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The Europeanization of national museums: Europoeic media and situated knowledges

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the current Europeanization of national museums in different European countries and considers it against the background of media theories and feminist epistemologies. Taking the example of the European Solidarity Centre Gdansk, the Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin and the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée Marseille, it suggests two approaches to the dynamics of travel and locatedness in the museum. Firstly, using the concept of what I call "Europoeic media" this essay shows how "Europe" as a travelling memory is shaped by and in media. Secondly, I argue that the locatedness both of memories and the memory researcher are not detrimental but instead produce "situated knowledges". Thus, in combining media-sensitivity and standpoint-reflexivity, the paper proposes new ways of taking into account the travels and locatedness of both memories and memory research.

Introduction: museums between the nation and Europe

"Look at this, Europeans!" stated the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung in May 2017, referring to what it called "Europe's first postnational museum" (Kirchner 2017). This museum, the House of European History (HEH) in Brussels, was initiated by the European Parliament and opened its doors to the public in May 2017. With its focus on European history, this institution can be seen as a significant example of a process that has deeply transformed the European museum landscape in the last 30 years, namely its Europeanization. Since the 1980s, museums in Western Europe and, since the 1990s, partly in Eastern Europe have increasingly focused on Europe and European history.[1] This phenomenon can be seen as a contemporary revolution of the institution of the museum: since its emergence in the 18th and 19th centuries, the nation and national history have formed its central framework. Modern museums were founded in the aftermath of the French Revolution in order to strengthen the emerging imagined national communities (Anderson 1983); they were one of the institutions manifesting the idea of a nation having a common history, culture and, therefore, collective identity (Macdonald 2000).

The current Europeanization of these materializations of national imagined communities (Anderson 1983) has led to the emergence of what I call "Europeanized national museums" (Czerney 2019): national museums which try to overcome the dominant national framework by Europeanizing their collections, exhibitions and narratives.[2] Three contemporary examples of such Europeanized national museums—in Germany, Poland and France—exemplify this endeavour: the Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin (DHM), the European Solidarity Center in Gdansk (ECS) and the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille (MuCEM).[3] Although all of them were founded in very different historical and political contexts and deal with highly diverse topics, I argue that these museums can be studied collectively. They are united by their status as national museums[4] and their common aim of Europeanizing national history narratives, thereby contributing to the construction of Europe as an imagined community. From a cultural and media studies perspective, the question is *how*—by what media and forms—this aim of Europeanizing national narratives is realized in the three museums' permanent exhibitions. In the following, I will not only describe some of the museums' medial strategies of Europeanization, and in particular their uses of what I call "Europoeic media" (Czerney 2019), but I will also ask what the research on museums "between the nation and Europe" can contribute to recent developments in memory studies, in particular its recent transcultural and transnational turns.

"Europoeic media": mediating a travelling memory

Europe is a transcultural phenomenon. Already the ancient founding myth of Europe tells us that "Europe" was originally a Phoenician princess who came to Crete on the back of Zeus disguised as a bull

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(Neef 2013, 29–52). Leaving the sexist dimension of this story of rape and kidnapping aside, what this myth hints at is that, from the outset, Europe has been a product of transcultural imagination and exchange as well as an endless chain of remediations (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Erll and Rigney 2009). From the ancient myth of Europe and Zeus, to maps from the Early Modern era depicting Europe as a woman, to present EU-iconography or the current Europeanization of museums—Europe does not exist as a clear-cut, stable entity with a fixed core or identity. On the contrary, it has been repeatedly constructed and reconstructed across different times and places as well as in different media. Europe only exists as a construction in and by media.

In this sense, Europe can be seen as a transcultural memory and travelling memory. As Astrid Erll points out, the "term 'travelling memory' is a metaphorical shorthand, an abbreviation for the fact that in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents and practices are in constant, unceasing motion" (Erll 2011, 12). Europe as a mnemonic form only exists through movement—its meanings are created and recreated over and over again without ever reaching a final form. Seeing Europe as a "travelling memory" highlights the complexity, diversity and non-stability of ideas of Europe. Like all memories, Europe needs media—not only to travel through time and space but also more fundamentally in order to become perceivable and communicable at all. In short: Europe needs media in order to exist. In memory studies, this central function of media in the production, circulation and perception of cultural memory has gained more attention in recent years and figures under the term of "media memory studies" (Erll 2017, 2). Central to this approach is the insight that media are not neutral transmitters of messages but the conditions for messages themselves (Erll 2017, 4; Engell and Vogel 2004, 10). As such, they shape what they seem to only transmit, conditioning what can be seen, perceived, stored and remembered. From a media studies perspective, without media there can be neither message, knowledge or perception of the present nor reference to the past.

Taking the example of Europe as a transcultural memory, it is this fundamental media-dependency of memories and constructions of the past that I wish to highlight by introducing the term "Europoeic media" (Czerney 2019).[5] Using the concept of "medium" in its widest possible sense, by "Europoeic media" I mean all those actors, institutions and things that create, negotiate and circulate concepts, notions, images and narratives of Europe. Europoeic media are media that design something as European and thereby create images and narratives of Europe, largely through their setting in intermedial constellations. They shape what we think of when we hear the term "Europe".

But more important than what Europoeic media are is the question of what they do: they "do" Europe in the sense of John L. Austin's (1962) speech act theory. They perform images of Europe that are no copies of an outside reality. What becomes visible as Europe and European therefore is formed by and depends on the characteristics of specific Europoeic media. Europoeic media produce ideas of Europe, thereby contributing to the meanings of "Europe". Taking recent media studies approaches to memory one step further, this term not only helps to describe the fundamental role of media in the process of creating transcultural memories, but it also draws attention to how exactly one specific "media constellation" creates and shapes images, narratives and topoi of a transcultural memory, like that of Europe (Czerney 2019, 77–83). Before demonstrating this point with examples from the three museums located in Germany, Poland and France, I will come back to the other question guiding this essay: the travel and locatedness of the researcher.

Situated knowledges: the memory researcher between travel and locatedness

Not only memories are bound to both travel and location—researchers are, too. As Susannah Radstone (2011) points out: "(…) memory research, like memory itself (…) is always located—it is (…) specific to its site of production and practice." Memory research like all research happens in specific socio-historic, political, national, economic, disciplinary and linguistic situations, with this situatedness shaping both the research process and the results. We all see and value different things while researching. But how to deal methodologically with this apparent fragmentation? Feminist standpoint theory provides an answer.

Feminist standpoint theory emerged as part of feminist science critique and epistemologies since the 1980s (Singer 2008).[6] Feminist epistemologies show that knowledge cannot be separated from concrete bodies, historicity and social power structures (Singer 2008, 285). Donna Haraway (1988) introduced the concept of "situated knowledges" to describe this entanglement of research and specific locations. Situated knowledges acknowledge and make explicit the position from which knowledge is produced. This applies to the researching subject as well as her historical, social, economic, cultural and technological location. It also means acknowledging that research can only illuminate parts of a phenomenon, thus avoiding the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 581).

Being aware of the standpoint (Hartsock 1983) from which one is speaking according to feminist epistemologies is a necessary condition for good research. Following Haraway (1988, 582f.), situated

and partial perspectives are not a deficit but in fact a privilege—the privilege of not having to pretend to see and know everything. Making the researching, thinking and writing subject as well as her location in specific structures visible will, according to Haraway (1988), lead to better research. Making explicit the conditions shaping the results leads to more reliable results. As researchers, especially in a highly dynamic and interdisciplinary field like memory studies, we are all located in different academic socializations and research languages as well as within power relations that are structured by categories such as gender, race, class etc. It is crucial to reflect one's own position within these categories because they form what we observe in our research, what we value as scientific, who we consider capable colleagues etc.[7] Once made explicit, these diverse standpoints can enter into a dialog with other partial, limited and situated perspectives and eventually form what Sandra Harding (1993) calls "strong objectivity": studies from diverse standpoints can connect and lead to a more comprehensive view of a phenomenon than studies that pretend to be universal and general.[8]

Situating Europe as a travelling memory: national museums as Europoeic media

The concept of situated knowledges helps to deal methodologically with the tension between the memory researcher's travels and locatedness. This section demonstrates how the concept of Europoeic media can do the same in relation to memories of Europe as they are mediated in national museums, such as the Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin (DHM), the European Solidarity Center in Gdansk (ECS) and the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille (MuCEM).

The concept of Europoeic media helps to describe how the Europeanization of museum narratives is realized: What media and media constellations are used to show a European history in these museums? And how do these media form images and narratives of Europe? Europoeic media can be analyzed *in* national museums and national museums can be analyzed *as* Europoeic media. The museums exhibit particular Europoeic media, and at the same time they are themselves "(multimedia-) Europoeic media", because they contribute to the creation of narratives and images of Europe through their exhibitions, catalogues or websites. One example of a recurrent Europoeic medium that can be found in the exhibitions of all three museums is the combination of maps and charts. A short trip to the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk will demonstrate this point.

Drawing on standpoint theory for memory studies, as developed above, I emphasize that the following analysis is only one of many possible ways through the

exhibition. My text proposes one reading of a highly complex phenomenon. It is influenced by my standpoint as a white, female feminist academic from a country of the European Union, having been trained in German media theory and possessing sufficient financial means to travel and study museums abroad. In the museums I researched, I am considered as member of the community I am researching. I dispose of enough economic and social resources to have access to the museums, travel to conferences and have time to study, read, think and write. All of this defines my research. It would take on a completely different shape if it had been conducted from the standpoint of a non-EU citizen, a Person-of-Color and EU citizen, a migrant or refugee. They would see different things and ask different questions. However, in the sense of the standpoint that can be chosen and developed critically it is possible—at least to attempt—to pay attention to these perspectives as well.[9]

The European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk opened its doors in 2014 and presents the history of anti-communist resistance movements in Poland and other central and East European countries from the end of the Second World War until 1989/90, focusing on the Polish Solidarity movement (Solidarność). From its structure as well as its content, the ECS can be described as a museum between the nation and Europe, as a Europeanized national museum: With roots in a local initiative launched in 1998, the ECS was officially founded after the national government made it one of its main cultural projects in 2007. Its permanent exhibition was financed by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage that along with other actors is also present in the advisory board of the museum.[10] On the other hand, the EU co-financed the building of the ECS and the president of the European commission was present at the founding ceremony. This position between a national and European scale is also evident in the museum's aims: "From the European perspective, ECS is one of the most important projects that incorporate Poland's fate into the collective European experience of history. (…) We want to keep the Solidarity experience well within the memory of Poles and Europeans, so that in the community of European democracies it is seen as an important part of Europe's founding myth." (ECS 2014, 4)

The European dimensions of the Solidarity movement are most thoroughly dealt with in the penultimate room of the exhibition titled "Triumph of Freedom". Up to this point, the exhibition mainly shows a national narrative; here, however, it turns towards the reunion of Europe after the breakdown of the communist bloc—Europe thus forms the triumphal end of the exhibition. Whereas the national history of Solidarity is also told by so called "primary objects"—authentic objects that are seen as "material

traces" of the past (Fayet 2007, 16)—Europe does not have such objects. Instead, the room presents other things like maps, touchscreens, witness testimonies and artistic installations. In museology, these things are called "secondary things" (Fayet 2007, 16). Here, however, they are central because they serve as Europoeic media, making visible the idea of Europe that the museum promotes.

Entering this exhibition room, the visitors see a huge map showing the decomposition of the Eastern Bloc (Figure 1). In the beginning Europe is a divided continent—the communist bloc in the East is colored in red and non-communist countries in the West in white. Next to the map, a small screen lights up after some seconds and shows a countdown. "Poland/Polska 04-06-1989" is the first entry. At the same time, the red lights behind Poland on the map disappear—and Poland becomes white surrounded by the red bloc. After five more seconds, the screen displays the word "Hungary" followed by a date and then shows the area of Hungary on the map turning white. As each country turns white, the red bloc on the map disappears and Europe becomes a united whole without borders.

This installation is combined with nine touch-screens hanging next to each other on the wall beside the map. Each touchscreen presents the fall of the communist regime in one country of Eastern Europe, showing short films, texts and pictures about the country's history as well as biographies of opposition activists. In this setting, the touchscreens function as spatial charts: the columns are formed by the different countries that the map demonstrated previously and the lines are integrated into the screens (pictures, texts, films etc.). In this way, map and chart collect data about the different countries' histories, form categories by drawing boundaries and put them into relation to each other. The categories that are thus formed are national categories and the relation that they are put in is one of comparison and contrast. The map and chart compare national histories demonstrating similarities and differences between them. Within the context of this installation, the common denominator of the different national histories is the heroic struggle against the communist regimes that culminated in the triumphal reunification of Europe.

Asking what the Europoeic media map and chart perform as Europe and as European history, we can firstly observe that Europe is depicted in terms of a clear and continuous story of success and progress: two blocs become united, standing for freedom and peace.[11] Secondly, asking who is shown as being part of this European success story, the history of the European reunification (as well as Solidarity's history up until now) appears to be a male-dominated history: the touchscreens almost exclusively present biographies of men. Finally, they depict European history not as a common history but as a coexistence of different national histories. Europe thus disintegrates into several national entities. The nation remains the dominant category of museal historiography.

This last finding, the enduring dominance of the nation as central framework for constructions of the past, can be observed not only in the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk, but also in the The Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (DHM). The DHM presents Europe as a continuous story of success, of growing wealth and peace, as a story of alternating phases of war and peace ultimately leading to reconciliation and unity after overcoming the two World Wars and the separation into two Cold War blocs. One mechanism in the construction of Europe in this exhibition is the staging of a common history. The Enlightenment, the industrial revolution,

Figure 1. Map "Decomposition of the Eastern Bloc" in the ECS.

the formation of nation states and especially the overcoming of two World Wars are shown as key elements of this history. However, a look at the medial staging of a common history shows that what is presented as European ultimately disintegrates into the coexistence of national entities. As in Gdansk, maps and charts are central to this process. For example, in the section on the Second World War, a map shows the deportation of the Jews and forced migrations during the war in Europe (Figure 2).

It visualizes the common space marked as European while at the same time crossing it by demonstrating different nation-states and the borders between them. Two charts that are displayed beneath the map pick up this thought: they list victims of the war and the Shoah (columns), categorizing them by nationality (rows). Thus, the map and charts stage the war as a common European experience (every nation had losses)[12] while at the same time disintegrating it into an aggregation of national histories (who suffered most?). Thus, the nation is re-established as the central frame of reference.

The MuCEM in Marseille—the Museum of Mediterranean and European Civilizations—constitutes a slightly different case: it aims at integrating notions such as multicultural diversity, hybridity and transcultural exchange into constructions of Europe. Opened in 2013, its goal is to show the entanglement of Europe with Mediterranean cultures and religions. One of its displays where this effort becomes particularly visible is the "mur de portraits" ("wall of portraits") in the (semi-) permanent exhibition "Galérie de la Méditerranée".[13] Surrounded by ancient (male) masks and busts, a big screen shows short interviews with nine women from different Mediterranean countries. They talk about what it means to them today to be a (female) citizen.[14] They speak different languages (Arabic, Greek, Italian,

Spanish etc.) and letters indicate where they come from. The montage of these interviews creates a transnational narrative in which Europe is not limited to the continent but enters into dialog with Mediterranean countries.

At the same time, as in Berlin and Gdansk, the MuCEM's transnational narrative disintegrates into the coexistence of stories framed as national: the women are marked as representatives of one nation. Moreover, this emphatic statement of diversity and entanglement ultimately seems to be a demonstration of positive multiculturalism in which the French element is dominant. The "mur de portraits" is exclusively subtitled in French,[15] therefore mainly addressing a national public that should be reassured of its cosmopolitanism, broad-mindedness and tolerance.

Although on a conceptual level all three museums highlight the importance of transnationalizing their exhibitions and narratives, it is the nation that remains central for the narratives created by Europoeic media. In these museums, Europe does not exist as a general, common entity with a stable meaning, but on the contrary, as multiple, national versions. It appears to form a travelling schema of constructing the past—and thereby also the present. Europe has no fixed meaning or roots it can easily relate to in order to build an identity. It is in constant motion, being created over and over again. At the same time, these constructions of Europe are situated in specific places and times, and this locatedness contributes to their particular meanings.

Europoeic media make Europe travel: They construct highly diverse and sometimes contradictory versions of Europe that demonstrate that Europe has no essence, no core identity that can be fixed and shown (thus challenging the idea that immigrants should assimilate to a European core identity

Figure 2. Map "Deportation and Extermination of Jews 1941–1944 and Forced Migrations 1938–1944" in the DHM.

as is often demanded in contemporary political debates).[16] At the same time, Europoeic media locate what they create as European in specific contexts (historical, political, national, cultural and economic) and, therefore, power relations. Museums in particular are powerful and authoritative agents of location and fixation because they seem to show only what has been there. In order to deconstruct this "realist discourse" of the museum (Bal 2011, 530), it is helpful to look at the media creating this discourse. Seeing museums as Europoeic media helps to see them as just one locating element of a never-ending chain of negotiations of travelling memories. Europe is one example of such a memory. Museums do not show "how it really was", rather they produce what "Europe" and "European" could mean at one specific location in time and space.

Conclusion: the portrait of travelling memories

The more dynamic, transcultural and complicated memories get and the more they travel, the more important it becomes for memory researchers to carefully consider their production, circulation and perception in specific situations. While "[m]emories do not hold still (for their portrait)" (Erll 2011, 11), researching them, writing about them and publishing the research does make them hold still. This insight calls for awareness of the specific time and location in which the object of research and the researching subject are positioned. A focus on the media of memory production, circulation and perception as presented here for the case of Europoeic media combined with reflections on the situatedness of the researcher with the help of feminist standpoint theory can be a step in this direction: to see travel and location not as opposites, but to value them as inextricably connected conditions for research in media and cultural memory studies.

Notes

1. This phenomenon until now mainly concerned national, regional and local history or ethnological museums (Mazé 2013). I am concentrating on national museums (see footnote 5). On mediating memory in the museum, see Arnold de Simine (2013). On European heritage and memory, see Whitehead et al. (2019), Kowalski and Törnquist-Plewa (2017) and the publications of the project CoHERE (https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohere/dissemination/#Outputs%20and%20publications).
2. By "Europeanization" I mean the process of making something European (Kaiser, Krankenhagen, and Poehls 2014, 3). This concept from cultural studies counters the schematic top-down-approach of Europeanization developed earlier in political sciences. In this view, Europe is imagined not only in political, juridical or economic texts but also by various actors such as school text books, maps, the common currency Euro or museums.
3. I studied these museums between summer 2012 and winter 2014/2015. My research combined the reconstruction of the museum genesis and its main actors, its aims and political embedment (politics) with field research and close readings of selected displays of the permanent exhibitions (poetics). See Czerney (2019).
4. The term "national museum" is not unproblematic because it means different things in different countries. For example, in Poland there are nine national museums that in other countries would figure under the term art museum or art gallery. Only three of them are national museums in a strict sense, being financed by the national government while the rest are private institutions (Mazan 2011, 670f.). The European Solidarity Center, on the other hand, is not officially a national museum. However, I am using the term in order to highlight the national positioning of the first person of the museal speech act, the one who is speaking in and with the museum's exhibitions (Bal 1996, 3–4): all three museums that I studied are nationally significant institutions; they have been initiated and/or co-founded by national governments in order to show national histories and are mostly financed by national funds (see section 4).
5. In German I use the term "Europamedien". "Europoeic media" draws on the source word—poeisis, thus referencing the process of bringing into being that which did not exist before as well as creative production.
6. Mona Singer (2008) stresses that no feminist epistemology exists in singular but that there are instead many diverse approaches and positions that the term in the plural unites. Harding (2004) gives an overview of feminist standpoint theories.
7. A standpoint cannot be equated with individual experiences (Singer 2008, 288). Instead it means a political positioning that does not automatically emerge from own experiences but develops in critical discussions of theoretical concepts and social power relations.
8. This approach is called "dialogic standpoint theory". Instead of one standpoint used for all critical analyses (Hartsock 1983) it calls for the dialog of diverse marginalized standpoints (Collins 1990; Singer 2008, 290f.).
9. For further reflections on my particular standpoint, see Czerney (2019, 104–110).
10. Although the ECS answers to the President of Gdansk, the national positioning of the ECS becomes visible in the national-conservative government's current aims to restructure the ECS in terms of staff and content (like it did with the Museum of the Second World War Gdansk in 2017/2018).
11. The scenography of the exhibition supports this reading: visiting the exhibition, one moves through dark, windowless rooms and strong sound design, while the room about Europe is situated on the top floor of the exhibition and is the first room with windows. It is not possible to visit the exhibition and move in another direction.
12. Little arrows indicate the numbers of deported Jews and expelled people from the different countries.

13. The exhibition is called "semi-permanent" because it is revised every 3–5 years. Therefore, the installation described here since autumn 2017 no longer exists.

14. For an analysis of this counter-lecture of male-dominated history, see Czerney (2015).

15. "Over-titled" would be a more suitable term as the translation appears on top of the women, thus predominating them.

16. See, for example, Röper (2015).

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