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## **Final draft**

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## **Decolonising European Minds through Heritage**

By analysing three museums exhibitions, this article investigates how the history of European colonialism is approached in an attempt to identify potential for decolonising European minds. The case studies consist of a temporary exhibition (2016-2017) concerning German colonialism at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin; the permanent exhibition of the House of European History in Brussels and the permanent exhibition of the Sagres Promontory (Portugal), a heritage site related to the conquest of the Americas. The analysis will focus on three aspects: 1) acknowledgement of connections between colonial histories and their contemporary influences in and for Europe; 2) the role of historical consciousness when dealing with the history of colonialism; and 3) re-narrations of colonial history through enabling new voices. Ultimately this approach involves ‘past presencing’ (Macdonald 2013), in bringing the many connections of Europe’s colonial past and postcolonial present together. It is argued, that although museums are increasingly engaging with decolonisation, there exists a need to better include decolonisation of European minds in these processes. Heritage as a future oriented project and a tool to manage memory, can be used to support historical consciousness and imagine a just future.

**Keywords:** Europe; decolonisation; heritage; meaning making, museums

## **Introduction**

In a recent opinion piece Jilani (2018) comments how decolonisation of museums is often perceived as ‘something to be done by, about and for people of colour’. This notion has resulted in a rather one-sided understanding where decolonisation is primarily approached as a euphemism for diversification of representation. Instead, as Jilani continues, decolonisation should be ‘about how museums can facilitate historical accuracy by engaging their majority-white audiences with how cultures, societies and national identities today remain deeply shaped by the era of colonialism’ (Jilani, 2018). What Jilani ultimately calls for is a change of perception; a switch from seeing decolonisation primarily as a process directed towards the ‘other’, towards seeing the decolonisation of European museums as a process aimed at rethinking how colonialism continues to influence the subjectivities of ‘white’ Europeans and through them our ideas about European heritage. In line with Jilani’s argument, this article is driven by the need to move away from an idea of one-way influences and the idea of Europe influencing the rest of the world towards an idea of the colonial project altering Europe (see also Lüthi et. al. 2016). Overcoming these influences requires decolonising European minds (cf. wa Thiong’o 1989, Andersen 2019), which for ‘white’ Europeans, is fundamentally a process of unlearning (see also Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012; de Sousa Santos 2017) and of undoing the structures of colonial knowledge production. Central to this aim is the concept of ‘coloniality’ that stems from Latin America (e.g. Dussel 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo and Escobar 2010; Shepherd 2019). Coloniality thinkers focus on the entangled nature of colonialism and modernity – connecting coloniality to both cultural, economic and political processes entangled in modernity, but more importantly to central questions over the need to decolonise knowledge production and consciousness.

By analysing three museums exhibitions, this article investigates how they approach the history of colonialism in their exhibitions in an attempt to identify potential for decolonising European minds. By exploring colonialism especially through the ways it is inscribed into European heritage, this article engages with the connection between the history of colonialism and its importance for contemporary Europe. The analysis will focus on three aspects: 1) acknowledgement of connections between colonial histories and their contemporary influences in and for Europe; 2) the role of historical consciousness when dealing with the history of colonialism; and 3) re-narrations of colonial history through enabling new voices. Ultimately this approach involves ‘past presencing’ (Macdonald 2012, 2013), in bringing the many connections of Europe’s colonial past and postcolonial present together. As Macdonald notes, ‘[p]ast presencing is concerned with the ways in which people variously draw on, experience, reconstruct and perform the past in their ongoing lives’ (2012, 234). This process engages both modes of remembering, which Macdonald has also referred to as forms of historical consciousness, and the attempt to uncover alternative or silenced histories and narratives – both of which are also key areas of decoloniality theorising (e.g. de Sousa Santos et.al. 2007; Suarez-Krabbe 2014; Maldonado-Torres 2017).

Within this article, I depart from Macdonald slightly and approach especially the performative aspect of how institutions engage in past presencing. I focus on how they create spaces where visitors can form connections between the colonial pasts and the contemporary realities in which they live in. As such, the focus is on museums as ‘change agents’ (van Huis, 2019) or as actors enabling new forms of past presencing to emerge. Central to this approach is the understanding of heritage as inherently dissonant (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Kisić 2017) and acknowledging that there are times when these dissonances are more visible and openly contested (van Huis forthcoming). With the growing diversity of European citizenry, we are in an era that makes the dissonances over the continent’s colonial legacies more

prominent – especially in Western Europe. Accordingly, many contemporary museums have acknowledged the need to change their activities and practices when engaging with colonial legacies of museums as institutions as well as those embedded in their collections and the ways to narrate them (e.g. Simpson 2001; Thomas 2009; Sauvage 2010; Dixon 2012; Deliss 2015; van Huis 2019). Furthermore, recent research has started to position both museums and their visitors as active participants in public debates (e.g. Simon 2010; Kros 2014), shifting the idea of museums from places of collecting and learning towards places of dialogue, activism and even criticism (Murawska-Muthesius and Piotrowski 2016).

## **Data and Methods**

There are many exemplary comparative analyses done between museums engaging with different colonial empires (e.g. Dixon 2016) or between museums attempting to engage colonialism from a European or a transnational viewpoint (e.g. De Cesari 2017). I want to depart from these analyses and focus on sites that take different positions in the national-European scale. The three cases under analysis are the German Colonialism: fragments, past and present, a temporary exhibition in 2016–2017 at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM) in Berlin; the permanent exhibition at the House of European History (HEH) at Brussels; and the soon to be opened general exhibition at the Sagres Promontory (SP), a national heritage site related to the onset of the Portuguese Colonial Empire. The sites comprise of one national site (DHM), one ‘European’ site (HEH) and one that is a mixture of the two, having been integrated into a national as well as a European heritage initiative (SP). Moreover, the choice of the sites is designed to reflect the re-focusing attempts of the decolonial school by broadening the timeframe to range from 1492 to contemporary realities. All three sites are located in former colonial empires in Western Europe. Although all three engage with both

imperialism and colonialism in the exhibitions, none of the sites can be considered explicitly as ‘museums exhibiting Empire’ (c.f. Aldrich 2009). Focusing on sites that engage with European colonialism as only one topic among many other aspects of European heritage is a conscious choice, as I am interested in how re-narrations and critiques of colonialism function when they are entwined with ideas of national and European heritage.

The data from the first two sites consists of ethnographic observations and documentation of the above mentioned exhibitions and their audio guides, as well as a collection of different written materials (exhibition catalogues, background papers, websites, brochures etc.) that were collected during and after the visit. Additionally short interviews with staff at the sites were conducted during the data collection. The data from SP was collected as part of a broader ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the EUROHERIT research project<sup>1</sup>. Due to an ongoing renovation of the exhibition the analysis relies on extensive structured interviews with the curatorial staff at the site as well as the conceptual plans of the exhibition that is due to be opened towards the end of 2018. All data was collected during brief site visits. The DHM was visited between 11 and 12 May 2017, the HEH between 31 January and 2 February 2018 and SP between 20 and 27 February 2018. All interviews were conducted in English by the author and later transcribed in English by the EUROHERIT research staff.

Methodologically the analysis comprises of thematic close reading of exhibitions and interviews, where special attention is posited on the intersection between the material remains of colonialism and the kinds of discursive approaches that are being used to narrate them. In the analysis, heritage is perceived as consisting both of its material aspects (e.g. heritage as buildings, objects and artefacts) and the meanings associated with it in narrative meaning making processes. Whereas approaches linked to material colonial heritage or ‘imperial debris’

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<sup>1</sup> Legitimation of European Cultural Heritage and the Dynamics of Identity Politics in the EU, more information at [www.jyu.fi/euroherit](http://www.jyu.fi/euroherit).

(Stoler 2008) enable the analysis of continuities of coloniality, i.e. the extent that its physical remains still exist around us. This discursive approach to decolonisation as a process of re-narration and unlearning, posits more emphasis on contemporary knowledge production around colonial heritage. In this framework, decolonisation of heritage could be perceived as a process that attempts to challenge coloniality of heritage through the creation of new meanings. Although not aimed at solving questions around the origins of the material objects nor the power dynamics involved in either their collections or their contemporary curation, this approach questions what that heritage can do now, by seeking to transform and open up the stories being told by those objects.

The article will start with a discussion on decolonising heritage from a theoretical angle. It will then introduce the three cases and their exhibitions in more detail, which is followed by the analysis of the three key aspects – presenting colonial pasts, creation of historical consciousness and attempt to challenge established meanings. The article concludes with final discussion and some final remarks.

### **From Avoidance to Awareness – Bridging Critical Heritage Studies and Coloniality**

Building on the ideas of Ernest Renan (1882), Delanty (2017, 3) proposes ‘the nation is based on forgetting of history, especially where the nation was born out of violence’. When we examine contemporary European nation states and the European Union as a collective agent of those states, it is clear they have built their historical narratives through certain exclusions. Overcoming these omissions is not merely a question of knowledge, for the history of European colonialism is not unknown per se. Nevertheless, there is an avoidance or layer of silence over not making all its continuing legacies fully visible among the white majority of Europeans (a position I myself also identify with). This avoidance has been discussed through concepts of

amnesia (e.g. Passerini 2003), white ignorance (e.g. Mills 2007) or even white innocence (e.g. Wekker 2016). However, it could also be conceived as repression – as active rejection of dealing with especially the traumatic aspects of colonial heritage (Kølvraa 2019).

Certain amount of repression or silence is not uncommon when compiling historical narratives. Trouillot (2015, 152-3) writes ‘narratives are made of silences, not all of which are deliberate or even perceptible as such within the time of their production’. Moreover, as Mason and Sayner (2018) point out in their analysis of the multiple and complex reasons behind museal silence, reticence does not always imply forgetting. Reticence has not erased colonialism from the collective European memory, but this partial or ‘covert silence’ (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010) influences extensively how colonialism has been narrated and remembered in Europe. As Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger explain, covert silences ‘are not about the complete absence of talk, ritual or practice. Rather, they are about the absence of content’ (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010, 1104). Both the concept of covert silence and repression enable the analysis of the grey areas between presence and absence of remembrance. Kølvraa (2019) explains how ‘strict divisions between absence and presence, collective and individual, might cause us to overlook how certain heritages can be a part of social life even if they are not clearly or fully articulated; even if they are reduced to a haunting disturbance or potentiality at the edges of social practice’ (Kølvraa 2019). In this article, I approach covert museal silences as forms of wider processes of repression of colonial heritages and memories. Overcoming these silences requires epistemological and ontological work, which is why we must approach heritage beyond its material aspects. Through a deeper and more honest engagement with colonial history, we must challenge narratives of European history, but also redefine what it means to be European in contemporary Europe. This must entail helping Europe’s post-immigrant populations to have “the European history they deserve as Europeans” (Buettner 2018, 145, emphasis in original).



A central aspect in promoting historical consciousness is connected to processes of knowledge production around the colonial past. As mentioned earlier, Jilani (2018) comments on the need for ‘historical accuracy’, but when calling for accuracy we have to be careful not to confuse heritage with history. Whereas history involves getting a full picture of the past, heritage is always about choices and, as a result, heritage can at times be ‘cut-adrift from the anchoring historical narratives that rightly or wrongly helped shape cultural memory’ (Chalcraft and Delanty 2015). Perceiving heritage as emerging from the act of labelling and categorisation emphasises meaning making processes around heritage and highlights the open-endedness of heritage as well as its potential for change (Lähdesmäki 2017). Critical heritage studies have enabled a shift towards these discursive and narrative meaning making processes around heritage (e.g. Smith 2006, Macdonald 2013, Lähdesmäki 2016), emphasising the importance of the contemporary moment in shaping our views of the past (e.g. Harrison 2013). This presentist approach can also enable decolonising European minds (cf. wa Thiong’o 1989). For wa Thiong’o the need to decolonise minds was aimed at moving beyond the colonial mind set instilled on the colonised and to reinvigorate African languages, cultures and science. In the European context, we must approach decolonisation of the minds as a process of unlearning the racial and cultural hierarchies imbedded in the ways many Europeans still (unconsciously) view the world. It is unlearning with a clear aim. As Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012, 3) frame it ‘it is time to start learning to unlearn [...] in order to relearn’. This unlearning is the key to relearning more inclusive and comprehensive ways to deal with Europe’s colonial histories.

Museums are central actors in creating these new meanings for existing heritage. Jones (1992, 911) argues ‘[m]useums necessarily decontextualize and then recontextualize their contents, thereby radically altering the matrices through which meaning may be projected, discerned [and] constructed’. Through this kind of de- and re-contextualisations, colonial ethnographic collections can also be perceived as being filled with transformative potential,

although their histories make these changes difficult and at times uneasy. Deliss (2015, 29) states that to ‘remediate the ethnographic collection is to engage with a mix of discomfort, doubt and melancholia [...] transforming these objects into a contemporary environment and thereby building additional interpretations onto their existing set of references’. As such, colonial collection and the heritage associated to them, is not only open to change, but according to Harrison (2013, 198) it ‘requires regular revision and review to see if it continues to meet the needs of contemporary society’.

As Deliss notes, we must attempt to present historical elements with contentious histories, by enabling ‘new visibilities and sayable things’ (Deliss 2015, 28), which finds echoes in the work of Bhabra, who proposes that postcolonial research ‘works “backwards”, in terms of reconstructing historical representation as well as “forwards” to the creation of future stories’ (Bhabra 2009, 70). Emphasis on the future is important as it enables change. Quijano (2000, 547) contends future is ‘the only territory of time where the changes can occur’. Accordingly, decoloniality should not be viewed as a process seeking to return to a pre-colonial status quo. The influences of colonialism are part of contemporary realities and as Mignolo states ‘future is bound to the chains of the past’ (2011, 31). Consequently, decoloniality should be directed towards change, freedom and future. However, in the process of creating something new, the past is not only the source of submission. The core of the decolonial debate is built on the acknowledgement of indigenous knowledges, epistemologies and ontologies. In this paradigm, the past functions as a source to recover currently marginalised and repressed knowledges that can be used to challenge current paradigms of Western knowledge and to imagine different decolonial futures (see also de Sousa Santos et.al. 2007; Mignolo 2011).

Creating a new postcolonial Europe on a more decolonial foundation will require a lot of memory work. This implies acknowledging the historical connections between colonialism and multicultural constitution of European societies (e.g. Ahmed 2000; El-Tayeb 2011;

Buettner 2016; Bhambra and Narayan 2017), as well as making the many entangled histories between Europe and its others more visible (e.g., Hall 1999; Said 2003; Delanty 2017). Rothberg's (2009) conceptualisation of multidirectional memory is an interesting tool for this process. By bringing the memories of decolonisation and Holocaust together, Rothberg is arguing for a conceptualisation of memory that builds links between these two difficult memories. Moving away from the idea of competitive memories, the idea of multidirectionality, as Chalcraft and Delanty (2015, 17) note, can also demonstrate 'the entanglement of different pasts and the hybridity that can emerge from these'. This kind of borrowing, cross-referencing, and negotiation is inherent to all memories, not only the difficult ones. As an overriding approach to understanding cultural cross-referencing, connectivity, transfer and hybridity the idea of entanglements ties closely to the emergence of self-critical historical consciousness and as Delanty (2016, 137), 'draws attention to the legacy of critique in European culture'. Embracing the idea of critical historical consciousness in the context of decolonising European heritage, would entail inclusion of forms of remembrance that would enable approaching colonialism and decolonisation as a history over which Europe holds a certain level of we must start to understand 'postcolonial' as a term that applies just as much to Europe, as it does to its former colonies.

### **Exhibition Summaries**

According to their website the Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM) views itself as 'a place of active communication and discussion of history' (<https://www.dhm.de/>, accessed 9/2018). In the permanent exhibition, the history of German colonialism has a rather small role. However, the DHM's temporary exhibition (tDHM) October 2016 to May 2017, 'German Colonialism: fragments, past and present' aims to raise awareness of the German history of

colonialism. The tDHM was mainly built around the museum's own ethnographic collection although some loans from other museums and private collections were used. Most of these objects were collected as part of the colonial system during and after German colonial rule (cf. museums exhibiting empire in Aldrich 2009). The exhibition consists of eight thematic areas<sup>2</sup>. In addition to engaging with the colonial period, the exhibition sought to bring the narrative from the colonial period to our contemporary society, which includes the process of political decolonisation as well as the contemporary post-colonial present. The tDHM was complemented by a series of public lectures and debates, film screenings and an academic conference.

The HEH is a history project designed and institutionalised by an initiative of the European Parliament. The HEH views itself as a place where visitors can 'strengthen [their] knowledge of Europe's common history and shared memories, reflect on the present, and visualize the future' (<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en>, accessed 10/2018). The HEH aims to tell a single European story instead of many national ones, and has raised the issues of colonialism, slavery and European expansionism as aspects of this story. As a new museum, opened in May 2017, the HEH had to start its collection from scratch and is still heavily dependent on loans in terms of the artefacts it uses in its exhibitions. The exhibition consists of six thematic areas<sup>3</sup>. In terms of space or number of objects, references to colonialism play a minor role in the vast museum as they surface explicitly at just three points in the exhibition. However, the entangled

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<sup>2</sup> 1) German Colonialism in a Global Context, 2) Colonial Worldviews and Colonial Rule, 3) Negotiations in Colonial Daily Life, 4) Drawing and Transcending Boundaries in the Colonial Context, 5) Colonial Collections, Colonial Gaze, 6) Colonialism Without Colonies (1919-1945), 7) Decolonization and Divided Remembrance and 8) Post-colonial Present?

<sup>3</sup> 1) Shaping Europe, 2) Europe: A Global Power, 3) Europe in Ruins, 4) Rebuilding a Divided Continent 5) Shattering Certainties and 6) Accolades and Criticism.

nature of colonial histories, does play a prominent role for example in the ways First World War is exhibited.

The last of the three, Sagres Promontory (SP) is a national Portuguese heritage site, which also received the European Heritage Label (EHL, an initiative of the European Commission) in 2015, marking its significance at the European level. The SP is best known for its history related to the Infante D. Henrique, (1394-1460), better known in the English speaking world as Henry the Navigator who was instrumental in establishing the Portuguese maritime expeditions and the colonial period that followed. Today SP has become one of the dominant symbols of 'Portuguese discoveries' both in terms of national and international heritage. The exhibition, still under construction, focuses almost solely on visual installations, projections, audios and texts. The plans include only few artefacts, most of which are reproductions. The exhibition is planned to cover SP's history, the life of Henry the Navigator, and the expansion of the Portuguese Colonial Empire (including technological and scientific developments it required) and finally a grand 360 degree installation of the film 'A Viagem' (the Voyage). The exit corridor is lined with large LED screens showing people from former Portuguese colonies talking in the many dialects of Portuguese.

Although my intention is not to go into details on different curatorial voices or the details of the curatorial processes at different sites, some contextualisation is needed. The curatorial team in the SP comprises of a fairly small team and there seems to be a strong emphasis on the institutional voice that dominates over the individual voices of the curators. The exhibitions in both DHM and HEH on the other hand, are a result a vast collaborative processes, which in addition to large curatorial teams included academic advisory boards. The inclusion of many curators is visible throughout the exhibitions as both in DHM and HEH it is possible to identify different tones, although the overall approach is the same throughout the exhibitions. However, it is worth highlighting that the tDHM is the only exhibition out of the

three to use curators from former colonies, although even in this case this addition came rather late in the process of planning the exhibition.

### **Presenting Europe's Colonial Past**

The first step in terms of decolonising colonial heritage in Europe must be aimed at acknowledging its historical relevance and the influences it has had and continues to have on Europe. These lingering influences can be conceptualised as coloniality – a network of meanings and power relations stemming from the colonial structures that continue to influence political, economic and cultural realms (e.g. Quijano 2000; Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality greatly influences processes related to the remembrance of colonialism. The extent to which these lingering effects are acknowledged influence what aspects of colonialism are remembered and how those histories are told (cf. covert silences Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010).

At SP, the link between past and present remains quite abstract. Although the Portuguese Colonial Empire was the longest lasting in Western Europe, the exhibition does not seem to acknowledge that this period affects contemporary Portugal. The space created by the exhibition seems to be reserved for the remembrance of Portuguese colonialism in a rather nostalgic sense. The Colonial Empire is seen as a period of national pride leaving out both the influences it had on people living in the colonies as well as the connections that history has to contemporary Portuguese culture and society. In the interviews conducted at SP, it was stated that the difficult history of colonialism and more precisely of slavery and Portugal's role in the slave trade was 'not exactly hidden, but it was not shown', nor was it an aspect of history that made the Portuguese particularly 'proud'. None-the less the topic of slavery is briefly included in the exhibition plans and the importance of this history is widely acknowledged. The

interviews highlight how history of slavery can provide a key opportunity to learn from past mistakes. However, these past mistakes are not seen as something concerning contemporary Portugal directly, but rather refer to the actions of Portuguese taken in another time and another place – either at sea or in the colonies. This separation of Europe from the colonies was further emphasised by the final installation, which instead of showing the many languages that (colonial) migrants speak in Portugal, shows the many versions of Portuguese spoken around the world in the former Colonial Empire. Thus SP chooses to narrate the continuing linguistic colonialism rather than linguistic and cultural diversity of postcolonial Portugal.

Connecting contemporary realities to Germany's colonial past was, however, one of the starting points of the tDHM exhibition. The opening display stated

Beyond the temporal and spatial borders of the colonial empire, German colonialism was part of a history of global entanglements that still have an impact today. The role of colonialism, which has been relatively minor in Germany's culture of remembrance up to now is now being critically re-examined (direct quote from tDHM, visited May 2017).

This can be seen in the ways the exhibition sought to encourage visitors to challenge preconceived ideas about colonialism. Furthermore, it is important to note, that of the three exhibitions the tDHM was the only one dedicating explicit space to the contemporary realities of postcolonial Europe. In the exhibition there was a separate section entitled 'Post-colonial present?' and in the tDHM catalogue authored by Gottschalk et.al. (2016), the post-colonial narratives were used as interruptions that use contemporary facts and objects to continuously challenge the historical narrative as it unfolds.

Although not reserving a separate space to debate the postcolonial continuities in Europe explicitly, the HEH does however make this link early in the exhibition. Similar to the tDHM, the HEH does not seek to present ready-made answers. Instead, it seeks to position the visitor as an active agent (see also Kros 2004). The introduction of the guidebook concludes by saying, 'you are invited always to keep a critical eye and to engage in the public conversation

about Europe's past and its implications for the present and the future' (EU 2017, 4). This approach is tested on the first floor, where under the title of 'Memory and European Heritage', the HEH attempts to set the overall tone for the exhibition. The installation is built around a list of fourteen phenomena common throughout Europe, such as democracy, the nation state, philosophy, capitalism and colonialism, etc. A pair of objects – one historical and one contemporary – represents with the present. Each theme starts with a historical artefact, which is contextualised by a short informative historical description. This historical narrative is then followed by a contemporary artefact, photograph or artwork, which is accompanied by a question aimed at challenging the historical narrative presented with the original object.

For example, the section on colonialism seeks to challenge the view that Europeans are the 'bringers of civilisation' by pairing a statue from Benin depicting an armed European sailor and Peter Turnley's 2003 photograph of a military checkpoint in Basra where an armed soldier is standing in front of a young girl. Similarly, the section on slavery raises the question of whether or not slavery has truly been abolished. The exhibition contrasts slave chains with a Banksy's mural 'Slave Labour' (2012), which depicts a young child kneeling over a sewing machine making a string of flags of the United Kingdom. By using a question format, the exhibition forces the visitor to engage with the contrast that displayed instead of just receiving a readymade answer. At the same time, it also shows how none of the fourteen themes are purely historical, but are still pertinent to European societies. Ultimately, this part of the exhibition raises the question of 'which part of this European heritage should we preserve; what do we want to change; what should we contest?' (EU 2017, 15), and highlights how heritage engages with the present and the future rather than being merely a representation of the past. Although, the HEH exhibition returns to these connections and critical tones in the following floor when debating the period between 1789-1914 (see later) and to a lesser degree in the section on the First World War, to a large extent these debates are not engaged once the



exhibition moves beyond this time frame (see also Buettner 2018). The only direct reference to colonialism later is a short video on decolonisation in Africa included in the section on the Cold War.

### **Creating Historical Consciousness**

Ahonen (2005) explains how historical consciousness implies a certain level of personal engagement with the past as well as an ability to be critical towards the past in question (see also Delanty 2016). As Maldonado-Torres (2017, 434) argues in his analysis of Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* (2008), decolonisation as a process of overcoming epistemic and ontological colonisation implies a change in language but also a change in consciousness. This change entails a challenge to the 'collective unconscious' which Fanon (2008, 165) describes as 'the repository of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a particular group'. From this perspective, the need for historical consciousness can therefore be seen as consisting both of increasing knowledge and of adopting new attitudes.

The DHM acknowledges the colonality of its collections and aims to engage with it directly. As Förster (2016, 158) notes, society should not only seek to 'critically assess the number of objects and circumstances of their acquisition, but also the knowledge and classification systems established in the museum and popularized by them'. This emphasis on the kind of knowledge that has been produced based on the objects takes us to the heart of the issues of addressing the continuing influences of colonialism on our contemporary perceptions of the world. As Förster continues 'these divisions still influence our mode of perception today and call for a decolonisation of ideas and concepts' (Förster 2016, 158), thus shifting our focus away from the debates on material objects to the meanings they embody and the potential for alternative knowledges that they might enable.

This attempt to challenge accepted knowledges is also reflected in the way the tDHM chose to exhibit plaster masks used as part of racial science experiments. The curatorial staff deliberately hid the plaster masks, choosing to refer to the immorality of displaying overtly racist material. Instead of the actual masks, the exhibition showed a wooden box that was used to transport one of the moulds from the Pacific to Germany and used this container as the bearer of the wider story implied by the masks. The accompanying text started by describing the research conducted by Otto Finsch (the maker of the moulds), including direct references to ‘tortuous procedures the models were subjected to’ (Gottschalk et.al. 2016, 206). The text takes a turn when it used Finsch’s own findings and words to show how the racial categories were, in addition to being morally suspect, scientifically unsound. After explicitly condemning racial science, of which the casts are a physical remainder, the section concluded by placing the artefact on display in relation to the racist colonial network within which it was initially created.

The plaster mould shown here makes us aware of the scientific practices in the colonial context without exposing again the person depicted in the image. The mould is imbued with the violence involved in making pieces of anthropological evidence. As a numbered series, the moulds document the dehumanized cataloguing process. (Gottschalk et.al. 2016, 207)

Whereas the tDHM attempted to break the established racist colonial narrative by practicing Jilani’s ‘historical accuracy’, the HEH made the choice to exhibit the masks in the ‘Notions of Progress and Superiority’ section alongside a variety of other colonial objects. In addition to giving the technical data on the artefacts, the Guidebook states

European museums, exhibitions and entertainments displayed colonial objects and sometimes even non-European people in ‘living zoos’. Non-Europeans became the ‘other’, presented as different from perceived European civilization and contrasted with how European saw themselves (EU, 2017).

The narrative promoted by the HEH website gives a slightly more nuanced approach to these casts, linking more directly to racial science and condemning their racist nature. Although acknowledging their racist nature, the curatorial staff did not however see the exhibition of these objects as an ethical problem. Moreover, the choice of words ‘non-European became the “other”’ suggests avoidance of pointing out the agency that Europeans had in this process of ‘becoming’. Instead of prompting the visitor to question racialised images and the science used to legitimate them and the broader colonial system, the exhibition reproduces them and ends up positioning the masks in a very problematic manner as exotic props in the narrative of European superiority.

In essence, these masks and the crates function as ‘physical and embodied dimensions of the past’ (Macdonald 2012, 240). They show how past presencing and historical consciousness are not only discursive or linguistic phenomena, but involves physical objects that have both with material and discursive afterlives. The case of the plaster masks seems to suggest various understandings over how to critically engage these afterlives. There is a difference between critique for the sake of being critical and that for creating understanding. In the tDHM critique was based more on giving a nuanced picture of the phenomenon, including taking some responsibility over that history and seeking alternative objects through which to tell the story. However, in the HEH although being highly critical, seems to (perhaps unintentionally) rely on reproducing contentious content as an attempt to use their shock value to provoke a reaction in the visitor without any explicit discussion on issues of responsibility or guilt.

Whereas both the tDHM and the HEH seek to use the platform they have created to point to the critical aspects, the case at the SP is more muddled. Although the interviews with the staff point towards a more nuanced and even critical approach to colonialism, the plans for the exhibition nevertheless highlight how the pressures to maintain a traditional, hegemonic

way to narrate (inter)national history can result in a hesitance in changing the established narrative. Although taking some crucial (but small) steps in opening up the debate on the role of the Portuguese in the slave trade, the approach of the new exhibition to colonialism is sporadic, superficial and rather uncritical. The discourses of ‘discoveries’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘trade’ dominate the discussions over concepts like ‘conquest’, ‘rule’ and ‘colonialism’, making the narrative rather Eurocentric.

Remembering colonialism through the lens of national pride has increasingly been challenged (e.g. Bragard and Planche 2009; Macdonald 2009), but the long tradition that prioritises a narrative of colonialism from the viewpoint of the colonisers is still explicitly and implicitly embedded in the ways colonialism has been narrated as part of European heritage in the SP (see also Turunen 2019). According to the SP interviews, this tradition stems from the prominent role the site historically has had, for example during the Salazar dictatorship (1932–1968) when Portuguese colonialism was tied to the rhetoric of ‘discoveries’ and the Fortress of Sagres was used prominently in building the national identity. As stated in the interviews: ‘This is a really important icon for Portugal. [...] Everybody knows, what is Fortaleza Sagres, everybody. Every single Portuguese knows what it is and what it meant’. This prominent position in constructing national heritage and the decades if not centuries of the hegemony of the narrative of ‘Portuguese discoveries’ make critical debates over colonialism extremely tense in the case of SP, although at the same time also long overdue.

### **Enabling New Voices**

Inclusion of new voices or critical viewpoints into contemporary museums is not exactly a new phenomenon, rather there are many exemplary museums who have engaged in decolonisation in the past decades (e.g. Sauvage 2010; Kross 2014; van Huis 2019). In the

context of the three museums under study, the ability to enable new voices can be seen in two ways. First, as enabling stories to emerge through re-narrating existing heritage through novel meanings. Secondly, through the concrete act of allowing unheard voices to enter the museum space. I will start with the former. Perhaps due to the very different position that the DHM has as a result of its extensive colonial collection, a central goal in the tDHM exhibition was to challenge the narratives that these artefacts were traditionally used to portray. The tDHM exhibition sought to explicitly highlight the ‘categories and perceptions behind such [colonial] collections, uncovering fault lines and different histories’ (direct quote from tDHM, visited May 2018). As an attempt to break the traditional colonial gaze, the tDHM exhibition opened with the ‘colon figures’, a set of wooden statues depicting German colonial officers made by their colonial subjects. The statues were accompanied by an explanation of how the European mind-set and style of categorisation influences museum exhibitions on colonialism. The ‘colon figures’ are posited as symbols reminding us for the need to look anew from a different perspective. This change of perspective is repeated at several instances in the exhibition – constantly reminding the visitor to challenge preconceived knowledge about colonial history.

The ability to transform the narrative by adding new layers of meaning to the artefacts (e.g. Jones 1992; McLeod 2009) is also actively understood by the curators at the HEH. According to Mork (2018, 133), who is the head curator of the HEH, ‘[t]he object is an actor: a good actor can play ten different roles’. She explains the ‘interpretation of each object has to be created anew in the concrete framework of each new presentation’ (Mork 2018, 133). The gradual accumulation of knowledge and its de- and re-contextualisation enables new interpretations. This ability is not however automatic and there are limitations to the extent that new meanings can be created.

Although neither the HEH, nor the SP necessarily engage in this re-narration to the same extent as the DHM, they both provide a prominent platform for it. Michael Rothberg

(2009), when defining his idea of multidirectional memory, talks on the ability of memories to create space for other forms of remembrance. He sees memory as ‘subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing, as productive and not privative’ (Rothberg 2009, 3). Taking Rothberg’s idea into the museum environment and building on Rancière’s (2009) notion of the ‘emancipated spectator’, Kros (2014) emphasises the visitors’ capabilities to create counter narratives. This approach sees museums as public spaces that expand beyond their walls and thus attempts to transform museum spaces into places that enable other forms of remembrance and perhaps also other sayable things.

Both the DHM and HEH explicitly claim being spaces of dialogue, but in SP the ongoing renovation was clearly influencing the abilities for dialogue that were present. However, the cultural program (Dinamização E Valorização Dos Monumentos, DiVaM) at Sagres offers an opportunity for dialogue far beyond the space of the exhibition or the fortress. Through an annual call, the cultural programs lends the site as a platform for local cultural associations to organise events. This enables them to take the debates further than the site can in their official narrative. The theme for 2018 was ‘Heritage, what future?’ and for 2017 was ‘Places of Globalisation’. Although the current analysis did not cover the details of SP’s cultural program, the importance of its ability to bring new voices to heritage sites should not be undermined. The cultural program offers an institutional frame for bringing new voices into debates about heritage and culture and this institutional connection is crucial as it gives these voices greater legitimacy.

New voices can also be brought into museums without a direct institutional link. One practical example of constructing new sayable things, took place in February 2018 when a group participating in Remembering 1918 -programme<sup>4</sup> was asked to visit the HEH and after

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Remembering 1918 – European Dreams of Modernity’ was a project of the Brussels-based Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, which is organised in partnership with European cultural and academic institutes. The aim of the project was to cast a critical and unbiased eye on the events of 1918 and their impact on the next one hundred years. The

an introductory tour of the museums the group members were asked to plan their own individual tours. Pirita Näkkäläjärvi, a Sámi journalist and scholar participating in the tour, took the opportunity and used different parts of the exhibition to talk about the history, culture and struggles of the Sámi people. It was not a simple task as she quickly noted ‘there’s nothing here on the Sámi people’ (Näkkäläjärvi 2018). However, many sections of the exhibition enabled her to talk about Sámi culture, its symbols, the colonisation of their lands and, in many regards unmet, the rights that international agreements have granted them. This shows how debates over European colonialism should also engage with the many forms of internal colonisation taking place within Europe. In addition to the Sámi question, these debates are relevant for understanding for example the political and cultural dynamics of Eastern Europe (e.g. Mälksoo 2009; Mayblin 2016; Tlostanova 2018; Głowacka-Grajper 2019). This was a very flawed and partial act of inclusion, but it serves to show the power objects have in enabling other stories to be told and perhaps other histories to be remembered. However, inclusion of marginal voices of European minorities, such as the Sámi, in the actual exhibition should be the primary aim. The current approach of both HEH and SP posits the responsibility of re-narration on others, whereas the institutions should work towards processes where the ones in marginal positions are not required to demand their rights, but that the institutions would engage in guaranteeing minorities the right to have a voice.

Indeed, one of the only points in the three exhibitions where voice is given to Europeans of colour in concrete terms is an installation in the DHM which follows the life of four generations of the Diek-Mpessa-Adomako-Reiprich family and their struggles to build a life in Germany, while being black. The photo installation is accompanied by an audio recording, in which Antonia Adomako, the great-great granddaughter of Mandenga Diek,

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recollects the family history, giving not only a face, but also a voice to the decades of struggles of black Germans.

### **Concluding Remarks – Towards a Shared Heritage**

In the analysis, we have seen different kinds of attempts towards engagement with Europe's colonial history from the three cases studies – Sagres Promontory in Portugal (SP), Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (DHM) and House of European History in Brussels (HEH). The article has focused on knowledge production around colonial heritage in an attempt to make the intangible heritage of colonialism more visible. Despite political decolonisation, moving from the colonial towards the postcolonial in a cultural sense is still an ongoing process.

In the context of museum exhibitions central concern is the intended audience of the exhibitions – whose memory are we trying to spark and what precisely are we hoping to remember? More precisely, who do we perceive as the primary audience of the exhibitions – the general public, the postcolonial minorities or already engaged audiences? All of these require distinct approaches. Those used by the selected case studies cater mostly to initiating this debate among the general public. This leaves them vulnerable to critique from the more engaged and more aware visitors (and researchers). I have attempted to look beyond these critical points towards the potentialities that exist in these exhibitions. As the analysis has shown, there is still a leap that needs to be taken from this form of engagement towards legitimating marginal voices.

However, what do we mean by inclusion of marginal voices? In her analysis of the development process of the HEH, Settele (2015) discusses the inclusion of what she calls 'marginal voices' into the narrative provided by the HEH. Her analysis predates the opening



of the exhibition and relies on interviews and documents related to the development of the concept and narrative for the museum. Settele is able to show crucial steps towards including ‘marginal voices’ were taken during the development process. In the second phase of the planning of the exhibition, issues such as colonialism, migration and Islam were brought into the narrative, although they had been excluded in the original plans made by the political initiators of the museum. Although Settele sees the increased prevalence of these topics as the inclusion of marginal voices, I would hesitate making the same claim. Although nominally ‘including exclusion’ – meaning engaging with some of the early processes othering and racism that contributed to the exclusion of Europe’s Muslim and postcolonial minority communities – the exhibition overall fails to include those who are excluded. It fails to create space for those communities to construct their own position inside European history and especially in offering a comprehensive debate on European colonial history beyond the First World War (see also Buettner 2018). After this point, HEH offers only a sporadic narrative on these in/exclusions that is poorly contextualised to the wider colonial context of post-war Europe.

Despite these flaws, the HEH exhibition does lay an important groundwork for debates on in/exclusion. Through linking the Enlightenment period as well as the industrialisation processes in Europe to the ways both of these manifested in European imperialism and the notions of European superiority that were driving the colonial process, both the DHM and HEH are able to raise important questions over some of the issues that lay at the foundation of European modernity. In SP these debates are still absent. The development of notions of superiority and the racial science used to support these claims can be in many ways considered as the intangible heritage of colonialism, and highlighting these aspects is crucial as it is these intangible notions that in many cases continue influencing contemporary European ideals and cultural norms. Although engaging in these debates, the HEH fails to use the platform it has created for providing actual voice for those who are marginalised in the narrative of European

history. The tDHM managed to make a few small steps towards creating some space for the minorities; these were precisely that, small steps. Moreover, although also the tDHM explicitly highlighted the role of racial science as a motivating and legitimating factor behind the colonial drive, neither it nor HEH explicitly connected this colonial heritage to contemporary European racism (cf. Goldberg 2006), rather both primarily engaged with racism as a historical phenomenon.

Additionally, none of the exhibitions connected colonialism directly to either past or contemporary migration, which was a grave missed opportunity (in reference to HEH see also Buettner 2018). In SP, mobility was narrated primarily as that of the Portuguese who travelled and the goods, including slaves, which moved between the colonies and Portugal. However, the colonial subject was not allowed to move. Even in the exit corridor the colonial subject remains enclosed in the former colonies. The HEH on the other hand engaged with both migration and colonialism. Although intra-European migration received a lion's share of these migration narratives, HEH did also make an effort to introduce debates of past and contemporary migration, including the ongoing 'refuge crisis'. However, these migratory flows from outside of Europe were not seen in connection to the imperial structures that connected Europe and the colonies. Acknowledging that people arrived in Europe as participants of transnational political and cultural networks would provide a crucial first step in normalising their existence in Europe (see also de Genova 2017). Out of the three museums, DHM alone included both migration and the voices of those who migrated in their exhibition.

As has been argued, this conversation on colonality of heritage is needed to create historical consciousness, visibility and polyvocality for remembrance of colonialism. As Goldberg (2009, 24) eloquently states, 'there is no history, one might say, without remembrance: no history of or for those not remembered, whose past is not made present, whose past is deemed to have no presence'. Goldberg's quote goes to the heart of many of the

complexities surrounding debates over the history of colonialism and its connections to the constitution of European citizenry and historical and contemporary migrant movements. If we perceive heritage as being entangled with ideas of identity (e.g. Macdonald 2006, Graham and Howard 2008), we need to also consider whether decolonising heritage can enable belonging for postcolonial European subjectivities. As was noted earlier, Rothberg attempts to discuss decolonisation as a shared memory (Rothberg 2009, 15). He builds his idea of a shared memory on the division of common and shared collective memory, initially devised by Avishai Margalit (2002), for whom common memory ‘aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually’ (Margalit 2002, 51). A shared memory, however, is more complex and involves a level of communication. For Margalit ‘a shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode ... into one version’ (Margalit 2002, 51-52).

The idea of shared memory is built on the idea of multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009), which has been further developed by various scholars focusing on the idea of entanglements that exist in transnational memories, heritages and histories (e.g. Chalcraft and Delanty 2015; Delanty 2016; Delanty 2017; Chalcraft 2018). While optimistic about the potential that multidirectionality brings to the ability of transnational memory cultures to deal with difficult heritages, I agree with Delanty (2016, 140) who notes that ‘[w]hile there are some examples of memories that cut across European societies [...] it is unlikely that there will be a common European memory as such’. I believe this holds true on colonial memories. However, with colonial memories time may be on our side. Although very much alive in many parts of the world, memory of colonialism for most within Europe is no longer direct. It is memory through affiliation, or one that is passed down. Hirsch conceptualises it as post-memory (Hirsch 2008). It is a memory that is not fully ours, but still conditions the world we live in.

Still, contemporary society can claim colonial memories and a central aspect of that process to is understand the ways those memories are present in contemporary Europe and how they for example manifest in the contemporary migrant flows on the Mediterranean. Durrant argues that the principal task of postcolonial narratives is ‘to engender a consciousness of the unjust foundations of the present and to open up the possibility of a just future’ (2004, 1). Heritage as a future oriented project and a tool to manage memory, can be used as tool in this process of imagining a just future.

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