Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory and Identity in the German Historical Museum, 1989-2019

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Abstract

Cases like the German Historical Museum demonstrate that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, reunified Germany, in accordance to the rest of the Western world, tried to shape a specific image of Europe and European identity, affirming at the same time that museums deemed to be and used as leading agents in shaping European public history and memory. This paper explores how a cultural institute interprets and displays Europe. It specifically examines the construction of the idea of Europe in Germany and the political use of the cultural field and public history. In addition, it discusses how symbols and artefacts were used to interpret an ambiguous and divided historical past, in order to accomplish social and political cohesion within critical political and social conditions in Germany and Europe. Finally, it focuses on how Arts and Museology, in different times and during periods of crisis, can become part of the public sphere and public history, through a museum's exhibition policy and how interpretation of Europe is reflected in the permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum.

Keywords

Idea of Europe, German public history, German collective identity, Museum policies, Cold War memory, Post-socialist memory

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Introduction[1]

In recent years there has been a general rise in interest in the public History of modern European societies, and in the traumatic memories of the 20th century. Subsequently, the impressive revival of memory studies in the last two decades has been accompanied by significant advances in the research methods of collective memory processes. Historical events like the fall of Real Socialism, the end of the Cold War in 1989, the revival of nationalisms, the unstable international environment, the financial crisis of recent years, even the refugee and immigration issue, are key factors that fostered interest in Public History, in traumatic memory, and in historical justice. In this context, the memory crises of European societies have been intensified, and the construction of a common European identity has come to the fore, often based on the awareness of the negative consequences of totalitarianism or the 'foreigner', or even on the Holocaust as a negative founding myth.[2]

Accordingly, new questions have been raised that would help us to interpret the recent history of Europe: What was Europe in the post-1989 period, and what was still left of Europe after half a century of division and conflict? What did Europe 'identify' as Germany? Which aspects of European history have been identified and presented in the German Historical Museum (GHM) so as to qualify as common history? How has the idea and myth of Europe been evolving over the years after 1989? How have symbols and artworks been used to represent the European identity of Germany or European identity in general, and how serious was the "resemiotization"[3] concerning the communist past? What was Germany's role inside Europe and inside European Union (EU)? What Europe does Germany envisage – as it was first shown in numerous exhibitions and then in the permanent collection of the museum, officially opened in 2006?

Cases like the GHM, which was founded only months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, provide an exemplary field of research to understand public history, the management of public memory in post-1989 Germany and its reframing. The history of GHM's temporary exhibitions in the last thirty years and of its permanent collections, their rationale, their public symbolism and signaling and their reception, show that reunified Germany, in accordance with the rest of Western Europe, tried to shape a specific image of Europe and a concrete European identity, affirming at the same time that museums deemed to be and used as leading agents in shaping the European public space and memory.

The historical context

The year 2019 was again a year of round anniversaries that engaged public opinion, giving reasons and motives for revisiting and reinterpreting the past, its semantics, and its public history. Europe and the world celebrated the 100-year anniversary since the end

of the First World War, the first industrial war that literally disrupted Europe; the 80-year anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, the war that changed world balances and downgraded the role of Europe; and the 70-year anniversary of the end of the Greek Civil War, and the official start of the Cold War. In Germany, another major event was celebrated: the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Wall, which marked the reunification of the country after half a century of division, as well as the reunification of whole Europe after the end of the Cold War.

Starting from the trauma of division during the Cold War, the healing process immediately after 1989, and the process of redefinition and reconciliation with the past were indicated by the difficult-to-translate term "Vergangenheitsbeveltigung". Germany as a reunified state has gone through a revisionist phase, at first, and later a heroic one – we could say – in 2002, which was marked by the economic and political consolidation of its sovereignty in Europe, and the return of the Christian democratic conservatives, with the new powerful Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Furthermore, the 30 years since the end of the Cold War have been enough for Europe to rewrite its history, as it is demonstrated by the latest European Parliament resolution entitled "The importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (European Parliament 2019)".[4] This official resolution essentially identifies Nazism with communism, and casts the responsibility for the beginning of the Second World War to the Soviet Union, due to signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-attack pact, while undermining, if not nullifying, the uniqueness of the Jewish genocide.

This outcome is certainly not accidental, and directly linked to the reactivation of nationalism that took place across Europe after 1989. To put it differently, it has to do with an outburst of national divisions, and a return to national identities and histories - especially in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The number one priority of the leaderships of all the states of the continent was to disconnect with the traumatic past - whether Nazi or Communist. "In fact, it transformed Western European experiences into Europe-wide norms of dealing with the past and aimed at normatively integrating Eastern Europe especially," as Friedemann et al. state (2017: 496).[5] Whoever aimed to take over control and power in West, wanted to redefine, as soon as possible, the relationship with history, to reconceptualize symbols, artefacts, monuments, and urban space to join the democratic chorus and western capitalism / neoliberalism.

In this context, German society and especially German leaderships, and subsequently the GHM's administrators, had to answer a series of questions. The GHM opened from the first moment a broader discussion on the definition of a common European artistic and historical heritage in the post-Wall period, especially on the eve of the new millennium. Objects and artworks were chosen and included in physical and later digital narratives, to "imagine", "define" or "(re)invent" the idea of Europe, to produce a new symbolic capital and promote a shared European identity[6]. Thus, Germa-

ny was entitled to claim that the country was historically part of the European civilization. More than that, Germany claimed to be a major contributor to Europe's (sic EU's) formation and stabilization, as it was, and still is, shown in the exhibitions that we will examine.

Europe in the GHM

Germany, therefore, had to deal, on the one hand, with its past and proceed more easily to the unification, integration, and renationalization of its populations, and, on the other hand, it had to convince its neighbors that it would never repeat the disastrous mistakes of its guilty past. The EU seemed to be a safeguard to achieve this goal, as it has been so far. Special attention, therefore, has been paid to promote a united and peaceful Europe, but through diversity (Schäuble in Trabold 2007: 130).[7]

The GMH has been the main vehicle for this trend, presenting German history within its European context, having acquired a collection of artworks and historical artifacts from the historical museums of Bonn and East Berlin (Asmuss in Trabold 2007: 103-105).[8] The relationship with Europe, mainly after the Second World War, and within the European Union, of course, is the key principle. According to the founding declaration of the museum, the main scope is the "[i]nterpretation and understanding of the common history of Germans and Europeans" or, in the words of the former Chancellor and founder of the museum, Helmut Kohl, "a project of national importance in a European context". It was precisely, as Kohl again pointed out, this museum that would be of "national importance for the European destiny", aiming at "the common heritage of the nation", and "freedom for all Germans", so as "for Germany to achieve unification and freedom in a united Europe" (in Stölzl 1988: 641).[9] In 1987, however, the year of the founding declaration of the museum, Kohl's Europe and the European Economic Community (EEC) were equivalent only to Western Europe (North and South, but this is something that will be discussed further later in this paper).

It is no coincidence, then, that Germany's strategy to be linked with the idea of Europe continued in the decades after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. It was an effort that had already begun before 1989, namely, to present Germany (West Germany, of course) as a nation-state pillar of stability and continuity for the European identity, tradition, and myth, as the only country that guarantees the perpetuation of principles and values of modern culture – as noted by German officials who helped establish the GHM in the 1980s. Even back in 1950, the idea of Europe was fostered in a key exhibition entitled "Works of European sculpture" at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, where "the organizers placed the works of 24 German artists together with the selected prominent Western European sculptures" (Schöne 2018: 23),[10] displaying in a certain sense, the birth of the European idea.

Image 1: *Wir sind ein Volk*, Plakat 1989, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Image 2: *Wir sind das Volk*, photograph, 1989.

Many, of course, in '89 saw with suspicion, if not with terror, the prospect of German reunification (fig. 1 and 2). The slogan 'Wir sind ein Volk', one of the museum's most recognizable and prominent symbols, replaced the slogan 'Wir sind das Volk', which was heard in East Germany at the time of the Wall's fall. This marked Germany's transition to a phase of redefining its national identity in terms of integration, which of course set by former West side. Germany tried to renounce immediately the "sinner" communist past, after it has cleared, in the meantime, the Nazi past.

Naturally, other countries shared the fear for Germany's past, like France which allowed the Union on condition that Germany would be integrated into a European institution where it would commit itself to peaceful conditions through the establishment of the monetary union and the Euro. However, the ship of "Europe" (another trademark of the musuem) with which Germany linked its own story, sailed into uncharted waters (fig. 3).

Image 3: Reyn Dirksen, *Europe*, 1950, poster, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Therefore, just months before the collapse of East Germany and the reunification of the country, there was a political decision to open the German History Museum. The resolution was signed at the Reichstag by the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, and the Mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen, on October 28th, 1987, marking the 750th anniversary of the found-

ing of the city (Ottomeyer 2006: 3),[11] in response to an economic objective, namely the further increase of tourist arrivals which had already been noticed in previous years.

It was then a response, albeit a delayed one, to the Museum of German History in the former German Democratic Republic, which was situated in Zeughaus since 1952, an answer, of course, intended to "consolidate unity based on common history". The new museum, which initially had neither a building nor a collection, had to play a political role from the beginning, visualizing and symbolizing a united Germany, and offering around 200 temporary exhibitions in an attempt to cover the absence of a permanent housing. With an eye on the East, the museum presented an "overview of German history within a worldwide civilization", as stated in the founding declaration (in Stölzl 1988: 611).[12] Years later, at the inauguration ceremony of the permanent collection, Chancellor Angela Merkel added – emphasizing the above narrative – another mission of the museum, that of a "German history different from its Marxist version" (in Trabold 2007: 67).[13] In the words of Kohl himself, during his speech in the German parliament: "the German Historical Museum justifies its political value as a national duty of European importance, mainly due to the division of our country. There is only one, common history of Germans – a long one, with many variations but a continuous history. We are working on keeping it alive, because it unites us all Germans [...] The German Historical Museum, which is not located far from Wall or its shadow, strengthens the consciousness of belonging to the people of divided Germany" (in Trabold 2007: 13, 16)[14]. The museum itself with its permanent exhibition became a symbol and an evidence of a unified country, and at the same time, of a new European and global, power.

A new distinct first group of exhibitions made its appearance. The 1980s was the decade of the domination of the conservative Christian Democrats, the decade that for the first time there were public voices again related to German ethnicity and national history. It is the decade of normalization, of the revisionist movement in historical studies, the so-called Historians' Dispute (Beier-de Haan in Axelsson et al 2012: 57)[15], and of the attempt to come to terms with the country's difficult past, in particular with the Nazi era. Accordingly, the goal of the new museum was clearly to set the past and its memory free of any obscurity, as the contributors of the museum, both Helmut Kohl and the first director of the museum, Christoph Stölz, testify in their opening speeches (in Trabold 2007: 11-16, 29-32)[16]. The first such exhibition organized by the GHM in Berlin, in the building of Martin Gropius Bau, from September 1st to October 1st, 1989, just days before the fall of the Wall, was entitled 'An Effort to Overcome the Memory of the Second World War'. The following years numerous exhibitions would be presented covering the period from 1933 to 1945, unraveling Germany's visual perception of history, and focusing on the idea of a victim nation. Shows such as 'Prisoners of War' in 1990, 'Germany in the Cold War' in 1992 and others became a vehicle for presenting a positive perspective upon war memory and the victory of the Western Allies.

In those first shows, immediately after reunification, we can detect an attempt to re-nationalize Germany within the European context and tradition, to use cultural heritage as a symbol of an indivisible nation, albeit exclusively in terms of the West. This is because the organizers saw the sense and purpose of their exhibitions in a peaceful juxtaposition and correlation of cultural positions. The exhibition entitled 'Bismarck - Prussians, Germany and Europe', organized in the fall of 1990 (fig. 4), was again, in a certain way, the artistic-cultural point of the re-birth and restart of the European idea. Highlighting a heroic phase of German history before the two world wars, and most notably the figure of Charlemagne who, on the one hand, unified Germany and, on the other hand, pursued a dynamic and interventionist policy in Europe, the exhibition demonstrated a common European and German origin. Furthermore, exhibitions such as 'Strike - Reality and Myth' or 'Iron Armor', seemingly unrelated to our subject, used the same semantic typology when dealt with specific historical issues that indirectly presented the shared cultural heritage of Germany and Europe, and the "major significance that these issues have to this day", as stated in the exhibitions catalogs.

Initiated half a century ago, this strategy "to establish commonalities and common identities, which in 1950 were viewed as a valued commodity and an achievement following the suffering of the war", was intensified at the beginning of the new century, albeit more openly criticized today. In public architecture, efforts have been made to "address and eliminate the still threatening feeling of 'Ostalgia' and of any nostalgia for the

Image 4: *Bismarck - Prussians, Germany and Europe*, poster of the exhibition, 1990, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

socialist past". It was, and still is an attempt to erase the memory of "the national tragedy of the 20th century and the responsibilities that accompanied it, along with the cancellation of 40 years of history in the other half of the country, the German Democratic Republic' (Giakoumakatos 2019).[17]

Even the architectural solution regarding the expansion of the GHM in 2003, designed by the American-Chinese I.M. Pei and being strongly supported by public opinion, referred to pre-war modernism and the Weimar Republic. Historical modernism enforced connections and correlations with a history visible in other buildings in Berlin, seeking its origins in the pre-war period, and further back in its imperial past (Zimmerer 2015).[18]

Image 5: *Palast der Republik*, Foto 2002.

Image 6: Ieoh Ming Pei (architekt), *Pei-Bau*, 2003, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

The dozens of periodic exhibitions organized by the GHM comprise, eventually, a second group of exhibitions that present a united, though not unified, Europe through coherent material on cultural heritage, a Europe of nations, a Europe whose roots are strong in German history (Ottomeyer 2007: 120). This approach was implemented through a series of exhibitions dedicated to Europe and its nations, exhibitions that, afterwards, were digitally displayed online (Trabold 2006: 3, 41-45). Between 1990 and 2000, we find keystone exhibitions like the one with the title 'Europe Taken Literally' in 1992, containing

> 115 photographic portraits of distinguished European personalities, taken during travels throughout Europe between 1990 and 1992. These are eminent Europeans who have had, through their words, an influence on the significant course of events on this continent: politicians at that time, journalists, representatives of the major churches, philosophers, historians and poets, as well as important theater and film producers – they were all taken literally" by Ingrid von Kruse on the contemporary idea - the dream of a united Europe.[19]

The exhibition was triumphantly received and followed by two parallel exhibition tours throughout the continent. The artist sought:

> the spirit of Europe in the countenances of artists and intellectuals and inquired of those concerned what Europe meant to them. [...] From Iceland to Italy, from Paris to Moscow she travelled – in a period in which the old continent was fundamentally altered. We perceive the people of Eastern Europe and the Baltic States who helped to shape the fate of their countries during those turbulent times, and we see many of those who, during the last decades in the West, imparted the spirit of Europe (Doenhoff 1992)[20].

In addition, exhibitions like the "The Last Days of Humanity, Pictures of the First World War" (1994), in cooperation with the Imperial War Museum and the Barbican Art Gallery, in London (1994), or "Art and Power. Europe under the Dictators, 1930-45" (1996), a further expanded version of the exhibition on the Council of Europe, proved the connections and the divide within Europe, and presented a common European history, though with differences. Moreover, exhibitions like "Myths of the Nations. A European Panorama (1998), "1648: War and Peace in Europe", an exhibition on the thirty-year war (1999), as well as the project "Europe's Centre at 1000", which included participating museums from Poland, Slovakia, The Czech Republic, and Hungary, displayed a transnational view, and a sustainable transnational dialogue with emphasis not only on similarities but rather on conflicts, disputes, and enmities with a view to reconciliation (Beier-de Haan 2012: 63-66).[21] These exhibitions served the purpose of historical reappraisal, and demonstrated how art and museum practices were embedded in an international, Western context

after years of isolation, and how, at the same time, a pan-European identity through culture was in fact constructed. Using again artefacts and archive material, the GHM created new signs of a common past, new symbolic and imaginary communities, normalizing years of intense conflicts.

On the eve of the new century and since 2001, the museum has held almost twenty exhibitions with a European theme, which means one every year, in an attempt to visualize and conceptualize with new reference points and milestones the new era of a common future within the EU. Because of the absence of a permanent collection until 2006, those temporary exhibitions represented the vision of the museum in public space, and its opening all over the world through the Internet, as a public history project. It is obviously impressive that since 2001 all the exhibitions have been accompanied by an online presentation in a special page, with information on the idea behind the exhibition, on the visit, and on the credits. But it was only after 2003 that multimedia interactive applications, and thorough virtual tours were added.

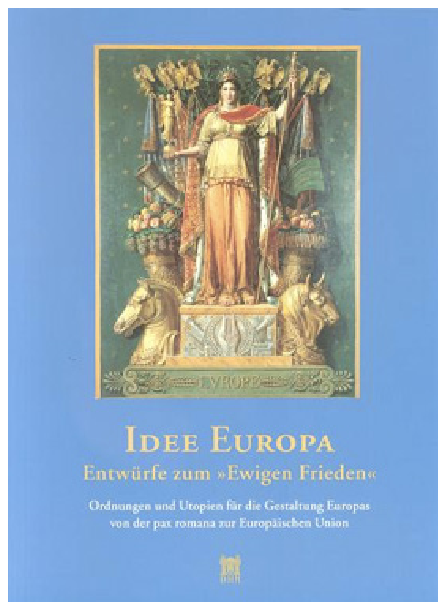

Image 7: *Idea Europe. Plans for eternal peace. Regulations and utopias to shape Europe from the Roman Pax to the European Union*, exhibition catalog, 2003.

The first attempt to give to the public a sense of a European project was a rather ambitious project, curated by the GHM in 2003, with the indicative title "Idea Europe. Plans for Eternal Peace. Regulations and Utopias to Shape Europe from the Roman Pax to the European Union" (fig. 7). It is worth mentioning the statement of the curator, Dr. Marie-Louise von Plessen, that:

> the exhibition follows the project of a United Europe in times of war and peace, which have shaped the changes in the topography of Europe for over 2,000 years to date [...] The idea of a European Union did not come into being in the 20th century.

According to the curator, the ancient idea of Europe went through time, and was formed through war and peace.[22] What was now at stake for Germany and the European Commission was a new order of things for Europe. A united Europe was for the GHM a federation of states, as is described online, accompanied by artefacts from all over the continent, a Europe which after 1989 was equivalent to further integration of new states.

After this key exhibition and until 2010, a series of exhibitions were held every year,

obviously aligned with the political decision to promote the things that unite Europeans in the field of history and culture rather than those that separate them. Similar arguments would be repeated later by museum managers in many periodical exhibitions. In 2006, the exhibition entitled 'The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' (fig, 8), under the auspices of the European Council, was presented as a cornerstone of modern EU, rooted in the old German Empire from the Reformation era and further back to Charlemagne. In this case, political institutions, legal history, and cultural heritage were used as a link among European nations. The portraits of Luther by Lucas Kranach, and Charlemagne by Albrecht Dürer – the two most important historical figures by the two most famous German painters – are perhaps the two most famous museum exhibits (fig. 9, 10), acquired for the permanent collection, displaying clearly and eloquently the 'Germanity' of Europe and the 'Europeanity' of Germany.

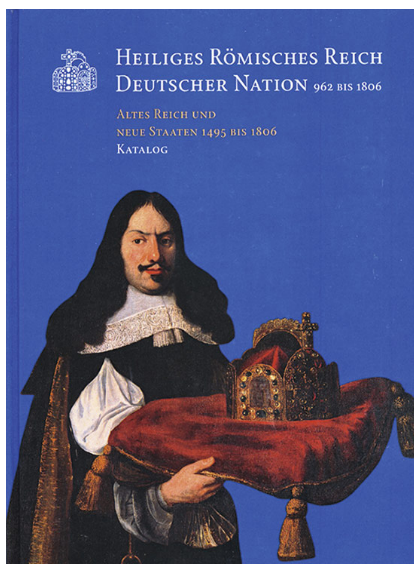

Image 8: *The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*, exhibition catalog, 2006.

Image 9: Albrecht Dürer, *Carlomagnos*, 1514, oil on wood, 0,635 × 0,47 m., Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Image 10: Lucas Cranach d.Ä. (Werkst.), *Luther*, 1529, oil on wood, 0,515 × 0,363 m., Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

This objective has been and continues to be strongly supported by the museum, reflecting the political will for a common future within EU borders, based, however, on centuries of German political and legal tradition, as shown in the exhibition "Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, 962-1806". Commemorating the 200th anniversary of the end of the empire, the GHM organized an exhibition, co-funded by the Council of Europe, to promote a political (German) structure that, according to the Minister of the Interior at the time, Wolfgang Schäuble, played a decisive part in the history and development of Europe from 962 until 1806, and is still important for the cultural life of Europe.[23] It was the conservative Michael Stürmer, one of the leading revisionists in the battle of historians, who argued at the same exhibition that 'Germans today, just like after 1945, are more European than Europeans", and that "the legacy of the old Empire" extends up to our days, 'a legacy bequeathed preferentially only to the EU, the hope in the face of opportunities and the threats of globalization"[24].

Image 11: *German history in images and materials*, poster, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

This perspective upon Europe's relations with Germany, which make up the third distinct group of exhibitions, would finally be displayed in the permanent collection which was inaugurated in 2006, giving visitors the chance to walk through the periods spanning from the beginning of German history to the present day. The main features of the permanent exhibition correspond to those of a national narrative – without any reference to the term 'national' – that its origins date back to the first century BC. Through a continuous journey of 2,000 years of German art and history, the collection rediscovers or rather reminds the Germans and the rest of the world of the existence of a German national identity:

> [t]he permanent exhibition takes up some ten thousand square meters of exhibition space on the two floors of the Zeughaus, displaying about 4,000 artefacts and documents of German history that can be seen in as varied a reference frame as possible. The basic principle underlying the permanent display is to exhibit two different types of rooms, in which German history is presented within its European context and its regional diversity'' (Beier-de Haan 2012: 66).[25]

Image 12: *Party dictatorship and daily life in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)*, exhibition poster, 2007.

Image 13: *Focus DDR*, exhibition poster, 2012.

At that time, it was a priority for Germany, as we shall see, to manage a double traumatic past, which was expressed through major exhibitions at the German History Museum, which constitute the fourth distinct group of exhibitions: “Party Dictatorship and Daily life in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)” in 2007 (fig. 12), “Focus DDR” in 2012 (fig. 13), and in 2017 “The Communism in its Time” (fig. 14), in collaboration with the ‘Federal Foundation for the Reapraisal of the SED dictatorship in Germany’ (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (SED)-Diktatur). The objective of those exhibitions was to present German history side by side with the national histories of other European nations.

Image 14: *The Communism in its time*, exhibition poster, 2017, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

But it was, of course, in 2009 that the GHM organized a series of exhibitions regarding the ‘round’ 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and its consequences for Germany and Europe. This time Europe was the vehicle for a peaceful Germany, and a peaceful coexistence with its neighbors, and the former communist states. It seems that the German state has learned its lesson, recognized its mistakes, as it has done

on various occasions, for example with the exhibition "1.9.39 Germans and Poles, Tears and Hopes" (fig. 15),[26] while expressing the conviction that in the context of a wider EU such errors will never repeat themselves. In addition to the example above, one notices that Germany has tried, on various occasions, to demonstrate its solidarity with the Poles also through exhibitions such as "Cassandra, Visions of Disaster, 1914–1945.[27] Germany sought to demonstrate that the Second World War and its consequences for the continent were, to some extent, to be considered a natural disaster, which can now be prevented if all states of the former Warsaw Pact, and the Community of other European states accept the principles of German Reformation and Calvinism, which "represents the birth of modernity", according to the exhibition entitled "Calvinism, the Reformed in Germany and Europe".[28]

Image 15: *1.9.39 Germans and Poles, tears and hopes*, exhibition poster, 2009, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Image 16: *Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures*, exhibition photo, 2010, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

Since 2010, the display of Europe seems to dwell in temporary thematic exhibitions, focusing mainly on the two world wars and their consequences, as in "Displaying Power - Art as a Strategy of Rule",[29] and "Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures" (fig. 16),[30] both organized in 2010. In 2014, the exhibition "1914-1918, First World War" was held. It is important to note that in all the above events there is a section dedicated to relations with Europe, obviously taking Germany itself as a starting point, and placing it in a broader European context. Europe is once again on the periphery of their interest, and appears only in accordance with German history - unlike the museum's first two decades of history, when Europe was the setting for self-fulfilling Germany. Even in the last exhibition, just a year ago, with the title "Europe and the Sea" (13/6/2018 - 6/1/2019), the idea of Europe is conceptually limited to that of a continent, whose main cohesive substance is the passion for sea life, and the desire to conquer the world by relying on naval power.

Conclusion

Today Germany demands to get a central position in the ongoing 'clash of cultures' (East-West / Christianity-Islam), a conflict that has replaced the Cold War (a burning issue for Germany, with a high immigrant population).[31] The principles and values of this perspective, which is ultimately limited to the characteristics of Greco-Roman antiquity, Christianity and European Enlightenment, were stated in the inauguration of the permanent collection in 2006 by all stakeholders and politicians, leaving out all other aspects. In line with this, the new Vice President of the European Commission, Mr Margaritis Schinas, of Greek origin himself, who is responsible for "Promoting our European Way of Life", put the above in words during his hearing in 2019:

> [t]he European Union is a beacon of light in a world that is becoming darker. We are diverse, we are inclusive, we are different, we are special. We are admired and envied. And I think that it is also in our interest to positively use these attributes, to make more resilient and more inclusive societies, without having the fear – or some call it self-flagellation – that we have to apologize because of our values (2019: 9).[32]

That's why cultural institutions like the GHM invest more at bringing history closer to general public.

To sum up, memories and monuments are dynamic, they change their meaning and content over time, and are used by their actors to highlight political, social, and ideological perceptions. That is why remembering or forgetting is always linked to contemporary strategies or correlation of power, and museums and monuments function as "mediators of social past" (Papadaki 2019: 136).[33] Different scopes or different priorities of-

fer an altered interpretation of the past, and different visual and artistic results. Interventions in public spaces create an active, and often ambivalent historical culture, and produce new battles for memory which, in turn, reflect active battles for power. In the GHM, the idea of Europe or the process of Europeanization (Graziano and Peter Vink, in Bulmer and. Lequesne 2013)[34] was a crucial matter to display, of great symbolic value for Germany's image as the leading, unifying, and peaceful force in the EU. What was on stake was a commonly accepted European identity – always, of course, in the context of the EU. In this context, the interpretation and display of a nation illustrates that it supports and is supported by a supranational, transnational, one might say, idea of Europe that, after the Second World War, is identified with the EU. Fulfilling the above concept, the GHM, at least during the first decade after the Fall of the Wall, has tried to reinterpret cultural and historical symbols, and has used its collections and exhibitions as a public sign of a country reborn, ready to unite European societies, and make the difference in a globalised world. On a symbolic level, with the re-exhibition of the permanent collections of the GHM, and with the construction of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, Germany seeks to become the custodian of world culture, and the main representative of European culture and European way of life - just like the title of the new vice-president of the EU states. However, it seems that, during the last decade, there has been a change in the museum's interpretation and visualization of the idea of Europe, downsizing its role and emphasizing German history itself. Attention is now focused on the German past, without direct European references and without digital online presentations, except when it comes to a German topic that includes a European aspect.

Endnotes

1. This article was part of the post-doctoral research project under the title «Real Socialism's memory in Germany 30 years later: Exhibition policy of the German Historical Museum and the processing of public monuments of the former Eastern Germany», which was funded by the Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH) for the year 2021.
2. See Leggewie (2009).
3. See Yoka and Bellentani (2019: 5).
4. See https://bit.ly/3V3nhSD (accessed 27th March 2020).
5. See Pestela, Trimçevb, Feindtc and Krawatzek (2017: 496).
6. See Delanty (1995), Bottici and Challand (2013).
7. Wolfgang Schäuble, 'Das Irreguläre am Reich im Lichte der regulären Europäischen Union'.
8. See Asmuss (2007: 103-105).
9. See Kohl (1988: 641).
10. See Schöne (2018: 23).
11. See Ottomeyer (2006: 3).
12. See Stölzl (1988: 611).
13. See Merkel (2007: 67).
14. See Kohl (2007: 13,16).
15. See Beier-de Haan (2012: 57).
16. See Trabold (2007, 11-16, 29-32).

17. See Giakoumakatos (2019).
18. Jürgen Zimmerer, "Humboldt Forum: Das koloniale Vergessen", *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik,* 7 (2015) (online in *Eurozine,*2015, https://www.eurozine.com/humboldt-forum-das-koloniale-vergessen/?pdf, [accessed 27 July 2021]).
19. http://www.ingridvonkruse.com/europa-presse.html
20. Marion Countess Doenhoff, 'Europa beim Wort genommen. 115 Porträt-Photographien', *Die Zeit*, No. 50, 4 December 1992.
21. Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, 'Deutsches Historisches Museum, Rethinking German History Against the Background of a Burdened Past and New Challenges for the 21st Century', pp. 63-66.
22. https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/idee-europa/idee_europa_struktur.htm.
23. Wolfgang Schäuble, 'Das Irreguläre am Reich im Lichte der regulären Europäischen Union', pp. 130-131.
24. Stürmer, Michael, 'Die Deutschen und das Reich', pp. 124, 127.
25. Rosmarie Beier-de Haan, 'Deutsches Historisches Museum, Rethinking German History Against the Background of a Burdened Past and New Challenges for the 21st Century', p. 66.
26. See https://bit.ly/3CRxGJQ (accessed 12th October 2022).
27. See https://bit.ly/3EyuCUc (accessed 12th October 2022).
28. See https://bit.ly/3ROmBgY (accessed 12th October 2022).
29. See https://bit.ly/3Ti8aTB (accessed 12th October 2022).
30. https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/kunst-und-kalter-krieg/en/ [accessed 27 July 2021]).
31. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the permanent collection of the GHM was inaugurated the same year that the final decision was taken to demolish the People's Palace and replaced it with the Old Palace, where is going to be housed the so called non-Western art collections (fig. 19) which will be inextricably linked to the remnants of European and German culture in GHM and in other institutions on the Museums Island.
32. See https://bit.ly/3ersLpE (accessed 12 October 2022).
33. See Papadaki (2019: 136).
34. See Graziano and Vink (2013).

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