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Mapping the Idea of Europe – Cultural Production of Border Imaginaries through Heritage

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to recent reinforcements of Europe's internal and external borders due to the refugee situation on the Mediterranean and the Covid-19 outbreak, talk of European borders has in the past decades focused on the freedom of mobility guaranteed by the Schengen treaty. In many senses, free intra-European mobility has become a recited truth in the EU discourse: a phrase that hides under its repetition the gap between its implied content and empirical realities of many of those who are affected by European borders' exclusive tendencies. Through the concept of borderscape, this article focuses on the role that cultural products – especially maps exhibited at heritage sites – have in reciting ideas of European borders. In this context, ideas of European heritage are approached as a bordering practice – as an active process of creating, sustaining and challenging cultural border imaginaries and the many in/exclusion they imply. Empirically the article is focused on the European Heritage Label (EHL), a recent heritage action of the European Union (EU). The article asks what is the relationship between national and European representations of space; how are Europe's external borders represented; and what kind of cultural power hierarchies can be identified behind these representations?

KEYWORDS

Borderscapes; heritage;
Europe; European Union

If you were asked to imagine Europe in your head, what would you see? Would you see a collage of landscapes, cities, buildings, and people, a string of flags representing the many nation states of Europe, or would you perhaps envision a map: a simplified image where Europe in all its complexities is simplified on a piece of paper? (see [Image 1](#)). If you imagined a map, close your eyes and focus on that map once more. What does Europe look like, is it colorful, or is it painted in a single color? Are there any internal borders visible? Does Europe have any external boundaries, do they coincide with the European Union (EU), or does Europe expand outwards and blur into other regions without clear borders? Is there land visible below the Mediterranean? Can you see Greenland? What about Russia or Turkey? Can you place yourself on that map and imagine crossing the

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Image 1. Clockwise from the top: Collage of flags located on the outside wall of Robert Schuman’s House, France; a still from a small interactive section of the permanent exhibition in the Alcide De Gasperi’s House Museum, Italy; a street banderol outside European District of Strasbourg, France. COPYRIGHT: EUROHERIT.

borders that are drawn there? If you again answered yes, what do the people traveling with you look like?

The questions above might seem silly. However, answers to such questions can reveal a good deal about the cultural meanings we attach to borders and the idea of Europe. Maps are often presumed to be innocent and neutral, but they “conceal at least as much as they reveal” (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2020, 213). By relying on predictable markers that most people read intuitively, maps construct a visual discourse that works to orient us in the world. Just by few strokes of a pen, a choice of color, and a seemingly innocently placed arrow, they help us define who we are, where we belong, and who our friends, allies, and enemies are. Consequently, maps are far from neutral. As van Houtum and Bueno Lacy argue, maps

are not merely a reflection of power but *power itself*. [They are] visual statements and narratives about the political topics they picture or, in other words, visual discourses. Their production is ‘controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed’ by procedures of exclusion that establish what is reasonable, true, and acceptable to say – or depict – and what is not. (2020, 196, italics in the original, see also Foucault 1981)

To scrutinize how this discursive power is mediated and reproduced in the cultural realm, this article analyzes European Union (EU) cultural heritage actions from the perspective of borderscapes (Brambilla 2014). As defined by Brambilla, the concept of borderscapes aims “to deconstruct the [...] political practices of inclusion-exclusion and the images created to support and communicate them on the cultural level” (2014, 25–26, see also Strüver 2005; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Newman 2011; Brambilla et al. 2015). Therefore, the concept perceives borders as actively constructed, fluctuating,

and, in an Appaduraiian sense, flowing (see Appadurai 1999). Moreover, it highlights the long-established tradition of emphasizing the agency of people and institutions in constructing, maintaining, and performing borders (e.g. Paasi 1998; Anzaldúa 1999; Strüver 2005; Newman 2011). These performances take place in varied forms. Here I focus on visual representations of borders communicated through selected EU cultural heritage sites and investigate how these representations formulate an idea of EUrope¹ – an understanding of Europe conditioned by the EU.

Heritage's ability to connect abstract processes and debates into a specific space, location, or an artifact (Smith 2006, 31; see also Demetriou and Dimova 2019) facilitates a reconceptualized sense of place for ideas of EUrope. It connects EUrope to a material environment but also to collective processes of remembering and forgetting (see De Cesari 2019). It enables the construction of communities and the promotion a sense of belonging (Lähdesmäki et al. 2021). As a result, it not only contributes to our understanding of self but can also engage us on an affective level and adjust our experience of being included in society (see Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010, 2315). However, the inclusion of some always implies the exclusion of others. In mediating belonging, heritage sites and the borderscapes constructed through them act as visual and narrative “battlefields of border-making and border-crossing” (Van Huis et al. 2019, 6; see also De Cesari 2017, 18) through which we collectively situate both ourselves and others. The battles over the borderscapes of EUrope have very little to do with actual borderlands: they are fought at the heart of the European project, over the multitudes of social and cultural images and imaginaries that work to normalize and legitimize different borders and their effects on different groups of people.

The article will start by outlining the research problem and the data. Second, it will continue with a short debate on some general trends in EU cultural heritage politics, the role of the European Heritage Label (EHL) as the flagship heritage action of the EU and the agency and relationships between the European Commission (EC) – the final authority in the EHL – and other associated actors involved in the EHL. The EHL is aimed at nominating heritage sites that are able to manifest the “breadth and scale of what Europe has to offer and what it has achieved” and as such represent the “milestones in the creation of today’s Europe.”² At the moment, there are 48 nominated sites and the next application round takes place in 2021. Third, the article will debate critical findings from the empirical analysis: starting from depictions of the nation, then external borders of EUrope and last EUrope’s relations to its former colonies, including evaluating different communities’ ability to cross both internal and external borders of EUrope. Finally, the article will conclude with some final concerns.

Research Problem and Data: Looking beyond the Recited Truths of EUrope

This article aims to look beyond the apolitical façade of maps and analyze the EUrope under construction in EU heritage actions. More precisely, I ask how is EUropean space represented in the EHL; what kind of connections, continuities, and breaks the visual discourses of EHL sites construct at EUrope’s internal and external borders; and what type of scalar and cultural power hierarchies can be identified behind these representations?

The analysis focuses primarily on the aspects constructed in silence: the elements hidden behind the “recited truths” of Europeanization – namely those of (national) diversity and free mobility. I follow Lentin and Titley (2011; see also De Certeau 1984), who describe recited truths as phrases that hide under their repetition the gap between their implied content (e.g. free mobility) and empirical realities of many of those who are affected by it (e.g. immobility and exclusion). The recited truths of European borderscapes reside in the prevailing contradiction between ethno-nationalist and postcolonial discourses and the prominent position of Eurocentric attitudes in EU policy (for debate see Shore 2000; Passserini 2002; Sassatelli 2009; Turunen 2019). This article promotes a critical re-reading of these borderscapes, where maps collected from the heritage sites are read “against the backdrop of colonial history and its inherent power relations” (van Huis 2019, 219).

Empirically I focus on the European Heritage Label (hereafter the EHL or the Label) – a recent EU heritage action. As part of the EUROHERIT research project, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in eleven EHL sites in ten different EU member states between August 2017 and February 2018. These sites are Alcide De Gasperi’s House Museum, Italy; Archaeological Park Carnuntum, Austria; Camp Westerbork, The Netherlands; European District of Strasbourg, France; Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Hungary; Great Guild Hall, Estonia; Hambach Castle, Germany; Historic Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland; Mundaneum, Belgium; Robert Schuman’s House, France; and Sagres Promontory, Portugal. Different aspects of this vast fieldwork have been published elsewhere (e.g. Turunen 2019; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020; Lähdesmäki et al. 2021). This article concentrates on these sites’ exhibitions, specifically using maps exhibited at the fieldwork sites as its primary empirical data, thereby shifting the focus from the textual or narrative discourses of Europe to the visual discourse constructed in the EHL sheds light on bordering practices hidden in plain sight. The analysis moves between general trends of the whole data and more specific sites and pieces of the exhibitions. Camp Westerbork – a former Dutch transit camp for the Jews, Roma, and Sinti – is especially carried along as a case study. Camp Westerbork was given the EHL in 2013 for its links to “crucial issues in European history, such as occupation, persecution, migration, decolonisation, and multiculturalism” (official nomination plaque placed outside the campgrounds). As such, it enables versatile debates on the nature of European borderscapes.

Methodologically the analysis builds on the growing tradition of using narrative and discursive approaches to study museums and cultural heritage (e.g. Price 2010; Wu and Hou 2015; Lähdesmäki 2017; Smith and Foote 2017). An essential starting point for the analysis is acknowledging the “thick” nature of maps as sources of knowledge. As Harley (2001, 52) has noted, “although maps have long been central to the discourse of geography, they are seldom read as ‘thick’ texts or as socially constructed forms of knowledge.” Instead, they are often a taken-for-granted aspect of what we perceive to be both the geographical and social landscape in which we live. To analyze how the selected maps mediate an idea of Europe, I focus on visual representations of space and territory on the national and the transnational level (Rose 2016). Following van Houtum and Bueno Lacy (2020), I use the iconological method to analyze different maps as contributing elements of broader visual discourses. Focus is posited, especially on the maps’ visual composition and their subject matter (ibid. 197; see also Kitchin, Perkins, and Dodge 2009). As a final step, these visual discourses are further analyzed by reading them

against the broader textual narratives and discourses produced by the EHL and our earlier analysis based on the more general fieldwork data. This juxtaposition aims to focus on different ways to “read” an image and how these readings relate to textual interpretations (see Hall 1997).

Cultural Europeanization and the Production of EUrope

Sassatelli (2009, 46–47) argues that while cultural integration was not explicitly part of the early European integration policies, the idea of cultural integration was, in many ways, part of the long-term plans from the very beginning of European cooperation. In recent decades, cultural heritage has become an increasingly important policy area for the EU (e.g. Shore 2000; Sassatelli 2009; Lähdesmäki, Kaasik-Krogerus, and Mäkinen 2019). There have been several switches and changes in the rhetoric of EU heritage policies. Following the Eastern enlargement of the EU, emphasis on the EU cultural policies shifted from the rhetoric of integration to identity (Sassatelli 2009, 24). This development was mirrored by an associated shift from material aspects of heritage to memory, or as Niklasson (2017) puts it, shifting from “things” to “people.” These changes are essential from the perspective of visual imaginaries of space, as “Europe” has in many senses become “a political project that ideologically (re-)produces Europe not only in terms of territory but also, and arguably increasingly more, in terms of a population connected in its ‘Europeanness’” (Engelbert, Awad, and Van Sterkenburg 2019, 134).

Along with the increasing effects of globalization, Calligaro (2014) has identified a more recent rhetorical shift towards intercultural dialogue. Although initially used especially in debates on EU cultural relations across the Mediterranean Sea, the same rhetoric quickly spread to all EU cultural debates. The EHL, as the latest EU actions aimed at cultural EUropeanization, is, in many ways, the poster child of both of these developments. The EHL is not interested in preserving European cultural heritage *per se*, and the sites receive no funding for conservation. Instead, the general aims of the EHL as defined as the “strengthening European citizens’ sense of belonging to the Union” and the “promotion of intercultural dialogue” (EP 2011). Therefore, the practical aim of the EHL is to nominate heritage sites that symbolize or characterize the idea of EUrope that the EU wishes to promote and use this symbolic potential for identity political needs. This emphasis on symbolic meanings, belonging, and dialogue makes the EHL a compelling and essential case for analyzing the kind of EUropean space it constructs and who is represented as legitimate citizens within it.

Before becoming an EU action in 2011, the EHL acted as an intergovernmental cultural scheme for five years. Integration into the EU framework led to some practical changes in the EHL, particularly in terms of the agencies of different actors involved in the EHL. Although the EC’s role and legitimacy as a cultural actor have been promoted in several EU declarations and policy guidelines (Sassatelli 2009, 49), the EC’s position remains far from straightforward in the EHL. Sites are selected based on member states’ applications, and the official decision-making power lies with the European Commission. However, in practical terms, *de facto* authority over nomination and monitoring belongs to an external European panel of experts (hereafter the panel). Moreover, the execution of day-to-day actions remains at the EHL sites and thereby firmly embedded

in their national frameworks. Due to these inter-scalar agencies entrenched within the EHL (see Lähdesmäki and Mäkinen 2019; see also Laine 2016), there are structural tensions between national interpretations of individual heritage sites and the “European significance” that all EHL sites are supposed to both individually and collectively manifest.

Although EU heritage actions, such as the EHL, are important bordering actors, their activities are by no means geared towards explicit border security concerns. Instead, all “European cultural policies [are] particularly relevant as *symbolic* policies” (Sassatelli 2009, 47, italics in original) that function as “political and cultural discourses that aim to situate people” (Lähdesmäki et al. 2021, 26). There is a performative element embedded in the way they function. In its simplest form, performativity refers to “reiterative and citational practice through which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 1993, 2). Through the repeated intermingling of maps, borders, and heritage, an abstract idea of EUrope is being constructed. Both borders and heritage thereby do things. As Niklasson puts it, they “are world-making acts leaving their own imprint on reality” (2019, 107).

Participating in this process also contributes to constructing the subjectivities of those who inhabit those worlds. In addition to belonging, this process is fundamentally about governance (e.g. Sassatelli 2009, 5). As we have argued elsewhere (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020, 40), in the EHL, this “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1994, 337) is not merely directed towards the audiences but also takes place between the EU and the EHL sites. After initiation into the EHL, the sites are expected to adopt EU discourses and rhetoric in their work and create the whole action’s main contents (ibid.). In this process, both the application (initial assessment of suitability for EU cultural policy aims) and the following monitoring (the measurement of continuing suitability) by the panel highlight the continuous governance of the EUropeanness of EHL sites.

Borderscapes of EUrope

Reproducing Ethno-National Cultural Spaces

Heritage is often understood as inherently linked to the formation and legitimation of identities (e.g. Graham and Howard 2008). In Europe, where the idea of heritage as we know it has been developed, these collective identities have almost, by default, been conceived through the (ethno)national lens. Perhaps due to this national tendency embedded in ideas of heritage, the *Enation* state’s image seems to dominate the visual representations of EUrope brought forward in the data.

The variety of maps included in the data range from different periods, and thereby, the borders being represented often vary from the locations of contemporary borders. Despite this temporal variety, the maps repeatedly bring forth the (proto)national space in their exhibitions. In addition to traditional maps, the nation is invoked in puzzles or other more symbolic representations (see [Image 2](#). The puzzle analogy also repeats on the European level, see [Image 3](#)). These national interpretations are further emphasized by using other banal national symbols such as flags or national colors within the exhibitions, promotional material, and more broadly around the sites (see [Image 1](#); see also Kaasik-Krogerus 2020).

In effect, the variety of European national communities function as the primary identities under construction and as the “naturalized” forms of belonging that lay the



Image 2. Clockwise from the top: Wall painting at the Historic Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland; still image from an interactive display located at the main hall of the Great Guild Hall, Estonia; the closing installation at the permanent exhibition of Camp Westerbork, the Netherlands. COPYRIGHT: EUROHERIT.

groundwork against which other forms of politics of belonging emerge (see Yuval-Davis 2006). The idea of the nation serves as the primary type of belonging that is mirrored back through social and cultural products of that society. However, as Cram has noted, “the coincidence of state and nation is rare, and the focus on the existing national state identities distorts” (Cram 2009, 110) European cultural politics and blurs the division between cultural identity (nation) and political identity (state). It also has broader effects in terms of how we envision Europe. Bhabra (2019) has conceptualized the dominance of ethno-national imaginaries in European cultural discourses by distinguishing between two different European dimensions. First, an idea of a cosmopolitan Europe revolves around exclusive notions of white national diversity disguised behind the nominally inclusive EU rhetoric of “United in Diversity.” Second, the idea of multicultural Europe conceived through the discursive reproduction of the otherness of Europe’s (post)migrant communities and the supposed threat that they pose to the unity of Europe.

Pervasiveness of the national frame speaks to the normative “national order of things” (Malkki 1995) as well as to the notion of “nationalism without walls” (Gwyn 1995). There

is a sense of national imaginaries that seem to exist and create differences beyond the borders that seek to distinguish those spaces. Especially in the museum sector, the persistence of national imaginaries over the European could be the result of museums' attempts to define European memory politics to work "through the very institutions and tropes of the nation-state it is expected to supersede" (De Cesari 2017, 18; see also Abélès 2000; Kaiser, Krankenhagen, and Poehls 2014).

To some extent, it could be argued that the EHL is attempting to change this by also nominating transnational sites and trying to create shared European heritage around the EHL sites. There are three transnational sites designated within the EHL (the Former Natzweiler Concentration camps, between France and Germany, Colonies of Benevolence between Belgium and Netherlands, and Werkbund Estates between Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, and Austria). Additionally, many sites use transnational rhetoric at their sites (e.g. Camp Westerbork, City of Schengen, Hambach Castle, Pan-European Picnic Memorial Park, and Robert Schuman's House). Although designed to shift focus away from national narratives, in terms of visual discourse, this transnational focus seems to reproduce the national setting: it is precisely the existence of the border that justifies their transnational status. Transnational rhetoric and the associated discourses of free mobility, therefore, have not reduced the significance of these national imaginaries.

In addition to separate national imaginaries, the exhibitions are in some EHL sites enlisted for displaying the emergence of a nation, for example in Hambach Castle (Germany) and Great Guild Hall (Estonia). In both of these cases, maps that show the emergence and expansion of the national space form a vital part of the visual discourse (see Figure 2 for an interactive map display on the emergence of the Estonian state). Although there is little attention paid to the nation's visual depictions that the EHL also actively reproduces in its promotional material (see Kaasik-Krogerus 2020), there is dynamic pressure from the panel to manage and suppress this national rhetoric on the narrative level. The monitoring report highlights "the historic role that the Hambach Festival played in the promotion of democratic ideals in Germany and in Europe during the nineteenth century" (EC 2016, 20). At the same time, Estonia's national story is actively criticized. As the report states

Whilst the site still meets the project criteria required for the European Heritage Label, the panel recommends that a thorough rethinking takes place in the upcoming project period on how to contextualize the mainly Estonian national history narrative in a wider European perspective [...] The project plans for 2016–2020 need to be revised accordingly. (Ibid.; 15, see also Turunen 2019, 199y).

Niklasson argues that the cause of the ambiguity over what "European significance" means for different sites is not due to unclear application guidelines nor the definition of heritage promoted by the EHL but the authorities' "vague approach to 'Europe' as a signifier" (Niklasson 2019, 108). As Niklasson continues, this elusiveness is not an accident but strategic (ibid. 109). It allows the European panel of experts (and indirectly the EC) to modify the overall narrative of the EHL to better align with their identity political needs. However, promotion of Europeanness as a cultural identity may unintentionally promote essentialist, Eurocentric tendencies that position Europeanness as an assimilationist, culturally superior identification seeking to suppress other forms of identification (see, e.g. Shore 2000; Sassatelli 2009; see also Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Mohanty 1993; Lähdesmäki et al. 2020, 80).

Finally, although the idea of a nation is often criticized for being an exclusive construction (e.g. Gunew 2004, 16; Bhabra 2014, 154), there are also some inclusionary attempts to visualize the nation in ways that depart from ethno-nationalist concerns. One such example can be found in Camp Westerbork, where the “102.000 Stones” installation at the former campsite represents all people deported from the camp. Although many of the victims were not Dutch by nationality, the stones and the tiling are arranged in the shape of the Netherlands. According to the website, the aim was to remind visitors “the persecution of the Jews [is] the concern of the whole Dutch society.”³ These symbolic burial stones, in a sense, create a figurative national space of grief and remembrance on the grounds of the former campsite – invoking an understanding of the Dutch nation. Although this emphasis on “Dutchness” reminds of the dominance of the national frame of interpretation, at the same time, it powerfully seeks to include formerly racialized groups, such as the Jews, Roma, and Sinti, into the core of the Dutch nation by seeking to define their fate as the fate of the Dutch.

A similar visual discourse is repeated inside the exhibition in an emotive visual installation that combines multiple media (see Figure 2). The display shows a partially transparent map of the Netherlands in both top corners. On the right, the map is from the pre-war period and densely dotted with red dots, signifying the density of Jewish communities in the Netherlands, whereas the map on the left corner shows the post-war Netherlands with only a few red dots remaining. The space between the two maps represents the passing of time. On the right-hand side, the wall invokes a sense of a Dutch space filled with a vibrant Jewish community depicted through a dense collage of photos and videos. The gray glass panel in the middle symbolizes the war years and, while moving further to the left, gives way to a wall that is now empty with only a few sporadic pictures of Dutch Jews – a state descriptive of the post-Holocaust situation in the Netherlands.

These inclusive tones are used extensively elsewhere in the exhibition to create a link between the Jewish refugees and the contemporary Syrian refugees in Europe. Remembering De Genova’s emotive comment that “in the European context, the very figure of migration is always already racialized” (2018, 1769), attempting to include the Syrian refugees in the Dutch realm of mourning seeks to challenge the ethno-nationalist ethos of European borderscapes and the existing racial undertones of contemporary immigration debates.

Where Does Europe End?

Given the connection between the EU and the EHL, it is perhaps surprising that Europe is directly mapped as the EU only at two sites – the two museums dedicated to the founding fathers of the EU, Robert Schuman, and Alcide De Gasperi. Additionally, in Lieu d’Europe in Strasbourg, France, Europe is depicted through the Council of Europe (CoE), a collection of 47 European states; including EU-members and non-members (see [Images 1 and 3](#)). However, beyond sites associated directly with European institutions, there seem to be very few instances of trying to depict Europe as a clearly defined space, although the use of banal European symbols, such as the EU flag and certain logos, is prevalent (partly due to the requirements of the EHL). This most likely stems from the way EHL is structured and that the sites are not designed initially to represent Europe. They are all existing national heritage sites that have, in retrospect, been selected to symbolize Europe. Although many sites reported in our broader



Image 3. Clockwise from the top: A puzzle prominently displayed, promoted, and sold at the European District of Strasbourg, France; prominent wall installation that depicts the fall of the Soviet rule by chronologically turning Eastern European states from red to gray located at one of the main halls at the Historic Gdańsk Shipyard, Poland; a map painted on a wall opposite a staircase that connects two exhibition rooms, Archaeological Park Carnuntum, Austria. COPYRIGHT: EUROHERIT.

fieldwork developing some of their activities due to receiving the EHL, none have re-designed their permanent exhibitions to match the specific aims of the EHL. Consequently, Europe serves as a backdrop or a side narrative of the events and remains a vague background signifier that can easily be manipulated to suit contemporary needs (see also Niklasson 2019, 108).

Perhaps due to the tendency not to explicitly depict Europe, there is much variation in Europe's outer limits. Moreover, most of Europe's depictions highlight the plurality of regions and various scalar dimensions (Lähdesmäki and Mäkinen 2019, 39–42). Often

Europe is represented through a rectangular box of geographical features. As is to be expected, these map squares sometimes contain “European” land and territories and the seas and neighboring regions surrounding it. The divide between what is considered as “Europe” and what is beyond it is left either unmarked or more often marked through some kind of coloring. On occasions, these rectangular boxes section off parts of EU member states: most often the northern parts of the Nordic states ([Image 3](#)). The outermost regions of the EU (OMR) and overseas countries and territories (OCT) are included primarily only in maps using the global scale, although no map explicitly acknowledges their status as part of the legal reality of the EU. This is not merely a matter of geographical location, as the OMRs closest to mainland Europe are also mainly absent: the Azores are included in one map, whereas the Canary Islands and Madeira can be found in two maps. Greenland is included in one map, making it the only OCT to be included in a map without a global scale. The tendency towards exclusion also pertains to Iceland – a state that although culturally and politically often conceived as part of Europe is not a member of the EU.

Interestingly, although these visual representations of Europe include many breaks, discontinuities, and exclusions (see, e.g. East–West divisions, [Image 3](#)), an aspect of continuity and shared space is also narrated. As most maps include the neighboring countries, they position Europe as a space that expands beyond the EU. In addition to countries like Switzerland and Norway, this continuity includes Western Russia and Turkey. In comparison, it is, for example, more likely that the northern parts of Nordic countries are cut out. This inclusion of Russia and Turkey points to geographical proximity and historical and cultural connections between these regions. It implies that imagining Europe is nearly impossible without referring to its long historical relationship with its two key neighbors, Western Russia and Turkey.

This visual continuity is actively broken when the visual discourse is compared to narrative discourses. The two World Wars and the Holocaust are the crucial anchor point for different EU remembrance activities (e.g. Lähdesmäki et al. 2020, 237), and they hold a prominent position in the EHL. With the Eastern enlargement of the EU, the emphasis on Holocaust remembrance has been complemented by attempts to engage with the trauma caused in Eastern Europe during the Soviet era. In this narrative, the end of the Cold war and Eastern Europe’s re-entry to Europe serve as a crucial turning point. The role that Russia/Soviet Union holds in this narrative is almost by default that of the enemy: it resides at sites that on a symbolic level either narrate the hostility and brutality of the Soviet rule or explicitly narrate its end (e.g. Historic Gdańsk Shipyard Poland; Pan-European Picnic Memorial Park, Hungary; Sighet Memorial, Romania).

In terms of Turkey, the inclusion is more fractured, and this liminal position also repeats in the visual discourse: one map in our data has explicitly cut Turkey out in a way that makes the map geographically incorrect (see Solidarity Center in [Image 3](#)). Moreover, based on the panel reports, all applications that have debated connections to Turkey/Ottoman Empire as part of their European significance have been rejected. There are minimal grounds for these rejections in the panel reports (e.g. EC 2015, 2017). However, similar rejections can also be found concerning sites that highlight cultural connections towards Northern Africa in their applications (e.g. EC 2015). Although

we do not know the panel's full arguments and therefore we can only hypothesize, these rejections hint towards hesitance concerning the role of Islam in European heritage.

When we switch our focus to the southern border of Europe, there is an even more prominent break both in terms of narrative and visual discourse. Africa is repeatedly cut out of many mappings of Europe, even when this makes the maps geographically incorrect (*Image 3*, see also Alcide de Gasperi's House Museum in *Image 1*). Although it could be argued that Africa has been left out for visual reasons or that the inclusion of Africa on maps designed to depict, for example, the fall of the Iron curtain is a trivial concern, these kinds of omissions have great influence over the visual imaginaries of European space, European people and their closest "neighbors." The distancing of Africa contributes to the depiction of the Mediterranean, once known as *Mare Nostrum*,⁴ as a powerful political and cultural border zone (see also De Cesari 2019). Although in geopolitical terms, Africa has been of vital interest for Europe both before, during, and after the colonial period (e.g. Hansen and Jonsson 2015), this tendency to dismiss Africa as less important in the global Eurocentric hierarchy of regions (see also Passerini 2012) shows the pervasiveness of colonial attitudes in contemporary European discourses.

Moreover, these dismissive visual discourses contrast with the symbolic role given to both the Greek and Roman empires (the Heart of Ancient Athens and Carnuntum) and, by extension, to the Mediterranean in the EHL. The only maps in our data that highlight the long history of deep cultural entanglements across the Mediterranean (see Chambers 2008) are presented at Carnuntum, where maps of the Roman Empire frequently include both the Middle East and Northern Africa (*Image 3*). In addition to maps found at Carnuntum, there is only one other map in our data show Europe together with the northern shore of Africa (in Hambach Castle). Strikingly, all other maps either use the global scale or cut off at the Mediterranean. However, it is important to note that the Sagres Promontory's permanent exhibition was closed due to renovation during our fieldwork. Additionally, several EHL sites located in Southern Europe are likely to have mappings that contradict our data. Therefore, it is very likely that the overall situation is not as drastic as our data indicate.

Visualizing (Post)Colonial European Borders

Overall, discussions over colonialism are still mostly absent from the EHL (see also Lähdesmäki et al. 2020), and there is minimal visualization of Europe in our data that would engage the imperial history of Europe. However, one could argue that it is precisely their absence, the encompassing silence, and the act of forgetting that makes the omission of colonial history such a powerful bordering tool (see De Cesari 2019). By erasing histories, these silences also effectively erase people from the realm of European belonging.

One of the only examples from our data is the "Beyond the Borders – 200 Years of Geopolitics in Europe" section of the permanent exhibition at the De Gasperi House Museum, Italy. The exhibition introduces global elements to its "European geopolitics," especially in two instances. First, it depicts the truly global nature of the two World Wars, including all European colonies in mapping the war effort's alliances. Second, it uses the global scale to map European colonialism and the decolonization process (see *Image 4*). The maps include the European colonies (United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal,

Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Germany) and departing from typical representations of colonialism include Russia/USSR, the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, Japan, and United States of America (which notably is already positioned as an empire in its own right rather than a European colony). Moreover, due to leaving out over three centuries of earlier colonial geopolitics, the timeframe used in the exhibition (1822–2008) somewhat erroneously represents Southern America as a region that has always remained free from European geopolitics.

The maps use color to distinguish regions belonging to each empire. The first map portrays a seemingly white map of the world. Successive maps show the division of – primarily – Africa and Asia into multi-colored blocks and then return them once so colorful map of the colonial world to its original empty white condition, implying a definite end of colonialism and erasure of its effects. In the final map from 2008, European imperial politics are visually reversed by pulling European empires into their national spheres. As opposed to the implied definite end of European colonialism, due to their geographical size, the United States and Russia continue to be inadvertently represented as vast empires even in the last map. This visual illusion distances Europe from being considered an imperial power that should be reprimanded for its actions, thereby legitimating widespread unwillingness to debate the after-effects of colonialism through EU policies.

A similar dismissal of colonial effects can also be identified in the ways mobility and migration are visualized and narrated in the EHL. Emphasis on borders has been buried in the official EU discourse under the rhetoric of freedom of movement. The notion of free mobility is an essential aspect of the story the EHL wants to communicate. As we have argued in our earlier work, free movement and borderlessness function both as a

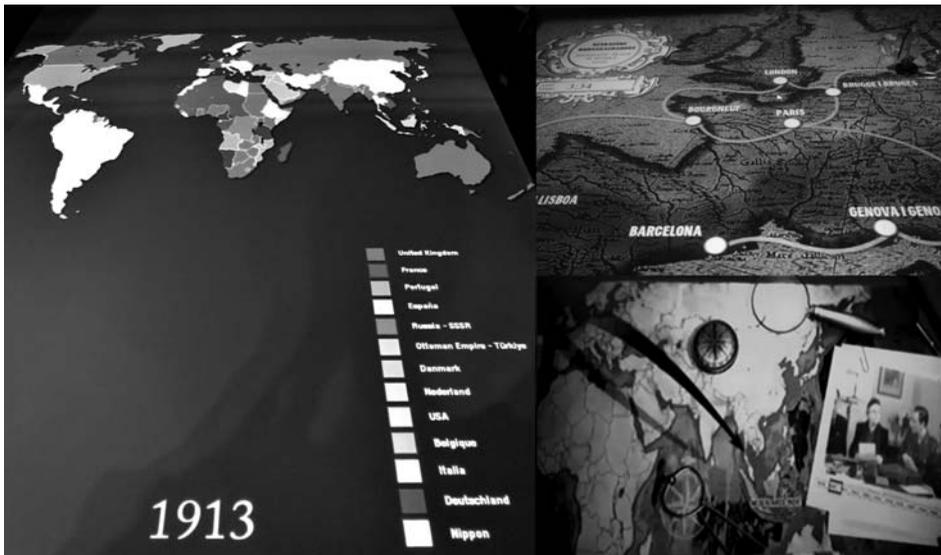


Image 4. Clockwise from the top: A still from a small interactive section of the permanent exhibition in the Alcide De Gasperi's House Museum, Italy; a large and prominently located interactive game on the Hansa traders at the bottom floor of the Great Guild Hall, Estonia; a still image from a video situated in a section on the Moluccan community's life at Camp Westerbork, the Netherlands. COPYRIGHT: EUROHERIT.

contemporary practice and future ideal in the discourses promoted by the EHL (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020, 102–103). Similarly, lack of cross-border mobility is seen as a risk or a threat to the future of EUrope (ibid.). This normative position of open borders is further emphasized by the inclusion of symbolic sites like the city of Schengen, the symbol of border-free Europe, as one of the EHL sites.

Interestingly some exhibitions also allow the visitors to try crossing (historical) European borders. For example, the virtual game in the Great Guild Hall enables the visitor to step into the Hansa traders' shoes and travel across a map of the Baltic Sea and beyond selling and buying goods (however notably not across the Mediterranean, see [Image 4](#)). Although hiding some of the privileges that the ability to cross that sea meant, it supports the illusion that moving across Europe is not a new phenomenon but has always been free.

This discourse actively dismisses the reality that borders exist to create divisions, and regardless of whether they are geographical, social, cultural, or imaginary, their primary function is to “include some and exclude many others” (Newman 2011, 15). Consequently, the recited truth of free mobility is often confronted by the inability of those on the outside to enter (Kinnvall 2016, 157), highlighting the border's asymmetry (Rico 2005, 5).

There is an interesting example of the unequal opportunity to cross borders in the permanent exhibition at Camp Westerbork. After the initial period as a transit camp, the area was used for multiple purposes, including a repatriation camp for Dutch colonial officers and soldiers and a settlement called Schattenberg for Moluccan refugees from the former Dutch East Indies.

The exhibition includes a video that focuses on the Second World War and the Dutch war effort in the East Indies. It uses maps as the constant background over which animation, images, and video clips are imposed (see [Image 4](#)). These maps are explicitly used to show movement: first, the unrestricted and unquestioned travels of the white Dutch to the colony, followed by the Japanese, Dutch, and American troops' actions during the war. The video culminates in the independence of Indonesia and the end of Dutch colonial rule. Although not depicted through the allegory of maps, Dutch colonial officers' ensuing migration back to the Netherlands is described as a traumatic event: showing burning colonial buildings and villas and women and children being crammed into trucks and airplanes. This narration places the Dutch colonial officers within the refugee narrative, one of the main narrative lines of the Westerbork exhibition. Elizabeth Buettner (2016, 248) has commented on the broader tendency of positioning Dutch repatriates as the victims of decolonization and the effects it has had on the racialization, discrimination, and even segregation of later colonial migrants. This victimization of the Dutch repatriates is contrasted by utter silence over the travel of the Moluccans, who were forced to leave Indonesia due to their role as Dutch collaborators during colonial rule. Only the white Dutch are represented as actors capable of crossing borders. The exhibition merely exhibits the Moluccans as living in the former campgrounds segregated from mainstream Dutch society.

Initially, one reason for the isolation of the Moluccans was that their presence in the Netherlands was not thought to be permanent. Rather their arrival to the Netherlands was seen as a temporary fix to a volatile situation in the newly independent Indonesia. Integration of the Moluccans started only in the 1970s, roughly twenty years after they arrived, along with the increase of colonial migrants from other Dutch colonies,

especially Surinam (Buettner 2016, 273). Even after decades of integration policies, the Dutch colonial migrants and their descendants continue to face discrimination, racism, and active silencing of their histories in public remembrance (e.g. Oostindie 2011; Buettner 2016; Wekker 2016).

The way the Moluccans are represented departs from how the wider exhibition repeatedly seeks to frame the Jews, Roma, and Sinti within the Dutch national space – producing an inclusive borderscape around formerly persecuted and racialized minorities. Similar inclusive refugee narratives are also extended towards the contemporary Syrian refugees. Simultaneously, the one refugee group who lived in the camp for twenty years, the refugees of Dutch colonialism, are left out of the main narrative the site wishes to promote. The inclusion of the so-called old minorities (Jews, Roma, and Sinti) in the national frame highlights the continuing importance of the idea of the nation state as a powerful tool of “postcolonial bordering” (Cash and Kinnvall 2017). Despite inclusive tones, postcolonial subjectivities continue to be excluded from the realm of European belonging (e.g. Bhambra 2019) – in effect, although they travel across the border between colony and empire, “the border travels with them” (Niklasson 2019, 119).

Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, I have analyzed the nature of borderscapes constructed in the exhibitions at the selected European Heritage Label (EHL) sites. These European borderscapes have been approached as performative visual imaginaries that sustain, enforce, and contrast contemporary European heritage narratives. Focusing on this discursive and performative aspect of heritage, De Cesari has called talk about European memory and European heritage as “a speech act that [...] call[s] into being a bounded entity called ‘Europe’” (2017, 30). Albeit still inherently ambiguous and vague, the constant repetition of this act has indeed created an idea of Europe and a sustained discourse of European heritage and increasingly an impression of a European people.

A central aim has been to determine what is hidden behind the constant repetition of certain visual representations of Europe. The majority of the maps analyzed treat the national community as the basic norm against which all diversity is measured. By relying on the repetition of national symbols and imagery, the implied belonging that European identity narratives seek to promote is that of the many nationalities of Europe. In addition to this type of daily reinforced banal nationalism (Billig 1995), it is relatively easy to identify a sense of banal Europeanism (Cram 2009) in the data. Although there are very few depictions of Europe as a clearly defined space, our data showed ample use of other EU imagery.

Many scholars have shown how national identity pivots around a sensibility that divides along racialized lines and exacerbates the white normativity of European belonging (Ahmed 2000; Rico 2005; El-Tayeb 2011; Cash and Kinnvall 2017; De Genova 2018; Bhambra 2019). By perceiving Europe as a collection of its many national communities, the nation state’s heavy exclusionary baggage is actively reproduced on the European scale: the exhibitions implicitly enforce an idea of Europe that Bhambra (2019) would define as “cosmopolitan” European diversity that is composed of the plurality of white national communities. As a result, the Europeaness of many post-migrant communities

continues to be denied based on “an often unspoken, but nonetheless seemingly very precise, racialized understanding of proper Europeaness” (El-Tayeb 2011, xii). Perhaps because of this stubborn denial of the Europeaness of Europe’s postcolonial communities, borders continue to be “the European question” of our time (De Genova 2016) even in the time of the rhetoric of free mobility.

To transform the idea of European heritage towards genuinely inclusive forms, there is a need to avoid perceiving Europeaness as a cultural category: as an umbrella under which other cultural expressions are assimilated. If such a thing as European culture exists, it exists only in the plurality of contemporary practices. It resides in notions of Europe that are postnational (Eder 2009), post-Western (Delanty 2017), postcolonial (El-Tayeb 2011; Bhambra 2019), or even post-European (Niklasson 2019). For such a pluralistic understanding, the potential of European heritage actions is not in identity politics – in the appropriation of individual historical traces as markers of Europe’s long-standing cultural presence. The prospect of pluralistic heritage exists in engagement with European history as a tool for learning about the good aspects of European history as well as the difficult ones. It resides in ability to use “heritage for its knowledge potential” (Niklasson 2019, 122).

Acknowledging this potential is equally about the type of sites chosen to represent Europe and the kind of visual and discursive narratives we tell through them. Many existing EHL sites could already help us imagine a different kind of Europe: one that would express the multitude of Europes hiding behind its self-constructed recited truths. Europes that are not conditioned by political agendas attempting to fit them under a pre-designed idea of Europe. This would require significant changes in the ways we perceive heritage, borders, and the role of cultural differences within Europe. However, it is fair to question how our perception of European borderscapes would change if instead of sites like the city of Schengen, the EHL sites focused on mobility would include places like Cova da Moura, the so-called favela of Lisbon, or the Camp de la Lande, better known as the Calais Jungle. Contemporary European diversity, when understood in a more comprehensive manner, is difficult to condense under a simplified representation, such as a map. Attempting to do so result in a similar epistemic and cultural violence that the construction of national cultures caused in the past. This baggage reproduced in language. It’s continuing effects have been revealed through conceptual developments such as the divide between cosmopolitan, white Europe of national cultures and free mobilities and the threat that non-white multicultural mobilities manifest to this ideal (Bhambra 2019). I believe the cultural baggage of this violence is also actualized in the normative position of assimilation – the desire to reduce and govern multicultural difference in the name of cosmopolitan (or national) ideals. The drive towards assimilation and aspiration to sameness are likely also some of the reasons behind visual representations that attempt to hide historical mobilities directed towards Europe. However, Europe has never been reducible to its national cultures. It has always been a home to transnational heritages that escape these neat categorization such as those of the Roma, the Sami, or the ones Pitts (2020) calls “Afropean” (see also Otele 2020).

Visualizing these communities existence in Europe requires breaking existing normative representations designed to hide their existence in and arrival to Europe. It requires much more than changing our maps. It requires sustained efforts to look beyond the recited truths of Europe and a systematic re-thinking of what kind of histories we

collectively imbue with cultural significance, affects and empathy: meaning what elements of our past we, the citizens of Europe, collectively choose to treat as our shared heritage. As the cases discussed in this article show, the seeds for radically different stories of Europe already exist, for example, the stories Moluccan refugees confined into Holocaust transit camps. More such stories can be integrated into our heritage through actions like the EHL. However, it requires a switch from seeing heritage as identity politics towards seeing it as a means for learning from our past and as means to build alternative solidarities to replace those based on nationality, ethnicity or race.

Notes

1. I use the concept EUrope to distinguish between more general understandings of Europe and an idea of Europe conditioned by the EU. For earlier use of EUrope, see De Cesari (2017); Lähdesmäki et al. (2020).
2. The EHL website: <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label-sites>, visited 22.3.2021.
3. Camp Westerbork website, <https://www.kampwesterbork.nl/en/museum/camp-grounds/102000-stones/index.html#/index>, visited 6.3.2019.
4. “Our sea” in Latin.

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