularly accepted as such.

The ways that black, Asian, Turkish, Maghrebi, and other intercontinental migrants and their European-born descendants have transformed Europe from within and rendered it increasingly multicultural sadly receive no attention in the HEH. In Étienne Balibar’s influential account, the ‘irreversible phenomenon of hybridization and multiculturalism now transforming Europe’ is transnational in ways that easily fit two of the museum’s three criteria for inclusion, namely in that they are ‘events and processes’ that ‘expanded across Europe’ – or certainly substantial portions of it – and ‘are relevant until today’. As Balibar continues, this ‘started with specific, reciprocal ties between former metropolises and their former empires (France and Northern and Western Africa, Britain and India, Pakistan, and the West Indies, the Netherlands and Indonesia), but is now quite generalised as a pattern of interaction between Europe as such and its “exterior”, meaning that ‘the Other is a necessary component of [Europe’s] “identity”’.<sup>21</sup>

Seen in this light, the HEH has not given late colonial, postcolonial and Turkish minorities who settled permanently the European history they deserve *as Europeans*. In between alluding to the ‘extensive use of

20 I have examined this broader topic in Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge 2016) chapters 7 and 8.

21 Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton 2004) 223. See also Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London 2004).

foreign labour in the 1950s and 1960s' that it implies ground to a halt and its sensitive treatment of the current refugee crisis that has reached new levels since 2015, the visitor is presented with a Europe that to all intents and purposes is completely white and secular. In this vision of Europe, the postwar migration flows highlighted and celebrated are those that take place between EU countries connected by open borders, not those penetrating the EU from without. By the same token, the growing national and linguistic diversity within the expanding EEC/EU that the museum places at centre stage is not matched by due attention to ethnic and religious differences.<sup>22</sup> In this reading, because they do not fulfil the first criterion for what the museum sets out to cover by virtue of not having 'originated in Europe', millions of people ranging from longstanding EU citizens to refugees who recently risked their lives to illegally cross the Mediterranean become collectively portrayed as 'in' Europe but not 'of' Europe, as Stuart Hall memorably phrased it.<sup>23</sup> Curatorial choices, in sum, risk lending legitimacy to the exclusionary agendas so prevalent at both national and transnational European levels.

## Conclusions

What the HEH's current permanent exhibition offers, in short, is a contested transnational and an incomplete global history of modern Europe. The museum is to be commended for gathering together a fascinating range of artefacts, including many rarely seen in conventional museum displays, and presenting them in a novel way that poses provocative questions and resists standard nation-centred foci. This in and of itself makes a visit to what is a stunningly renovated art deco-era building well worthwhile. Moreover, it deserves praise for its engagement with a number of fraught controversies still raging today, not simply those concerning totalitarianism, the Second World War, the Holocaust/Shoah and the legacy of communism in Central and Eastern Europe but also the divided responses to the European Union itself.

The HEH team could easily build on these foci to encourage visitors to reflect further on its core subject matter and move beyond it. What might its 'Memory of Shoah' exhibit that currently compares French, Polish, and Ukrainian engagements with the Holocaust look like if it also considered how Europe's colonial violence is remembered, forgotten and made sense of? Visitors might be asked, for example, about whether the murderous regime

22 European Parliament, *Building a House of European History* (2013) 20. See valuable points on this theme in Chiara De Cesari, 'Museums of Europe: Tangles of Memory, Borders, and Race', *Museum Anthropology* 40:1 (2017) 31.

23 Stuart Hall, "'In But Not of Europe': Europe and Its Myths', in: Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Figures d'Europe: Images and Myths of Europe* (Brussels 2003) 35-46.



that reduced the Congo Free State’s population by millions during the time of King Leopold II might justifiably be framed as a Holocaust; what – if any – connections might be made between German colonial atrocities in early twentieth-century Southwest Africa and later Nazi crimes in Europe; or why discussions of French counterinsurgency tactics and torture during the Algerian War frequently interacted with Holocaust memories – all topics intensely debated among historians.<sup>24</sup> Taking this step would both connect with the HEH’s pre-1914 colonial displays and carry them into the decolonisation era that the museum has left virtually untouched. The current display already alludes to the conviction of Maurice Papon for crimes against humanity in late 1990s France on account of his wartime involvement in deporting Jews from Bordeaux to concentration camps. Inserting follow-up content about the brutal state crackdowns on Algerians living in Paris while Papon was its chief of police, that gained increased publicity during and after the trial, would not only be straightforward, but also allow for a fuller treatment of the Algerians’ long-term history of migration and settlement in France.<sup>25</sup>

Devoting more attention to the presence of Algerians and the Algerian War itself in early 1960s metropolitan France, to name just one possibility, would help the museum better fulfil another of its stated ambitions, that of ‘taking the wider global context into account’.<sup>26</sup> It presently does this selectively in the ways explored above, as well as through a section on the top floor devoted to ‘Europe as seen from abroad’. Yet to fully achieve this aim would require rethinking its emphasis on ‘events and processes which have originated in Europe’ as the main qualification for inclusion. Taking on board not only ‘events and processes’ but also peoples and cultures originating from *beyond* Europe as equally crucial to Europe’s past, present, and future would open the door to alternative points of view, such as Frantz Fanon’s. On what grounds might Europe in today’s globalised world be understood as ‘literally the creation of the Third World’, as Fanon provocatively proposed during the age of decolonisation?<sup>27</sup> Urging museumgoers to grapple with this argument would make a trip to the HEH even more rewarding than it already is.

24 A suggestive sampling of important contributions to this debate include Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford 2009); Jürgen Zimmerer, ‘The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 39:2 (2005) 197-219; Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz’, *Central European History* 42:2 (2009) 279-300;

Sarah De Mul, ‘The Holocaust as a Paradigm for the Congo Atrocities: Adam Hochschild’s “King Leopold’s Ghost”’, *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 53:4 (2011) 587-606.

25 Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford 2006).

26 European Parliament, *Building a House of European History* (2013) 8.

27 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (London 1990; original French edition Paris 1961) 81.

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